The Girl Behind The Mask

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The Girl Behind The Mask

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Summary

Lexa Woods is a millionaire playgirl and the sole inheritor to the Woods Enterprise Holdings fortune after her parents passed away in a tragic accident. Since then, she’s completely satisfied living a life involving endless booze, women, and parties. Although she is still a senior (and has been for 2 years now) at the prestigious UCLA, college education and real-life responsibilities doesn’t concern her. She’s envied, wanted, and rich, and that’s all that matters.

That all changes however, once she meets the beautiful and mysterious Clarke Griffin – a dedicated student struggling to support herself and her younger brother, who isn’t at all intrigued by Lexa’s self-destructive lifestyle. Although both women are from two very different worlds, Lexa is determined to get to know more about the only girl who, up until now, has been the only one able to make her feel alive. She wants – No, NEEDS – to find a way to make Clarke see that there is more to her than meets the eye… that there is more hidden away to the girl behind the mask.

**Read if you want to: Laugh your ass off, fall in love with the dynamic duo known as Aden and Raven, and fall even more in love with CLEXA :)**

**
You rerouted the course of my self-determined path. 
Over the past year, I have often found myself contemplating the moment which it happened. 
And I think…
Perhaps…
That maybe it was that day we had our first date.
Do you remember, my love?
When you showed up with flowers and rather nervous.
Or maybe…

It was that night, when we shared our first kiss.
But it could have also been the day I truly fell in love with you.
Or the day I at least realized I was in love with you…

for my heart has always known it, it was my brain that needed to come to terms with it.
Yet when I truly trace back the moments we have shared,
I am more and more convinced that my life was forever altered
that day you and I locked eyes while we each stood on opposite ends of your staircase.
I, as usual, was reluctant and uncertain… afraid you could say.
And maybe you were able to interpret all of that.

But I remember what message was transmitted in your gaze.

Determination.
Disbelief.
Possibilities.

You saw the future of ‘us’ in that moment.
All before you even knew my name…

I didn’t know it then… wouldn’t have believed it then if anyone had tried to tell me otherwise,
but that was the last moment I would ever spend in my ordinary life.

You half-stumbled, half-slithered your way into my guarded heart in ways that no one else ever could.

What you saw that night… I will never truly know.
But one thing is certain.

You rerouted my path permanently.

You pulled me out of a sure-to-be boring, uneventful, cautious route
into one that was rocky, thorny, and uncertain…
Yet beautiful.
Because you were there.

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One Year Ago…

Raven burst into the room with such pizzazz that it sent the door swinging into the wall, colliding with such intensity it poked a hole straight through it.

“Guess where you’ll be on Saturday, April 15th at approximately 7 Post-Meridian Pacific Standard Time?” She asked loudly, grinning unashamedly at the frightened blonde.

“Raven! Do NOT give me any more reasons to take away your key! Please learn the fine art of
knocking!” Clarke responded, not bothering to leave her chair, where she slumped atop the many books and laptop on her cluttered desk. “I’ll be studying. For a Midterm. You should know that because you’ll be doing the same.”

“Negative, blondie! Gosh you suck at this…” Raven sighed, walking towards Clarke and throwing a gold envelope on top of her chemistry - wait, no, biology? Raven shrugged, something sciency - textbook.

“You, princess, will be attending the highly anticipated, outrageous, out of this world – wait for it - Annual Wood’s Birthday Extravaganza!” She finished with both arms stretched towards Clarke, hands splayed and fingers wiggling.

“Come again?” Clarke narrowed her eyes; glaring at Raven in honest confusion.

“Gahh! Keep up! You know, for a self-proclaimed genius, you sure don’t live up to the title.” Raven teased, opening the envelope for Clarke and waving the invitation in front of her still confused face. “Lexa Woods! The richest, brattiest, most envied senior in all of UCLA…? It’s her birthday!”

“And I care because…?” Clarke blinked a few times, still failing to process the reason for Raven’s overly eager attitude.

“What! How long have you been cooped away in this gloom room of doom?” She replied, shaking her head in utter shame. “Sheesh, no wonder you’re still single.”

“Hey! Leave my love life out of this and just cut to the point, Reyes. I have studying to get done.”

“LEXAAA WOODSSSSSS!” Raven continued, sounding an awful lot like Dory from Finding Nemo. “Rich bitty…you’re in biology with her! It’s her birthday and she invited us! Well, me… because I actually try to make friends. But you’re my ‘Plus One’ sooo, you comin’.”

“Ha! Yea keep dreaming, Ray.” Clarke scoffed at the idea; the absurdity of it all baffling her. “Not gonna happen.” She stated, rotating in her chair to face her computer.

“Aw that’s too bad… And too late!” She smiled, turning to leave, tossing the invite on Clarke’s desk. “I already RSVP’d for us both… So… Yea, good talk.” And she bolted out of the room, crashing into Aden right as she turned the corner out of the bedroom. “OUCH! Watch where you’re going, you little brat!”

“ME? You ran into me, you uncoordinated moron!” He replied, followed immediately by an “OW! You’ll pay for that, Raven!” Aden growled as Raven swatted the back of his head.

“Don’t make me give you another Dutch Oven, you little turd!” Raven threatened, causing Aden to gag in response; reimagining the scenario. “Yea, that’s what I thought…”

“Both of you be quiet!...and both of you watch your language!” Clarke chided them, still curiously analyzing the envelope Raven left behind.

“Is this the thank you I get for trying to rescue you from your boring life!?” Raven responded, huffing from frustration. “Well… YOU are hereby dismissed as my charity case!”

Clarke shook her head, smiling at Raven’s goofiness. She picked up the invite, noticing how each word was handwritten in black ink onto sturdy, sparkling, gold-tinted paper in perfect symmetry-
Miss Raven Reyes

Congratulations!

You are invited to attend the 23rd birthday celebration of

Alexandria (Lexa) Mae Woods

Date: Saturday, April Fifteenth

Time: Seven Post-Meridian Pacific Standard Time (oh, Raven was actually being serious!)

Location: Wood’s Mansion, Beverly Hills, CA

Attire: Formal

Theme: Masquerade Ball- Mask Required

You are permitted a Plus One

Please RSVP no later than April First

Clarke sighed. She tossed the invitation aside and was about to dive back into her books when Aden burst into her room.

“Clarke!” He blurted, hair fussed and face flushed. A frown plastered on his young face. “Please go get Raven out of my room! She’s not letting me do homework and keeps farting all over the place!” He tossed his arms up in the air to illustrate frustration, eyes pleading for mercy.

“You little liar! He was playing Call of Duty when I walked in, Clarke! Didn’t see a single book open!” Raven chimed in from his room across the hall. "He’s just mad because I took over the game and I am whooping his A--BUTT!…But A for effort, kid! You should really consider a career in acting!"

“Well, you should consider getting a career!” Aden shouted back, shaking his head in disapproval. “Freeloader!”

“Parasite!” Raven yelled back from his room.

“Enough. Aden, no games until your homework is finished. You know better.” Clarke scolded, softening her expressions when she saw his disappointment. “…And AGAIN watch your language REYES!” The blonde yelled across the hall to her friend who was still in Aden’s room, most likely still playing the kid’s game.

Turning to the boy she smiled and asked, “What do you want for dinner?”

“Pizza!” She heard Raven yell from across the hall, in near-perfect synchrony with Aden, causing a groan to escape from Clarke.
“I swear, sometimes it feels like I’m taking care of two kids!” She whined, taking another glance at the invitation before exiting her room for the kitchen, a thought for another day.

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“Aunt Indra!” Lexa called, as she stepped through the massive, double-glass door trimmed with dark wood. Her voice echoing off of the colossal marble walls in the grand foyer of the mansion; a glass dome and a glittering chandelier hung above, both impressing and intimidating visitors in equal measure.

“Kitchen!” A voice shouted in response, and she walked past the dual spiral staircase that led to the upstairs part of the house in its direction. There, she found a hunched Indra, apron on and focused, as she carefully placed the last layer of pasta on the lasagna.

“Indra, we have cooks. Why do you insist on slaving away in the kitchen when that’s what they’re paid to do?” Lexa questioned, opening a 1953 bottle of imported scotch and pouring herself a generous portion.

“Because…” Indra responded, a smile framing her still youthful face as she worked. “I just happen to know how much you love my lasagna.” She looked up at Lexa, smile immediately collapsing as she watched her toss back the liquor. “Lexa... I thought we agreed that you would at least make an effort to control the urges.”

Lexa nodded, ignoring Indra’s devastated look and poured herself another portion.

“We did and I am.” She responded, tossing it back and swallowing the burning fluid in one gulp. “Today, I’m having just two instead of three.” She smirked, proud at her witty response.

“Any news from the tailor? I need my outfit ready at least a week before my party, Indra. What about the musician? Did we get Justin or not? …I swear performers are such a pain to deal with.”

“Performers aren’t the only ones…” Indra whispered to herself, chuckling as she did. “The tailor will have the outfit ready on the 5th, so there’s still plenty of time. As for Justin, he’s trying to rearrange his tour schedule in order to squeeze us in. I will be hearing from his manager within the week.”

“Squeeze us in? Who the fuck does he think we are! You know what, cancel him. I want Katy Perry instead.” Lexa waved a hand in dismissal, fingers twitching to grasp the bottle once more but preventing herself from doing so. “She’s a better entertainer and much sexier to look at anyway.”

“Relax, child. Everything will be perfect for your party.” Indra soothed her, using a timid tone that always urged an innocent response from Lexa, her own special weapon to calm the spirited girl since she was a toddler. She paused her movements for a moment, analyzing Lexa where she stood leaning against the granite counter.

“Sometimes I see you and I have a difficult time processing how much you’ve grown… what a beautiful and strong young woman you’ve become.”

Lexa’s eyes met hers and Indra thought she saw a flash of emotions penetrate through the guarded, emerald eyes. “Your parents would have been proud, child.”

The flash of emotions lingered for another second before it vanished; stare hardening to its original form once it passed.

“Proud? Of what, exactly? That their only daughter is a drunk, a womanizer, and spending their life’s work on lavish parties and cars?” She scoffed, caving into the urge and pouring herself another
drink, quickly bringing it up to her impatient lips. “Highly doubt it.”

“Oh, and speaking of womanizing,” Lexa continued, swiftly changing the subject, “I’m having a girl over tonight. Suzy, or Sandra, or- who the hell cares. In case you want to retreat to the basement so you don’t complain that I keep you up late.” And with a wink and her infamous mischievous smirk, Lexa walked away before Indra had a chance to say anything further.

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“This will cost you Aden-soccer-duty for two months, Raven!” Clarke hissed, trying to focus on her walk, which was highly compromised by the 4-inch heels Raven suggested she wear (and by 'suggesting' meaning throwing it at Clarke with a ‘Got those for you. You’re welcome.’), while straining to breathe at the impossibly tight dress Raven insisted she purchase (and by ‘insisting’ meaning buying it for her and then threatening to send her distant, workaholic mother an email stating that Aden was being starved and urging the woman to come home if she refused to wear it)... so she sucked it up and slid into the limo after her dashing, cunning, manipulative best friend.

“Hey, I love the brat. He gets me! ...You know we talk mad crap about you when you’re not around right?” She joked, elbowing Clarke at her own smugness.

“You two talk mad crap about me to my face, so no, that doesn’t surprise me.” Clarke said while rolling her eyes at her friend.

“Listen, just try and have a good time tonight. It will be fun!... Won’t kill you to let loose once in a while... Oh, and I brought along my purse in case we see knickknacks that we can snatch.”

Clarke rolled her eyes again. “You’re already filthy rich… you can retire that high school habit of yours, Ray.”

“Yea, well, old habits die hard. Plus,” She said, left hand gently tapping her left leg, which was sheathed in a metal brace, “makes me think of how we used to be in the old days, ya know. Raven and Clarke- a modern Bonnie and Clyde but prettier and with more UNF!” She winked and smiled, spirits high and hardly ever dismayed by anything.

The limo slowed to a crawl roughly a few minutes later as it approached a massive, 10-feet tall, wrought iron gate with gold decor splashed against the black metal. Clarke stared in awe, registering the large ‘W’ resting in an ovular frame on top of the gate as it parted to allow them entry. Raven bounced excitedly on the seat next to her, champagne glass in hand spilling its contents all over the carpeted limo floor.

“HOLY SHIT!” She exclaimed, eyes wide in excitement. “Man, and I thought I was swimming in dough! This lucky bitch probably needs to use Waze to get from her bedroom to the crapper in this place!”

From the distance, as the limo drove down the lengthy driveway, the glamorous Wood’s mansion blossomed into view, sucking away Clarke’s breath at the sight. It resembled less of a mansion and more of a palace, modern yet similar to something you’d expect out of The Great Gatsby. Every light, in every room, was on and the exterior of the mansion was ornamented with flashing white lights.

The chauffeur pulled to a stop in front of the granite staircase leading to the entrance of the house, and almost instantly the door of the limo was pulled open by servants in black and gold tuxedos, extending a hand first to Clarke, then to Raven, and helping them out of the vehicle. Another servant, standing a few feet away, carried a tray with champagne glasses, handing each of the women a glass.
The double doors were pulled open as they approached, doormen bowing to them in a welcome as they entered the impressive foyer. This moment, the moment Clarke's eyes scanned the interior of the house, the moment it gazed upon the impeccably dressed attendees that loitered around her, was the first time her jaw dropped open in sheer admiration.

“Holy-“ Clarke started...

"Dog turd.” Raven finished, classy as usual. “And to think… all she had to do was be squeezed out of her mothers’ vagina to get all of this… how is that fair?!”

“Both her parents had to die for her to get all of this, Ray… I hardly think it's fair.” Clarke responded back quietly, feeling a pang of sorrow for the girl; a stranger she never met and never heard of, until recently. Raven looked at her questioningly, intrigued at how Clarke knew the details about the splendid, yet tragic life of Lexa Woods.

Clarke shrugged, giving Raven a smug but serious smile. “Google.”

They moved to the main hall, where people flowed in and out of the vast ballroom, Clarke immediately noticing that majority of the attendees were the upper, snobby portion of her UCLA colleagues - people Clarke and Raven had nothing in common with nor associated with by any means. The men were dressed in the finest suits and tux designed in Beverly Hills, accented with a tie –either traditional or bow- and postures that not only screamed ‘old money’, it reeked of it. The women wore dresses that appeared to be uniquely crafted and designed with only that individual in mind, beautiful and prestigious. There was an array of colors in dresses- navy blue, red, black (like Clarke’s), gold, silver (like Raven’s), and so on. Yet the most intriguing feature of anyone’s outfit was, without a doubt, the mask each person sported; effectively concealing the identity of it’s owner.

“Man, I’d love to drop one of my homemade stink bombs in here.” Raven said, chuckling at her own joke. “I’d happily go to jail for a night if it came to that.”

“You know, we didn’t have to come… You’re the one who practically dragged us here.”

“For the knickknacks, Griffin!” Raven responded, as if it was obvious to everyone but Clarke. “I want a souvenir before the night is over.”

The ballroom was equally stunning. There were tables placed along the walls, candles and flower petals decorated the center, and near the entrance to the room a long table rested, decked with a variety of finger foods and deserts. On the opposite side was a small, but plentiful bar with a bartender serving beverages ranging from soft drinks to hard liquor. Music was blasting via surround speakers, and a small crowd danced to its tunes in the center of the room.

“Alright here’s an idea…if we get separated, lost, or somehow dragged to the dance floor by persistent, drunk weirdos, we need a rendezvous spot.” Raven plotted, not a second went by before she found a solution. “I vote the bar. Let’s go scope it out.”

They each had two drinks, and Raven was in the process of ordering a third when a loud screech cut through the music and a familiar voice erupted from the stage at the far end of the room, causing Clarke’s eyes to widen at the sight. “Is that…?!”

“Good evening, Ladies and Gents!” Katy Perry announced, flashing the cheering crowd a dazzling smile. “Welcome, all, to Lexa’s twenty-third birthday party! Who’s excited to be here?” She asked, receiving louder cheers and applauses. “Lexa personally invited me here tonight and I could not be happier to be able to celebrate such a special day with such an incredible woman, so I propose a toast!” She chimed, lifting a glass of champagne to the crowd, where a group of people surrounded a
figure Clarke assumed to be Lexa but couldn’t see past the bodies. “To Lexa!...” the crowd chanted back, hands rising into the air with glasses and cups. “…In life, may you find your purpose. In love, may you find your heart. Good fortune on your journey, and always remember…an end is only a start. Happy birthday, Lex!” Katy finished, earning more cheers and applauses from the crowd. “We have an eventful evening planned for you all tonight, so enjoy, let loose, and of course, have fun!”

Pairs gathered at the center to dance and cheer as the performer began to sing, Clarke and Raven quickly jumping in and singing along.

“FUCK YES, KATY PERRY!” Raven shouted, singing out-of-pitch and slurring her words, the sound coming out of her mouth turning heads and earning her curious looks. “You'ust gotta iniiiiite da liiiiight. And let it shaaaaane. Just ooootoo da niYiiiglht. Like the fork of Julaaaaaahhh!”

After a few more drinks, Raven decided she had enough of Katy and the suffocating crowd. “Griffin! Operation Knick a Knickknack is on! Vamos! Rapido!” She tugged Clarke out of the ballroom with the pretense of heading for the nearest restroom, but redirected towards the foyer which was currently vacant when she confirmed they were in the clear.

“Ray, this isn’t one of your brightest ideas and I’m calling you out on it.” Clarke tried to reason with her, but she knew it was a pointless effort.

“One teeny, weeny little souvenir! That's it, then we leave!” Raven was already climbing one of the double staircases towards the second level, leaving Clarke no choice but to follow in pursuit. Once there, she went for the nearest door, expectations high and showing, and walked into what seemed to be a guest bedroom. She closed the door, uninterested. “Too impersonal. Next.”

“Raven! Just grab whatever and lets go before someone finds us!” Clarke begged, watching as Raven opened and closed another door farther ahead.

“Bathroom.” She said in explanation, opening yet another door. “Aha! Here. We. Go.” And she moved in. Clarke followed. The room was strange to say the least; a single, long shelf ran along its walls, decorated with different trinkets and items that made no sense in the slightest. Raven grabbed a silver, flower-shaped brooch, covered in small crystals. “Got it! Let's bounce! I wanna try and get a selfie with Katy before she leaves!”

“Raven maybe you shouldn’t… that seems expensive, we can get in a lot of trouble if-”

“Relax, Princess. Look at all the crap on these shelves. She’ll never even miss it, I promise!” So after surrendering to Raven’s appeal, they left. Clarke took another glance at the strange room before shutting the lights and pulling the door closed; ignoring the uneasy feeling looming from the unwarranted discovery.

Indra waited until the coast was clear before firmly grabbing Lexa’s arm and pulling her to the foyer, where they could have a private moment free from wandering eyes. “How many drinks have you had, Lexa, and God help you if you lie to me, girl.” Indra hissed, tone angry and serious, but not appearing to frighten the grinning, swaying brunette in the least bit.

“Well, um let’s see… I was never the best mathematician, but according to my calculations, roughly… seven…?” She spoke, words slurring and breath stinking of gin, presenting Indra with ten fingers instead of seven.

“You foolish girl! You were in there groping that girl…and lucky for you I caught you before you
were able to slip your foul hands under her dress…Lexa, you cannot go around acting like this, do you hear me?!” Indra asked bewildered, shaking her head, a little terrified at Lexa’s poor behavior. “This isn’t a game, child! This is serious and you can get in real trouble!”

“She was practically begging for it… they always do, so relax Indra, no harm done. She’s probably looking for me to finish what I started so…” She took a step back, indicating she was done with this conversation, and she saw Indra move to stop her, to keep her from leaving, but it wasn’t Indra’s attempt that rooted her in place; her feet suddenly feeling like it was cemented to the floor beneath and unable to budge.

Her eyes drifted to the top of the staircase, where she saw the most breathtaking figure descend to where she stood; golden hair flowing freely from her movements, long dress cascading off each step behind her in such a magical way, Lexa thought it was an illusion. Lexa’s eyes hungrily scanned the length of the toned and curvaceous body, noticing the dangerous yet alluring opening that dipped down her chest, exposing the top and side of her full breasts. Even though her face was hidden behind a pearly white mask, her lively blue eyes pierced through it, causing Lexa to instantly forget how to breathe.

She suddenly felt broken yet unexplainably sober; knees unlocking and beginning to weaken, throat dry and raspy, and eyes beginning to sting - refusing to blink and cause the image to disappear, afraid it was another drunken apparition. But it wasn’t. She knew the moment those solid, bright eyes finally found hers and connected. The moment blue and green met and held the other’s stare, neither wanting to linger but finding it impossible to break contact. The girl, whoever she was, stopped dead in her track, returning Lexa’s fiery gaze in equal fervor.

And at that moment, as Lexa would soon discover, was the turning point in her life; the moment she crossed paths with this goddess whom she had yet to meet. She didn’t care about anything else that second…all she cared about was getting to know this stranger that was making her heart pump a bit faster and her palms to become moist…all she cared about was getting to know the girl behind the mask.

Chapter End Notes

*Thank you all for reading!*  

PLEASE LEAVE KUDOS AND COMMENTS TO DETERMINE FUTURE/CONTINUATION OF STORY!
Right there, pinned under the intense stare from the green-eyed, masked stranger perched at the base of the spiral staircase, was when Clarke felt her jaw drop for the second time that evening. She quickly regained control over it and snapped it shut before her mouth could betray her further.

Someone called up to them, tone sounding irritated and angry, but Clarke’s focus was entirely devoted to the figure below, dressed in a perfectly fitting, all-white tuxedo and black stiletto high heels. She wore a black bowtie around her neck, which complemented her vicious yet beautifully designed black mask. She looked stunning, and Clarke did not have to ask who the woman- hair curled and tossed over her right shoulder, that stared up at her with such a fiery gaze- was.

“Ladies! The second floor is out of bounds!” A woman shouted up to her and Raven, finally pulling Clarke out of her enchantment. “Do not make me repeat that again!”

“Indra, it’s alright…” Lexa spoke, placing a calming hand on Indra’s arm, “I gave them permission.” She glanced back at the two, both still frozen in place, and winked at Clarke in a manner that insinuated she’d be paying her back later for the save.

“Uhhh, yea, ma’am, our apologies…” Raven jumped in, presenting the irate woman with a cheesy grin, slipping the hand still clutching the stolen brooch behind her back and climbing down the steps. “We were, er- just heading back to the party.” Raven confirmed, wrapping her free hand around Clarke’s wrist and pulling her the rest of the way down, passing in between Lexa and Indra as they escaped to the ballroom.

Clarke’s eyes once again found Lexa’s as she walked by, catching the faint smell of her scent that was an uneven mixture of lavender and bourbon. She kept walking, unsure whether out of her own will or because Raven still hauled her in the direction of the ballroom. But even as she walked away, she felt Lexa’s gaze follow her until she was out of sight, and as tempted as she was to turn her neck and steal one more look at the woman that took her breath away, she refused to do so and allowed herself to be carted towards the still raving celebration.

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“Lexa! Eyes on me, girl!” Indra ordered, snapping her fingers in front of Lexa’s face to grab her attention. “I swear, you are worse than a teenage boy during puberty!”

“Indra, I have to go… Can we raincheck this conversation? Thanks.” She spoke, stepping away from Indra, ready to dash in pursuit-

“Oh no… We are having this conversation NOW!” Indra spoke, once again firmly holding Lexa’s arm thus preventing her from moving. Lexa turned to face her, brows scrunched in a silent plea, bottom lip jutting forward in a pout.

“But, aunt Indra….it’s my party!” She tried, giving the woman her best ‘I’m sowwy’ face. Indra just shook her head, sighing and rolling her eyes.

“Fine. But you best behave, child… do not let me catch you elbows deep up some poor girls’ dress again or there will be hell to pay, you hear!!?”
Lexa furiously nodded her head in agreement, a smirk forming on her face at Indra who released her arm. “That’s why I love you!” She leaned forward and gave the woman a grateful kiss on the cheek and left.

Upon entering the ballroom, her eyes scanned it from end to end, gaze scrutinizing every blonde her eyes landed on in hopes she would be the one, but failing to locate the white-masked, blue-eyed beauty to her disappointment. She felt an arm drape heavily around her shoulder and turned to see Octavia, her longest and - at the current moment - most annoying best friend hand her a glass of water.

“There you are! I’ve been looking everywhere for you, Lex. Here, drink, you need to sober up.” She pushed the glass into Lexa’s hand but when Lexa refused to take it, she handed it over to a butler walking by. “Hey, c’mon I didn’t see you eat anything all night, why don’t we-“

“O, not now.” Lexa cut her off, starting to feel the irritation coursing through her veins, fingers starting to twitch in search of a drink with a little more kick to it… “Later, k.”

“Ok, ok…everything alright?”

“Fine.” Yes she was mad, possibly borderline furious, a sensation she recently grew accustomed to due to its frequent occurrences.

“Alright… when you’re ready to stop being a bitch come find me.” Octavia mumbled, disappearing into the massive crowd.

Lexa felt slightly guilty, but it lasted only a second because there, near the stage where Katy Perry still performed, she saw her… black dress and white mask and loose blonde curls spilling down her back. Without realizing it, her breathing hitched, and she was powerless to do anything else at that moment other than stare in her direction- keenly observing her every movement, the way she stood slightly awkward beside her friend, who currently attempted to climb onto the stage forcing the blonde to pull her back down and frown from embarrassment.

Lexa watched as some drunken idiot nearby bumped into the blushing girl, causing her to stumble forward in a momentary loss of balance, yet it was she who turned and apologized, placing a caring hand on his arm and asking the dumbfuck if he was ok. Lexa smiled; the adorableness of it all quickly abating the anger and replacing it with a foreign feeling she had not felt in a long time. That is, at least, until the dipshit decided to try his luck further and placed a tentative hand on her hip. Lexa watched closely, eyes probably scathing a hole through his core, as he pressed his hips against hers, eyes looking down at her as if she was a prize he would soon be polishing in the privacy of his bedroom. A thought crossed her still raging mind, well, maybe she is… maybe that’s his girl.

Her hands clenched into fists, jaw tightening and eyes blurring at the uncontrollable anger surging. The urge was spiking and she knew she wouldn’t be able to resist it…

Lexa walked to the bar where she ordered a round of shots, enough for six people, and downed each one without even pausing for a breath.

“You sure left in a hurry earlier…” a voice, husky and low, delivered to Lexa’s ear seductively caught her attention. It was the girl Indra caught her getting frisky with earlier, in the middle of the dance floor - crap what was her name! “I was thinking you could give me that tour you promised… I think now is a good time, don’t you?” She said, biting her lower lip and batting her eyes, a finger ran up the length of Lexa’s arm slowly and she traced it with her eyes.

“Absolutely…” Lexa said, tossing back the last shot and grabbing her wrist, towing her out of the
ballroom. “We can start with the nearest closet.”

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The door to the guest bathroom swung open and the sound of high heels stopping abruptly should have been enough to bring Lexa to pause, yet she refused to detach her ravenous lips from the neck they currently sucked on. Its owner - *fuck, what the hell was her name!* - sat on the edge of the granite countertop, dress bunched up around her waist where Lexa’s impatient hands had pushed it up, and her legs were parted and wrapped possessively around Lexa. Lexa’s hands rested on her plump behind, where she kneaded the flesh roughly, pulling the girl’s warm core flush against her toned stomach, grinding against her slowly. She felt the girl gasp and tense at the intrusion, and Lexa grumbled, clearly irritated at being interrupted.

“Occupied!” She rasped annoyed, voice muffled by the girl’s neck, mask tossed aside to allow her to feast without any barriers.

“*Shit!* I’m so sorry! I thought it was vacant…” the intruder responded, sounding clearly embarrassed and overly apologetic.

Frustrated and suddenly losing interest, she pulled away from the girl, and immediately regretted not having done so sooner. The gods, or spirits, or - whoever- must have a really sick sense of humor because the blushing, shock-stricken intruder standing awkwardly by the door was none other than the mysterious blonde, eyes wide in surprise behind her mask and mouth hanging open, causing a similar reaction from Lexa (except hers was out of stupidity rather than shock).

“Oh hey! We were-er, just leaving…please feel free to um…sorry about that.” Lexa felt her body temperature start to scale, and she rubbed the back of her neck nervously in anticipation.

“No, I-I should’ve knocked. I can go in the kitchen…” The blonde said hurriedly, eyes shutting behind her mask as what she had just spoken dawned on her, “… I meant, not *go* go in the kitchen… I just need the sink.” Her ice-blue eyes shifted to where the sink was, swiftly averting to the floor once she made eye contact with the girl that still sat, almost naked, on it.

“No! No…please, by all means…” Lexa stepped aside, motioning with a subtle nod for the girl to step down. “It’s all yours.” The girl, pulling down and adjusting her dress, moved out of her way, allowing her to pass by.

“I’ll um, see you back at the dance floor?” The girl asked, starting to head for the exit, giving Lexa a wink and an unashamed grin.

Lexa merely nodded, lingering a bit longer in the restroom after she had departed. “Again, sorry… I was-"..."

“No, truly, you don’t have to apologize…” She said earnestly, giving the flushing brunette a smile-shy, yes, very bashful, Lexa thought- through the mirror. “Sorry for interrupting…”

It took Lexa a moment to recover from the smile she had received, although nervous and delivered out of embarrassment, it was stunning and she needed more of it. She watched her through the mirror, observing how her body curved forward as she washed her hands…eyes especially interested on the impressive rack that spilled out of her dress, causing Lexa’s speech mechanism to become temporarily impaired.

“You didn’t… she’s not anyone important-“ She wanted to slap herself then, seeing the reaction her statement had on the blonde –brows raising and lips tightening, “I meant, she’s not my girlfriend –..."
we just met!” LEXA, SHUT THE FUCK UP YOU AIRHEAD! “I meant- we’re…not together.”

She merely nodded, eyes dropping back to her hands. “No need to explain, I get it.” Another smile – polite, this one was polite; another internal scream released inside Lexa’s burning chest.

She shut the faucet, reaching for a paper towel, and Lexa couldn’t help but scan the length of her body as she angled forward, really focusing on her notable glutes and how perfectly round they were. Damn, what I wouldn’t give to get a taste of that-

“You have a lovely home… I’m assuming you’re Lexa…?” She asked through the mirror, fully aware of what Lexa had been doing.

“Yes! Yes that would be right…” Lexa said extending her a hand. “Hi! I’m Lexa.” Just as quickly debating whether to use that hand to slap herself at her redundant declaration. “And you just said that…” Smooth, Lexa, please go get a brain transplant.

Yet she smiled once again, only this time it was a little less timid - leaning more towards sweet, maybe? “It’s nice to meet you… Happy birthday, by the way.” But Lexa’s hearing capabilities faltered at that moment because the blonde took her hand, shaking it politely, causing her already struggling brain to nearly short circuit at the warmth and softness of her skin.

“Er- *clears throat* thanks.” The new proximity allowed Lexa to better examine the mesmerizing set of eyes behind the mask, the only area of her face that was uncovered besides her mouth, causing her to look south to stare at her pink-shaded lips that parted slightly when she inhaled. “You got a little somethin- here let me get it for you!” Too eager, tone it down! Her brain finally started working; coming up with a brilliant plan once she noticed the small splashes of shimmering spots scatted on the blonde’s neck and chest. She reached for a towel, dipping it in running water, and moved back to face the blonde.

“May I?” She waited for permission, sensing the woman hesitate but eventually give her a nod. Lexa bit the inside of her lip, feeling an overly-creepy smile beginning to form.

Gently, she brushed her hair aside- relishing how light and soft it felt on her hand- exposing the side of her neck, and placed the moist towel just beneath her ear. As slowly as possible without causing suspicion, she dragged it across her neck, clearing it of any sticky drops that remained. Growing a little bold, she allowed her hand to travel lower than necessary, pretending to wipe away a nonexistent drop on the swell of her right breast and desperately wishing she was using her tongue instead of the towel. Lexa nearly collapsed when she noticed the blonde's chest rise and fall with increased speed the lower her hand traveled, making her wonder if it was from nervousness or from... arousal?

She looked up, finding the blonde staring intensely at her, causing a series of shivers to run down her spine.

“There... all done...” Lexa smiled, steadying her hand as she pulled it away, tossing the towel aside.

“Thanks…” the blonde said, clearing her throat, “Well, I should be going, my friend is probably looking for me…” And with another smile –awkward, nonononono! NOT awkward, dammit! - and a nod, she walked to the door, pulling it open-

“Wait! I never did catch your name...” Lexa shouted after her, before the blonde had a chance to step out.

The blonde turned to face her, head tilting slightly to the side, another smile forming- smug,
definitely smug, maybe cocky? “Oh, I’m no one important.” Then, without another word, she left.

***

“Ray! Ray!” Clarke stormed into the ballroom, easily locating her friend across the room. KP had long left and the crowd was beginning to thin out, a good indication it was time to leave. Raven sat casually on one of the empty tables, wine glass in hand, talking to a girl Clarke never met before. “Raven, we need to get going, I told the babysitter we wouldn’t be past 2 AM.”

“The kid will be fine! He’s 10! Practically a man now, he can take care of himself.” Raven waved a hand in dismissal, but thought better of it once she saw Clarke’s frigid glare. “You know what, on second thought, I’d have no one to pick on if something happened to the bugger. Ya, let’s go.”

Clarke waited impatiently outside for the limo to pull up, looking over her shoulder every now and then to see if Raven would emerge. When she did, she was escorted by the black-haired, blue-eyed girl Clarke saw her with at the table, mask long discarded, chatting with her. The girl leaned forward, and they embraced, and Clarke heard her call out something that made Raven laugh as she came down the steps to meet Clarke.

“Who’s she?” Clarke asked, curiously watching the girl who stood just outside the door, still watching as Raven approached her.

“That’s Octavia, good buddy of mine. We met when I used to play. She was talking to me about possibly coaching the team, can you believe it! Man, what a high that would be!”

Clarke smiled, genuinely pleased that Raven was happy. “That’s awesome, Ray! You should do it, you’d be incredible at it!”

The limo finally appeared, and Clarke stepped aside to allow Raven in first, taking one last look at the magnificent house before sliding in herself. There, at the door, a second observer had appeared, standing next to Octavia and joining her as both now watched Clarke. She saw Lexa smirk from the distance, hands stuffed in her front pockets and tie undone, leaning casually against the door. Her lips moved and Clarke saw Octavia shrug and shake her head in response to whatever the question was, both pairs of eyes still not budging from Clarke.

Clarke ignored it, finally entering the limo and diverting her attention fully to Raven, who was still blabbing about coaching.

“…It’s different, and who knows, I may hate it you know, but it will at least give me something else to do besides play video games all night and pick on your little brother…and you… I’m sure I can find time to squeeze you both in though!”

Raven was more than a friend to Clarke, she was a sister, and they treated each other as such since pre-school. Since her terrible accident, which caused her to become disabled thus preventing her from pursuing a soccer career, she never really settled into anything, constantly changing jobs and hobbies, and making it her mission to torment the Griffin siblings full-time.

“You should totally do it! You can take Aden along, to watch as you instruct. I’m sure he’ll equally benefit.” Clarke tried to not sound overenthusiastic but truth is, she needed some much deserved alone time, and with caring for Aden, school and work, it was a luxury she simply could not afford. “And you live a block away from me. I highly doubt our friendship will take a turn.”

“Kid, you couldn’t get rid of me if you tried!” Raven joked, spirits high and light, Clarke wondered if it was elation from the news or the wine going to her head. “And let’s be honest, you sure have
tried…remember that one time, in middle school? When you dared me to go and knack Mr. Kane’s super special pen? Yea, you said he wasn’t in his office, that you saw him leave for the day and dared me to go steal it. Which I did. Except he was there and caught me right as I was sneaking out. ALL so that I could get detention for the rest of the week and not bother you after school while you studied for ART class.” She squinted her eyes at Clarke, shaking her head slowly. “Don’t think I forgot, Griffin.”

Clarke threw her head back and let out a throaty laugh, wiping her eyes as tears started to collect. “And it totally worked!”

“Yea yea, you twat… keep laughing…”

“Do you know her?” Lexa asked O, pointing with her chin in Clarke's direction, getting in a last glance before the blonde disappeared into the limo.

O shrugged, shaking her head. “Nah, but she’s friends with Raven… the girl I told you about, remember? That was in a motorcycle accident a few years back?”

“Yes, I remember… so they’re friends… you have Raven’s number?” Lexa asked, eyes following after the limo as it pulled away, silently wishing it wasn’t the last time she gazed into those intoxicating blue eyes.

“Yea…why?” O asked nonchalantly.

“Because O…I have reason to think I just met the most incredible, most beautiful woman ever - granted I never even saw her face…and I already fucked it up.” O snapped her head towards her, eyes widening in surprise. “I need to fix it.”

“Lexa Woods… all the years I’ve known you, I don’t think that sequence of words ever left your mouth.” O stated, chuckling in disbelief. “She must have done a number on you, hun.”

“That’s an understatement… there’s just something about her, O!” Lexa huffed, perplexed at these murky feelings. “Those damn beautiful eyes, they made me feel so transparent, you know? Just…the way she looked at me, with curiosity and not loathing like most people do, it made me feel real. Well, until I ruined it with - what's her face. I don’t care what I have to do to get a second chance, I’ll do it… But I need a way back in. So, I’m gonna need you to text Raven. I need a name.”

“You sure this isn’t the booze and your insatiable horniness talking?” O joked, snorting at her own jest, but quickly swallowing it back down as she saw the dreamy look on Lexa’s face.

“No… I can’t explain it and yes, I know how crazy it all sounds but...she just made me feel alive, O. More than I have in as long as I can remember.” Lexa smiled, gaze looking beyond the darkness that surrounded them, mind rewinding to the moment her eyes first landed on the stunning blonde. “My heart was beating, O, like really beating! And then I just felt warm everywhere…it was just incredible. No lover, not anyone has ever made me feel that way.” She admitted, unsure why her tongue was spilling the contents of her suddenly fragile heart, as if something dormant within her had finally awakened. “I don’t understand it... but five minutes with her - that’s all I had, O, five minutes, and it was enough to do all this…Makes me wonder what a little more time with her can do, you know?”

Octavia was quite literally speechless. Lexa finally turned to look at her when she received no response in return, only to find an open-mouthed, wide-eyed brunette gawping at her. “Oh, for
crying out loud, Octavia…snap out of it. Just… hurry the fuck up and text Raven!”

“You know, you should have been a poet, Lex;” Octavia finally conjured the strength to say, “You truly missed your calling settling for rich, spoiled bitch.” And with a wink, she pulled out her phone.

***

“So Ray, is that Lexa girl friends with Octavia?” Clarke asked, rubbing soft circles on Raven’s back, who happened to be heaving chunks out of the limo window at the present time. “I saw them together when we were leaving.”

Raven gagged, grossed out by the foul taste in her mouth. “Fucking wiiiiiiiiine! Why do I continue to drink that satanic poison?! Here, pass me the champagne, will ya? I need to sober up.” Raven stuck her head back in, extending a hand in direction of the champagne bottle.

“I hardly think that’s logical.” Clarke responded, but did it anyway, Raven’s reasoning was one aspect about her friend she learned to never question.

“Fuck logic.” She said before taking a long swig of the champagne. “Yes, blondie, they are. Best friends. Grew up rich and pampered together, yada yada, happily ever after. The end.” Another swig. “Why?”

Clarke thought before responding, trying to really place her experience into words. “I sorta bumped into Lexa, after that kid spilled his drink on me? Well, I rushed to the bathroom and she was there…and I honest-to-god thought she was a vampire for maybe 20 full seconds. I never witnessed such determination to suck someone’s neck like that… it was impressive!”

Raven burst out laughing, nearly tumbling from her seat. “Yea, she’s a total fuckgirl. I heard rumors that she has a different chick over every night of the week… total player. Why? Did she make a pass at you? Fuck, Griffin are you gay and I’m just now finding out about it?!”

“What! No! I mean, I don’t think I am… I mean, I don’t know! Would you care if I was?!”

“Nah it wouldn’t surprise me… I see how you glance at my ass every now and then… I don’t blame you for it…”

“Raven, I totally do not! And to answer your question, she made a passive-aggressive pass at me, but seriously, the nerves on her! I had literally just walked in on her practically fucking some random girl on the sink counter and no more than two minutes later she’s trying to butter up to me…batting her lashes and throwing me a crooked grin… it’s the oldest trick in the book.”

“Say what you want about her, but she’s got game dude.” Raven nodded in silent appreciation.

“Yea, well, it’s beyond ridiculous. She clearly treats women like a piece of meat and I’m simply not amused by that kind of behavior. It’s childish and immature. You know, you’d think that going through such a tragic life experience like she did, with losing both her parents, would push her to be better. But no… nope, she’s nothing but a stuck-up, spoiled, narcissistic brat.”

“Wow!” Raven exclaimed, chugging the last of the champagne. “For someone who’s clearly not interested, you sure have a lot of strong feelings about her… but I’m sure it’s only because you don’t care… because why would you she’s a horrible person!” Clarke knew Raven was mocking her, but she refused to be swayed. Lexa Woods was no decent human being as far as she could tell. “True, tragic events should make a person better… but being through one myself, I can kinda understand her… sometimes these things can break a person, Clarke.” Raven spoke so earnestly, it felt like a dagger was suddenly forcing its way in through Clarke’s ribs. “Not everyone can overcome
adversary like you, princess.”

All Clarke could do was nod in agreement, feeling slightly ashamed at how quickly she was to judge; how fast she was to compare her own struggles to that of another and to evaluate them based on her idea of triumph.

“I know she may not have made a huge impression on you buuuuut… it would appear she thinks otherwise.” Raven said haughtily, a grin emerging on her face as she raised her cell phone up to Clarke, a message was open on her screen. The top read ‘Octavia,’ followed by three very simple words...

‘Who’s the blonde?’

Chapter End Notes

*Thank you all for reading!*

PLEASE LEAVE KUDOS AND COMMENTS TO DETERMINE FUTURE/CONTINUATION OF STORY!
Octavia awoke to a sudden vibration from beneath the pillow she currently drooled on. The stench of booze and smoke seeping from it caused her to gag and cough a few times, and she winced mildly in its direction. The room was bright, too bright, and it did not help alleviate the massive hangover and pounding headache she felt hit her like an incoming train.

Looking around, she found Lexa sprawled on the floor by the bed, wearing only a white Calvin Klein sports bra and boxer briefs, snuggling with roughly half-a-dozen empty bottles of Heinekens. Octavia rolled her eyes at the sight; silently apologizing to the pillow once she realized the smell was clearly all Lexa.

She pulled her phone out and perked up when she saw Raven’s name flash on the screen.

“Yo, drunkie! Wake up!” Octavia bellowed, tossing a pillow at Lexa, who only rolled to her other side grumbling curse words up at Octavia. “Fine. I guess you don’t want to know what RAVEN texted back about a certain BLONDE!” She made sure to emphasize the two words she knew Lexa had been dying to hear all damn night.

It certainly worked. Lexa shot up into a sitting position so impossibly fast that Octavia screamed from surprise. “WHAT THE FUCK, LEXA! FIND YOUR CHILL, BRO! You scared the shit out of me!”

Lexa scrambled to her feet on wobbly legs, still visibly drunk from the night before, stepping on a bottle which rolled under her weight and caused her to crash back down harshly on her ass.

“What did she say!” Lexa asked, eyes wide and excited, barely registering that she currently sat on at least three uncomfortable bottles.

“Jeez, now that’s real thirst…” Octavia laughed, scooting over to give Lexa space when she crawled into bed next to her.

Octavia opened the message, which revealed a single word, yet to Lexa the combination of those 6 letters were suddenly the most beautiful formation she had ever seen.

“Clarke.” Lexa and Octavia said out loud in synchrony.

“Clarke…” Lexa repeated it again solo one more time, relishing how the name just rolled off her tongue and tugged at her heartstrings, she felt her lips curve upwards into a smile. “Did she say anything else?!”

“Nope. Just that.” Octavia shook her head.

“What! What kind of information is that! Seriously, I mean, can your friend be any LESS specific?!” Lexa scoffed, feeling empty and unfulfilled with the simplicity of the text; she wanted more…she needed to know more. Just as she was about to dive into a ruthless rant about Raven’s ineptness, Octavia’s phone started to vibrate with such continued momentum from incoming messages that Lexa briefly thought her phone had broken.

‘Clarke Abigail Griffin.’
22.

“DOB - 06/08.”

’S-I-N-G-L-E.’

‘Senior/ Nursing Major.’

‘CEO of Nerdville.’

‘Sucks people’s fun for fun.’

‘Bartender and waitress at Arcadia Bar and Grill.’

‘Works- M/W/F/SAT 7 PM -10 PM.’

‘Classes- M/T/W/T 9 AM-5 PM.’

‘In Biology with Playgirl over there.’

‘No, I don’t need laxatives, mom.’

‘....’

‘Please pretend the earlier text never happened...’

‘Back to Clarke- Can email class schedule upon request.’

‘Will be referring to Playgirl as PG to facilitate texting.’

‘Thought PG was a vampire. Lost major points there. Tsk tsk. ’

‘Enjoys studying, doing homework, and making sure baby brother also studies and does homework.’

Neither Octavia nor Lexa spoke after reading and re-reading the stream of messages from Raven. Both merely gazed at the screen in expectation of another wave of texts to come pouring in. Lexa had opened her mouth to make a comment when another set of vibrations interrupted.

‘She has specifically asked me NOT to tell PG ANYTHING.’

‘I will deny any and all accusations I receive here-on-out.’

‘If she does ask if I was involved, this was all a massive butt-text.’

‘May the force be with her.’

‘P.S. She gets to biology freakishly early to get good seats. Just to paint a picture of how big a nerd she is and the kind of girl PG is trying to get with.’

‘P.P.S. She’s not interested in being a booty call. So tell PG to drop the PG act.’

‘P.P.P.S. You still owe me $13.75 for those tacos, bitch.’

Octavia rolled her eyes at that last one. Cheap-ass bitch.

Lexa sat next to her, eyes suddenly blank and unblinking, absorbing the amount of information she
had just received.

Octavia smirked at the stumped look on her face. “Is that specific enough for ya, PG?”

***

Indra leisurely sipped her scolding hot coffee down at the kitchen table, browsing through the *Los Angeles Times* as part of her usual morning routine. She was always the first one up in the mansion; up before the maids or any of the other houseworkers arrived. She enjoyed the privacy and quiet, and felt strangely at ease to be free of responsibilities for a few peaceful minutes every day.

That peace was strangely short lived when she heard a bellow call to her from the upstairs floor.

“Indraaaa! Indra!” Lexa shouted, sounding slightly panicked. Indra immediately jumped to her feet and rushed to the stairs.

“What is it, child!” She shouted back, taking the steps two at a time until she reached the second landing. “Lexa, is everything alright?!” She sprung into Lexa’s room, heart racing and frantic, ready to tackle down an intruder or burglar.

“Indra! I can’t find my books! My textbooks! Where are they?!” Lexa replied, on her hands and knees searching under the messy bed. The room was completely disheveled. Clothes, plates, food remnants, thongs (Indra cringed; Lexa didn’t wear thongs) and empty bottles decorated the floor. “Indra!”

Indra was still trying to process Lexa’s question, not quite sure she heard her correctly. “Textbooks? What do you need your textbooks for?”

“For class! I’m gonna be late and I can’t find my fucking book!” she sighed, moving to the massive, walk-in closet to check for her school material.

“You’re…going to class?!” Indra, still unsure if she heard correctly, inquired. “As in, college?”

“Not if I don’t find that goddamn book!” Lexa shouted from the closet.

Indra jumped into action, crossing the room as fast as possible to Lexa’s desk. “Where did you last leave it, child?”

“If I knew, I wouldn’t be in this situation!” Lexa hopped out of the closet, pulling up a pair of tight, grey jeans and zipping them. Her daft fingers worked quickly pushing each button through its hole on the white, button-up shirt she tossed on, stuffing one side into her jeans and letting the other casually hang. “Hey, how do I look? Is it ok, too casual?” She asked, rolling the sleeves up to her elbows and adjusting the collar.

Indra paused yet again, definitely positive she misheard Lexa this time. She cocked her head to the side at the question, admiring the effort behind Lexa’s choice of outfit. “Since when do you care how you dress?”

Lexa shrugged, stuffing her feet into a spanking new pair of white Nike airmax, and Indra saw a faint blush cross her face. “Yes, child, you look beautiful as always.” She smiled at the flustered girl, handing Lexa her favorite, charcoal Rolex watch that was far too big for her slim wrist.

She then crossed over to the bathroom, opening a bottom cabinet and pulled out a brush. Indra returned to Lexa and very gently ran it over her tousled hair. She smiled down at the suddenly timid girl. “So… what’s got you interested in attending class all of a sudden?” She asked, trying to keep
her tone as straight as possible.

“Just figured I should finish college so you can stop getting on my butt about it…” Lexa replied defensively, but Indra smiled, knowing Lexa wasn’t quite ready to share yet. She gave her a kiss on the forehead and returned to the bathroom, placing the brush back in its location.

“Well… try and find a better home for your books then,” she said, pulling out a stack of textbooks from inside the same cabinet, throwing Lexa a questioning look.

“Oh! Right-er… O and I were using them as doorstoppers…” Lexa chuckled faintly, rushing to grab them and giving Indra a kiss on the cheek. “You’re awesome! Gotta go! Love you, Bye!”

***

The classroom was empty with the exception of the professor and a few lingering students from the class prior. Clarke weaved her way through the auditorium-like seats and took her regular spot near the back of the class, setting down her coffee and pulling out her notebook and laptop. She was browsing through her notes while she waited for class to start, when she received a text from Raven.

‘Hey! You in class?’

‘Yes. What’s up?’

‘Wanna grab lunch after?’

‘Don’t we always, Ray?’

‘Jeze, excuse-moi for confirming. See you after class.’

Clarke put her phone aside, shifting her attention back to her notes. She tried concentrating but found it nearly impossible because some fussing idiot decided to take a seat directly behind her, even though the classroom was still mostly empty, kicking the back of her seat every now and then and irking her to no limit. The endless flipping of pages and restless creaking of a chair caused her to silently cringe, but she ignored it and tried to zone into her studies.

A piece of loose-leaf paper floated to the floor by Clarke’s feet, and she heard someone mumble an apology when she reached to grab it. She turned in her seat to return it to its owner, tempted to crumple it up and throw it at the annoying pest, but froze in place when she came within inches of a rather familiar, rather unexpected face that had haunted her dreams since Saturday night. Her jaw unhinged (it was becoming a habit lately) and her mind started to jumble as the girl smiled at her, giving Clarke a flawless, full-teethed beam.

“Thank you.” Lexa said, grinning a little too widely for the gesture and collecting the paper. “I-er, I’m sorta freaking out. I hear we have a test and I’ve been MIA for a few weeks.” She chuckled nervously. There was an instant there, right at that moment when they just held each other’s stare in silence, and Clarke thought she noticed Lexa’s eyes glint and goosebumps coat her neck and upper chest.

“What are you doing here?” Clarke blurted out, unable to contain her shock any longer.

“Well, I-um, I’m in this class. We have a-“

“I don’t recall seeing you here since school started and now, out of the blue, you’re suddenly concerned with exams?” Clarke was certainly curious and skeptical, not willing to pin Lexa’s sudden reappearance to mere coincidence. She saw Lexa’s lips attempt to counter, but no words spilled out.
After a moment, Lexa cleared her throat and adjusted her posture.

“Yes, well, I’ve been busy… with stuff. Personal business and all.” Lexa feigned a stern tone to conceal the tension. “But yes, if you must know, I take my education very seriously.” She paused, swallowing dryly from the oh, really look Clarke was giving her. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have some studying to do.”

Clarke observed in sheer amusement as Lexa, suddenly distraught and desperately trying to gain the upper hand, pulled her textbook closer and flipped the cover open, determined to ‘study.’

“Yea, good luck with that.” Clarke said, smirking up at the rattled brunette, who simply shrugged as if uninterested. “But I don’t think you’ll get far studying calculous for a biology test.”

Lexa’s eyes nearly exploded from her head then. She slammed the cover of her textbook shut, immediately noticing the bright, red CALCULOUS plastered on the top. Clarke had to look away, because the girl was turning an unusual shade of purple. She reached into her schoolbag and pulled out her own textbook.

“Here.” She handed it to Lexa, who took it gratefully, mumbling a barely audible ‘thank you’ in return. “The test covers chapters 7 through 9. It’s on the female anatomy.” Clarke smirked up at her once more, pinning Lexa in place with her scorching glare. “Something tells me you’re rather an expert in that field.”

The girl was nearly blue now. Clarke turned in her seat right as class started, smirking under her breath. She could feel Lexa staring at the back of her head, but she never turned again, refusing to give the girl a single shred of satisfaction.

Clarke finished the multiple choice exam in record speed. She gathered her things, stood, and walked down the lengthy hallway to hand in her test. When she walked back towards the exit, she shot a curious glance at the brunette as she passed by, catching her furiously bubbling in her scantron without bothering to even glance at any of the questions.

Clarke sighed and shook her head just as Lexa shot up, test in hand, and raced down to hand it in. She didn’t wait for her. She kept on walking, knowing Raven would be waiting at their usual spot. Yet it surprised her when she heard her name being called out, and just the acknowledgment that she even heard her name at all made her pause.

“Hey! Clarke! Hold it a sec, will ya.” Lexa called to her, reaching her just outside the building, handing Clarke her book. “Thank you. That wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be. How did-“

“How do you know my name?” Clarke cut her off, eyes squinting at Lexa, who tensed and gulped nervously. “I never told you my name.”

“I-yes… well-you see…“

“You recognized me…. from your party.” The realization slowly dawned on her, and Clarke worked to put two and two together. “Curious…since I never once removed my mask. So… who told you?!“

“No one!” Lexa replied, but her voice waivered slightly. “You have very… distinct hair… I recognized the back of your head when I walked in class…” Lexa had clearly entered full-on anxiety mode now, fumbling for a believable lie but failing miserably at it.

Clarke nodded slowly, yanking the book out of Lexa’s trembling hands, and powerwalking towards the cafeteria.
“Wait! Clarke, I-“

Clarke wasn’t listening. She knew exactly who had done it and the anger she felt pumping through her blood needed immediate release.

Raven stood just outside the cafeteria, waving to Clarke when she saw her approaching, hand quickly dropping limply to her side when she noticed Lexa sprinting behind her with a freaked look on her face.

“Oh, I am so dead.” Raven whispered to herself, quickly trying to think up an excuse.

“Wanna tell me how the hell she knows my name?!” Clarke accused, shouting at Raven as soon as she was close enough. “And do NOT play dumb, Raven!” Clarke hissed once she caught the confused look on Raven’s face.

Raven shot Lexa a menacing glare over Clarke’s shoulder. “Look, Clarke…” She sighed; there was no winning this round and she knew it. “Octavia-”

“You’ve got to be kidding me…” Clarke cut her off, guessing where the conversation was going, and shook her head. She turned to face Lexa, who was so intent on catching up to the blonde that they nearly collided when Clarke suddenly stopped and faced her.

“Let me make this easier for you…No, I’m not interested in being another checkmark off your list. So please, save yourself time and embarrassment and leave me the hell alone.”

She faced Raven once more, who looked at her in utter astonishment. “Thanks for having my back, Ray…” and walked away before Raven could respond.

Raven scoffed, turning to Lexa who looked beyond devastated. “I hand you everything on a golden platter and you still fuck shit up. Let me make something clear Woods, Clarke is my best friend. I don’t know what your intention with her is but if she ends up getting hurt, I will personally… hire, someone to hurt you right back.”

Lexa just sighed, frustrated and disappointed at how the encounter had gone, desperate for a drink.

“Now, I’m gonna go back in there and try to make it up to her. And YOU… will stay far, far away and not even CONSIDER going to her work place, called Arcadia and located downtown, at roughly 7 pm tonight…where she will be bartending.”

Lexa’s brow curved upwards, confused and intrigued simultaneously.

“Oh! And please tell O I’m waiting on her to Venmo me the taco money. Alright, laters.”

And with that, Raven waltzed off into the cafeteria, leaving a very puzzled Lexa staring after her to pick up the pieces, contemplating if she should heed Raven’s advice or not.

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Raven charged into the bathroom, sticking a white, lacy bra she scooted from the bathroom sink through the shower curtains and waved it unceremoniously at the showering blonde. “I come in peace!” She shouted, receiving a yelp from a very angry, very naked Clarke. “And bearing beer.” She stuck her other hand through the curtains, presenting Clarke with an ice-cold blue moon.

“Raven! A little privacy here, please!” Clarke shouted, but realized it was futile to argue so she caved, secretly glad for the beer. “If this is your idea of an apology, you’re gonna have to work a little harder.”
“How many times am I gonna have to apologize?!” Raven whined, leaning against a wall as she talked to her friend. “All I gave her was your name! And maybe suggested you have biology together. But that’s it! I swear!” Raven decided it was best to withhold the WHOLE truth for now…

“When I SPECIFICALLY told you NOT to, Raven!” Clarke reminded her, sipping the beer. “After Saturday night, how could you think I would even take her seriously?!”

“To be honest, I was hoping you wouldn’t. Listen, Clarke,” Raven continued, shifting against the wall to face Clarke through the curtains, “It’s been a while since, ya know, you got laid. Or had any sort of intimate anything with anyone since you-know-who.” Clarke shot her a look of pure warning, Raven knew she was treading dangerous territory by resurrecting the topic but knew it was absolutely necessary. “And who better to get all up in there and clear out those cob webs than L.A.’s most eligible bachelorette!” Raven teased, but the sincerity in her tone was enough to make Clarke listen. “I love you, and I’m not saying go and plead everlasting fealty to the chick but… It’s about time you move on from Finn, babe.”

Clarke turned off the shower and stepped out, wrapping herself in a towel before finally addressing Raven. “When I’m ready to move on, I will do so my way. I understand you’re trying to help, but this is sabotage and I won’t have that, understand?” Raven nodded, forcing on a smile, already hatching out an apology in her head for the special guest Clarke would be receiving later that night. “Good. Now… you have Aden tonight. I have to go to work and didn’t really bother calling the sitter. That’s what besties are for!”

Raved huffed, stomping her foot down to express her clear distaste, pouting as she followed Clarke out of the bathroom. “But… that will cut into my Orange Is The New Black binging session!”

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The bar was unusually quiet for a Monday night. Clarke polished glasses in between serves; her only customers being two college idiots, possibly frat boys, tossing back shot after shot for no apparent reason. She rolled her eyes when one of them winked at her and stared a little too long for her liking.

She was pouring another round of shots for the brainless bimbos when she heard the loud purr of a motorcycle stall and come to a stop right outside the bar. Through the window, she watched as a slender figure swung a leg over the black Harley and removed her helmet, placing a fitted black cap over her straightened hair and swiveling it backwards.

Clarke’s heart sank as she saw the figure, dressed in skinny black jeans and a black leather jacket, cross the short distance to the door and step inside. Their eyes immediately locked, and Clarke felt her hands become slightly unsteady, causing her to spill the tequila she poured on the countertop. She looked down, breaking eye contact because those bright green eyes were doing… things to her that she couldn’t explain. She heard the light scrape of a stool against hardwood floor as Lexa took a seat directly across from her; her cologne causing Clarke’s head to spin in delicious loops and making her swallow a little harder than usual.

“Evening, beautiful.” Clarke was expecting a timid, apologetic tone to slip out of her mouth, but was graced instead with a rather smug, cocky attitude that made her head snap up, catching the grin appearing on Lexa’s equally cocky face. Her demeanor radiated confidence and power; a rather abrupt change from the rattled girl she saw in class only a few hours earlier. “I’ll have a whiskey on the rocks. Make it a double.” She ordered, tone laced with authority and command, shrugging off her leather jacket and tossing it over the countertop. She wore a black wife beater underneath, and Clarke’s gaze digested every inch of skin being showcased, examining the muscular arms and shoulders in close detail and paying special attention to the intricate tattoos running the length of
Lexa’s right arm.

“See something you like?” Lexa probed, smiling boldly once she caught the blonde checking her out. “There’s plenty more that I’d love to show you in private.” She winked, a crooked grin followed and the way she looked at Clarke, with darkened eyes from underneath the rim of her cap was just... fuck.

Clarke scoffed. “So you’re following me now? Is this how you usually get women? Through sweet talk and stalking?” She felt the rage envelop every part of her body, and she shifted her attention back to the shots in need of a distraction. “Because if you’re looking for an easy lay, I’d suggest trying the bar across the street. Nothing but brainless bimbos and skanks- just how you like ‘em.”

Lexa smiled, leaning forward to bring herself closer to the feisty blonde fixing up the shots. “I didn’t know you were such an expert on me and my taste in women.” Lexa said, tone suddenly low and dangerous. “Let’s just say my preferences have changed dramatically since Saturday night.” Ah, fucking hell, Clarke thought, feeling her thighs quiver slightly at the admission.

Clarke recovered and paused what she was doing, leaning forward to meet Lexa halfway. She brought herself close enough to Lexa to make sure there was no miscommunication between them. “I don’t know what Raven told you, and frankly… I don’t even know if I’ll ever find out myself because I will murder her the second I see her for pulling this little stunt,” She hissed, steadying herself against the edge of the counter for support as she inched closer to the still grinning brunette, “but in case I failed to make myself clear this morning, here it is again - Leave me the hell alone.”

She pulled back once she finished, a scowl conquering her features, yet Lexa’s grin remained intact, maybe even becoming more playful with the challenge.

“I can see why this place is so empty… friendly service not your strong suit, eh?” Lexa shot her another crooked smirk, a brow rising in her direction. “I’m just here for a drink, don’t flatter yourself into thinking otherwise.”

Clarke wanted to argue, but the bold statement completely defused her, and Lexa must have noticed it too from the way she bit her bottom lip and adjusted her posture, chin lifting slightly and claiming victory.

“Hey, sweets, what’s the hold up?” One of the brainless idiots called out, laughing haughtily with his idiot friend. “Why don’t you bring that sweet ass of yours over here with the shots and tell us your name?”

Clarke poured Lexa’s drink hastily, gaze remaining low as she worked, wishing desperately that she could be anywhere else but there at that moment.

“You ok?” Lexa must have sensed her discomfort, sensed how suddenly vulnerable she felt. Clarke nodded, still refusing to meet her gaze, and took the two men their shots once she pushed the whiskey over to Lexa.

“Whoooaaa, hold on a second, sweet cheeks.” One of the boys, the one who had been winking and flirting, grabbed her wrist as she pulled away, spinning her back to face him. “I think I remember asking for a name…” He tilted his head to the side, eyes roaming over the length of her body, ravaging her with his eyes in a not-so-subtle way.

Clarke saw Lexa stiffen in her seat from her peripherals, saw as she gripped the whiskey glass more firmly and pivoted her body towards the boy, as if in preparation to launch the glass right at his head. Clarke yanked her arm free, walking away before any of that could unfold, and moved towards the end where Lexa sat, preferring her proximity over theirs.
“Clarke, are you ok?! Did he-“

“I’m fine.” Clarke noticed the empty glass in Lexa’s hand, and without asking if she needed another drink, proceeded to pour her one.

“Do you want me-“

“I can take care of myself. I said I’m fine, so drop it.” Clarke was angry. This wasn’t anything new, being harassed by drunk fools at work, but Lexa’s presence there threw her off… she bit the inside of her lips, trying to control the rush of emotions, and trying to contain the sudden warmth in the pit of her stomach at seeing Lexa so concerned.

Lexa nodded, clearly holding back, and tossed back the drink. “You looked beautiful Saturday night… I wanted to tell you then, but you never really gave me a chance to.” Lexa admitted, reverting back to the coy girl Clarke met in class, suddenly glad the shots were working.

Clarke picked up the glass and refilled it. “Do you usually work this hard to get a girl to drop her panties for you? Because last I checked, stalking doesn’t really get me damp down there.” Clarke shot her a look of pure warning, eyebrows twitching from the tension.

“Oh, is that so?” Lexa retaliated with a cocky smirk and hungry eyes that had Clarke gripping the glass she handed Lexa harder than necessary. “Tell me… what does get you damp down there, Klark?”

It was now Clarke’s turn to go multi-colored, because out of everything she was expecting, that question was definitely not it. Lexa winked, bringing a straw up to her mouth and taking it in between her lips, biting down on it gently and slowly enough to cause Clarke to stare.

“You don’t have to share…. I want to uncover those secrets on my own.” Lexa continued, the insinuation loud and clear and hell if that statement alone didn’t get Clarke plenty damp already.

“Don’t hold your breath.” Clarke managed to say as harshly as possible, urging yet another arrogant smirk out of Lexa. Clarke cringed when she heard more whistling and cat calls coming from the boys, causing her to slither further away from them and closer to where Lexa sat.

“Clarke, you shouldn’t have to-“

“Don’t.” Clarke shoved the drink back at her. “I said, drop it.”

“I’m just trying to talk to you… nothing more, I promise.” Lexa replied, looking up at Clarke from beneath the rim of her black hat, eyes appearing slightly lighter than usual even in the dimly lit bar.

“Save it. I’m not interested, alright.” Clarke grabbed the empty glass but thought best not to refill it, instead she placed it in the sink, a cue that the conversation was over. “I’m sure you probably have a line of girls waiting for you when you get home and it’d be a shame to keep them waiting.” Clarke spat, the pronounced distaste in her tone clear, and she questioned why she even said that in the first place and why the thought made her so… pissed.

Lexa smiled at the jealous remark, and Clarke wanted to shoot herself for being so transparent that moment. “Mila Kunis herself could be sitting in my living room, naked, with whipped cream spread all over her body and it still wouldn’t be enough to get me to leave… so, how about another drink?”

The comment, along with the straw Lexa teased with her tongue, sorta made Clarke gulp… really….really….really hard. The boy whistled again, trying to get Clarke’s attention.

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“Bitch, are you deaf?! Don’t make me hop over this counter and teach you a lesson or two…” Another round of laughter erupted. Clarke was about to call security to escort the two men out when she heard the loud racket of a stool collapsing to the floor.

Just as quickly as it made impact with the ground, so did the idiot’s face to the hard, wooden surface of the bar. Lexa was on him the moment the comment left his lips, pulling his arm from under his chin backwards which caused him to lose balance, and she used the momentum to drive his head forward and nose first into the countertop. The result left Clarke transfixed; watching as the stream of blood gushed out of his broken nose and tears rolled down his face as he cried – literally cried – from the pain. His friend, confused and too drunk to react, began to panic and instead of staying to help, dashed out of the bar to save himself.

Lexa took further advantage of the situation and pulled the idiot back roughly by the roots of his hair, bringing her mouth close to his ear to make sure he heard her properly. “Consider this a lesson on what happens when you’re a dick and mistreat a lady in public.” She spoke roughly, tugging his hair further back and causing him to cry out in pain once more. “Free of charge.” She pushed him forward, stepping away just as security arrived.

The guard pushed the crying idiot out of the establishment and ordered Lexa to leave or else he’d have to involve the cops. She nodded, slipping her jacket back on before she reached for her wallet. Without even bothering to count, she pulled out all the bills she had and tossed it on the counter towards Clarke.

“I’ll see you in class Wednesday…?” And left before Clarke had a chance to respond. She watched, mesmerized as Lexa walked over to her bike, replaced the cap with the helmet and swung over the leather seat. Then, after turning on the ignition and hearing the bike purr to life, she pulled out onto the street and revved it out of Clarke’s sight.

Clarke looked at the bills Lexa had tossed over and she felt her mouth drop open as she counted the number of Benjamins that stared blankly up at her.

“Fucking bitch.” She whispered, baffled, and stuffed the seven-hundred dollar tip into her back pocket. She should feel angry, she knew that, and maybe part of her did. But that wasn’t the emotion that dominated right now. No, it was anger mingled with relief and something slightly more… wicked.

Because she’d be a goddamn liar to say that watching Lexa manhandle that idiot didn’t send electrifying jolts racing all through her body. And she was quietly grateful to have been wearing black shorts or else the evidence of that little stunt she witnessed would have been clearly visible. She cleared her throat, and after wiping off the blood on the counter and picking up the fallen stool, she made a run for the ladies room.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed!!!

Next chapter should be up within the week. SO, what do you think? Does Lexa stand a chance? Will Clarke be able to resist?

I love hearing your comments/perspectives!
Hey guys! First of all we wanted to say thank you all so much for all the awesome comments, feedback, and kudos that you all have left!! You all are truly awesome and we love hearing from you guys and we love reading every single comment you all leave! It makes SilverSnake222 and I extremely happy! :)

We wanted to say sorry for taking a little bit longer than usual to post this chapter but we truly did want to take our time and make it perfect, as this is a very important chapter and point in the story ;)

However, we do plan to make it up to you all and reward you all for your patience by having the next chapter up by Saturday :)

Again thank you for your continuous support of the story and all the amazing comments and kudos! Hope you all enjoy!

“Ahhh, cover your eyes, kid! Hurry, hurry!” Raven instructed Aden, who currently sat next to her on the couch pressing a pillow into his face, secretly mortified at the amount of times he’s had to repeat this routine in a single episode of Orange Is The New Black.

“I can still hear them, you know!” He grumbled back, voice muffled by the pillow, rolling his eyes beneath his eyelids. “You have got to be the worst babysitter ever.”

“You know, most brats your age would appreciate being allowed to watch mature content.” Raven pulled the pillow down, letting him know it was safe to resume. “Just, whatever happens, do not tell Clarke.”

“You know, most brats your age would appreciate being allowed to watch mature content.” Raven pulled the pillow down, letting him know it was safe to resume. “Just, whatever happens, do not tell Clarke.”

“Yea, yea, I know the rules…” He grumbled, reaching into the popcorn bowl and grabbing a handful before flicking his eyes back to the screen. “Ugh, I can’t believe Piper would cheat on Alex! I mean, I get that Alex ratted her out, and yea… she sorta tricked Piper into lying and was set free while Piper got thrown back into prison but… Alex is her soulmate! How could she cheat on her like that!” Aden shook his head from disappointment.

“Two words kid: Ruby. Rose.” Raven chimed, stuffing a handful of popcorn into her mouth. “I mean, can you blame her?! Stella is finger lickin' hot! No mortal being can resist that bad girl act and those tats!” Raven stopped for a second, having a sudden flash of Déjà vu as an image of Lexa and Clarke flowed into her mind for no particular reason. She chuckled, Clarke must be a goddamn deity than.

Raven’s phone went off and she answered without glancing at the screen for an ID. “The kid is fine. He’s alive and watching Bambi.” She spoke, monotone and distracted by the show, figuring it was Clarke calling to check up on them.

“Raven, hey! Listen, er- sorry… I got your number from Octavia… I hope that’s alright.”
The raspy, slightly quavering voice that seeped through the phone caused Raven to shoot up, flipping the popcorn bowl and scattering its contents all over the floor.

“I was wondering, if you’re not busy right now, can we- I dun know, meet up? I can come to you! If that’s better, or- “

“I thought you were going to see Clarke…” Raven jumped in, causing Aden to shoot her a confused glance. “Are you there now?!”

“Uhhh, I was. But I left…” Lexa responded, tone soft and fragile. “It didn’t go so well.”

“Ahhh, crud.” Raven sighed, pausing the show and earning a displeased look from Aden.

“Alright, I have to feed the kid anyways, so…” Raven looked to Aden, “kid, what do you want for dinner?”

He shrugged, uncertain. “I thought the popcorn was dinner.”

“What! I mean like, real food, kid! What are you craving?” she asked again, telling Lexa to hang on.

Aden shrugged again. “Cupcakes?”

Raven glared at him, shaking her head in disbelief. “Seriously? Aden, you are highly mistaken if you think I will allow you to have cupcakes for dinner?! What kind of friend-slash-sitter do you think I am? Absolutely NOT, young man!” Raven spoke sternly, shaking her head, earning a confused and misplaced glare from Aden.

"Ice cream?" Aden countered, offering a second suggestion after a short pause.

Raven’s stare was frigid for a moment, but Aden held it, unwilling to back down. ”Now you're talking." Raven agreed, stare diffusing into an impish look, and turned her attention back to the phone. “Alright, PG…meet us at Polis Ice Cream Shop in 30 minutes.”

Raven sat Aden down in a booth and placed a ginormous ice cream bowl in front of him. “Bon appetit! Oh, and if Clarke asks…?”

“I had meatloaf for dinner.” He responded, rolling his eyes and digging into his bowl.

Raven patted him on the head, a sleazy smile conquering her face. “Such a good boy!”

“So are you gonna tell me why we’re here? Who are we meeting? What’s it got to do with Clarke? Why did you put strawberry chunks in my ice cream?” He asked without pausing for a breath, irritated with Raven for her lack of an explanation.

“We’re here to talk to someone. Her name is Lexa. Lexa Woods. She’s a… friend of Clarkes’. “ Raven shot back, answering each question in a continuous string. ”And strawberry is good for you. It's got calcium and other healthy crap.”

"That's milk, you dumbass." Aden retorted, utterly baffled at how Raven had survived for 22 years.

Raven sat down next to him, picking off his bowl every now and then while they waited for Lexa to arrive. ”Yea, well, ice cream has milk in it. And you better control that foul mouth of yours around Clarke, you little dipshit.”
The shop door swung open right at that moment, and Raven and Aden watched as Lexa, resembling a toddler who just had her popsicle stolen, moved sluggishly in their direction. Her aura screamed defeat and surrender, and Raven almost, almost pitied her.

“So… on a scale of ‘1-to-The cops will never find my mutilated corpse’… how murdered am I?” Raven asked as Lexa slid in the seat across from them.

“Make that two mutilated corpses,” Lexa sighed, letting her head rest against the back of the seat. “I’m pretty sure she’ll keep my head for dart practice.” Lexa turned, noticing the wide-eyed boy staring curiously at her. “Oh, er- hey there, I’m Lexa. Nice to meet you…?”

“Brat. His name is Brat.” Raven intervened, throwing Aden a glare. “So… care to tell me what happened?”

Lexa shrugged, perplexed herself at the chain of events that led her to this peculiar moment. “I think I came on too strong… I mean, I just wanted to impress her, ya know! Especially after acting like some brainless idiot this morning…” Lexa’s shoulders slumped forward in resignation, burying her face into her hands to hide her agony. “It was a disaster… she probably thinks I’m only trying to sleep with her and-“

“As in a Slumber party!” Raven laughed nervously, looking from Lexa to Aden. “Oh yea, pffff Clarke hates slumber parties!” Lexa caught onto the insinuation, mouthing a ‘sorry’ to Raven and throwing an apologetic glance at the boy.

“Stop it, Raven, I’m not 9 anymore…” Aden broke his silence, throwing Lexa the most intimidating glare he could muster. “You’re trying to get with my sister?!”

Lexa stiffened in her seat, feeling the blood completely drain from her face, ready to retreat to some godforsaken cave and spend the rest of her miserable life there. Well, this is just perfect. First I fuck up with Clarke, and now with her Kid brother. Just. Fucking. Dandy. “No! No, see I- well, I mean… I like your sister- Clarke. Yes, I like her but- I wouldn’t, not yet… oh fuck.”

Raven and Aden were helpless to do anything other than stare and wait for Lexa to cease her babble. Raven was prepared to grab her a paper bag in fear she was about to start hyperventilating from how much the brunette was stuttering and panting. After a minute, she relaxed, lowering her eyes in embarrassment and clearing her throat.

Aden still looked at her questioningly, as if trying to understand everything about her from his observations alone. “Raven, you agree with this?!” Aden asked, a little surprised and fully aware of Raven’s involvement in all of this.

“Have you met your sister kid?! It’ll take seven bulldozers and a team of hand-selected Jehovah’s Witnesses to get through that wall she’s got up.” Raven responded bluntly, pulling the boy’s ice cream bowl towards her and digging in. “I figured this is gonna end either surprisingly well – with lots of butterflies and pigeons and other winged creatures that people find creepily romantic flying all around you, or… its gonna end horribly, horribly shitty… And I mean that literally, with the pigeons and unknown winged creatures shitting all over you.”

Aden snorted at the comical comment, turning his attention back to a still frigid Lexa. “Do excuse my friend. She’s mentally challenged and forgot to take her pills today.” Lexa slowly thawed at the remark, chuckling lightly and earning a snarl from Raven. “So… you’re into my sister, huh?” He asked Lexa, his gaze squinting in her direction as he sized her up, nose scrunching up to feign distaste. “Do you like her like her? Or do you just like her? And be specific, please!”
Lexa felt her face suddenly ablaze under the scrutiny of the ten-year-old, blue-eyed, blonde boy that in his skeptical mode, resembled Clarke in ways that made her insides flutter.

Lexa paused, inhaling soundly before meeting Aden’s stern gaze. “I know it’s a little early to really say everything that I feel, but… yes, I do like like your sister…very much so. She’s… very special.”

Aden inched forward, hoisting himself up with both elbows and resting his chin against his tiny fists. “Are you, at the present time, seeing anyone else?” He asked, glaring at her with such intensity, it caused her to cringe a little.

She looked to Raven, brows shooting up in a questioning fashion.

“Nah-uh, don’t look at me PG,” Raven shook her head, stuffing a spoonful of melting ice cream into her mouth, “answer the kid. You heard him!”

“Oh-er, no.” Lexa cleared her throat, adjusting uncomfortably in her seat. “I’m not, at the present time, seeing anyone else.”

“Good. And Miss Woods, do refrain from overthinking here. I’ll keep my questions to a single, one-word answers. Capiche?”

Lexa nodded, looking around to make sure she wasn’t being Punk’d, as if expecting Ashton Kutcher to walk in at any moment.

“Do you plan on being involved with someone else if you gain my sister’s affection?” Aden continued, Raven was now observing intently next to him, slurping the remnants of the ice cream that lingered in the bowl.

“No. No, I do not.”

“Do you own a dog, or pets of any kind?” He asked, tapping a finger on his cheek.

“Uh, no. I used to, though! A few years back-“

Aden lifted a hand to stop her. “We’re talking present time here. Do try and keep up.” Raven scoffed, puckering her lips at Lexa’s inability to follow instructions, mumbling dumbass under her breath. “What’s your favorite color?” Aden pressed, cracking his knuckles and inching closer to the brunette.

“Green!” Lexa shouted excitedly, finally proud to know an answer in this bizarre interrogation.

“Favorite movie?!”

“Ahhhhh- crap I know this, I know this…” She said, snapping her fingers as her mind scanned a decent movie to settle upon. “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory!” She squealed, jumping in her seat.

Aden squealed right back, eyes glinting from excitement. “No way! That’s a classic!”

“Whoooooaaa wait, wait, wait…” Raven jumped in, index finger pointed at Lexa. “The original or the remake?”

“Pffft, the original hands down.” Lexa replied without missing a beat. "Johnny Depp scares the bejesus out of me in that remake." She continued, gaining impressive nods of agreement from both Raven and Aden.

“Ok. What do you like to do for fun?” He asked, his boyish smile melting her a little. She looked to
Raven who gave her a wary look in warning to censor her answers.

“Well, I enjoy video games… a lot more than I should. Oh and I like watching soccer!”

Aden lit up at the answer, beaming with delight at the newfound common ground between them. “Do you play? Who’s your favorite team?! Raven used to play, she taught me everything I know!”

Lexa smiled back, feeling unusually calm at the interaction. “No I don’t play, I suck at it actually, but my best friend does.”

“Clarke doesn’t play either, she sucks at sports. She loves to paint though. Do you paint too?” He asked, but his question went unanswered because Lexa was storing that piece of information away with the upmost care.

Raven chuckled, rubbing circles around Aden's back. “Easy there, my little hairless Chihuahua, lets reel it in a little. Let the girl breathe.”

“Ok, ok. One last question, and also the most important…” Aden glared at Lexa, sitting back on his knees to gain a bit of height leverage over the brunette, but still failing 5 inches short. “WHO should Piper choose…. Alex or Stella?”

Raven perked up at the question, lips transforming into a silent ‘Ooo’ as she nodded, pleased with Aden’s choice of question.

“That’s a no brainer, Alex all the way.” Lexa responded matter-of-factly, causing both sets of eyes across from her to widen in surprise.

“Really?! Aden and Raven said in synchrony. Lexa nodded, and when asked why by the baffled pair, she simply shrugged.

“Because… that’s her soulmate.”

And that, my friends, is how Lexa conquered the youngest of the Griffin siblings.

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“No fucking way, Woods!” Raven shrieked, ogling the parked motorcycle outside the ice cream shop. “That’s a 2016 Harley-Davidson Sportster Seventy Two!”

Lexa nodded, smirking as she addressed Raven. “It most certainly is… you like bikes?”

Raven puffed, rolling her eyes. “My last serious relationship was not with a person, I’ll tell you that much! Man, I miss it…” Lexa observed the distant look on Raven’s face. “Cruising down the highway, with the wind whipping through your hair and bugs hammering against your teeth.” She sighed. “Yup. Nothing like it.”

Lexa let out a small laugh, suddenly curious as to what caused Raven’s unfortunate incident. “Did you lose control?” Lexa asked, pointing with her chin towards Raven's braced knee, ashamed for not asking Octavia about it sooner.

“This? Nah. Some rich, drunk idiot slammed into me one lovely Saturday night. Threw me 25 feet from the impact point… the prickly bastard didn’t remember a thing.” Raven reminisces, oddly calm and comfortable. “I got 25 mil out of it… a million for every feet I tumbled once I went down.” She chuckled, looking to Lexa, who returned her gaze with a pained smile. “The money sometimes almost makes up for it.”
Lexa’s heart clenched upon noting the flood of emotions that invaded Raven’s dark eyes. She barely knew her, yet she understood the root of that pain; a pain that no amount of money or inheritance, no number of luxurious cars and assets, could abate. It was a pain that she herself battled daily to conquer.

She pulled her keys from her pocket, offering them to Raven. “I know it’s possibly the dumbest idea I’ve ever had but… care to take her for a spin?”

Raven’s response was instantaneous, a grin stretched on her face and before Lexa had time to process the hazard in her action, Raven snatched the keys and swung her good leg over to straddle the bike. “About damn time you offered, Woods! I was really hoping I wouldn't have to resort to waterworks here!” She plunged the key into the ignition and revved it, placing the helmet on her head before turning to a perplexed Lexa, who immediately regretted the decision. “Who knew you were such a softy, Playgirl! Maybe next time I’ll tell you about my dead parrot if it means getting the keys to the Maserati you got stashed in that garage of yours!”

Aden walked out right before Raven pulled into the street, shouting to him to stay with Lexa while she took the bike for a spin, and then she was off, laughing and screeching into the night.

“You totally let her manipulate you with the accident story, didn't you?” Aden wondered, staring after Raven until she vanished from sight. "Raven Rule Number One: don't pity her because of her accident. Raven Rule Number Two: stay far, far away from her after she has Mexican food of any kind. Her farts can be deadly."

Lexa giggled. "So, is there a set of Clarke Rules I should know about?" Lexa inquired, secretly curious and dying to collect any amount of information that may aid her in her quest, but holding back a little to not seem so desperate.

Aden marinated her question for a second, attempting to reason if surrendering information about his sister to someone who could potentially hurt her was wise. He eventually came to terms with a single realization that both he and Raven, clearly understood: Clarke had stopped fighting her demons long ago. She was broken and damaged, but survived mostly because of him, because she had a duty and responsibility to Aden. Maybe Lexa could encourage her to battle and defeat those demons once and for all; maybe, just maybe, this weird, slightly unhinged, but equally damaged person could teach Clarke how to breathe again. Maybe even how to live again.

"There are many levels to Clarke. She's only showing you the one she wants you to see, and I'm assuming it's the proud, stubborn version of herself that falls into place when she's scared." Aden stated, eyes distant as he watched a young mother play with her infant son through the window of a McDonalds across the street. "The more you get to know her, the more you'll get to know those hidden levels that make Clarke who she is. But it will take time before she's ready, so just be persistent. Don't give up too easily but don't let her walk all over you either. She needs someone to challenge her every now and then." He paused, still watching the mother and son interacting happily with one another, quietly wondering if he had any moments like that with his own mother. He knew the answer was no... that every happy memory of his young life was all credited to Clarke. "Just be true and honest, no matter what, for your sake and hers."

Lexa stood in silence next to the boy as they waited for Raven’s return. The stillness of the night suddenly creating an awkward tension between them. She tensed even more when she felt his small, but firm hand slither into hers and grasp it. She stood there, considering the implication behind the gesture; analyzing every possible reason behind it. She found none, and decided to let Aden lead her through this unusual, yet tender moment, slowly wrapping her fingers around his petite hand in the process.
“I like you a lot already. You seem very nice and I think you’re a good person.” He stated, eyes not meeting hers, still looking straight ahead as he spoke. “But I love Clarke… she’s everything to me. She’s not just my big sister… she’s my friend, my mom, and my hero all wrapped in one.” He smiled up at her now, genuine and timid, and Lexa swore she felt her heart slightly tear. “She’s all I have. So, if you like her like her, you have my blessing to pursue her. I just ask that you take care of her and her heart. It’s been broken before and I don’t think it ever really got better since.”

Lexa just stared into his bright, innocent eyes that at that moment seemed wiser than she would have originally guessed. The knot that lodged in her throat was nearly painful, preventing words from flowing out, so she nodded.

That was enough for him, and he granted her a cheeky smile, eyes readjusting to the end of the road as Raven approached.

“Woods, that was orgas-AWESOME! I’ll make you the deal of a lifetime here.” Raven spoke breathily, still floating on a high. “I’ll trade you the kid for the bike. He’s cheap and easy to feed. Does his homework without having to be told and only requires diapers if you give him tea after dinner. Plus, you can milk him for all he knows on Clarke. Whad’ya say?!"

***

The following Wednesday, Lexa awoke to the first alarm she set the previous night. Although a huge fan of the snooze button (and on any other occasion she would have pushed snooze a minimum of fifteen times), today she was up before the alarm even had a chance to rouse her, and she hopped excitedly from bed once it spurred to life.

She was prepared today. Her outfit had been decided the previous night, settling for faded jeans, a white, v-neck T beneath a plaid button-up sweater that was at least two sizes too big against her slender frame, and she pulled a red beanie snuggly over her hair. Her school bag was ready and waiting by the door, satisfied with its contents after she triple checked to make sure she had her Biology book this time around.

She was the first to arrive in class that morning, second only to Professor Jaha, who eyed her curiously and somewhat skeptically, as she zigzagged her way to her seat.

She placed a large, Starbucks coffee on the desk directly in front of her. She recalled watching Clarke take careful sips from her coffee the previous class; more intrigued by how her perfect, pink lips wrapped gently around the opening in the cap instead of paying attention to her exam.

It wasn’t hard to track the Starbucks Clarke frequented; taking an educated guess that it was likely the one on campus. It was even easier to get the piece of information she needed, once she locked eyes with the attractive (and clearly thirsty) brunette working the register, all she had to do was bite her bottom lip mid-smirk and gaze at her from beneath her irresistible lashes, and the girl was putty in her hands. A few harmless flirtatious comments and an “accidental” touch of careless fingers earned Lexa what she had come in there for in the first place. A Venti, Quad, Nonfat, One-Pump, No-Whip, Mocha. Clarke’s regular order. She made a mental note to ask Clarke at a future time what the hell that meant.

She was nervous. Leaning back in her seat, book out and opened to some random page. Notebook out and opened to a blank page. She tapped her foot anxiously, nibbling on the cap of her pen as she watched the clock in the far distance tick away minute-after-minute. Each tick spurring her heart to clench a little tighter, a combination of excitement and terror.

_Crap, she should be here by now…she’s always early, so where is she?... Ah, fuck, she dropped the_
class!... Wait no, she can’t do that, can she?... She probably hates me... oh god, why am I such a fucking idiot!... Seriously, is she not coming?... Did I put deodorant on this morning?... Yea, she definitely hates-

A hand came down hard on her desk then, causing her to snap her eyes upwards only to find angry, frigid aqua orbs glaring down at her. She’s here! Lexa squealed internally, unable to restrain the smile that formed on her relieved face.

“You over-tipped Monday night.” Clarke spoke unkindly, lifting her hand to reveal the crumpled bills and sliding it closer to the confused brunette. “I don’t know what kind of girl you may think I am and honestly, I don’t care… but you’re highly mistaken if you think you can buy your way into my pants.”

Lexa’s little fluttering heart stuttered and stalled, sputtering randomly for a few seconds before plummeting to her stomach. “What? No! Clarke, that was never my intention. Those idiots left without paying you and I just wanted to make sure it was covered!”

Clarke grew tired from her excuse, turning away from Lexa and wrapping a hand around the cup of coffee on her desk. She placed it back in front of Lexa. “The only thing I want from you, Lexa, is for you to forget me and leave me alone. Whatever little game you’re playing here, leave me out of it.”

Clarke turned back around right as Professor Jaha greeted the class, ruining Lexa’s chances to repair the situation. Her hands were sweating and trembling slightly from the rejection, and she’d be lying to say it didn’t bother her… because right now she wanted nothing more than to wrap her fist around those beautiful golden locks and pull the infuriating woman back and kiss her senseless. She absolutely despised the effect Clarke was having on her. Lexa wasn’t one to lose control or be whipped around… no, she’s the one who usually does the whipping, figuratively and literally speaking.

Yet here she was, racing to class at ungodly hours of the day, tracking down her favorite coffee and beating up strangers for a woman who clearly wanted nothing to do with her. It was both intriguing and terrifying the sheer amount of power and control Clarke already possessed over her, and for the first time in her life, Lexa wanted to yield to it… if Clarke would only permit her to.

Lexa was so enveloped in her thoughts; so distracted by the buzzing in her chaotic mind and how quickly her carefully calculated plan had gone south, that it took her a moment to notice that Professor Jaha stood only a few feet away from her, calling her attention.

“Miss Woods!” He spoke, leaning towards her over the row of seats. Lexa blinked a few times, trying to process what it is he wanted. “Miss woods, your exam results…” He clarified, quickly reading the confused look on her face, and handed her the graded exam. He leaned in closer to her as she took the stack of clipped papers, observing her reaction as her eyes roamed over the bright red ‘F’ drawn at the top of the page, shoulders slumping down from embarrassment and disappointment. “This is the second exam out of four that you have failed, Miss Woods.” He spoke, tone low yet gentle, as if attempting to keep the humiliation a private session between them. Lexa’s eyes flicked from him to where Clarke sat directly in front of her, ears pricked up and attentive. She was listening. “I have arranged a make-up exam for students in the same situation as yours a week from today. It is not usually a mercy that I offer but seeing the low grades I’ve received from this particular exam, I’m willing to make the exception. I’m expecting your attendance, and if you do not appear or earn anything below 75 percent, that is grounds for an automatic fail for the course. So may I suggest you find yourself a tutor, Miss Woods.” He warned, straightening his posture to take his leave. “And maybe spend more time actually reading the questions next time, instead of studying the back of Miss Griffin’s exquisite head, and at least you’ll be able to write your name in the proper box.” He
shot up a brow at her, and Lexa dipped her head back to the exam, blushing fiercely when she noticed she had written her name in the DATE section.

She nodded as he walked away, sinking further down into her seat, wanting to pull her beanie down over her face as far as it would go and disappear into it. She stole a glance towards Clarke and noticed the reddened tint visible on the tip of her ears. Lexa flushed even deeper at the realization that her staring wasn’t as subtle as she assumed it was.

At that moment, she wanted nothing more than to be swallowed into the ground below; consumed until she vanished into a pool of quicksand. To say her ego was bruised was a massive understatement, because at the current moment, her ego was cowering in a dark corner, whimpering and sobbing and crying out for mommy. She sighed. Man, this day can’t possibly get any worse.

And because the universe was not quite finished making a mockery out her. And because she was cursed, and doomed, and jinxed and every three factors rolled into one giant shitbag, she soon discovered that she was not-so-surprisingly wrong because it quickly got much, much worse. She watched as Jaha handed Clarke her exam, a beaming smile on his face as he congratulated her for doing an incredible job and receiving the highest grade in the class. Clarke smiled back politely, and Lexa couldn’t help but gravitate towards her… wanting to simply be closer to her, closer to her perfume and sickly addicting shampoo, wanting to just be-

*Splash*

OH, NONONONO! YOU’VE GOT TO BE FUCKING KIDDING ME! Lexa silently screamed, scrambling in her chair as she watched, dumbfounded, as her elbow nudged the scalding hot coffee from the edge of her desk and sent it spilling its contents right down Clarke’s back.

Clarke gasped the second the liquid made contact with her skin, drenching her shirt and the tips of her hair. Her back curved forward, detaching rapidly from the chair, as the searing coffee ran down her spine.

“Oh, mahgod. I am SO SORRY, Clarke!” Lexa apologized, unsure if she should help the squirming blonde, or if she should bolt out of the class and never, ever, ever return. “It was an accident, I swear, I didn’t mean it. Here, let me help you with-”

“Don’t you FUCKING touch me!” Clarke rasped, currently way more preoccupied with the uncomfortable liquid that still stung her back. She stood up, huffing in anger, face reddened and transformed into a scowl, and rushed out of the classroom. The patrons of Professor Jaha’s Biology class watched attentively as all this unfolded, some watched in silence but most were holding back smirks and snickers. They watched as Clarke angrily dismissed herself from the class, and watched as Lexa, just as red from embarrassment, fumbled to collect her things (and Clarke’s) and chased after her, stumbling out of the classroom in her desperate haste.

She wasn’t sure in which direction Clarke had gone once she left the room, but guessed the nearest restroom was a good place to start. Lexa pushed open the bathroom door a few classrooms down from where their classroom was located, and stepped inside, barely registering as the door came smack in the face because no amount of pain could distract her from the vision she witnessed from across the bathroom. Clarke, standing with her back to Lexa, shirtless and sporting a black, lacy bra, holding up the drenched shirt to the handdryer.

Her mouth suddenly felt like the Sahara Desert and Mars all merged into one, and she was unable to stop her eyes from absorbing every inch of skin exposed (starting at Clarke’s sneakers-clad feet, up her bare, toned legs, analyzing how perfectly snug her ass was tucked into the fabric of her shorts, and back up the nude back). She was especially intrigued by the small, yet surprising tattoo on


Clarke’s lower back, and she smirked, silently thinking that maybe there was a rebel in the saintly woman after all.

Clarke turned, catching Lexa’s gaze as she practically devoured her from where she stood pinned by the door.

“You done eye-fucking me yet?!” Clarke snapped, causing Lexa’s eyes to widen in shame.

“No, I wasn’t, I was just- I really like your tattoo.” Lexa mumbled, moving into the empty bathroom and closing the door. “I-er, brought you your things. I figured you wouldn’t be returning to class after… this.” She chuckled nervously, hands clenching into fists from the glare Clarke gave her. “I’m so sorry, Clarke. It was an accident. Is there anything I can do?!”

Clarke refocused her attention to the ruined shirt, a massive coffee stain conquering most of the material. It was pointless to try and save it. She tossed it in the trash before walking over to the sink and wetting a few paper towels.

“You’ve done more than enough. I said it before and I’ll say it again, just get the hell away from me and leave me alone.” The blonde warned, anger visibly clear in her eyes. Clarke started to dab the moist towels around her upper shoulders and back, ignoring Lexa who happened to be standing besides her, contemplating her next move.

For the first time in her life, Lexa felt defeated. She felt ruined and reduced to dirt. No woman, not a single one throughout the course of her life, has ever had that effect on her. She wanted to run from that bathroom, run and forget Clarke, possibly by going on a day-long drinking binge and finishing off the night by calling up a girl or two and fucking them senseless. She wanted to throw the past few days into the trash bin and pretend none of it was real; pretend that this intoxicating, infuriating blonde in front of her never stumbled into her life.

But she did. And Lexa knew from the moment their eyes met, that Clarke was different. That Clarke was special. So against all her instincts telling her to run, she strutted over to the blonde, snatching the wet towels from her hands and earning a loud gasp, and spun her around so she faced the wall, a little harsher than she originally intended to but she couldn’t help but feel slightly irritated at how maddening Clarke was being.

“HEY! What the FUCK are y-“

“Shut up, Clarke.” Lexa ordered, a hand holding the fussing woman in place by the smooth curve connecting her neck and shoulder, while dragging the moist towels across her upper back. “I just want to help.”

“I don’t remember asking for your help!” Clarke argued back, trying to turn around but Lexa’s grip tightened and prevented her from doing so.

“Yea, well, I’m doing it anyway, whether you like it or not. So stop struggling and let me, alright?!” Lexa pleaded, tone harsh but nervous.

Clarke relented after a minute, finally grasping the seriousness in Lexa’s attitude. Lexa smiled, silently considering this a small victory. She moved Clarke’s hair to the side, tossing it over her shoulder, and moved the towel over the rest of her exposed back.

“You’re infuriating, you know that?! None of this would have happened if you wouldn’t have been so goddamn stubborn and just accepted the damn coffee!” Lexa stated, dragging her hand in an excruciatingly slow pace down the toned, porcelain back. She was ready to take full advantage of
this time with Clarke. “I’m trying to be your friend, to get to know you… must you be so damn impossible all the time?!”

Clarke scoffed, throwing her head back slightly but not moving from under Lexa’s grip. “Trying to be my friend? You seriously expect me to believe that that’s all you’re after? I wasn’t born yesterday, Lexa. I know a player when I see one.”

“Trust me, if all I wanted with you was a quick fuck, I would have had you by now.” Lexa said boldly, already preparing for the backlash she was about to receive.

“Wow! Stupid AND COCKY! You sure have a way with words…I’m impressed you even get any action at all talking like that.” Clarke growled back, tensing up slightly under Lexa’s touch as her hand moved further down her back.

“Words have nothing to do with it, beautiful…” Lexa leaned into Clarke, her front grazing Clarke’s back close enough to cause the blonde to let out a sharp breath. “It’s my highly talented fingers you should be worried about…”

Lexa ran her index finger down Clarke’s spine to make her point, tracing the outline down to where it caved in before the swell of her ass. She noticed the goosebumps that rose in its wake, taking that as an indication that although Clarke’s lips may be preaching her resilience to her charms, the rest of her body was clearly not as immune. Lexa smiled, another small, but significant victory for her.

“You know, maybe if you worked this hard at studying for that exam as you are to try and impress me, you would have passed it.” Clarke mentioned, rapidly trying to change the subject. Lexa paused her movements for a while, considering Clarke’s words. She had long cleared away any coffee splashes from Clarke’s back, yet she wasn’t ready to release her yet, and she noticed that Clarke also made no effort to push her away.

Lexa shrugged. Letting Clarke go, catching her gaze as the blonde turned to face her. She fought the urge to shift her gaze south to her chest, fully aware Clarke made no effort to conceal herself.

“Well, maybe you’ll get your wish after all, princess…” Lexa said playfully, giving Clarke a gentle smile, shrugging off her plaid button up. “After next Monday, I’ll most likely fail out of the class and you won’t have to see or deal with me ever again.”

Lexa closed the gap between them and draped the sweater over Clarke’s shoulders, waiting patiently for Clarke to stretch her arms into the sleeves. Clarke hesitated, looking up at Lexa with a scalding stare and pursing her lips, but she knew she had no alternatives here: it was either accept Lexa’s shirt or walk around campus partially nude.

She settled for the first option, reluctantly allowing Lexa to slip the sleeves up her arms. Lexa grinned, biting her lower lip and claiming yet another victory. Once Clarke was securely wrapped in it, Lexa harshly pulled her closer by the collar of the shirt to bring the two ends together. Clarke let out an unexpected moan as she was yanked forward, nearly colliding against Lexa, blushing violently when she realized the sound that escaped her lips.

Lexa was full-on beaming now. The delicious sound, though soft and brief, was enough to cause her insides to melt and pool right in between her thighs. She clenched them subtly, desperate to maintain control of the situation, and focused on tantalizing the blonde instead. “Well, well... someone likes it rough…” Lexa breathed, all pompous and low, winking at her and moving her fingers to push button after button through its designated slit, closing the shirt without ever removing her eyes from Clarke’s. Clarke held her glare, challenging her right back, but Lexa saw as her pupils slightly inflated when she made the comment; saw as her chest rose rapidly beneath her fingers where they
lingered above her breasts. *Nope, definitely NOT immune to my charms.*

Once she was done, she took a step back, giving the flustered blonde some much needed space, smirk still plastered on her smug face. Lexa analyzed just how delicious Clarke looked, dressed in *her* shirt, draped in *her* cologne... it was a sight she could get used to seeing, she silently admitted. Clarke rushed to grab her things, swinging her schoolbag over her shoulders. Without another word, she moved towards the door, pulling it open, but stopped. She let the door close back into place and stomped to where Lexa still stood, leaning against the sink, eyes alight like molten lava.

“You think I’m infuriating, well, YOU’re the infuriating one!” Clarke hissed, invading Lexa’s personal space, reclaiming a small sliver of control back. "Not only that but you're equally deranged, careless, reckless, a little too full of yourself, and wasting your time because you're not even my type." Yet the scowl on Clarke's face quickly vanished when she grabbed Lexa’s wrist and yanked it closer to her, fumbling in her schoolbag and pulling out a pen. “Let me make something perfectly clear to you... we are not friends, we are not pals, and next time you look at me as if I'm crawling around on all fours for you, I will personally kick you off a building.” She spoke bitterly, eyes tracing over the numbers she scribbled on Lexa’s unusually warm palm. Once she finished, she gathered herself and stepped away. “But I hate being in someone's debt, so... you got yourself a tutor, for a few hours tomorrow afternoon. Consider it payback for handling the assholes at the bar... don't flatter yourself into believing it's anything more."

And with a piercing glare and a notable sway of her hips, Clarke strolled out of the bathroom. Lexa looked at her hand, the combination of numbers printed on her skin suddenly worthy of becoming a permanent tattoo. It took her a moment to realize that Clarke... that fucking Clarke Stubborn-Ass Griffin, had JUST given her her number, without Lexa even asking for it!

She would have attempted a backflip right then and there if her legs hadn’t suddenly turned to jelly. Her heart was racing in between her lungs and she felt the pulsing heartbeat reach the edges of her fingertips and toes, only to loop back to her heaving chest. She pumped a fist into the air, tempted to yell from the overwhelming happiness she felt.

Lexa was already executing the promising outcome of tomorrow in her head; coming up with scenarios on how to use this one-on-one time with Clarke to her full advantage. She silently sent a plea for forgiveness up to the universe for hastily accusing it of harassment earlier; thanking the gods and her clumsy self for spilling that heavenly, searing beverage on Clarke and then miraculously aligning the stars to help her pull this off. She picked up her things and left, grinning wildly and adding this fourth, and most successful, victory to her collection.

Chapter End Notes

So what did you all think? Do you guys think this is one step forward for Lexa and Clarke? Do you think that Clarke is finally letting her guard down just a little for Lexa? How long do you guys think it'll be before she realizes Lexa's true intentions and gives Lexa a chance?

Leave your comments and let us know! We'd love to hear what you all think

*Kudos are greatly appreciated*
Lexa lounged fluidly on the metal bleachers surrounding the soccer field, absorbing the already stinging April sun while she waited for Octavia to finish practice. A surreal smile still clearly painted on her face since the bathroom encounter a few hours ago, and though she tried concealing it as she strolled across campus, it was a futile battle; her lips would not willingly bend into any other shape other than that cheesy grin. She brought her hand up to her line of sight for possibly the 100th time since Clarke scribbled her number onto it, the mere memory of the moment enough to get her heart rate escalating and her chest expanding in need of air. The green ink that glimmered on her palm as she lifted it up against the sun almost brought the figures to life, and she had to hold herself back from diving into a passionate French-kiss with her hand.

She was still highly skeptical of the Universe and its discriminatory treatment towards her, so she was prepared this time for any trickery that might transpire. The numbers had already been memorized within five minutes of Clarke writing it. Lexa made sure to engrave it into her brain… You know, just in case she just happened to stumble on a pebble and get her hand mysteriously chopped off. She had also saved it into her phone, typed it in an email which she sent herself, taken a picture of the evidence scribbled on her hand, and just for the sake of being extra thorough, written it down into three different notebooks. Not this time, Universe. Not. This. Time… you oversized motherfucker. She was taking no chances.

“Why do I feel like I’m interrupting an intimate moment between you and your hand?” Octavia’s voice pierced the calmness and Lexa sat up, making space for her friend to settle down next to her. “Is that your new thing now? Hand fetish? Which is totally cool if it is but generally people desire other people’s hands… not their own.” She spoke jokingly, opening the paper bag Lexa had brought...
to the field with her and taking out its contents. “Bro…this is a burger. With large fries.”

Lexa looked at her somewhat confused. “Yes, that’s what you wanted.”

Octavia sighed, desperately wanting to shove the burger in Lexa’s face. “I asked for a salad, you idiot! The last time I had a burger was when I was five! And that’s only because you and Anya tricked me into believing the meat was tofu!” O rolled her eyes, slightly irritated mostly due to her overwhelming hunger. “You know I don’t eat meat, Lex. Where’s your head at, dude.”

Lexa didn’t reply. Instead, she opted to answer Octavia’s question by practically ramming her splayed hand centimeters away from her face, forcing Octavia to momentarily go cross-eyed trying to focus on the blurry scribble.

“No… that’s either the number of people that despise your guts as of today – me included-, or it’s a phone number.” Octavia responded disinterested, slapping Lexa’s hand away from her face. “So, about you going to get me that salad, I have to get back to practice in twenty and would appre-“

“She gave me her number, O!” Lexa just blurted, louder than she originally intended. “Clarke! Her number! Gave me!”

Octavia shook her head, attempting to digest the information. Her eyes suddenly widened in realization and Lexa saw them slowly transition from surprise to sorrow. “Ahhhhh, FUCKING HELL! You have got to be kidding me! Today, out of all days, the chick decides to pull the stick out of her ass and play nice?!” Octavia growled from frustration, glancing over at Lexa who looked seriously confused. She sighed. “Raven and I… sorta had a bet going… and, well-“

“You fucking bitch…” Lexa jumped in, shaking her head. “You bet against me, didn’t you?”

“Look, you kept striking out time after time and I honestly didn’t think you were gonna get anywhere with this chick.” O explained, giving Lexa a pitiful look. “Raven was the one who started it! If there’s anyone to blame here, it’s her!”

“Wow… and here I was thinking that out of everyone, at least my BEST FRIEND would be supporting me! You know what… you don’t even deserve to know how it happened. And go and get your own damn salad… and while you’re at it, find a new best-“

“Have you used the number yet? Have you texted her?” Octavia cut her off, effectively changing the subject, holding back a giggle when she saw Lexa’s composure convert from anger back to pure excitement and glee, already forgetting the bet and her involvement in it.

“No! Not yet, I mean, should I?! Isn’t there some unspoken rule about how long to wait to text someone? I mean, I really want to. But I don’t know… I wouldn’t want her to think I’m like, desperate or anything, ya know.” Lexa scoffed, waving a hand as if to brush that preposterous thought aside. Octavia just glared at her. You? Desperate? Nah. No way. “Plus, she’s already expecting me tomorrow night. She’s gonna tutor me, O! And the best part is, I didn’t even have to do anything! She was the one who came up with it! But I guess she’s expecting me to text, seeing that I don’t know where we’re meeting…or what time. That’s a valid reason, right? I mean, I could ask Raven, but I wouldn’t want her to think I’m some type of stalker, you feel me?!”

Octavia rolled her eyes again. You? Stalker? You don’t say…

“Lexa! Stop! Breathe, goddamn it!” Octavia wanted to push her down the bleachers to get the babble to end. “Ok, how long ago did this happen?”

“Two hours, thirty-seven minutes and approximately thirteen seconds ago.” Lexa responded
immediately, barely needing time to think.

*Sweet baby Jesus, what kind of sorcery is this?! The whipping is real!* “Ok, well, usually it is advised that you wait three full days to reach out to the person. Seeing you don’t have three full days, we need to approach this in a logical manner.” Octavia spoke, tone serious but playful, letting herself be recruited into this insanity. “Let’s assume an hour is equivalent to a day in this scenario. That being the case, and seeing that it’s been a little over two-and-a-half hours since she gave you her number, my advice is to wait the remaining twenty-three minutes before texting her. That way you don’t seem overly eager.”

Lexa nodded, eyes glazing over in obvious yearning, restraint slowly slipping with each passing second.

“Fuck it, Lex, text her now! I have fifteen minutes before I have to get back to practice and I wanna see what she says.” Octavia encouraged, sliding in closer to Lexa who already had her phone out. “There’s still a chance of me winning this bet!”

Lexa scowled at her, but her wrath quickly dissipated when she started typing the message, feeling increasingly nervous.

‘Hey, it’s Lexa! How are you? I hope you’re doing well. I’m pretty good, thanks for asking. What time should we meet tomorrow? Anytime and place works for me! Let me know. Hope you have an amazing day! See you tomorrow!’

“Dude! Keep it simple and nonchalant. Act cool.” Octavia pitched in. Lexa erased the message and tried again…

‘Ey gurl, it’s Lexa. How you doin’…yea, what time should we meet tomorrow, yo. Let me know, cutie.’

“Holy hell, Lexa! Are you gangsta now, yo? Tone it down, home-slice.” Lexa sighed, deleting the message yet again and going for a third attempt…

‘Hello, Clarke. This is Lexa Woods. May I inquire the time and location of our encounter tomorrow evening? Thank you.’

“I take back everything I ever preached about you. You have ZERO game. Get a grip, Woman!” She was near ready to punch Octavia’s teeth in now…

‘Hi, Clarke. It’s Lexa. I was just wondering what time and place works for you for our session tomorrow evening? Let me know. Thanks!’

“There we go! Perfect!” Octavia chimed, patting her on the shoulder. “Now, send it.”

Lexa hesitated; thumb hovering over the Send button. She pressed her eyes shut and pushed her finger down.

“Good! And now we wait.” Octavia exclaimed, opening the burger and removing the meat, and proceeding with a tentative bite.

Five minutes passed, and Lexa was on her feet, stomping up and down the bleachers. Ten minutes passed, and Lexa was doing jumping jacks around Octavia. Fifteen minutes passed, and Lexa was crouched into a fetal position, mumbling *the Universe hates me, the Universe hates me…*

*beep beep*
Both Octavia and Lexa sprang into action, diving for the phone.

Lexa reached it first, hands already fumbling with the gadget, pressing her finger down heavily on the print scanner. “Ahhh, fucking iPhones!”

Once it unlocked, Clarke’s message took over the screen, and Lexa and Octavia both eyed it hungrily.

‘My place. 6 pm.’

‘1589 Thirteenth Street, LA, CA. Bring your textbook, notes, and exam.’

Lexa smirked, unable to contain the warm energy transfusing through her.

“Great… I’m sure Raven has a lovely, humiliating dare in store for me when she finds out she won the bet.” Octavia growled. “Yippie. So happy for you, Lex.” Her tone clearly expressed the disdain she felt.

Octavia dashed down the bleachers just as a whistle pierced through the air, insinuating practice had resumed. Lexa stood there another moment, just appreciating the marvelous day she was having. Closing her eyes as she lifted her face towards the heavens and inhaling deeply, feeling light as a feather and ready to drift off into the polluted L.A. air.

It was short lived, of course, because a rogue soccer ball suddenly materialized out of thin air, striking her flush on the forehead and knocking her down from the impact. She saw stars for a split second, pathetically ignoring the roar of laughter that erupted from the field where the team gathered.

It seemed the Universe wasn’t through tormenting her yet.

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Clarke cleared the kitchen table of its usual items, replacing it instead with her laptop, biology book, notes, and her exam.

She pulled her hair up in a messy bun, rowdy curls fell about her face but it didn’t bother her, she had other matters occupying her mind at the moment. Aden was at soccer practice with Raven, so she’d have the place to herself for the evening… alone with the infamous Lexa Woods. She wasn’t nervous. If she was positive of anything it was that she could handle Lexa and her incessant flirting. She was already expecting it, given the girl’s recent behaviors and attempts. But Clarke was prepared for it. Ready to throw it right back in her face and watch in amusement as the brunette swallowed thickly after being rejected yet again.

The loud rumble of an overly-priced engine drew her attention to the window facing the street, and she caught glimpse of the charcoal Audi R8 just as it pulled to a stop into her driveway. Figures. Typical player wheels. She looked at her watch. 5:55 PM. She was early.

Clarke lingered just behind the front door, waiting for the bell to ring before she reached for the knob. She heard as light footsteps rushed up the front porch stairs and the creaking of wood as Lexa approached the front door. Then there was a pause. Clarke listened intently, trying to determine what made Lexa hesitate. Clarke heard her mumble incoherently from beyond the wooden door, and after yet another pause, the doorbell finally screeched to life.

Clarke waited a few seconds before pulling the door open, twisting her face into a defensive scowl and stiffening her posture in preparation, ready to confront Lexa the second their eyes locked. Only the joke was on Clarke this time around, because the instant that door swung open, revealing the
figure waiting patiently beyond its threshold, Clarke felt her resolve quickly crumble.

“Hi, Clarke.” Lexa spoke softly, tone firm but not overwhelming. “May I come in?” Lexa calmly waited for the confirmation, receiving a nod from the blonde in response. As she strolled in, Clarke grudgingly watched her, taking in her whole appearance and secretly wishing Lexa would have picked a different choice of outfit. The loose-fitting basketball jersey, combined with the ankle-tight sweatpants and the slicked-back ponytail drew her wandering eyes in like magnets. Her arms were fully exposed, along with her ribcage from the dipping slit on the sides of the jersey, and the muscles -god, does she work out?- along with that tattoo sleeve running down the length of her right arm, and the cologne…goodness, that cologne just screamed sensuality and roughness, and… Don’t you dare go there, Clarke! What the hell are you doing!

“You have a lovely home.” Lexa turned to meet her with warm eyes and an equally warm smile. “Thank you again for having me over, I really appreciate it.” Clarke returned her smile timidly, eyeing her suspiciously. Well…this is new. Is this a new flirting technique she’s trying out?

“Er, thanks. It’s my mother’s house. Not mine.” She led Lexa into the kitchen, showing her where she could settle down. Lexa smiled again, reaching in her schoolbag and pulling out a ceramic, Starbucks cup. It had been personalized; Clarke’s name was engraved in gold into its porcelain surface.

“I figured I owed you an apology for my mishap yesterday.” Lexa handed her the cup, and before having the chance to even process what she was doing, Clarke reached for it, taking it from her grip. “I really am sorry, Clarke… It was an accident but I still feel extremely guilty. I hope you accept this as an apology and a thank-you for helping me tonight.” Clarke looked into her emerald eyes, analyzing them curiously before concluding that Lexa was being sincere. There was no trickery present. “Oh! It’s also spill proof! I made sure to get a lid that doesn’t leak.” She gave Clarke a sly smile, but it was soft… free of her usual arrogance, Clarke noted.

“Oh, well, thanks… I guess.” Clarke responded, still trying to understand what the hell was happening. Why she was being so…normal? “I think we should get started, I only have a few hours.”

“Yes, of course. I have all my school stuff. I looked over the exam prior to coming here and I somewhat understand the questions and where I went wrong. I figured getting a head start could save us time.” Lexa sunk into a seat, opening up her textbook and flipping over the pages of her exam as she spoke, all business and serious. “I guess I know more about the female anatomy than I originally presumed. It’s just a matter of converting my personal knowledge into useful information.” Lexa’s tone was straight and even, revealing absolutely nothing and leaving Clarke wondering if the statement was meant to boast. Lexa’s passive, almost naïve features proved otherwise.

“Well, maybe next time you should heed Jaha’s advice and focus a little more on the exam and a little less on staring at me, wouldn’t you agree?” Clarke pointed, taking a seat next to the brunette, unsure why she even resurrected that issue.

“Yes, and it won’t happen again.” Lexa confirmed, giving her a firm nod. “I don’t need any distractions… I have to pass all future exams if I have a shot at graduation.”

That made Clarke freeze in place, but she quickly thawed as a wave of rage coursed through her. Distraction???!! So NOW I’m just some fucking, meaningless DISTRACTION to her?! Oh, HELL NO!

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but I thought the whole reason for you even showing up to class lately was to try and swoon over me?” Clarke couldn’t help it. The words just flowed out of her mouth
“No, you’re not wrong. Look, Clarke, I’m sorry for how I’ve been acting lately… you’re a cool girl and you’re obviously extremely attractive. I won’t deny it, I am, was, super drawn to you…” Lexa explained, eyes lowering to the table as she talked, not catching the mild blush that painted Clarke’s cheeks, “But I get that you don’t feel the same. You made your point loud and clear… so I’m backing off. I don’t want to make you feel uncomfortable…you deserve better than that.” Lexa gave her a weak smile, and Clarke clenched her hand into a fist to avoid slapping it off of her. It’s been twenty-four hours and she’s suddenly over me? What the ACTUAL fuck!

“Oh, I see. Well, I’m glad we’re finally on the same page.” Clarke spoke coldly; averting her eyes from Lexa’s to glance at her computer. “Want anything to drink before we begin? Soda, juice, beer?”

“Oh, a beer would be great actually… if you don’t mind, of course.” Lexa responded politely. Clarke just nodded, standing and making her way to the fridge. She pulled out two beers, popping them open, and before she strolled back to Lexa (who was currently way too focused on reading her textbook), Clarke frustratingly pulled her loose, V-neck shirt as low as it would go and swayed back to the still concentrated brunette. Let’s see you resist a little cleavage.

“Here you go. Hope you like Blue Moon.” Clarke handed Lexa the beer, growing even more frustrated when Lexa maintained her gaze firmly on the book.

“It’s one of my favorites actually. Thank you!” Lexa paused and lifted her gaze as she spoke. But just as quickly, she lowered it back to the book and continued her reading, barely registering Clarke and her obviously exposed chest. Clarke wanted to grab her by the shoulders and shake the indifference out of her.

“So, um, what do you want to go over? Any particular topic you’re struggling with?” Clarke cleared her throat before speaking; summoning all the strength she possessed to keep her chill.

“Yes, there is, now that you mention it. Can we go over the female reproductive system? It appears I sorta screwed that up big time.”

Clarke smirked, perking up at Lexa’s choice of topic. Oh, this should be fun.

“Oh… alright, so tell me. What’s the purpose of the fallopian tubes?” Clarke asked, swiveling in her chair, body and attention now fully directed at Lexa.

“Oh, it’s a pair of tubes along which eggs travel from the ovaries to the uterus.” Lexa responded, grinning at her innocently. “Happens every month. And it’s every woman’s worst enemy since it’s the reason we bleed nearly half to death.”

Clarke nodded, slightly impressed but attempted not to show. “Good. You got it. What’s the point of menstruation?”

Lexa squinted her eyes, which still rarely ever landed on Clarke… OR her chest, which she puffed out in a not-so-subtle effort to grab Lexa’s focus. “To rid the uterus of said egg. Shedding it away in order for the next cycle to begin.”

Clarke nodded again, shifting closer to the edge of her chair and closer to brunette. Let’s make this a tad more interesting, shall we?

“Tell me, what happens during sexual intercourse?” Clarke spoke flirtatiously, eyes closely analyzing Lexa’s profile, seeking for any signs of discomfort or trepidation. Let’s see you keep that infuriating chill now.
But the brunette turned and faced her dead on, lips curving into a crooked smile, and Clarke immediately knew from that look alone that she had flipped a hidden switch. Fuck... “Intercourse… between a man and a woman?…or between two women?… there’re many possible answers for that specific question.” Lexa responded calmly, the slight purr to her tone was enough to get the blonde to clench her thighs firmly shut. “I personally never had intercourse with a man, so I couldn’t tell you from experience… but with a woman, well… a lot happens. Especially when I penetrate them with either my-“

“MAN AND A WOMAN! S-sexual intercourse between a man and a woman! For reproductive reasons!” Clarke had to interrupt, the image floating around her muddled brain left her gasping for air. She sure as hell hoped Lexa didn’t catch it… but the smug look on her face indicated she most definitely had.

“I see… well, in that case, the man penetrates the woman’s kitty with his wee-wee. He pumps his boys deep inside the channel and then it’s all downhill from there. The little dudes fight to the death, one finally wins and gets to breach the egg. Bada-bing, she’s preggers. And then said man probably leaves her with the kid to go repeat that routine with another woman. Did I get all that right? So he gets to walk away with his balls emptier and satisfied, while she walks away with a kid and the unsurprising realization that she didn’t even climax from the encounter, since guys are about as skilled as a pillow in bed, and know nothing about how to please their women.”

“And sex with women is better? You sound a little bias about this, don’t you think?” Clarke asked, without ever meaning to…without even realizing she had asked the question until after it had slipped from her lips.

Lexa smiled, visibly pleased with the question. “Oh, absolutely. Women know exactly what other women like, Clarke. Women know what points to hit, what places to touch, whether to use their mouth, or fingers, or both.” Lexa bit her lips then, and Clarke had to strangle the whimper dying to be released, her thighs were clenched so impossibly tight that it started to quiver beneath her black leggings. “We make better lovers. We fuck better than any man. And not to brag, but I would never leave my lady until she’s had at least five consecutive orgasms. I can guarantee that.” Lexa winked, and sweet heavens on a popsicle, Clarke believed every delicious word that dripped out of those succulent lips.

She so desperately wanted to break the fierce eye contact between their eyes right then, yet she was powerless to because Lexa held her gaze in such a hypnotic way that it made looking at anything else impossible.

Lexa finally caved first, shifting her gaze down back to her book, releasing the blonde from her hold. “Umm, yea I think you have the intercourse part down pat.” Clarke cleared her overly-parched throat, anxious to change topics. “What’s the next question on the exam?”

Lexa flipped the page, face suddenly igniting with delight, presenting Clarke with a wicked smile. “What's the purpose of the clitoris?”

“You've got to be kidding me... “You know, we can just skip over that. It’s obvious what its purpose is and-“

“I think it would be damaging to my overall learning experience if we skip a question, Clarke. And is it obvious? What its purpose is? Are you aware that the clit has over 8,000 sensory nerve endings, automatically making it the most sensitive part of a woman’s erogenous zone. It’s also designed solely for pleasure, with no other purpose other than to help a woman climax and orgasm.” Lexa spoke, so incredibly scientifically and scholarly that Clarke’s jaw slightly dropped. Lexa paused, stretching out her muscular arms – Jesus, she can probably pick me up no problem… possibly pin me
“Clarke?” Lexa asked, raising both eyebrows in her direction. “Something the matter?” Lexa was holding back a smirk, Clarke watched infuriated as the corners of her lips twitched.

“Nope. Not at all. You look like you need another beer.” Clarke needed a reason, an excuse to get up and stretch her already wobbly legs. A reason to put some much needed distance between her and the enraging brunette, who was doing her damned best to make everything she said, every movement she made, a direct attack at Clarke’s already sensitive womanly bits.

She made her way back to the fridge, standing in front of it’s opened door for a moment too long, absorbing the coolness it radiated. What the hell is happening. What is she playing at?!

And before she realized, Lexa was up and hovering right behind her, arm extending over her shoulder and grabbing a beer. Clarke stiffened, feeling her warm breath cascade down her sensitive skin from her proximity. “I got it, don’t worry.” Lexa whispered, a little too close, and Clarke’s only response was to snap the fridge door shut. She turned, but instead of backing up, Lexa closed the gap between them, propelling Clarke backwards and pressing her against the kitchen counter. Lexa reached around her for the bottle opener, popping it open, and taking a long swig before speaking.

“Want to know a secret?” Lexa spoke huskily, leaning forward and close enough that Clarke could smell the alcohol on her lips, and she had to close her eyes because her body might as well have converted to a fucking generator from all the electrical currents racing through her from her voice alone. “On how to make a woman cum? Peel back the outer layer of the clit and lick the exposed nub with precise, unpredictable swipes… That will get you screaming for release.” And Lexa may as well have spoken that directly to her clit because Clarke felt the muscles of her core clench at thin air. She bit down on her tongue hard to keep from moaning, because holy hell, she was soaked right through her leggings.

Lexa took a step back, grinning proudly, fully aware of Clarke’s obvious situation. “You look a little pale, Clarke? You sure you’re alright?” Oh, you fucking bitch! And it took Clarke whatever little restraint she possessed, grabbing onto the edge of the countertop with a forceful grip, to keep her from pouncing on Lexa and taking her right then and there.

But after a few breaths, she managed to relax, and moved stiffly back to her seat. Lexa followed her lead, plopping down on the chair next to her. “Yea, I think you’re good on the reproductive system.” Clarke confirmed, voice course and rough, scanning her test for another topic to discuss.

“Yea, I may have ovary-acted when I said I needed help with it!?” Lexa admitted, laughing at her own joke. It took Clarke a second to understand, but it didn’t amuse her in the slightest. She just stared at the brunette. “Relax! It was funny! Get it?? OVARY-acted!”

“Yea… HI-larious.” Clarke rolled her eyes. “Ok… how do you want to tackle these topics? Start from the top of the exam or the bottom?”

Lexa gave her another joyful grin, and Clarke steeled herself in preparation for what was about to unfold next. “Great question, Clarke! I don’t know… I’m a top kinda girl myself…but you…” She said, tone octaves low, running her eyes up and down Clarke’s body, “YOU, beautiful, strike me as more of a bottom chick to me.”

And Clarke swallowed dryly, whether out of arousal or anger she wasn’t sure, but the nerves! No way in HELL am I- She was about to verbally deny the bold assumption, but was cut off by rushed little footsteps crossing the parlor to the kitchen.
“Clarke! Claaaaaarke! You’ll never BELIEVE what happened at soccer practice today!” Aden shouted from the living room. “I kicked the ball at some kid’s head and knocked him unconscious! It was AWESOME! You should have seen his face, it was all—” Aden finally stepped into the kitchen, eyes immediately zoning into Lexa’s, both sets widening in recognition and panic.

“Lexa?” He asked softly, features darkening from confusion as he tried to understand why she was currently in their kitchen.

Clarke twisted her neck from Aden to Lexa and back to Aden, equally confused and speculating.

“You two know each other?”

“You’re…Lexa Woods.” Aden piped up and ignored her question, his face transforming from alarm to awe. “I’m Aden. It’s an honor to meet you, Miss Woods! I’m a huge fan of yours and your family!” Aden walked proudly over to the still baffled brunette, extending a hand up to her which Lexa grabbed on a hunch. He gave it an overly harsh squeeze, trying to basically tell her to play along since he did not have the privilege to explain with words.

“Oh-er, um…thanks…young man.” Lexa responded, letting go of his weirdly strong grip for a scrawny, ten-year-old kid. “It’s a pleasure to meet you too.”

“Clarke… you never told me you’re friends with Lexa Woods!” Clarke squinted her eyes at him, confused but intrigued. “Miss Woods, pardon my fawning, but I read the article you gave Forbes Magazine when you were nineteen! The one about continuing your parents’ legacy. That was just…mind blowing!” Lexa shot him a look of sheer terror now, she herself had forgotten about that event… so, so long ago. She was almost a different person then… “I must admit, what you did… creating a non-profit organization for young college students who lost their parents, much like you did…well, it inspired me. It made me want to follow in your footsteps.” Aden glanced down at his feet shyly, and Lexa suddenly wanted to scoop him into her arms and squeeze the sadness right out of him, whether genuine or not. “I’m sure you have a million things going on, and it’s not my place to ask but… I’d love to interview you sometime. See, I want to be a businessman myself when I grow up… but I never really had a role model to look up to in the business world… well, not until now at least.” He lifted his gaze then, shooting Lexa a pained look that was so incredibly raw and authentic, so resilient yet humble, that it made her look away as she nodded, quickly bringing a hand up to wipe the single tear that spilled from her eye.

Clarke felt wrecked from Aden’s heartfelt admiration, fighting off tears of her own. “Sweetie… honey,” She knelt before him, hands gently ruffling his already disheveled hair. “Why didn’t you tell me this, Aden. I can find someone to mentor you if that’s what you want… I can get—”

“Me.” Lexa spoke firmly, earning both their attention and giving the pair a hopeful smile. “You can have me. For as long as you want, anytime you want, Aden.” She walked over to the boy, kneeling before him much like Clarke, placing a light hand on his shoulder. “The honor would be all mine.”

Aden grinned widely now, inspiring similar smiles to form on Clarke’s and Lexa’s still saddened faces, and without an ounce of hesitation, he wrapped his arms around Lexa’s neck, embracing her in a grateful gesture. “Thank you! I can’t wait to tell my friends about it! You’re awesome!”

Lexa looked at Clarke, who was still struggling to process what was happening, but hugged him back in earnest, making a mental note to buy the kid a whole goddamn ice cream parlor for being so goddamn clever.

“Hey, monkey, what do you want for dinner?” Clarke asked, standing and ruffling his hair some more, Lexa followed suit. “I can make your favorite! How’s that sound?”
Aden furiously nodded; all traces of sadness already vanished from his face. “I’ll be upstairs. While you make dinner. Doing the ton of homework I have, which will probably take me hours to finish, so no chances of me interrupting you again…” He shrugged, shaking his head. “It was nice meeting you, Lexa. Can’t wait to see you again. Super, super, super soon.” He winked and grinned, making a dash for the stairs.

Clarke cleared her throat when they were alone, turning to face the brunette. She smiled. “Well, we still have quite a lot to get through in order to get you ready for that exam. Would you like to stay for dinner?”

And in her mind, Lexa was already handing Aden the keys to his own, privately-held, ice cream parlor, further considering calling up Pope Francis and nominating the boy into sainthood. “Yes!” She announced, a little too eager, but she didn’t care. “I’d love to.”

Lexa returned to her seat, scanning over the pages of her exam, but her mind traveled elsewhere… back in time…four years ago.

“So,” Clarke lured her back to the present, who currently stood shuffling around the pantry and cabinets, preparing dinner. “What was that all about? If you don’t mind me asking?”

She watched Lexa tense up slightly, but it was only for a second, she soon relaxed back to her original self. “My parents passed away when I was eight-years-old. Not much younger than Aden. Their life and death are no secret… a few key strokes in google and you will stumble upon everything you need to know about them.” Clarke nodded slowly, in agreement with that statement. “Naturally, I inherited an insane amount of money, along with 80% of their company’s stock, which automatically makes me the head shareholder of the firm.”

“Wow…That’s a lot to manage…for an eight-year-old.” Clarke contributed, giving Lexa a soft smile to let her know the comment was meant to comfort, not taunt her.

Lexa smiled back, and Clarke continued about her task, attentively listening as the brunette continued to share. “Well, because I was still a kid, and obviously unable to manage a Fortune 500 firm, the responsibilities were passed on to an adviser. A counselor, if you will. A friend and confidant my parents loved and trusted while they were still alive.” Clarke sensed Lexa pause, as if considering how to proceed next. “I could have reclaimed the power when I turned 18, if I wanted to. In a way, it was expected of me… a birthright of sorts… to continue what my parents started. But I couldn’t… I didn’t want any of it. All I wanted was the money and to do with it as I pleased.” Lexa confessed, tone firm but there was hint of sadness there, Clarke noticed. “I felt guilty, about it all. About failing my parents so miserably. So when I was asked by Forbes to do an interview, I accepted –well, it took a lot of Indra’s encouragements and persuasion to get me to concur. The non-profit organization was always more an idea than a reality. It just never really took off. Mostly because I never really made an effort to see it through.”

Clarke nodded, acknowledging what she was saying, still steadily focused on the meal she prepared. “Indra… is she a relative?” Clarke had been curious about the woman since the fateful day they met.

“No. Not by blood at least. But she basically raised me. She was my mother’s midwife, when my mother became pregnant with me. Once I was born, she continued to care for me, alongside my mom.” Lexa explained, she had a smile on her face now. Clarke assumed she must truly love this woman. “Once my parents passed away, she stuck around. She filed the adoption papers, and made it official. See, I was going to be placed in foster care. Indra decided that she would rather take a bullet on the shoulder a million times over than let me be dragged out of her arms and placed with total strangers. I love her…with every fiber of my being. She may not be my biological mother, but she is my mom. No doubts about it.”
Clarke swallowed the scorching sensation that quickly crawled up her throat. She knew that feeling, she knew it far too well. “She sounds like an incredible woman. You’re lucky to have her.” She threw the brunette a mixed look, one that encompassed both sorrow and envy.

Lesa understood the look but decided it was best not to question it. She stood and walked over to Clarke when she noticed the blonde straining to reach an item off the top shelf. She smiled and reached for it, placing an innocent hand on the smalls of her back as she did so, grabbing the salt with ease and handing it to the flustered blonde. “Oh, um…Thanks.”

“No problem. Do you need help?” Lexa watched, slightly fascinated with Clarke’s cooking abilities. “I mean, I don’t cook. Shocker, I know... But I can be useful! I can help by… grabbing items off shelves for you… or handing you utensils and other kitchen tools. I wouldn’t trust me with a knife, or put me too close to the stove just yet…the Universe has been fucking with me lately and I don’t want you to become collateral damage.” She gave Clarke her most candid smile, pleasantly surprised when she received a giggle from the blonde.

Clarke surprised herself with the unexpected reaction. She was tired of fighting the urge, especially when it came so naturally now. Tired of fighting the voice in her head that bellowed for her to proceed with caution; to not allow herself to be persuaded by Lexa’s charismatic appeal. She was tired of all of it. “Alright… wanna grab me a beer from the fridge? I’m parched.”

Lesa beamed at her, crossing the distance to the fridge in a single step. “Here you go, Madame.”

Clarke released another giggle…well, more of snort really. And Lexa had to slurp back the drool she felt ready to drip from the corners of her dangling mouth.

“So… do you take care of Aden? All by yourself?” Lexa managed the courage to ask, leaning with her back against the counter next to Clarke.

It was only fair, Clarke reasoned, for Lexa to inquire. Especially after the brunette had been so transparent with her about her own family. Clarke still had her doubts, of course, and she was fully aware of the perils that awaited her if she dared to trespass that fine line from acquaintances to friends. *It’s just a conversation, Clarke. Stop overthinking every damn thing for a change.* “Yes. I basically took over when my mother left. It’s been me and him for a while now.”

Lesa listened, wanting to dive further into into the story, but reluctant to ask for more. She didn’t want to press Clarke for details she was not ready to reveal. Luckily, Clarke relented on her own.

“She joined a program called *Doctors Without Borders* a while back. Five years ago, to be precise. At the one-year anniversary of my father’s death.” Clarke was ready to feel the usual range of emotions that crippled her to near nothingness at the mere thought of her father and his passing. She was surprised when she felt her heart continue its steady beat, her hands did not quake nor constrict into fists from pain or anger, and her eyes remained dry and focused as the memory invaded her mind. She wasn’t sure what was different this time…

“She wasn’t coping. Even when she still lived here, she was never mentally present.” Clarke continued, voice low but strong. “I assumed responsibility over Aden from the get-go. Taught myself how to cook and be domestic in every way he needed me to be, while still making sure I kept up with my studies. I took on a part-time job in order to help with everyday necessities when my mother was dismissed from the hospital, since she was deemed unstable to continue to work. My mother caught onto it, and she started withdrawing further into whatever shell of the person she was becoming. It didn’t surprise me when she made the announcement that she was leaving for a little while. Neither Aden nor I were truly shocked, or hurt. She was already so far out of our lives that we already considered her gone before she ever left.”
Clarke pointed with her chin at the wooden spoon lounging at the far end of the counter, and Lexa quickly reached for it, handing it to her without a second thought. “She doesn’t make enough to support us financially. We basically survive off of my father’s life insurance and savings, which was meant for Aden’s college education but now it’s all but depleted. She does come home three times a year for a few weeks, while she waits for her new assignment to be sorted out. And then she’s off again. We skype every now and then, when she’s in a location with decent internet. But we mostly communicate through letters and postcards. Its mostly for Aden’s sake. Pass me the basil, please.”

Lexa’s hands darted for the tray of spices, and she paused, mildly panicking when she realized she had no flipping idea what the hell basil was or what it even looked like. “Errrrrr-“

Clarke snickered, shaking her head. “Green. Brown cap.”

“Ah! I knew that.” Lexa handed her the spice, nearly dropping it when she felt Clarke wrap her fingers around the container and in turn, wrap them around her fingers as well. Their eyes locked, only this time there was no anger or tension transmitted through their gaze, if anything, both had simultaneously entered a moment of accord and understanding. Clarke felt her soul slowly gravitate towards the green-eyed brunette that stood so patiently before her; a pull that drew them into each other, and Clarke wanted to fight the urge but she couldn’t. She saw Lexa dip her head and lean, and she closed her eyes… waiting for the inevitable to occur, waiting for her to—

“Claarrrrrkeee! Is dinner ready?! I’m famished!” Aden burst into the kitchen right. At. That. Fucking. Second, sending Clarke stumbling backwards and quickly redirecting her attention to the stove, while Lexa lost her balance and staggered forward, smacking her forehead right into an open cabinet door.

“Fuck!” She screeched, quickly bringing her hand to her throbbing head, taking the keys to that ice cream parlor she had previously bought Aden in her mind and shoving it—

“Move your hand. Let me see.” Clarke was on her as quickly as it happened, grabbing her wrist and pulling it away to assess the damage. “Aden, set the table. Dinner will be ready in five.” She spoke over her shoulder, giving Lexa a shy smile once she turned to face her yet again. “It’s just a scratch… you’ll live.”

But for reasons unknown, Clarke reached for the emergency kit just the same, and pulled out a cleaning pad and a band-aid. She tended to her very minor, very insignificant scratch, holding back a smirk when Lexa whimpered the moment the moist pad made contact with her skin. “Hush… you big baby.”

Lexa pouted. “You don’t know the week I’ve had… this is the second time my forehead’s been harassed! In less than forty-eight hours!” She whined, wincing mildly when Clarke pressed the band-aid down. “But I guess this almost makes up for it…” And Clarke slightly melted at the grin spreading over Lexa’s face.

“Go and sit down at the table. I’ll fix up the plates.” Clarke interrupted her train of thought, placing a plate full to the brim in front of her. She did the same for Aden, who rubbed his shin soothingly under the table, still blissfully confused.
“You kidding me, it’s one of my favorites! Thank you!” Lexa replied in earnest, unable to contain the smile conquering her features.

They ate in relative calmness. Aden drilled Lexa about the Legacy project, and Clarke would interrupt every now and then and tell them both to shut up and finish their meal. Occasionally, the two women would risk tentative glances at the other, which would result in awkward blushes and shy grins, forcing both to quickly avert their gazes elsewhere.

Once finished, Clarke ushered Aden out of the kitchen and upstairs to finish his schoolwork, earning a pat on the head from Clarke and a bitter glare from Lexa. Lexa lingered behind, assisting Clarke with the dishes, drying them as Clarke washed and rinsed. She had never, not once in her life, been required to occupy herself with petty housework or chores. They had workers for that, and Indra encouraged her to focus on her studies and nothing else. But this… this task right here which should have been tedious and dull, was anything but. She was with Clarke, helping and being useful, and she sincerely could not fathom a moment throughout her privileged life where she so perfectly belonged.

“I was hoping we could get through all the topics for the exam tonight… sorry for not being more helpful.” Clarke admitted, shutting the faucet and reaching for a towel. “You can take my exam, and study that. It might help.”

Lexa smiled, walking over to the table and collecting her belongings. “I’ll figure it out. You’ve done more than enough.”

Clarke walked her out, leaning against the door frame once they both stepped out into the surprisingly cool, L.A. air. Lexa beeped her Audi to life, and Clarke watching amusedly, observing the way her composure suddenly reverted back to her overconfident self.

“I’ll tell you what.” Lexa spoke playfully, eyes traveling from blue-orbs to pink lips and back. “If I, by some miracle, manage to pass this exam next Monday, you agree to let me take you out on a date.” She bit her lips then, presenting Clarke an innocent but totally smug smile. “What do you say?”

Clarke rolled her eyes at the cheesy proposition, but smiled back nonetheless. “There’s no challenge there. Passing the exam requires minimum effort. You’re going to have to do better than that if you want a shot at taking me out.”

Lexa nodded, weighing her options, eyes suddenly igniting as an idea crossed her mind. “Fair point. So how about this instead,” Lexa took a step closer to Clarke, tempted to take in those parted lips between her own, but she refrained. “If I get a grade higher than yours on this exam… I get to take you out on a date. Deal?”

Clarke released a full bodied laugh then, head rolling back and body slightly shaking from the strong vibrations. She recoiled mildly from the abnormal gesture, realizing it had been some time since she last laughed like that… “You can’t possibly be serious. You do know I received the highest grade in the class, right? A class of say, 200 students? I got a single question wrong, Lexa. You’d have to get a perfect score to beat me.” She gave Lexa her most vicious grin, raising up a brow at the brunette in a silent gotcha.

“Oh, who’s the cocky one now?” Lexa rebutted, inching even closer to the blonde, only this time Clarke stood her ground, she refused to be swayed by Lexa’s domineering proximity. “If you’re scared that you might lose, I get it. I mean, it takes real guts to accept a challenge, but if yo-“

“Deal.” Clarke was tired of listening to her ramble pointlessly, reasoning that a perfect score was a
near impossibility given how much time and effort she herself dedicated towards the exam. No way in hell she’ll do it.

Lexa smiled again. “Ok then. It’s on.” She took a step back, winking at Clarke, and started heading towards her car.

“What happened to me being a distraction? You were sure quick to change your mind about that.” Clarke called to her just as she opened the door to her vehicle, tossing her school material into the passenger seat.

“You were never a distraction, Clarke.” Lexa called back decisively. It was dark and Clarke couldn’t decipher the expression on her face from the distance and lack of lighting, but her tone was saturated with a warmness and humor that instantly relaxed her. “If anything, you’ve given me a reason to focus. Which I’ll prove to you Monday morning, after I Ace that exam.”

And with one final goodbye, Lexa slid behind the steering wheel and reversed out of her driveway and into the street, pressing down a little too hard on the accelerator which caused the engine to roar and the car to soar down the narrow road and out sight.

Clarke’s eyes nearly disappeared into the inside of her head. Fucking show off.

***

Clarke sat in the library, munching quietly on an apple, nose pressed into a book enjoying the relaxing break in between classes. She was utterly engrossed by the novel, flipping pages in a dying need to conclude *The Alchemist*, needing to become a part of the prestigious club that had already uncovered its mystery.

So it was rather shocking when the book was rudely pulled from her hands, and she was denied her yearning, watching angrily as Lexa slid into the seat across from her waving the book around the air unceremoniously.

“It’s a beautiful day out, yet when I stopped to think ‘where would a massive nerd be hiding out on this rather lovely day,’ it was a no brainer. My feet started walking me to the library before my brain even had a chance to process an answer.” She grinned at the still scowling blonde, opening her schoolbag in the process and pulling out a stack of papers.

She plopped it down in front of Clarke and leaned back into the chair, curiously watching the blonde’s features twist from anger, to confusions, then to astonishing disbelief.

“No fucking way…” Clarke whispered, picking up the papers and furiously scanning page after page, repeating the cycle once she finished. “But, how?! There’s just- No! This has got to be a mistake!”

“It’s no mistake, beautiful.” Lexa pitched in, smugness level peaked to the max. “Professor Jaha thought the same. He even went over the answers, twice. Your eyes aren’t deceiving you.” She leaned forward, bringing her index and placing it under Clarke’s chin and lifting it so their eyes would meet.

“So… about that date?”

And Clarke could do nothing but stare back, dumbfounded, at her. Trying and failing to understand how in the fucking world Lexa had managed to get a fucking 100% on the exam, when she had failed to do so!
She scoffed, shaking her head slightly; partially out of disbelief, and partially out of amazement. And ok, *mostly* out of irritation as well. She had agreed; she was committed, and by the looks of Lexa’s superior smile, she was screwed.

*Well, shit!*

Chapter End Notes

Well... Well... Well... How the tables have turned! :)

We hope you guys loved it just as much as we enjoyed writing it!
Please don't forget to leave a comment with your thoughts and don't forget your Kudos please!!

Again, thank you all for your continuous, amazing support and love for the story!
Until we met again my friends!

xoxo
Hello again guys!!! We are back!!!!

First, we want to say sorry for taking a little longer than usual with this chapter. Life happened and we couldn't have finished it sooner. We are in the middle of work projects and final projects at school so please bare with us!

However, to make up for it we have made this chapter a little long for you guys! We spent the last 2 weeks giving it our all and we are proud of the outcome of it. It is 28 pages long so we hope you all enjoy it!!!

Thank you all for your immense, continuous support for our story! We cannot wait to hear from you all again!
We love every feedback, every comment, every emotion that we get from you all. It is our drive to keep on writing!

We love you all!

Here is chapter 6... The date ;)

xtaJat07 xSilverSnake222

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Indra ran the pad of her thumb over the rough surface of her favorite fridge magnet; a 17-year-old, hand-made souvenir gifted to her from a 6-year-old rather thoughtful child. The engravings on its clay surface were jagged and rough; lacking finesse and smoothness, but the words read surprisingly clear, Lexa Loves Momma Indra. She naturally smiled, reminiscing upon the warm memory and the disbelief that such a fragile item had miraculously survived all these years. She slapped the paper flush against the door of the fridge, pressing the magnet at its center, making sure it held securely before taking a few, tentative steps back to admire her work. She was beaming; heart swelling with pride as she once again scanned the page from top to bottom, eyes lingering on the 100% written on its corner. She figured Lexa’s exam had earned a spot on the fridges door-of-fame.

'Miss Indra! Miss Indra!' Young Aden called to her as he slid into the kitchen, losing his balance for a second but expertly regaining it, stopping a few feet before her. The panicked look on his innocent face made her chuckle. "Miss Indra! The girls... They sent me.... For the sandwiches!" He said in between heavy breaths, his small chest heaving furiously as he tried to relax into a normal breathing rhythm. "Please don't send me back there empty handed! They're cranky, and hungry and... I'm too dang adorable to die!"

Indra chuckled again, giving him a small shake of her head. "Aden, I told you to not let them bully you around, child. You must stand up to them, boy!" She scolded gently, but still moved to finish organizing the tray of sandwiches she had prepared for the famished group, who currently occupied the game room. "This is the fifth time they have sent you to do their bidding. You are not their servant, little one!"

Aden nodded, pausing to consider her words for a minute, his features adorably scrounging up as he
pondered his choices. Just then, Lincoln waddled into the kitchen, balancing at least a dozen dirty dishes with his hands and mouth, mumbling incoherently through clenched teeth that were currently occupied latching onto the edge of a cup.

Indra sighed, giving them both another disappointed shake of her head. She moved to help the clearly desperate Lincoln with the dishes.

"Oh thank god..." Lincoln gasped, relief washing over him once the dishes were put down safely on the counter. "They've sent me for beers! Aden, what's taking you so long!? Raven is about a second away from going all Hannibal Lecter if she isn't fed soon!"

Aden threw Indra a look of pure terror, and Indra rolled her eyes at the pair, attempting to understand what has happened to the men of this generation. "Enough! Both of you!" She lectured, index finger waving from one to the other. "Now, listen here. You are men! Proud, strong, independent men, you hear!? You are not wimps! Now walk back in there and tell them you will not be treated as such!"

Aden and Lincoln exchanged a concerned look, before looking back to the very serious Indra. "But-"

"I won't hear any of it!" Indra cut them both off when she heard the beginning of an excuse form on their lips. "Now... Puff out those chests, remove that fear from your eyes, and march back in there and tell them you are not some thing to be ordered around! Go, gentlemen!"

Aden and Lincoln readily obeyed, puffing out their chests and nodding firmly, speaking encouragements to one another as they made their trip back to the game room.

Indra waited patiently in the kitchen, finishing up the last of the sandwiches. The sound of clattering objects and shouts resonating from the basement urged yet another sigh from her, and she wasn't one bit surprised when both, Aden and Lincoln, scrambled back into the kitchen, frenzied and frightened, clearly intent on collecting the requested items.

“What happened?!” Indra asked, shooting them a perplexed look.

“Octavia threatened to cancel my Xbox subscription!” Lincoln responded back, hands fussing around in the fridge and pulling out the two boxes of chilled Coronas.

“And Raven threatened to cancel my monthly subscription to The Economist!” Aden replied in a panicked tone, tiny hands already latching onto the handles of the sandwich tray before Indra even had a chance to react. "Sorry, Miss Indra, but I'm gonna need these sandwiches now!"

"Aden, I got the beers and cups! Are we missing something?? Ahhhhh, I think we're missing something... Oh god, I don't want to go back in there...Octavia might just decapitate me!"

"The list, Linc! The list of contacts Lexa demanded! Inside the drawer!" Aden shouted, lifting the tray and starting his walk back to the game room.

"Got it!" Lincoln shouted back triumphantly, placing the paper in between his teeth and grabbing the two cases of beers in each hand, following Aden out of the kitchen.

Once alone, Indra let her head roll back in exasperation, eyes gazing at the ceiling and exhaling soundly. "Men..."

***
"That's overrated! C’mon, PG, you gotta be more original than that if you wanna make this date memorable!" Raven dismissed the idea, taking a pause to stuff nearly an entire half-sandwich into her mouth. "Oh! I know! How about a new set of wheels?! Have you seen the death-contraption she calls a car? Fred Flintstone used to own it back in the day..."

"Raven, c’mon! I need SERIOUS ideas! And how is buying Clarke a new car even a plausible idea for a date?!” Lexa snapped, erasing the newest addition to the whiteboard with the back of her hand and turning back around to her suddenly disengaged audience. “Guys! Can you put the food down for a sec and focus, please?!”

Aden shot his tiny hand into the air, the excited look on his face insinuated he had an idea.

“Go ahead, little man.” Lexa encouraged, spirits climbing a little, surely no one knew Clarke better than her own kid brother...

“The petting zoo!” Aden blurted, leaning forward on the stool he was perched on and nearly tumbling from it from excitement. “Clarke LOVES the petting zoo! She always says it’s her favorite place to go when we go together!”

Lexa nearly face-palmed her own damn face at the innocent, but still super flipping adorable statement. “Aden…”

“Lex, we gave you a thousand ideas already, dude!” Octavia reasoned, taking ginormous bites out of her sandwich. “I mean…just pick one! I’m sure she’ll love it regardless!” Lexa watched as Raven and Octavia practically inhaled sandwich after sandwich, clearly wagering who could eat the most the fastest. “I think the ‘dinner on the beach’ is the best one yet, if you ask me.”

Raven scoffed, spitting out nearly half her chewed sandwich on Octavia’s face. “Yea, sweet idea O… I guess sand blowing all over your face and food while on a romantic date clearly wins top spot.” She mumbled with a full mouth, already reaching for another piece. “Aden, beer!”

Aden hopped from the stool, rushing over to Raven and grabbing the beer bottle. There was a straw protruding from the opening, and he lifted it up to her mouth. “You got this, Raven. You’re kicking her butt right now… just chew and breathe…chew and breathe…oh, and swallow!”

Lexa was about ready to explode. “Raven! You’re her best friend! Surely you must have some notion of what she likes?!”

Raven took a long gulp of the beer, patting Aden on the head in a good boy gesture before turning her attention to Lexa. “Woods, I already told you! Get her a new set of wheels! I’m thinking… Porsche? Ferrari?”

“Ferrari, definitely a Ferrari.” Aden agreed hastily, still holding the beer up to her lips. “I’m pretty sure she likes…convertibles?! Right, Raven?”

“Oh, yes! Absolutely. Good call, Aden.” Raven winked at the smirking boy before refocusing on Octavia and the sandwiches. “I swear you’re stuffing these down your shirt, you cheater! You went from a B-cup to Double D’s in a span of 20 minutes!”

Octavia grinned, gulping down forcefully before shoving another sandwich into her already stuffed mouth. “What’s the matter, Ray? Scared you might lose?”

Lexa growled from the building frustration expanding like wildfire in her chest. She shifted her gaze back to the white board and let her eyes scan the list of ideas that had been accumulated throughout the night.
Ideas for Larke’s 1st Date: (The name coupling compliments of Raven…of course).

- **Romantic dinner on private beach** (Octavia had suggested, which earned her a gag response from Raven).
- **Romantic dinner at L.A.’s top strip club** (Raven countered, earning weird looks from everyone in the room and a rather appropriate question from little Aden regarding WHAT they’d be eating… safe to say she tried keeping it G-rated from then on).
- **Romantic trip AND dinner at Disney Land** (yup…you guessed it… a hearty suggestion from Aden, who clasped his hands together when he mentioned it and earned ‘Awe’s’ from everyone except Raven… who gagged in disgust once again).
- **Romantic dinner at a romantic restaurant??** (Lincoln pitched in, earning him a ‘seriously? A restaurant? For a romantic dinner!? What the F is wrong with you’ look from both Raven and Octavia…Lexa just rolled her eyes and sighed).
- **The Arcade** (According to Aden, Clarke’s second favorite place in the world).
- **A day trip to Vegas**
- **Bunge-jumping**
- **Netflix and Chill**
- **Lego Land**
- **Weekend getaway to romantic city with pointy, metal tower shaped like an ‘A’** (Aden rolled his eyes before shouting 'Paris, you idiot!')

She was doomed. Nothing here was useful. “I know you’re upset, but I honestly think that anything you decide on, Clarke will love.” Aden spoke softly, startling Lexa out of her daze. He looked up to her and gave her a sincere smile. “She would have never agreed to your dare if she honestly wanted nothing to do with you. You already got through the hard part, Lex. This part here, this is the fun part! Just be yourself.” Lexa smiled back, wrapping her arm around the boy and pulling him into her. “But… if all else fails, you can’t go wrong with a new Ferrari. I love Papa Smurf, but he’s older than me and is always breaking down everytime Clarke drops me off at soccer practice. Do you know how humiliating that is!? I have a reputation to uphold!”

Lexa chuckled, pulling him closer and tickling him. Aden howled from laughter. “Papa Smurf? Is that what Clarke named her car?!!”

Aden relaxed once Lexa pulled back, ruffling his hair. “Yea… she was obsessed with the Smurfs. And it’s blue, so I guess she thought it was a suitable name.”

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by Raven, who grabbed the boy by his shoulders and spun him abruptly, placing him between her and a very agitated Octavia.

“If I offer the kid as sacrifice! Take him instead! I’m way too valuable for whatever you have planned in that twisted little brainless head of yours!” Raven bargained, shoving a rather confused Aden towards Octavia. “He’s easy to train, too! Just give him treats and he’ll do your bidding, I swear!”

Octavia swerved around Aden, intent on grabbing the sly brunette. “Never pegged you for a sore loser, Ray. My, oh, my this will be fun…Lincoln cut her off!” Lincoln rose to his feet so impossibly fast that even Lexa was thrown back by his inhuman agility. He and Octavia rounded Raven into a corner, causing confused glances to be exchanged between Aden and Lexa who still had no clue what was happening.

“Ok, ok, O listen to me…. Before you go all Kung Fu Panda on my ass, don’t forget that I gave you a second chance to redeem yourself from our earlier bet. Fine, you won this round but that makes us even! So how about we break this tie off like adults! You can call off your little henchman over there.” Raven was referring to Lincoln, who was poised and ready to pounce the second Octavia
gave the order. Lexa watched slightly amused.

“Aden, let this be an important lesson to you… don’t ever become a Lincoln when you find yourself a sweetheart. Women want partners that stand their ground and aren’t easily bossed around, ya hear me?”

“Really? ‘Cuz I don’t know if you’re aware or not, but we all think Clarke has you whipped to the Moon and back. Actually, more like to Pluto and back now that I think about it…” Aden declared, tone nonchalant and relaxed, as if the realization was no mystery to anyone with a decent pair of functioning eyes. “Yea, its that obvious.”

Lexa’s jaw dropped open in disbelief. No, I am most definitely not whipped! “That’s absurd! I’m not a Lincoln! Pfff, no way in hell!”

“No way in hell, what?” Octavia asked, walking back towards Lexa, arm slung around Raven’s shoulder as if nothing had happened.

“Aden thinks I’m whipped! Can you believe that!? Tell the little dude that’s not true, please.”

“Oh yea, it’s totally true.” Octavia responded, indifferent and unsurprised. “Frankly, I think they should rename Whipped Cream to Lexa Cream… cuz, you know, you’re giving the word whipped a realllyyy bad rep.”

“Yea, PG, it’s clear to the entire UCLA population, of geniuses and imbeciles alike, who will wear the pants between you and blondie when ya’ll become a thing.”

Aden and Lincoln snickered at the comments, and Lexa briefly understood how it must feel to be a volcano on the verge of erupting. “I am NOT whipped! And Clarke will NOT wear the pants, I will!” Lexa stated, proudly lifting her chin to the air and puffing out her chest.

“Hey, alpha dog, Clarke just texted…said she’s out of tampons and needs some ASAP. Want’s to know if you can go grab her some…?” Raven asked, twirling her phone in her hand, eyeing Lexa curiously.

“Yea, of course! What brand does she use?? Does she want chocolate or ice cream? You know what, don’t ask! I’ll surprise her with both! Tell her I’ll be there in 30 minutes! 25 tops if I take the Lotus!” Lexa responded only too eagerly, grabbing her wallet in the process and ready to sprint out of the mansion.

She stopped when everyone exploded in laughter, not requiring an explanation for the sudden outburst. She allowed her shoulders to slump forward in resignation. Raven walked over to her and tapped her gently on the arm.

“Yea… I’ll be sure to customize your collar and dog tag… I’m thinking ‘If found lost or drunk, please return to Clarke.’

***

The night weaned on and success still eluded Lexa. Every idea proposed was either too simple or too extravagant, and none seemed to be good enough… perfect enough for Clarke. She had taken many girls on dates before, either to a fancy restaurant or some top-notch L.A. club infested with celebrities, but always with the expectation to woo them just enough to get the panties off. It was always only too easy. Always far too predictable. And she was always successful.

But in the morning they would leave. Or better, Lexa would call them a cab before they had even
roused from their slumber and order them out. Every girl to ever make the walk of shame out of Lexa Woods’ Life never made it back in again; no, Lexa wasn’t one to recycle women. So its no wonder that she currently finds herself in this predicament. This rather unusual, uncharted territory she for one isn’t accustomed to. Clarke… Clarke deserves the very best. She deserves everything. And for the first time in her life, Lexa isn’t expecting the night to end with Clarke screaming her name beneath her. No, that’s not what she wants at all out of this date. To see her smiling… to see that genuine, breathtaking, unparalleled smile that is so rare but when it appears, it eclipses the moon and sun combined with its brightness. Yes, a smile. It's really all she wants.

Lexa gave up on her peers after witnessing Raven counter Octavia’s bet by wagering instead that she could beat O in a farting contest. Aden was all for it, to say the least; reaching into his shorts pocket and pulling out a twenty and proudly claiming he backed Raven. Lincoln, who also had enough of the two and their endless bickering, had shifted his attention to Lexa’s impressive game and console collection, eyes glued to the massive projector screen while he lost himself into whatever game he was playing.

She made her way to the kitchen, realizing that the sandwiches Indra had made for all five of them were devoured by two.

Indra was there, of course. Indra was always there. Always present whenever Lexa needed her, even before Lexa had a chance to realize it herself.

“Now, why is that beautiful face that was bright with excitement only a few hours ago suddenly gloomy, hmm?” Indra posed the question lightly, peeking up from behind her tablet and shooting Lexa a motherly gaze. “Is Raven still picking on you?”

Lexa sighed and groaned, shoulder slumping forward. “No. I just…ugh, I can’t- I-I… nothing I come up with is working! All my ideas suck! She’s gonna hate this date, Indra. Which will make her hate me!” Lexa backed herself into the wall and leaned her weight into it, pressing the palms of her hand into both eyes. “It has to be perfect. But I don’t know how! Clarke is different, she’s not impressed by money like all those other girls… she doesn’t care for all this shit! She cares about stuff that matters, you know. She’s special, Indra.” Lexa was biting the inside of her cheeks to keep her anger and frustration under control. “She’s special and I don’t… I don’t know how to make her see that.”

Indra smiled. It was a mild smile, but it was the type of smile that was reserved solely for mothers and their children. The type that did not require parting lips and exposing teeth, but instead it was soft and meek, so meaningful that it was meant to be shared privately. Her smile was saturated with love and pride for the suddenly fragile girl standing a few feet away from her. It was a smile Lexa hadn’t seen, much less been the cause of, for a very long time.

“Come here, Alexandria.” Indra beckoned her forward, putting the tablet down on the table and sliding her chair from beneath it. Lexa slowly walked to her, unashamed and unhesitant when Indra pulled her onto her lap and cradled her into her arms. She wasn’t concerned that she was a twenty-fucking-three-year-old woman resembling a toddler at the moment. She didn’t care because Indra’s arms were the closest thing to her mother’s arms; the only place she ever felt truly whole and alive.

“I have yet to meet this girl…this Clarke that has you so…”

“Whipped.” Lexa scoffed, resting her head against Indra’s chest and allowing her body to melt into her as she rocked soothingly back and forth.

“I was going to say, composed.” Indra chuckled, and Lexa smiled when the gentle vibrations tickled her. “You were a train wreck, child. On a path to either jail or the morgue. Do you know how many
nights I have lost waiting for you to come home—just to hear you stumble through the door intoxicated, or bloody from another random fight you’d get yourself into. It’s the most terrifying thing to witness... but the fear would quickly be overcome by relief that you were still alive, still breathing, and still here.” Lexa swallowed thick, she attempted to apologize but the embarrassment was lodged deep in her throat and preventing words from forming. “To see you come home, with a smile on that beautiful face; blabbing endlessly about some girl you met and how she’s the sky and you are the earth; how she’s the stars and you… you are just a nobody watching them as they shimmer; *that* is one of the best feelings you could ever give me.” Indra placed a kiss on her head, and pulled back to rest her chin there.

“So, I may not know this Clarke, but it sounds like she is one *hell* of a woman. She’s not any of these girls you are used to, Alexandria. So… make it about her. In every way, and every moment. Make it about honoring her and who she is. If you do that, I guarantee you that she will love every second of it.”

Lexa sighed, and nodded; wrapping her arms around Indra and whispering a soft ‘thank you’ to her.

“Just... please refrain from taking ANY of Raven’s “advice”. I like this Clarke and I have hopes of meeting her one day. Raven’s ideas absolutely guarantees *that* will never happen.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice...” Lexa chuckled and agreed.

“But Aden, I like that boy. He reminds me a lot of you, Alexandria, at that age. Smart and bold, and intuitive. He’s a rather curious and attentive little thing, isn’t he?”

“He’s the greatest... I mean, I owe that kid this date, Indra.” Lexa shuffled from her lap then, kissing her forehead before retreating back to the basement. “You’re great too. But don’t you think it’s a little embarrassing to have my test grade up on the refrigerator door? I mean, what am I, five-years-old?!”

“To me you are. You will always be my wittle *Leashy-Loo*.” Indra laughed, giving her a light swat on her behind as Lexa rolled her eyes at the nickname and turned to leave.

She was rather surprised to find all her guests passed out when she returned to the game room. Octavia was draped over Lincoln’s broad back on the couch facing the game screen. Raven was lounging awkwardly on the pool table, one arm dangling from its edge. Lexa tried and failed to guess the *how* and *why* Raven ended up in such an uncomfortable position and in such an uncomfortable place when there was a sofa not two feet away from it. Looking around she found little Aden, curved into himself on a reading chair, both hands tucked beneath his mess of blonde hair. She smiled. It surprised her how quickly she had become fond of him.

She inched closer to the pool table and not-so-gently rolled the 8-ball right into Raven’s crotch. The impact was apparently more forceful than Lexa originally calculated and it caused Raven to shoot up from the unexpected pain and shock, smacking her forehead against the low-hanging billiard lights. A hand rushed to each point-of-impact, and she grabbed her crotch unceremoniously, eyeing Lexa with a gaze that would have been scary, if the vision before her wasn’t incredibly comical.

“Little tip of advice, Woods... if you’re gonnna wake a lady, do refrain from shoving balls in between her legs!... Wait, no, no, I’d actually like to wake up like that now that I think about it... yea, I take that back! By all means, shove as many balls as you’d like!”

Lexa rolled her eyes, motioning for her to get off the table.

“I think its past Aden’s bedtime, Reyes. Quit your fantasies and take the kid home before Clarke
skins us both. She'll be home from work soon.” Lexa spoke before Raven had a chance to dive into her bitching, pointing to where Aden slept soundly on the chair. She moved to where Octavia and Lincoln were lounging and gently roused them.

Slowly everyone came to, and Lexa rushed to where Raven was leaning over Aden, attempting to pick him up without having to wake him, struggling slightly since her leg couldn’t bend with the brace.

“Hey, no, I got it, I got him.” Lexa stepped forward, gently pulling his limp and small frame into her, adjusting so that his arms dangled over her shoulders and his legs wrapped around her waist.

“He’s pretty heavy for such a scrawny little thing, isn’t he?” Raven joked, positioning his head in the crook of Lexa’s neck. “Thanks…my knee is kinda throbbing. But I didn’t want to wake him.”

They walked outside, careful not to shuffle much and wake the boy. Raven rushed back to the house just before reaching her car, mumbling she forgot something. Lexa waited patiently by the vehicle, holding Aden’s weight to her and secretly loving how he unconsciously wrapped his arms a little tighter around her neck. She knew at that moment that she was more than just fond of him.

“I’m back! Sorry! Forgot the milk!” Raven shouted, rushing down the front steps with a gallon of milk in her left hand.

“What! You stole my milk! You went back in the house to steals milk?!”

“Dude, Clarke asked me to buy some and I forgot… and decided to come help your desperate ass instead!” Raven explained as if it made all the fucking sense in the world. “It’s for the kid. He needs his milk… in order to sleep.” Raven continued, figuring the look of sheer disbelief Lexa was giving her deserved a better explanation. “He has nightmares. Really bad ones, every night almost. Its been like that since their dad died. And milk, for some reason, is the only thing that helps it.” She continues, opening the passenger door so Lexa could place him in the seat. “He likes it warm, with two spoons of sugar and one of honey. I tuck him in before handing it to him, so that he’s ready to fall asleep the moment he finishes it.” Raven clipped the seatbelt around him and pulled back, closing the door softly and smiling at Lexa. “Clarke does it too, but he likes the way I make his milk better. But don’t tell blondie that or it will break her heart.”

Lexa couldn’t help but smile, and shoot a pained gaze towards the sleeping kid in the car, who had his blonde head pressed against the window.

“It’s hard…not to love him. He’s been through as much as any of us and yet he’s still intact while we’re all a crumbling mess held together by some cheap, knock-off brand of Scotch tape.” Raven tapped Lexa’s shoulder and moved to the driver’s side, opening the door, but paused just before slipping in. “She likes to paint, Woods. Clarke. Its her favorite thing to do in the world. Or it was… she hasn’t done it in five years. Since their mother abandoned them. She says she hasn’t had a reason to since.” Raven nodded, drumming her fingers against the hood of the car. “Maybe you can give her one…”

And with that, Raven slipped in and turned the engine, pulling out of her driveway and out of sight. Lexa stood there for a moment, allowing the silence to sheathe her and the starless night to comfort her as her mind galloped in different directions, each sending jolts of excitement to her fluttering heart. Ten minutes. That’s all it took for her to figure it out. For the details and pieces of the perfect date to unfold right before her unfocused eyes.

Ten minutes. Was what it took for the beginning of the rest of their lives to fall effortlessly into place.
“Absolutely NOT, Ray! You’re returning it immediately!” Clarke bellowed, shouting over her shoulder as she took the steps leading to her room two at a time, darting directly for her already disheveled closet.

“Princess, it’s a gift! Just shut the fuck up and take the damn thing! Stop making such a fuss about it and try it on!” Raven barged into the room not two seconds later, unzipping the solid-white, garment bag and pulling out the sheathed dress from within.

Clarke still refused to turn around and face her rather infuriating, shit-listener of a friend. “I told you to stop buying me things, Raven! I’m not your responsibility and I do NOT need your fucking expensive ass dresses to dress for a date, alright?! I can handle this on my own.” Clarke huffed, hands busy burying into the heap of clothes scattered within the closet or shuffling through the countless dresses that had been worn and neglected over the years.

“This expensive ass dress, as you so consider it, cost me thirty bucks and the promise to deliver Aden’s entire Pokémon Card Collection to the pimply-faced nerd working behind the Macy’s register.” Raven explained, tone feigning hurt as she spoke. “I ran the idea by Aden while he napped and he completely understood.”

Clarke spun around then, eyes wide in disbelief. “You whore! Is that what I’m worth to you?? thirty bucks?! You’re filthy rich! Seriously, Ra- “

Ravens’ fluid movements caused Clarke to clamp her lips shut as the dress was lifted by its hanger and put on full display for Clarke’s suddenly attentive eyes. She had never wanted so badly to throw a heavy, possibly prickly, object at Raven than at that very moment because the object in her grip was nothing shy of breathtaking. **Fuck! It’s gorgeous! Double fuck! I’m gonna have to fucking apologize to her!**

“So…” Raven caught on to Clarke’s silent internal turmoil, picking up how quickly Clarke’s eyes shifted from pure admiration of the dress and then to hatred and agony whenever they clicked back over to her. “I accept foot massages, home-cooked meals, and oh! A month worth of you doing my writing assignments for my classes as your heartfelt apology for questioning my judgment.” Raven quipped, not bothering to reel in the emerging self-satisfied grin conquering her face as she tossed the fabric over to Clarke who instantly reached out for it.

“I’ll agree to the home-cooked meals and two assignments, Ray! But you can forget my hands ever coming within two football fields of your rather questionable feet.” Clarke agreed through pursed lips, swallowing her bubbling pride in acknowledgment that fuck, she desperately needed this dress. Her closet was as desolate and pitiful as just about anything she had a claim to in this world. Except for Aden.

“Well, shit! I would have settled for a hug but since you insist…” Raven winked, flinging herself onto Clarke’s bed in her euphoric victory.

Clarke quickly undressed and slipped the bunched dress over her head before adjusting the material down the length of her body. To say it was a perfect fit was a bit of an understatement if the image reflected back at her in the full-bodied mirror and the look of sheer awe on Raven’s face was any indication. It might as well have been painted on her. Or rather, designed and then sewed with her body as the frame and mold, shaping the fabric to hug and enhance every curve.

“Ok… PG is gonna have a heart attack the moment her eyes drop to your tits, Griff.” Raven remarked, eyes unashamedly scanning Clarke’s chest and how the dress dipped low enough to firmly
cup and lift her breasts and showcase her cleavage as if it was the single purpose of the dress’s design. “I’ll be sure to have 911 on hold and Aden there to record the whole thing.”

“You don’t think it’s too… much? I mean, where the hell is she taking me anyway? What if it’s inappropriate? You know I don’t belong in this lifestyle, Ray.” There was a rather small part of her that always felt uneasy around the wealthy brunette, Clarke knew. Their clashing personalities was only one of an array of differences that segregated the two into different categories, if not into different worlds entirely. It made her uneasy. She was never one to think of herself as unworthy of something due to socio-economic status, but the reality suddenly washing over her made it impossible to ignore obvious facts. In this singular matter, she was far beneath Lexa’s league.

Raven must have sensed her discomfort; the shift in energy and Clarke’s surfacing insecurities was anything but subtle.

“Clarke, look at me.” Raven pleaded, attempting to penetrate the defensive wall gradually rising around the blonde. “Whether or not you belong in this lifestyle is irrelevant, hun. The real question you should be asking is whether or not you belong with the person in it.” Raven smiled, all traces of mockery long eradicated from her features. Clarke scolded herself internally for sometimes, too often really, ignoring the soul hidden beneath Raven’s own personal barricade. The daily jokes and snarky remarks that seemed to be always dripping from her confident lips was many times a cover to draw attention away from the truth and pain hidden beneath her caramel irises. Clarke observed them now, blue and brown meeting in a moment of vulnerability from both parties, and sure enough, buried in the depths of those expanding pupils, she saw Raven’s demons peeking through; demons that only too closely resembled her own. Raven walked over to her, gently bringing her into a bear hug. “You look stunning, princess. Tell the voices that are saying otherwise to come deal with me if they have an issue.” Raven reassured her with a chaste kiss to her forehead. “Now, put on the heels and meet me in the bathroom. That hair is looking more tragic than Jack’s pointless death in The Titanic. It’s been decades and people still aren’t over that ish.”

By 3:45 PM she was ready. Raven truly did wonders with her golden locks, which was waved and tossed to one side of her face and leaving the other exposed. She opted out of wearing jewelry, choosing to remain as natural and unblinged as possible. The doorbell rang a few moments later and Clarke tensed slightly, the sound directly jolting her heart into an erratic frenzy.

“ADEN! DOOR, SQUIRT!” Raven shouted from the second floor bathroom, where she tapped blush over Clarke’s pale cheeks. She heard shuffling downstairs, followed by muffled voices greeting one another. She gulped. Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuckfuck

Raven finished quickly and shooed her out of the bathroom, nearly pushing her down the stairs when she saw the blonde stall by the edge of the staircase.

“Get your pale-ass down there now, Griffin! She’s waiting, you idiot!” Raven whispered angrily, nudging Clarke forward until the movement came naturally to her and she started to descend on her own.

Clarke wasn’t aware that she was holding her breath until her eyes found Lexa, who waited patiently at the base of the staircase, back turned to her while the brunette engaged in a light conversation with Aden. She wasn’t aware that her breath was held captive in her searing lungs even as the idea of familiarity crossed her mind…suddenly aware of the irony in this moment; an interesting twist linking them back to the fateful day they met. It was only when the brunette turned, upon hearing them come down the steps, and their eyes locked, that she felt her breath finally escape.

Clarke smiled. She was powerless to fight the urge not to when Lexa looked like that. All sharp and pristine in her modified suit. Only instead of a jacket over the button-up dress shirt that were rolled to
her elbows, she wore a vest, with the top buttons undone and revealing her pronounced collarbone underneath. Her hair was loose and straight, tossed over to one side much like Clarke’s. She held an enormous bouquet of crimson roses in her hands, which Clarke noticed were trembling lightly as she approached her. She smiled again. Secretly glad the brunette was just as nervous as she was… if not more.

“Wow! Umm, y-you look b-beautiful.” Lexa blurted, shoving the roses against Clarke’s chest. Clarke took them and inhaled their scent, picking up the faint traces of cologne seeping from them that was all Lexa.

“You look very handsome yourself.” Clarke confessed, biting her lips as she drank Lexa in, watching as the brunette crumbled a little more under her gaze. “And thank you for the roses, they’re beautiful.”

“Well, you’re beautiful-er!” Lexa countered, a little too quickly and voice only too shaky. Clarke sucked in her lips in an effort not to laugh at her adorableness.

“Raven, do you mind putting these in a vase for me please. They need water.” Raven grabbed the flowers, winking at the flustered brunette.

“You alright there, Woods? You look like you need some water too.” She mocked, patting Aden on the head as she walked by, who had his phone up and aimed at Lexa.

“I’m fine.” Lexa responded. “So, um, y-you ready to go?”

Clarke nodded, following Lexa through the door which she held open for her to pass through. “So, are you gonna tell me where we’re going or are you planning on leaving me guessing all night?”

Lexa smirked, her skin finally returning to its normal shade as the blush faded from her cheeks.

“Patience, beautiful. It’s a surprise.” She extended an elbow for Clarke to grasp, and Clarke willingly wrapped her arm around it. “Your chariot awaits, princess.”

“Make sure she’s home by eleven, young lady!” Aden shouted after Lexa, who turned and winked in acknowledgement. He sighed, gently shaking his head. “Man, they grow up so fast.”

Raven leaned by the door frame beside him, watching the pair disappear into the sleek black vehicle. “Sooo… what now, twerp.”

Aden twisted his lips in thought. “Binge on *Game of Thrones*? A highly inappropriate series for a child my age to watch and Clarke would completely disapprove of?”

Raven shot a brow up at him. “I’ll make the popcorn.”

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Lexa swore she wasn’t gonna be like this. Like some rattled schoolgirl in the presence of their favorite celebrity. She told herself…no, commanded herself to keep her wits about her. To remain cool and focused in order to ensure the plans of their date unfolded without any kinks or hiccups. Even as she walked up Clarke’s front porch steps and her index jammed into the doorbell she reminded herself over and over again that she got this. *You’re a Woods, dammit! Just be yourself and no matter what happens, just keep it cool.*

Yea, that theory just about flew out the window the moment her eyes found Clarke, and she felt her insides do a little dance before nearly succumbing to a self-induced coma. *Holy tits!* Was all her brain
could recite in her fuzzy head, over and over and over again. Get a grip you fucking perv! Eyes on her face, EYES ON HER FACE! But alas, her eyes kept gravitating towards the rather impressive chest and the instant Clarke was within her reach, she just had to shove the bouquet at her chest to give her some much needed distraction. So, she was off to a rocky start.

Being in such a close proximity to Clarke in the backseat of their transport and that damn delicious perfume of hers was no fucking help either. She took a few deep breaths, desperate to revive some shred of control, and slid closer to the blonde who had both hands resting awkwardly on her lap. She’s nervous too, you useless piece of crap! Take care of her! This is about her so get your fucking act together!

Lexa reached for the divider separating the driver and passenger seat ahead and opened the top, revealing the discreet cooler within. She pulled out the champagne bottle and two glasses, glancing over at Clarke who merely gawped in awe.

“Wow… that totally reminded me of Harry Potter for some reason. Is this car magical?? Are we going to Hogwarts?” Clarke smirked, clearly trying to alleviate some of the budding tension.

Lexa giggled, pouring the liquid into each glass and handing one to Clarke, who smiled in return. “If that’s what you want, beautiful. I’m pretty tight with Albus Dumbledore… I can have him give us a tour of the castle and then we can go see a Quidditch game right after.” She winked; taking a sip of the sweet champagne and feeling herself relax a bit. She scooted closer to the blonde, tempted to reach for her free hand but hesitated.

“So how did you do it? How did you surpass my biology grade? I’m… intrigued.” Clarke shot the brunette a curious glance, still somewhat irritated that she was stripped of her ‘Highest Exam Grade Received’ streak.

Lexa grinned, downing the champagne before speaking. “Lets just say that for once I had a damn good reason to apply myself and sit my ass down to study.” She poured herself another glass and topped off Clarke’s. “Not only did I get this date with you, I also got the chance to give you a taste of what it feels like to not be on top for a change… which I’m hopeful I’ll be able to demonstrate yet again in less of an intellectual manner and more of a physical one sooner rather than later.” Lexa ran her tongue across her bottom lip as she watched Clarke’s cheeks faintly blush at her promise. Yea, preferably sooner. Much, much sooner.

“One date and you think I’ll give it up that easily? Please, Woods. You’re gonna have to do a whole lot better to get me to spread my thighs for you.” Clarke fired back, but her tone held no edge, instead it was laced with humor and a mild challenge.

Lexa’s smile widened, nervousness completely gone and replaced with her usual, self-assured confidence. She leaned in a little, voice dropping to a whisper. “Something tells me you’ll have changed your mind by the end of the night.” As expected, the bluntness left the blonde speechless, and Lexa keened internally at how she brought her glass up to her glossy lips and took a long, needy gulp.

Gustus, her private driver who has been servicing the Woods clan since before Lexa was born, pulled into L.A.’s Van Nuys airport. Lexa watched attentively as Clarke’s eyes widened the second she figured out her location.

“The airport… Lexa, why are we here? I thought you said we were going to dinner?!” The concern in her voice was very discernible and Lexa’s heart fluttered at how beautiful she looked like this… confused and for once, not in control of the current situation.
“I did say I was taking you to dinner… and I will.” Lexa confirmed, earning her a brow furrow and a small pout that made her just want to reach over and caress the creases away. “But that’s later… This, is the first portion of our multi-portion date.”

Clarke looked about ready to cry, and Lexa froze, suddenly feeling completely devastated and not even sure why. “Clarke, hey! It’s ok, I promise!”

“I’m scared to fly, Lexa! God, please tell me we’re not getting into anything that hovers! Just…can we please just drive.”

“Hey, listen to me. I promise it’s gonna be ok, alright? I’ll be there… right beside you.” Gustus opened the door on Clarke’s side and extended a hand for her. She cautiously accepted and slid out of the vehicle. Lexa followed quickly behind, wrapping an arm around the blonde’s waist to keep her steady.

“Hey, it’s ok. That’s us right there.” Lexa pointed to a chopper in the near distance. The name *Woods Enterprise Holdings* painted in gold across its black exterior. Lexa felt Clarke tense immensely under her touch. “Clarke, I’ve been in it thousands of times. I swear, it will be ok. Trust me? I would never let anything happen to you.”

Clarke detached her gaze from the helicopter and finally looked at her. The fear there was undeniable, yet it slinked away slightly when Lexa pulled her closer to assure her, and Clarke nodded shyly, allowing Lexa to lead her closer to the chopper.

The pilot opened the door for them and greeted Lexa with a polite bow and a ‘Good to see you again, Miss Woods’ followed immediately by a second bow and a ‘Miss Griffin’ as he offered his hand to Clarke to assist her up and into the seat. Lexa, decided to enter first, reaching down to Clarke whom after a few heartbeats, relented and allowed Lexa to pull her up. Once settled, Lexa reached over and buckled up the very pale (more so than usual; nearly Casper-like at this point), very rigid blonde, who had both grips latched firmly to the seat.

“If I die, I swear I will reawaken from my grave and come after you, Lexa.” She hissed through clenched teeth. “I assure you I will make the afterlife a miserable and torturous place for you. You better wipe that smirk from your face because I’m not kidding!”

Lexa couldn’t help it, angry Clarke was just too darn cute to resist. “Hey, as long as we’re together in the afterlife, you could do your worst and it would still be heaven for me.” Lexa slid the headset gently over Clarke’s blonde tresses, careful not to mess up her beautiful hair or cause her discomfort. Clarke let her, clearly out of her depth here.

Lexa settled into her seat and buckled herself in, placing her own headset over her ears.

“Clarke, this will allow us to communicate over the noise. Can you hear me ok? Clarke? Is this working?”

“I can hear you fine! I’m just trying really hard to ignore you for putting me in this levitating death-trap!”

The pilot entered and began fussing with button after switch after lever, and when the rotor blade began to spiral, Clarke couldn’t help but reach over for Lexa’s hand, bringing it into a boa-like grip. Lexa tried reaaaaaaly hard not to smile and reveal how much she was secretly enjoying this. It made up for the lack of blood flow not circulating to her numbing fingers.

“Relax…I’m right here.”
And slowly the craft elevated, rising gradually above Los Angeles and its sun-kissed towers. After a few minutes in the air, Clarke finally mustered the courage to open those beautiful blue eyes that surpassed the beauty below them; and while they eagerly absorbed the details of the city from this new height, Lexa’s eyes were fixed on the blonde beside her, examining every detail of her perfect profile.

“Wow…this is-I don’t even know what to say.” Clarke whispered over the headset, still gazing through the glass window as they hovered over the bustling city, the ocean visible in the horizon and it shimmered spectacularly as the L.A. sun sunk beyond its edge. “I can see our school from here! Look, there!” Clarke eagerly pointed, pressing her index to the window. Lexa smiled and leaned forward.

“Good eye! Look over there, Clarke.” Lexa focused her gaze elsewhere, watching as Clarke followed her finger. “You see that building? The pointy one? That’s mine. Well, my family’s.”

“I’ve driven by that building countless times and never knew… It’s beautiful, Lexa.”

“Thank you. Maybe one day I can give you a tour.”

They continued this pointing game back and forth. Clarke completely oblivious to her earlier fears and she now laughed earnestly as Lexa pointed out a park that Indra would take her to when she was still a kid, sharing that she had her first kiss there at the age of eight with a boy and that it was at that point forward that she realized she never wanted another boy to kiss her again. Lexa couldn’t help relishing that even in her more calm state, Clarke never did release her hand.

“Miss Woods, we’re two minutes out from the Bank Tower. Landing preparations are in order. Proceed?” The pilot broke through their headset.

“Proceed as planned, Thomas. Out.” Lexa commanded, and Clarke shifted uncomfortably in her seat upon hearing the deep, strong order coating her voice. She wouldn’t mind hearing that tone again, she silently admitted.

The helicopter descended slowly, grazing the top of the building before finally plopping onto the cemented cover. Once the blade ceased its whirling motion, the pilot rounded the craft and opened the door for Clarke, who gladly accepted. Lexa followed right behind, ordering the pilot to return to the airport since his services would no longer be needed. She then offered her elbow for Clarke to grasp onto yet again. The blonde swiftly weaved her arm around it in desperate need of support.

“Now, this part is where the fun really begins, Clarke. I think you’re really gonna love this next surprise.” Lexa led her through the door and down the stair case to the level below. The observation deck, or what the 73rd floor of the building was dubbed due to its superb view overshadowing all of downtown LA, was encased in glass with an open deck running around the circular building. It was vacant and free of loiterers and tourist, which Clarke found rather unusual for a Saturday afternoon.

“I’ve lived here all my life and thought I had seen everything there is to see of this place.” Clarke chuckled. “I can’t believe how wrong I was. This is…just incredible, Lexa. Thank you.”

Lexa tugged her through the glass doors and out to the warm, summer weather where a magnificent, incomparable view of L.A. awaited them.

“‘You’re very welcome. But this isn’t why I brought you up here. Well…it’s part of the why. Here, come with me.” Lexa extended her hand, and Clarke surrendered her own and allowed the brunette to wrap them together.
Leading the way, Lexa walked around to the other end of the building, where the deck opened into a wider space. She paused, shifting to allow Clarke a chance to fully grasp the commotion happening a few feet ahead.

There was a make-shift bar at the far corner, ordered and set-up only for this special occasion. A violinist was poised and awaiting instructions on a stool near the bar; violin lifting to rest beneath his chin the second Lexa gave the nod. The soft and soothing sound that pierced the air drowned the sound of the city hundreds of feet below them, allowing them to focus on the main attraction of the evening. At the very center, just before the glass panel that separated the deck from the edge of the building, rested two massive canvases, both perched on metal stands with padded high chairs before them. A grey-haired and grey-bearded man with warm, kind eyes beneath rimless glasses approached them. Lexa felt Clarke’s hand constrict around her own and observed with a sly smirk as her eyes enlarged when recognition dawned on her. Lexa wanted to break into a fist pump frenzy. She knew she picked the perfect instructor then.

“Ah, you must be the lovely Clarke Griffin.” His words were accented yet clear and his voice low and roughened by age. Lexa observed as he extended a hand to the stunned blonde in a greeting. She had to nudge Clarke back to her senses until she finally broke from her daze and reached out her own. He brought her hand up to his lips and placed a chaste kiss against the smooth skin. “I must agree with you, Lexa, she truly is a sight to behold. It is a pleasure to meet you, my dear. I’m-“

“Gerhard Richter.” Clarke interrupted, tone alive with vigor and a confidence that startle both, Lexa and Mr. Richter. “German visual artist. Ranked number one painter in the world for your abstract and photorealistic work over the past five years. I follow your work like it’s religion, Mr. Richter. I-I, umm, gosh you’re really here… I’m sorry I just, I-I can’t believe it.” And that confidence washed away just as quickly as it came, urging a chuckle out of the world renowned painter and an adoring smile from Lexa.

“Lexa here had me flown from London to give you two a private lesson. She has told me that painting is a passion of yours, yes?” The elderly man inquired, peaking at Clarke from beneath his glasses.

Clarke could only nod, words appeared to be untrustworthy at the moment.

“Well, I have a lovely class planned for the two of you.” He motioned them forward, closer to the canvases and the variety of paint options that was placed on a nearby table. “Today, we will be painting the Downtown L.A. view. Now, I don’t usually create landscape or city portraits, but Lexa was rather persistent in vocalizing her wishes. It was impossible to say no.”

Clarke glanced over to the blushing brunette, who tried to quickly compose herself but the exposure had done the damage.

“He’s exaggerating a little. I merely suggested the idea. I just knew I had to get the best for you…” Lexa was awkwardly glancing at her feet now, afraid to see what truths she might find if she was to look into Clarke’s eyes at that particular moment. “No one else would have been good enough.”

Clarke wanted to say something, to do something, but she was floored. Her body and brain simply ceased to respond.

“Well, how about we get started, eh? We only have a few short hours until sundown and we want to capture the beauty that is L.A. it all it’s sun-setting glory.”

Lexas moved to grab them the white aprons and walked briskly over to Clarke. “Here. We wouldn’t want to get that very beautiful and very white dress dirty now.” She stated, slipping the apron over
her head and tying the strings around her waist. “Or maybe we would… maybe get it real nice and
dirty to the point where you’d just have to take it off…”

“You’re doing really well, PG… don’t ruin it.”

“Right! Sorry! Uhhh, wine?”

Clarke smiled, helping Lexa with her own apron and the strings. “Absolutely.”

The class, to Lexa’s relief, went flawlessly. Clarke was entirely in her element, Lexa quickly noticed,
whenever she would throw timid glances at the concentrated blonde, who was listening intently and
actively participating with the instructor. Lexa, on the other hand, disengaged from the lesson two
minutes into it, when she peeked over at Clarke and caught the breathtaking view that is Clarke,
draped in white, under the dimming light of the setting sun. Golden hair nearly aflame in the dying
light, and blue eyes ever vivid. She was just so fucking beautiful. So fucking perfect. It made Lexa
want to drop her paintbrush and just watch her for the duration of the class.

“Miss Woods! Did you catch that?” Lexa’s head snapped forward, catching the questioning look of
their instructor. “Soft, horizontal lines all across. We are starting with the sky.”

“Lines. Horizontal. Sky. Got it.” Lexa reiterated, quickly dipping her brush into, crap he said mix the
blue with the...fuck! Was it grey? No… well, the sky is blue. But he said something about golden
streaks of sunray…golden like Clarke’s hair… Clarke… ah, I’m about to wing this shit. She dipped
the blue with orange and clumsily drew horizontal patterns across the top of her canvas. Hmmmm,
doesn’t look half bad… hey! Maybe I’m a natural!

She looked over at Clarke’s painting, and her heart flunked when she saw the beautiful patterns
intricately drawn on the canvas. She glanced over at Richter and quickly noticed just how identical
his and Clarke’s were. She looked over at hers again, and a 5-year-old could have done a better
fucking job. She shrugged and kept on with the random strokes of her paint brush. Ok…not a
natural.

By the end of the three-hour course, Richter came around to Clarke’s painting, fawning over the
brilliance she had created. Lexa had to admit, Clarke’s painting looked even better than Mr. hot-shot,
world-renowned painter over here.

“Now, interesting choice of colors here, Clarke. Did you deviate from the choices I selected?”

Wait until he sees my choices of colors... definitely deviated there...like, a massive fucking detour. As
in, the GPS was rerouting me every damn minute type of detour...

“Yes, I wanted to truly grasp the shimmer of the sun against the steel and glass buildings. I think my
choices could have been better but-“

“No, Clarke… It’s remarkable. Absolutely stunning! A-and I can’t express enough how incredible
this sky is! It’s a near perfect resemblance!”

Pffff... Boring sky... wait till he sees my sky... its got purple in it... not just boring grey and white
and blue... PURPLE!

“Thank you. I figure a splash of yellow to accent the faint clouds would subtly separate the blue from
the white, but not overwhelm it.”

“Yes, yes, child, brilliant choice. Truly. And the ocean…my… this diversity of shading here, I never
even instructed that, it’s an obscenely difficult skill to master. Yet you succeeded flawlessly.”
I painted a little dude swimming in my ocean... bet Clarke didn’t think of that! HA! My little dude is all happy over there going for a swim... swim on, little dude, swim on...

“Are those... people in the water? Stunning. The amount of details... perfectly human-like...”

...she TOTALLY stole that idea from me... when she saw me drawing my little dude... I ain’t even mad...

“Miss Griffin, I must say... you’re a born natural. This kind of detail, well, it took me years to fully grasp and develop. Here,” Richter reached into his jean pocket and pulled out a business card, “that’s my information. If you’re ever interested in more lessons, Miss Griffin, I’d be honored to teach you. I don’t take students, never have and never will. But you... you are a special young lady. And these skills deserve to be showcased for the world to see.”

Lexa watched, smiling as the blonde looked at her with those beautiful eyes, all in awe and amazed, as if she was unworthy of such recognition. But she was more than worthy. Lexa always knew it. Richter now clearly knew it. Everyone knew it. Except for Clarke. You deserve the universe, babe.

“Alright, Lexa, let’s see your masterpiece, shall we?”

Lexa puffed her chest out proudly, twisting her canvas so both, Clarke and Richter had a full view of her work.

“WOW!” They both exclaimed simultaneously. For a brief second Lexa thought, WOW as in, amazing! Or WOW as in, Lexa I want you as my student too!

But no. Nope. It was more of a WOW! That fucking sucks!

“I was... distracted, alright! I will admit, I guess it’s a little off...but colors were never my forte!” Lexa explained, feeling slightly defensive of her work.

“Neither is sight, apparently. I mean, I can’t even figure out what you painted here, Lexa! What is that?” Richter asked, pointing and squinting at a splash of something on her painting. “Is that a careless dribble of paint?”

“No! That’s my little dude right there! My little dude who’s going for a swim... in the ocean! See, that’s his arms and that’s his legs!” Lexa sighed, giving up once she caught the pair holding their breath in an effort to suppress a laugh. “It sucks, I know, I know.”

After saying their heartfelt goodbyes to the painter, and after Clarke had the chance to further inquire about the details of the potential opportunity, they ditched their messy aprons and darted inside and for the elevator.

Gustus waited patiently just outside the building’s first level entrance, stepping out to open the door for the giggling women and placing each of their painting in the trunk.

“Gustus, please make sure to place Lexa’s on the bottom... where it belongs... beneath mine.” Clarke winked, clearly using the moment to revert their positions and rub it in Lexa’s face.

“Hmmmm, sounds like a challenge. Just remember, beautiful, I’m stronger than you... I can easily pin you down... easily hold you under me...” Lexa whispered to her, sliding in closer and closer until the blonde was pressed against the opposite door. “Easily take you however way I so desire...”

Clarke’s eyes ignited then, lips curving into a tantalizing smirk. “Well... I guess we’ll see about that, won’t we?”
And just the promise of one day getting the chance to see about that was enough to get Lexa daydreaming in all shades of grey…and purple…and fucking orange.

The car pulled out onto the busy street in direction of their next stop: dinner. When Gustus came to a halt in front of a dimly lit facility, Clarke wondered if they were lost. The building was almost entirely concealed by wilderness and veiled by darkness, and if someone wasn’t actively searching for it, it could easily be ignored. Once they stepped out of the car, the sound of lapping waves clashing against rocks echoed through the eerily silent night, and Clarke figured they must be near the ocean.

The restaurant was quaint and plain. Not overly crowded but contained enough patrons to create a warm, cozy environment. There was a blazing hearth at its center, encased in a massive half-stone, half-glass container, radiating warmth throughout the restaurant. Clarke soon noticed that it was the only source of light in the entire facility.

“No electricity here. Fire. The cooks use fire to prepare every dish. No stoves, no microwaves, and as you can probably see – no-pun intended – no lights.” Lexa explained, following Clarke’s gaze from one end of the restaurant to the other. “It’s one of my favorite places. The food is phenomenal!”

They were guided to their table and quickly served Lexa’s wine order.

“Are you trying to get me drunk, Miss Woods?” Clarke asked playfully, eyeing the brunette as she poured Clarke a rather generous portion of wine.

“Why, Miss Griffin, that is absurd! Why would I ever want you intoxicated and compliant? I’m a gentle-lady and would never put you in such a …tempting situation.” Lexa replied hungrily, gaze dropping to the blonde’s rising chest where her breasts spilled from its inhumane confinements. Seriously, things of that nature should be illegal.

“I’m up here, Lexa. And try as you might, it’s not gonna happen.” Clarke lifted a brow and left it that.

Dinner, just as Lexa had previously mentioned, was beyond exceptional. Even the simple Spaghetti au Bolognese they ordered to share tasted like unadulterated sin. The server stopped by to pour more wine into each of their glasses, and Clarke definitely felt herself relax into a calming daze she hadn’t felt in a long time.

“Ok, I have a confession to make.” Lexa blurted randomly, eyes fixated on the three uneven candles burning in the middle of their table. “I think I have a mild obsession with candles. Ok, ok…maybe an insane obsession. Indra always gets me candles for my birthday and I always pout and complain but secretly, I love it!”

Clarke burst into a fit of laughter, unable to contain it once she noted how unbelievably serious the Lexa was being. “Ok, well, let’s see… I have an obsession with saving… things. Like, everything. Bugs, pests, whatever. Don’t ever ask me to kill a bug, because I can’t! I feel so bad!”

Lexa giggled at the confession, suddenly feeling even more curious about the blonde staring at her from across the table. “Can I ask you something?”

Clarke nodded, still giggling weakly. “Go for it.”

Lexa downed her wine, using the time to properly word the question dying to leave her lips. She decided to just take the plunge and see what happens. “Who broke your heart?” She left it at that, carefully gauging the beautiful face across from her as it twisted into pained shock. She knew she
was crossing into dangerous and possibly, unwanted, territory…but she needed to know. She needed to understand how someone who had her could ever be dumb enough to let her go…

“I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have asked. It’s the wine, it made me a little bold. You don’t have to-“

“His name was Finn. Is Finn.” Clarke chuckled nervously; taking a sip of her wine to drown the acid taste that formed in her mouth at the very mention of that name. “He was my first and only love. He was my first everything really. Prom date…first kiss…first relationship…first lover…he claimed all those firsts from me.” Lexa nodded but stayed silent. She didn’t want to intrude on Clarke’s moment. “I loved him. More than I have ever loved anyone outside of my dad, Aden and Raven. And we were happy, you know. High school sweethearts who ventured into college together. Tackling the world head-on and thinking that love would really conquer all. That was us. The perfect couple. The happy couple. The couple that was destined to be together forever and always… and we were all those things, until we weren’t.”

Clarke reached for the bottle of wine and refilled her own glass, gulping it down in a second and refilling it again without another thought. “He proposed during our junior year of University. And seeing that we were in love and already making plans for a future together, I said yes. And it was incredible. Gosh, I was so happy. My father was dead and my mother had left and still, I was smiling and giddy and just buzzing with unending happiness. I had Aden, and Raven, and Finn. And to me that was enough. To me that was everything.” She paused, eyes watching the burgundy liquid swirling in her chalice. “We even hired a wedding planner. I wanted to have that fairy-tale wedding that most little girls dream of. And he was all for it. Helping me with choosing colors and decorations. Always involved and willing to help.” She paused again, finishing the wine before continuing.

“On his birthday, I told him I wouldn’t be able to celebrate with him since I was scheduled to work that night. He was angry. Said I didn’t appreciate him enough. That I couldn’t even call off work for him. But little did he know that I already had. That I was planning him a surprise at his dorm, and invited all our friends. He had left that night to go to dinner and we set up during that time. So when we heard the door unlock and someone stagger into the apartment, everyone jumped up from where they hid. Turns out the surprise was on me. He had waltzed in with some bimbo wrapped around his waist, sucking face so hard that it took him a minute to realize that I was standing a few feet away, with twenty of our closest friends, and Aden, all there to witness him mid-cheat. Needless to say, the engagement was called off and he changed schools right after that. I haven’t seen him since.” Clarke finished, suddenly wishing she had another bottle of wine to gulp down.

Lexa cleared her throat, sensing the time had come to say something. “I’m sorry, Clarke. No one should ever experience that kind of betrayal. How long ago did this happen?”

“Last year. Fifteen months ago to be precise. He never even apologized…for cheating. For getting caught.” Clarke added, eyes slightly unfocused as she spoke. “Raven did a number on him that night. Once I stormed out of his apartment, she ripped the girl off of him and landed a well deserved fist right into his traitorous mouth. He had to get a few teeth implants from the blow.”

Lexa smiled. But the smile was a reciprocation of the sorrow she felt seeping from Clarke. “You don’t deserve that, Clarke. You deserve better, you deserve-“

“You?” Clarke answered for her, eyes suddenly blazing with rising emotions, and Lexa saw a hint of misplaced hatred in them. “I deserve someone who treats women like trash. Fucks them and tosses them out. Goes through them like it’s a change of outfit before discarding them to the waste bin. Just because you can.”

“That’s who I used to be… but I have no desire to go back to that, Clarke. I mean that. Not a
thousand girls could fill the place that I have reserved just for you. I know that sounds lame and cliché, but its true. Only you can fill that gap. But its your choice. All I can promise is that I’ll keep proving you wrong everytime.” Lexa smiled, receiving a curt nod from the blonde who suddenly looked embarrassed. “In the meantime, I’ll just keep showing up with coffee and taking you on these awesome dates until you cave and fall for me. Which will happen. I guarantee it.”

Clarke snickered, biting the inside of her cheek. “If that day ever happens, I’ll surprise you with a thousand candles.” Clarke joked, light and relaxed as if the past few minutes never occurred.

“When that day happens, make sure to get cinnamon spice candles and if you so decide to be in some type of clothing, I like lingerie, the kind that rips easily so we don’t waste more precious time.”

They left the restaurant lightheaded and hand-in-hand, settling into each other once they stumbled into the backseat of the car.

“I think I’ve had too much to drink.” Clarke remarked, snuggling into Lexa’s embrace, face nuzzling her neck. “Congratulations, you have succeeded in getting me drunk.”

Lexa reached back into the cooler, careful not to move too much and lose the blonde from her arms. She pulled out two bottles of water, and opened one for Clarke. “Here. Sip. Now.” She placed the opening to Clarke’s lips and guided her to drink, watching ravenously as water dripped from her lips, down her neck, and onto her very, very captivating chest. “We have one more stop to make and I need you coherent, beautiful.”

“One **hiccup** more **hiccup** stop?!” Clarke asked, wiping away the droplets of water and looking to Lexa with a shocked gaze. Her lips were still moist from the water and glistening in the moonlight, and they were close…so, so close. Lexa snapped her jaw shut and brought the still hiccupping blonde back under her arm.

“Yes, just one more stop, and then I’ll take you home. To your home! I meant your home, not mine! Well, unless you want to-“

"MY home, Lexa! Good try though." Clarke cut her off, settling into Lexa’s chest.

Lexa ran her fingertips lazily up her arm, feeling the blonde press into her further. “Hold your breath, princess. It will make the hiccups go away.”

A few minutes later, Gustus announced their arrival. Clarke had dozed off, still pressed into Lexa, a hand clinging tightly to her vest and her nose buried in her neck. She mentally cursed herself in advance for having to ruin this moment.

“Clarke. Hey.” She shook her lightly, smiling when her blue eyes fluttered open and confusion settled in. “We’re here. Last stop and then we can go home, ok? I just really want to show you something.” Clarke simply nodded, but went right back to pressing her nose in the crook of Lexa’s neck. Lexa melted. She felt the urgent need to take care of Clarke. To scoop the sleeping beauty into her lap and cradle her. But at a later time. Now, she really wanted to finish this date according to plan.

So she sorta dragged Clarke out of the car, supporting her weight as she led the slightly swaying blonde up steps and through the doors. Once inside, she led her through corridors, up an elevator, through more doors, until they were finally there. The hum of machinery gently roused Clarke from sleep. Once the sleep had drained from her body, curiosity soon took over, and her eyes eagerly scanned her unfamiliar surroundings. Lexa answered her question before she had a chance to ask.
“We're inside the Griffith Observatory. I have one more surprise for you.” Lexa guided her towards the massive telescope facing upwards towards the enclosed dome. Just then, a woman entered and greeted them, introducing herself as Dr. Callie Cartwig, Head of the R&D Department.

“Ladies, if you’re ready, I’ll go ahead and get started then.” Lexa nodded, and Callie strutted over to a panel with countless blinking lights. She pressed a button and the purr of gears shifting drew all pairs of eyes up to the ceiling. The dome split open, slowly retreating into itself and revealing a beautiful and untainted night sky above, the piercing bright stars that littered the black abyss suddenly feeling close enough to touch. Clarke gasped once the dome had been fully withdrawn, speechless at the beauty showcased before her. She never remembered seeing a night sky so impeccably clear and free of light pollution. Seeing so many stars blinking down at her, as if she was the main attraction and they were her audience. For some bizarre reason, she felt like she was the center of attention.

“It's magnificent. I have never seen so many stars.” She spoke, eyes never leaving the sight above. She was tempted to reach up in hopes that one would land on her palm.

“What are you feeling right now, Clarke?” Lexa approached her, careful not to interrupt the moment Clarke was clearly enjoying. Lexa studied her carefully, wishing she could desperately tap into that beautiful mind and read every thought currently coursing through it at that moment.

“I feel… important.” Clarke chuckled, fully aware of how silly it sounded. “As if I’m the only person here. The only one left in the world. As if the stars are looking down at me, waiting for me, rather than me looking up at them…” Clarke admired them a moment longer, sighing a breath of appreciation before continuing. “I feel elevated. Special. Like nothing else matters but this moment. This right here."

Lexa faced her then, cupping her face and pulling her eyes back to hers. “Everything you just described, is how I feel…when I’m with you.” Lexa confessed, and that…that took Clarke’s breath away. “You’re all those things…and more, Clarke. The number of stars up there, that pales in comparison to how much I care for you. You shine brighter than all of them combined. You’re your own star, Clarke.”

Clarke felt the sincerity in Lexa’s tone. She could feel it permeate through her skin and into the depths of her wrinkled soul, soothing the scars and tears that had been neglected over the years.

Dr. Cartwig stepped in, calling to Clarke and ushering her closer to the telescope. Clarke obeyed, barely, reluctant to detach herself from Lexa's scalding gaze.

“I have adjusted the telescope. Once you peek into it, you will see a singular star, at its center. If you get confused as to which one I’m referring to, just look for the brightest star within the scope’s range.”

Clarke did as instructed. Sure enough, it wasn’t difficult to pinpoint the star Dr. Cartwig was describing. It was perfectly round in shape. And bright. Brighter than any other star. Bigger too. Clarke was no astronomer, but this star in particular could take down any other star that tried to mess with it.

“Do you see it, Clarke?” Lexa’s voice was hopeful, and shy. Clarke nodded, still memorizing the details she was seeing.

“I named that star after you… I know it sounds like possibly the gayest thing anyone can do, and heck, I’m as gay as they come, but… I thought it was fitting.” Clarke’s attention had shifted back to the brunette, who was struggling to keep her head upright from her overwhelming shyness. “I
figured that since we have you down here, it was only fair for the universe to also have a version of you up there. Maybe now that I've granted it that, the Universe can stop being a massive jerk and quit picking on me.” Lexa smirked mischievously, and Clarke had to swallow back the rush of emotions swirling in her chest.

Dr. Cartwig, who was exceptionally talented at vanishing and materializing out of thin air, stepped forward and handed Clarke a laminated certificate. The stars’ coordinates were written on it, emboldened for all to see. Her name, ‘Clarke’, appeared beneath it, confirming that said star at said location was indeed named Clarke.

“You have your own little piece of the heavens now.” Lexa smiled.

The tour concluded after that. And both left, still hand-in-hand, in direction of the parked car. Once inside, they returned to their former positions, Clarke pressing herself against Lexa, and Lexa caressing her arm and head as Gustus drove the drowsy pair home.

When they arrived at Clarke’s home, Lexa gently coaxed the blonde awake, laughing when Clarke huffed in frustration and pleaded to just let her sleep, dammit!

“You’re home, Clarke. C’mon.” After a moment of persuasion, Clarke finally slid out of the car and allowed Lexa to walk her up to her front door. “Stay here, let me go get your painting from the trunk.”

“No, there’s no need. I want you to have it.” Clarke stopped her before she had a chance to dash back towards the car. “Toss that crap of a disaster you made today and keep mine instead.”

“Hey! I’ll have you know that I’m incredibly proud of my shitty painting! It's going up in my room, right alongside yours.”

Clarke rolled her eyes, smiling back at the silly image. “Well, thank you. I had an amazing time, Lexa. I truly mean that.”

Lexa rocked back on her heels a little, downplaying the current of happiness running through her. “It was my pleasure. Thank you…for giving me a chance. I’m really glad you liked it.”

They both paused a moment. Eyes looking everywhere but at each other. Lexa felt her palms begin to quake under the building anticipation. Its like both knew exactly what needed to happen, yet neither wanted the rejection that may follow in the aftermath. Lexa swallowed, ah, fuck it. And leaned in.

She deviated last minute, and landed her lips at the corner of the blonde’s mouth instead of her original target. She decided it might be too soon. Decided it might be too risky. So a less invasive kiss was probably more appropriate.

“G’night, beautiful.” Lexa pulled back, smiling down at Clarke who watched her with a rather curious look. “Thank you for today.” And turned before her inner predator acted on impulse and did something she might regret.

Slender, tentative fingers wrapped around her wrist just as she pulled away, tugging her back. Lexa turned immediately, only to be graced with an unexpected, gracious peck on the lips, initiated and delivered entirely by the blonde. She froze in place.

She watching as Clarke pulled back, trying to decipher her own reasons for the act. Lexa scanned her face. Scanned it for any signs that she may be misinterpreting this moment; searched for any hints of discomfort. But she found nothing. Only trepidation. Only lack of courage to continue what Lexa
should have started. So, tossing reason and logic aside, Lexa grasped Clarke’s face with both hands and brought the uncertain blonde into her lips.

Time appeared to have slowed and any sounds that were previously noticeable faded into nothingness. Lexa felt her tongue graze the thin lips, desperate to taste them; desperate to have them properly. Clarke parted them and allowed her entry, and Lexa didn't hesitate pushing her tongue into her mouth in search of Clarke's. It was slow, and soft, and loving. It was balanced and intimate. They explored one another for a brief moment; relishing the taste of wine that still lingered on their lips.

Clarke however, grew impatient at the incredibly slow pace set by Lexa. She pulled the brunette closer, a silent plea to speed things up. But still, Lexa's lips moved painfully sluggish, and Clarke decided to take matters into her own hands. Sucking Lexa's lower lip into her own, she let her teeth sink into the plump flesh and pulled back slightly to shoot the brunette a daring ‘come hither’ look.

And Lexa did. She pushed Clarke back against the door, pinning her against the surface with her own body, and began to ravage Clarke's yearning mouth. The kiss was a close clash between fire and ice. Bruising and fierce. Tearing at skin and grazing on teeth as they merged, parting for breaths only to be pressed forward again.

It was messy, but controlled. It was savage, but gentle. It was Lexa and Clarke. When they finally pulled away, they were both desperate for air; lungs on the verge of collapsing after being deprived of it for so long.

Lexa adjusted her vest and cleared her throat. A wild smirk spreading on her face. “So, umm, see you in class Monday?”

Clarke nodded, unable to respond. Lips still quivering from the passionate tangle. She gave the brunette a shy, but telling smile, and turned, twisting the key into her lock and stepping inside.

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“Ahhh, Raven, MOVE! I want to see!” Aden begged, trying to climb over Ravens' back to catch a glimpse. He succeeded when she shifted to adjust her leg, creating a small wedge on the window for him to press his cheek against and watch the scene unfold.

“Crap, they’ve moved out my line of sight.” Raven complained, pressing her cheek as far as it would mush against the glass but receiving zero satisfaction. “Kid, what do you see??”

“Ok, uhhhh, they’re talking. Just talking. Ok, oh! Lexa leaned in! I think she kissed her!”

Raven high-fived herself. “What’s happening now?!”

“Well, more talking. WHOA!” Aden’s eyes flew open, his breath fogging up the glass beneath his lips. “CLARKE kissed her back! Clarke made the move this time!”

“See, I told you Clarke wouldn’t resist. Totally saw this coming.”

“HOLY SHIT!” Aden nearly shouted.

“WHAT? WHAT, ADEN WHAT!”

“okay, gross. I’m ten and I do not want to see my sister lick the inside of someone else’s mouth, yuck!” He moved quickly from the window, which was soon taken up by Raven.

“Oh, yea. They’re totally hot for each other. Damn! They’re really going at it! Aden, I think you may
just witness your sister do the walk of shame INTO her house. Plot twist right there…wow, PG got that tongue work down… Clarke’s pretty impressive fo- shit, kid, run! Get into positions, go!” Raven detached herself from the window and dove for the couch. Aden followed close behind, plopping himself on the floor right in front of the couch and hastily turned on the TV, switching to some random channel that was not HBO.

Clarke came in right at that moment, making her way casually over to where the two sat.

“Ok, you two look mighty suspicious right now. What are you doing?”

“Oh, hey Clarke! Just watching TV! Nothing suspicious about that!” Aden responded, giggling nervously.

“Whatchu watching then?”

“We’re watching the… Discovery Channel. Yes. That is what we are watching, indeed.” Raven answered this time, quickly glancing over to the bottom corner for an indication of what channel they were on. “Learning stuff, and all. You know, good brain food for the kid before he goes to sleep. I’m considerate like that.”

“You little rascals, you were spying on me weren’t you! Discovery Channel my ass, Raven!”

“Ok, in OUR defense, you two were kissing mad loudly. Sounded more like a bear slurping water on your porch and me, being the good, protective babysitter that I am, merely gazed out the window to make sure said bear slurping water wouldn’t maul little blondie here.” Raven explained very matter-of-factly. “Turns out the ’bear‘ were just two chicks sucking face and about ready to-”

"RAVEN!" Clarke warned, rolling her eyes and physically drained for this. "I'll deal with the two of you in the morning. Off to bed. Both of you.”

Chapter End Notes

So what did you all think???

Please don't forget to leave us your comments, thoughts, ideas!!
Also please don't forget to leave your kudos!!

Also come find me on Twitter @TaJat07 Leave me your thoughts and ideas there as well :) I'll be happy to chat with you all!

We will see you all again very soon!

xoxo
Hey Guys!!! We are back!!

Sorry for the little bit of wait but FINALS are finally over and life has slowed down just a bit for us to be able to finally finish this chapter for you all!

17k words and 42 pages later and here we are!! We have worked so hard on this chapter and put a lot of time and ourselves in it and we really hope you all will like it...

All I can say is just hang in there with us please ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“FOUL! THAT WAS A FUCKING FOUL!” Raven shouted from the sideline bench, standing up abruptly and rushing over to where the referee, who had blown her whistle and brought the game to a pause, stood in the middle of the soccer field. “You’re seriously not gonna call that intentional kick to his shin a fucking foul?! Are you fucking kidding me?! Don’t pretend that didn’t just happen, AGAIN, Ginger!”

The ref sighed, shaking her head at Raven and taking a step towards her. “Reyes, it’s a fucking game. So how about you sit your ass back down and chill the fuck out, alright? Creating a scene isn’t gonna do anything for your boys.”

Aden limped over to where Raven stood, still blatantly glaring at the redhead referee who once again blew her whistle to indicate the game was back on.

“It’s ok, coach. I’m ok.” Aden struggled over to the bench, plopping harshly onto it and proceeding to roll down his knee high sock. “Sorry… I didn’t see him coming. I should have dodged it.”

“Aden, that little weasel has had it out for you ever since we beat them at the qualifiers. He’s a fucking bully and Wilma over there is too dumb to see it. Don’t ever trust redheads, kid! It’s true what they say about them not having souls.” Raven kneeled before him, lifting his leg to analyze the damage. Sure enough the early signs of what would soon transform into a horrific bruise was already outlining the surface of his skin. “Fucking asshat. I swear I can strangle that little shit with my bare hands. Do you know where he lives, kid?”

Aden smiled, chuckling lightly. “I’m good, coach. It’s just a bruise, I’ve had worse. Put me back in?”

Clarke rushed to the field then, flinging herself over Aden and pulling him into an overdramatic embrace. “I saw it! Oh, sweetie, are you ok? Do you want me to take you home? We can stop for ice cream on the way!”

Raven rolled her eyes. And the Oscar for Most Melodramatic Blonde goes to… “Chill, Griff. The kid will live. Tone down the hugging, you’re embarrassing him!” Raven pulled Clarke’s arms away, freeing a blushing Aden from her hold. “Alright, pull yourself together and get back in there, little man. We can still win this thing and we’re not going down without a fight.”
Aden nodded, rapidly pulling his sock back in place and taking a quick sip of water. Before he had a chance to step back into the game, Raven pulled him back by his elbow, leaning in to whisper in his ear. “And uh, you know I’m never one to encourage violence. But I think that little fuckface could use a swift knee to the crotch, if you catch my drift.” She winked, gaining a knowing smile from the boy. “Accidental, of course.”

And after gracing her with his boyish smile, he darted back to his position, shouting orders and effectively leading the rest of the Nightbloods to the offense.

Raven took a seat next to Clarke, who resumed her watching with a look of pure concern on her face. “He’s fine, Clarke. Aden is a tough little dipshit.”

Clarke smiled, playfully punching the brunette’s shoulder.

“So… care to tell me the steamy details of your date last night? Well, I sorta spoiled the ending for myself, but c’mon! Fill me in! I wanna know what happened before you sucked in her lips into that vacuum you call a mouth! Seriously, Griff, I never knew you had such potent suction capabilities!”

“Shut it, you bitch. I should have known you’d be spying.” Clarke nudged her again, a little harder this time. “How could you let Aden see that, Ray?! He’s 10! I don’t want that engraved in his memory, he’s still so fragile!”

Raven held in a laugh. Fragile my ass… Raven caught Aden sneaking a glance at the TV during a steamy Game of Thrones scene the previous night. Melisandre had disrobed (like she does in every fucking scene) and Raven saw Aden’s tiny little eyes widen in appreciation the second she flashed her impressive rack. She was about to scold him before remembering that her reaction had been the exact same. *Humph, can’t blame him. Kid’s got good taste.* “Relax, he only caught the mild stuff. But stop dodging and dish, Clarke!”

Clarke didn’t need much persuasion to relent the details of her date, and quickly brought Raven up to speed, eventually catching her up to the kiss.

“Ray, it was-god, I can’t even describe it, you know! I was just a jumble of feelings and emotions, and I’ve just been trying to sort them out all night. I mean, I had an *AMAZING* time. Truly, I really never expected that… never expected her to be so…caring! So considerate, and sweet. And just like, really fucking cheesy.” Clarke laughed, and Raven joined in, equally amused by the revelation.

“She’s-I know it’s still too soon. And I honestly don’t know what it is I’m feeling just yet but- she’s not at all who I thought she was. I mean, she may have been all those things that you described and that I witnessed, but I believed her when she said she didn’t want to be that anymore, you know? I think she meant it.” Clarke admitted, feeling her chest expand more fully from the mushed emotions still sizzling within. Unaware that her lips pulled up into a smile, she continued. “She did everything perfectly. *She* was perfect… but I know it’s still too soon. I mean, there’s still so much I don’t know about her… I can’t just dive into this like I did with Finn… I can’t surrender myself so completely like that again, Ray.”

Raven draped an arm around her shoulders and pulled her into an empathetic embrace, pressing her cheek into Clarke’s head when the blonde leaned against her shoulder. “I know it’s hard, Clarke, seriously I get it. But not once, not ever actually, while you were with him, did I believe you two were meant to be together. You loved him that much was abundantly clear, and I know he loved you too, but there were moments when I believed that love was pressured in ways. It was too perfect. Too safe. Too much fairytale and not enough real, you know… It didn’t feel true, Clarke. Even Aden suspected as much… You know the kid is a secret Disney princess waiting to burst into random songs at a moment’s notice, and he would always quietly mention that Finn wasn’t your true
love. That he wasn’t your soul mate.” Raven caressed Clarke’s arm as she spoke, surprised at how still the blonde was, but she knew Clarke was listening. “I thought he was babbling naïve bullshit at first, but even I started to agree with him after a while… I think your destiny was never supposed to be intertwined with Finn’s, babe. I think that privilege was always meant for someone else.”

Clarke finally stirred, sniffling softly, still keeping her head beneath Raven’s chin and not daring to move. “So what, you think Lexa is the one? Is that what you’re saying?!”

Raven inhaled, trying to sort her thoughts to arrive at the most appropriate response to the pending question. Raven understood how significant her words and thoughts were to Clarke. “I think… that she represents the type of love and future that has always been designed for you… uncertain, unsafe, unruly and one-hundred percent REAL, Clarke. Lexa is a wild card, and I get your hesitation, I get it, truly! But with her, it’s not predictable, like it was with Finn. It’s not perfect and easy and routine, like it was when you were with him. Finn… what he gave you was a life capable of enduring, babe. Lexa, on the other hand, she’s trying to give you a life worthy of living, Clarke.” Raven drove her point home, finally admitting that the once platonic, sex-based relationship she sought for her best friend had unexpectedly evolved into something that even she had a difficult time processing. Yet she knew every word she spoke was true. “And I think you’re doing the same for her… Lexa has changed. Is changing. That to me is what soul mates are meant to do for one another.”

Clarke raised her head then, finally meeting Raven’s intense gaze. Raven smiled. “Plus, Lexa is like, a thousand time’s hotter and richer than Finn. Probably better in bed too… she looks like she can fuck a girl into a coma.”

Clarke laughed, pulling Raven into her and hugging her lovingly. “She named a star after me, Ray… I have my own star, can you believe that?! I know it sounds cheesy but… gosh, she was perfect yesterday. Just…perfect.”

“Yea, yea… you two are just 50 Shades of GAY, alright… Seriously, PG just dropped 30 fucking points on my badass meter. She just went from being Buttercup to Bubbles on my Powerpuff scale.”

“You’re seriously comparing her to a Powerpuff Girl? A fictional cartoon character? How very mature, Raven.”

“You’re just mad because you always got stuck being Blossom when we were kids. For being so incredibly bossy and demanding. But everyone knows that Buttercup is the true hero in that trio.”

Clarke scoffed. “SO not true! Blossom was a badass! Poor Aden… always ended up having to be Bubbles… Remember when we’d stuff him in one of my old, blue dresses and pull his hair into ponytails?!”

They both broke into laughter, remembering the fussy boy tripping over the lengthy dress, chasing after them with tears rolling down his chubby cheeks, pleading to let him be Mojo Jojo at the very least.

“Man… poor squirt…think he still remembers that?” Raven asked, now resting her head against Clarke’s shoulder.

“Probably not.” Clarke huffed, deep in thought, mind reaching back to less confusing and conflicting times. “He was really young.”

A sharp yelp, followed by the piercing blow of a whistle, drew the two reminiscent women out of their daze and back to the field. They watched as a bigger boy of the opposing team rolled on the grass, hands tucked into his crotch with tears flowing down his face.
“AHHHHH, MY BALLS! MY BALLS!” He bellowed, drawing his teammates and opponents to circle around him, some laughing while others kneeled closer to help.

An incredibly smug Aden strutted back to the bleachers towards them, sporting a shit-eating grin that practically screamed ‘Yeaa, I fucking did it. Deal with it.’ The ref, catching onto his less-than-sorry persona, presented him with a red card that disqualified him for the rest of the game. He shrugged, clearly unruffled by the decision.

He caught sight of his sister and coach, both standing and inching closer to the edge of the field. Clarke was angry. That much was clear. She had a scowl and a pretty intimidating thing going on with her eyes and eyebrows that made him cringe at the mere sight.

Raven, on the other hand, was returning his shit-eating grin, mouthing a ‘Good job, brat’ under her breath. She gave him a low-key thumbs-up with her left hand, which hung around her waist, so that Clarke wouldn’t see.

Upon reaching them, he looked Clarke in the eye and feigned an apologetic look. “It was an accident?” He attempted, barely even trying to be convincing. This boy was a bully, and the blow was more than well deserved. But Clarke wouldn’t have it.

“You’re grounded, Aden! A week, no video games! No TV! Got it?” She scolded, puffing out air in disappointment. Aden nodded, gladly accepting his fate.

Clarke momentarily left to grab an ice pack for the kid’s shin, giving Raven the opportunity to bring him into a bear hug.

“So… grounded, eh? No games. No TV.” Raven repeated, eyes focused directly ahead where the kid with the busted balls was being carried out of the field, crying out for dear mommy. “Was it worth it?”

The smile that spread over Aden’s face revealed the truth before his mouth could confirm it. “Totally worth it!”

They high-fived, but quickly went back to looking ‘serious’ when Clarke approached, rushing the still limping boy out of the field towards where Papa Smurf was parked.

“Make sure you ice that, kid! We need you for the next game!” Raven shouted after Aden, who turned and winked at her. “Oh, and Clarke and I decided we’re all going to be Powerpuff Girls for Halloween this year!”

And almost instantaneously, Aden’s features twisted to one of pure horror, shooting Raven a panicked and indicative glare.

Oh yea, the brat remembers.

***

Clarke was downright anxious to get to class Monday morning. Raven and Aden’s constant badgering about the date made it nearly impossible for her to concentrate on anything else for the remainder of the excruciatingly slow-passing weekend. To make matters worse, that kiss she shared with Lexa on the porch was on constant replay in her head, promptly igniting every one of her senses and drawing her back to that moment; the recollection never failing to leave an uncomfortable dampness down under. Lexa’s intoxicating cologne, easily the most delicious aroma she ever had the pleasure of sniffing, triggered her body to quake in ways that Finn’s fingers never could. The soft, throaty grunts that permeated from Lexa’s mouth as she pushed her impatient tongue against
Clarke’s, all feral and hungry, made Clarke softly moan and whimper in response. Even more tantalizing was how Lexa felt pressed against her; how it felt to have that toned, muscular, yet gentle figure molded against her own, only made her yearn for Lexa’s constant presence and warmth. It had been a day. Twenty-four hours since she last saw her. Yet twenty-four hours quickly began to feel like a lifetime.

Clarke cursed under her breath when she caught herself slipping, and focused on making her way into Jaha’s predictably vacant class (Monday morning classes are not incredibly popular among the student body). Her eyes scanned the area where her desk was located, and she felt her breath hitch slightly upon noticing there was no Starbucks cup placed on its surface. Nor was there a dorky brunette eagerly waiting for her in the seat behind hers. Clarke frowned. Her earlier anxiety quickly replaced by increasing aggravation. Why the fuck isn’t she here?!

Halfway through the class, - and three broken pencils, a pile of crumbled papers, and just about a thousand glances at her phone later- Clarke felt her willpower dismantle. After another second of debating the pros and cons, she threw caution to the wind and picked up her mobile.

Clarke: Seriously? Skipping class? And you were just getting on Jaha’s good side. Smh.

Ten minutes crawled by and still no response. Clarke felt her leg subconsciously start to bounce under the table, shaking nearly the entire row with the vigorous vibrations. She huffed, and slammed her phone down angrily, forcing herself to listen to the dull and sleep-inducing lecture, only to pick her phone up again not two seconds later.

Clarke: He’s talking about the next exam. Giving out the topics we need to focus on. Just FYI.

No, he’s not. Or he might actually be… I have no idea what he’s blabbing about. Seriously, where the FUCK is she?!

Another five minutes dragged on and still…No. Fucking. Answer. UGH! She was absentmindedly gnawing on her pen cap now, trying to alleviate the tension, but it was to no avail. After another agonizing minute, she had enough of the niceties.

Clarke: Where the FUCK are you????

She tried. She really, really, really tried to keep it together.

Her phone buzzed in her hand almost immediately after, and her heart did an interesting little tap dance when she saw Lexa Woods displayed on her screen.

Lexa: Hey, sorry… overslept…was up all night playing video games with O.

Clarke knew, right at that moment, just how capable of murder she was. She was gripping her phone so incredible hard that the innocent device might have been her first victim, but then…

Another vibration.

Lexa: Can ya take notes for me? I’ll deal with Jaha later…tnx.


Clarke thought about the perfect, most appropriate response. One that would convey all her feelings,
yet still leave it ambiguous enough to rouse a reaction. She needed it to be precise, yet subtle. Concise, yet blasé.

**Clarke:** K.

*Ha!*

Moments later…

**Lexa:** Everything ok?

*Totally worked.*

**Clarke:** Fine.

**Lexa:** Doesn’t sound fine…

*Oh, it’s not fine! Far from it!*

**Clarke:** I’m in class and you keep distracting me with your texting. So no, not fine.

**Lexa:** ...

**Lexa:** Um, you texted me first.

*Fuck!*

**Clarke:** Well, I just think it’s dumb for you to be skipping when you know you need to pass to graduate. Just sayin’…

**Clarke:** Also, I didn’t buy coffee thinking you were going to get it. Not that you need to! You just said you were so I didn’t buy any… and that’s rude, in my honest opinion. Whatever, though.

*Ah, the classic guilt trip! For when all else fails…*

**Lexa:** My bad… was just feeling lazy this morning and didn’t really feel like driving to campus. I got you next time, tho!

**Clarke:** Don’t bother.

Clarke barely registered that her peers were gathering their belongings and Jaha was shouting over the commotion that erupted with class dismissal. She packed up, her insides scalding at such a heated temperature, she thought it might just cause internal damage.

She slammed into the door leading out of the building, eager to meet Raven for their usual lunch and vent. Yea, that’s what she needed. To *vent.*

But she never did get a chance to quite do that because, leaning against the stairs railing that led down the buildings front steps, was the *subject* that she wanted to vent about.

Lexa, in a plain black T-shirt, tight camo pants and black boots, stood smirking at her, and started walking slowly over to where Clarke stood frozen. She noticed the brunette was holding a large, Starbucks coffee in her left hand, and Clarke couldn’t contain the heat that flushed across her face.

“Hey, beautiful.” Lexa stepped up to her personal bubble, smirk converting to a full-teethed smile.
Clarke gulped. She wanted to deny it. To pretend as if Lexa’s absence hadn’t nearly driven her to the brink of insanity… to dismantle that infuriating, only-too-aware smirk that was plastered on her face. *Maybe…maybe I did miss your stupid, self-assured, maddening ass.* But she couldn’t give Lexa that satisfaction, so she brushed it off with an eye roll. “Please… you want to fail, by all means, go for it. I was just pissed that I didn’t get my usual dose of caffeine.”

She snatched the cup from a back-to-grinning Lexa, who totally saw right through her cover. Lexa bit her lower lip, and Clarke felt her gaze drop to her mouth while her mind simultaneously resurrected all those earlier thoughts and mushy memories tracing back to their first kiss; to how soft, and plump, and *bitable*—

Lexa cleared her throat, and ran her index across the smooth expanse of Clarke’s tinted cheeks. “Skip the rest of your classes today.” She spoke softly, allowing her traveling hand to grasp and hold the back of Clarke’s neck. “I have another surprise for you.”

Clarke exhaled loudly, feeling the warm sensation settling into the pit of her stomach. It was happening obscenely frequently lately and usually whenever the brunette was around. “You know I can’t skip, Lexa. I’ll be behind…and finals are really not that far away, I can’t ris-“

“Clarke, trust me. It will be worth it.” Lexa reassured, batting her lashes and jut ting her lip, pulling out her most effective puppy dog expression. “I’ve been preparing all morning. Everything is set. All you need to do is say yes. But if you really want to go to class, I understand.” She meant it. Lexa would understand. She’d be upset, and disappointed, but she’d understand.

Clarke sighed; she knew there was nothing to debate. “Fine. But I have work in the afternoon. So whatever you have planned better not entail helicopter flights. I’m seriously capable of shoving you out of one, so don’t tempt me.”

Clarke knew she had made the right decision the second she saw those lips break into a breathtaking smile. Lexa’s hand dropped from her neck and ran down her arm to arrive at her hand, and Clarke picked up on Lexa’s attempt to intertwine their fingers together. Clarke subtly pressed her hand to hers, giving Lexa a silent permission to advance. Lexa merged her hand to Clarke’s, straightening her posture proudly as if she had just conquered a colossal victory, and she tugged Clarke lightly towards the school’s parking deck.

“No flying, I promise.” Lexa reached over and grabbed Clarke’s school bag, flinging it over her own shoulder. "Come, my princess, your ride awaits."

***

Lexa took two ginormous strides the second they came within range of the parked Maserati, dashing ahead of Clarke and swinging the passenger door wide open.

“M’lady.” Lexa purred, offering Clarke a small, playful bow as she approached.

Clarke giggled, unwilling and unable to suppress the foreign feelings that inexplicably revitalizing within her whenever she was around Lexa. What had begun as a mild, but captivating curiosity the night of Lexa’s birthday had escalated to an undeniable yearning and attraction that was growing increasingly more difficult to ignore; and becoming increasingly easier to accept.

“Thanks… _Romeo._” Clarke grinned and slid into a plush, leathered seat that remarkably conformed to her shape. Lexa rounded the car in record time, tossing Clarke’s schoolbag in the back seat and
slipping in behind the wheel.

She grinned. “Does that make you my Juliet, then? Are you insinuating we’re gonna fall madly in love and become the symbol of romance to inspire musicians and poets to sing and write about us for centuries to come?” Lexa winked, igniting the engine. “We can pretend the part where they both cruelly die in the end never happened.” Clarke rolled her eyes, biting her lower lip to refrain herself from confessing just how incredibly cute Lexa looked in her excitement.

“Just shut up and drive, will you?” The roof of the car detached and slid backwards, exposing cloudless sapphire sky above, solid and profound, and almost as beautiful as the blue orbs staring admiringly up at it, Lexa thought.

“Buckle up, beautiful.” And they were off. Car gliding effortless atop rough pavement as Lexa weaved it through the flow of traffic, throwing Clarke smirks and heated looks at every stop sign and traffic light that halted their progress. Clarke kept her gaze firmly ahead, not daring to return the gesture. Not fully prepared to cave into Lexa’s undeniably enchanting charms just yet. Once they fled the city limits, Lexa maneuvered her way to the less congested, scenic roads that ran parallel to the dazzling Pacific Ocean. She eased on the accelerator when the terrain became slightly more perilous as the road curved alongside the stony mountains lining the ocean’s coast. They cruised for a while along this road, hundreds of feet above from where the sea waves clashed against the base of the mountains, watching the shimmering, deep blue expand to near infinity. Lexa’s hand moved to the radio, pushing in the power button and eyeing the blonde who lounged in the passenger seat. Clarke’s face was pointed to the heavens and a soft, relaxed smile stretched her lips. Her eyes were closed as she absorbed the bright sunrays and her arms wrapped back around her headrest. So fucking beautiful…

The sound that cut through the speakers made both women jump from unexpected surprise, and Lexa nearly punched the radio back to silence from the brutal velocity exerted by her hand. Clarke scanned the brunette, who was blushing furiously, desperately trying to keep her focus on the unending road ahead.

“Was that… Bruno Mars?” Clarke teased; Lexa picked up on the humor coating her tone and shifted uncomfortably in her seat. “Was that… Just The Way You Are, by Bruno Mars, to be more specific? Oh, don’t deny it, you little liar! You’re turning purple right now!”

Clarke was not about to let this go easily, pushing the brunette into admission when she saw Lexa’s head shake in faint denial and mumble an inaudible ‘no.’

She reached forward and pressed the power button back on, satisfied the second the music spilled from the speakers and granted her the confirmation she needed. Lexa’s jaw was impossibly clenched. “Well, well… never pegged you for such a softy. This is as cheesy as it gets, PG.” She continued her teasing; absolutely loving the way Lexa was swallowing dry. “Such a romantic… Here I was… expecting hard-core rap or R&B…but no…Bruno Mars… Ain’t that just adorable.”

“I’m not adorable…” Lexa grumbled, pale from embarrassment now. “It’s the radio. I don’t control what they play, Clarke.”

“Oh, is that so? Then why does your screen read ‘Audio Connected to The Commander’?” Clarke wondered out loud, making sure to emphasize every word. “Wait, more importantly… you named your iPhone ‘The Commander’?” Oh yea… Lexa was back to purple now. Clarke seriously thought she was considering driving her ridiculously overpriced car off the edge and put an end to her misery.

Clarke smirked, straining to hear Lexa grumble something about ‘her cousin’s idea to name her
fucking iPhone.’ She was relishing just how easy it was to ruffle Lexa’s feathers and semi-glad to know that the bad-girl, tough-girl act was only about as deep as her easily penetrable skin. She turned up the volume as loud as it would allow her.

“You know, I actually love this song…” She admitted, not missing the glint that flashed through Lexa’s emerald eyes that looked almost silver in the sunlight. Clarke smiled.

“Her eyes, her eyes make the stars look like they’re not shining.

Her hair, her hair falls perfectly without her trying.

She’s so beautiful,

And I tell her everyday…”

Lexa’s eyes wore torn between watching the road, and watching the siren singing to the song besides her; inhaling in the way Clarke’s lips moved in perfect tune to the words. True, Clarke was no Celine Dion when it came to her singing… heck, that’s not a fair comparison… let’s just say she makes Britney Spears sound like Celine Deon… but still… her beauty far surpassed her inability to produce good vocals…once you got around the high-pitch, nasally screech dripping from her perfect mouth.

“Yeah, I know, I know when I compliment her, she won't believe me.

And it's so, it's so sad to think that she don’t see what I see.

But every time she asks me do I look okay?

I say…”

Lexa couldn’t help it any longer, and she jumped in to assist Clarke with the chorus, grinning the second she felt the words communicate everything she wished she could to the woman sitting next to her.

“'When I see your face…

There's not a thing that I would change,

'Cause you're amazing…

Just the way you are.

And when you smile…

The whole world stops and stares for a while,

'Cause girl, you're amazing…

Just the way you are.’”

They made eye contact for a brief second. Lasting the length of a blink of an eye or a flutter of wings before both pairs shifted back to the road. It was quick, but it was enough to catch the raw tenderness outlining Clarke’s glistening eyes; and in them, Lexa saw her own emotions reflected back at her.

She rested her right hand on the console, palm facing up and intention clear. She kept her gaze fixed directly ahead, smiling to herself when she felt Clarke’s soft hand slide into hers; smiling even wider when the blonde intertwined their fingers together, like she had done earlier.
Lexa decided she had more than enough encouragement and went solo for the next part of the song.

“Her lips, her lips, I could kiss them all day if she’d let me.

Her laugh, her laugh, she hates but I think it’s so sexy.

She’s so beautiful…

And I tell her everyday.

Oh, you know, you know, you know I’d never ask you to change.

If perfect’s what you’re searching for, then just stay the same.

So, don’t even bother asking if you look okay,

You know I’ll say…”

Clarke jumped in for the final section. Eyes not detaching from Lexa’s profile, giving the brunette an earnest smile and mimicking the soft patterns Lexa’s thumb was tracing on her hand.

“When I see your face…”

There’s not a thing that I would change,

’Cause you’re amazing…

Just the way you are.’’”

The song softened, only the vocals pushing through now. And Clarke became silent, letting Lexa bring the song home… watching the sincerity that poured out of her with every word. And she knew… Clarke knew she meant them all.

“And when you smile…” Lexa continued alone, putting her heart and soul into every syllable she uttered, “The whole world stops and stares for a while…

’Cause girl, you’re amazing,

Just the way you are.”

Lexa felt the gentle fingers wrapped around hers squeeze faintly, and she deciphered that signal as confirmation that her message was properly received. She smiled, sinking back into her seat with unabated satisfaction.

Pffft, Romeo ain’t got nothing on me.

***

A little while later the brunette finally pulled off to the side of the road into a tourist-friendly parking area. Lexa hopped out of the driver’s side and rushed to open the door for Clarke, who shot a brow up at her at the clear demonstration of chivalry.

“I’m capable of getting my own door, you know.” Clarke, of course, couldn’t resist challenging the brunette whenever the opportunity was presented. “This is not the 20th century.”

Lexa chuckled, helping the blonde out of the vehicle and shutting the door behind her. “Pretty sure
we would have both been torched alive if it was… you know, me being a lesbian and all. Doubt that idea would have gone down well.”

Clarke shook her head. “Wrong century. And Wrong crime. Lesbians were never burned at the stake alive. Witches were. Back in the 17th century. Not the 20th, you doofus.”

Lexa rounded the car and popped open the trunk, Clarke leaned by the door listening to her shuffle items around under the lifted cover. “Pretty sure the lesbians would just throw the dumb witches under the bus whenever they were pressed to confess to their lesbianism!” Lexa shouted over the roaring sound of a passing van. “That’s why we survived and the witches went extinct! We’re smart like that! Well…unless they all went into hiding,” more shuffling, and ruffling, and clinging of what sounded like glass against glass, “like in Harry Potter, ya know! ‘Cuz if that’s the case, then we’re all f**ked. Lesbians ain’t stand a chance against Voldemort. He gon’ Avada Kedavra the hell out of our traitorous arses.”

After concluding her pointless ramble, Lexa finally poked her head from behind the cover, smiling at Clarke. “Come here, beautiful.”

Clarke rolled her eyes, but pushed herself from the door. “So… is this the part where you kill me and then toss my deceased body tumbling over the edge?”

Lexa smiled, stepping aside so Clarke could see what she hid within the trunk. “Not quite.”

Clarke felt a warm wave wash over her the moment her eyes locked on the surprisingly large picnic basked sitting inside the trunk. Blankets and pillows were tucked into the corners of the trunk’s walls, and there were rose petals scattered all around it. A medium-sized, stuffed Raccoon-teddy bear sat prepped against the basket, there was a card held between its tiny, Raccoon paws.

“It’s for you… and I hope you like my poem. It’s silly… and a little dumb, but I mean every word.” Lexa explained, blushing from creeping shyness.

Grinning, Clarke reached forward and grabbed it. She opened the flaps and cleared her throat. “‘Roses are red. Violets are blue.’” The following two lines were handwritten messily over two scratched out lines. “’I suck at poems. Nice…tits’?!”

Lexa’s jaw dropped, and she lounged for the card, expression baffled and shocked. “Wha- No!” She scanned the card, and almost immediately a revelation dawned on her. “Fucking ANYA! I’m gonna fucking kill her! The dumb bitch!” she looked back at Clarke, who was about ready to burst into tears from the laughter she was holding in. “My fucking cousin… it was supposed to say ‘I want to fill your tummy, like you fill my heart!’”

Clarke exploded then, bending forward and wrapping her arms around her waist, laughing so hard that it made tears roll down her cheeks and her abdomen contract and sting. “Oh, Jesus… Oh, God, honestly I don’t know which version is worse…that doesn’t even rhyme!” She panted, calming down once she saw the pout on Lexa’s lips and the way her brows scrounged close together pitifully.

“Yea, yea… go ahead and laugh…at least I don’t sound like a dying Hyena when I sing!” Lexa countered childishly, glaring at the blonde who gave her a questioning look. She shrunk immediately once she saw Clarke challenge her with her stare. “A very, very cute baby Hyena, might I add…”

Clarke scoffed. “Shut up and feed me before I have you for lunch.”

Lexa perked up. “Ah, is that so? By all means… I’ll let you feast all you want.” Lexa laughed once she saw Clarke tint up, pulling out the basket and asking Clarke to grab the blankets and pillows.
“Why a Raccoon?” Clarke asked before closing the trunk lid.

“No idea… random ass people compare me to a Raccoon for some weird ass reason… so I figured it must be my spirit animal or sumthin…” she shrugged, not really indulging in the thought much further than just that.

They made their way down a rocky path, clearly not meant to be used by pedestrians. Lexa led the way, and Clarke followed close behind. Lexa stopped just before reaching a rock that required her to use both hands to lower herself down. Clarke handed her the basket and then the blankets and pillows.

“Alright, now, crouch and give me your hands.” Clarke did as instructed, slightly worried she was about to split her skull open. “Ok, good. Now just step off the edge. I got you, I promise.”

Clarke hesitated, but eventually let herself slip from the brink. Lexa immediately brought her into her arms, wrapping protectively around her. Clarke thought the move was a little exaggerated, but so was the way she leaned into Lexa’s embrace, pressing herself fully against the brunette. Yea… definitely not necessary, yet totally worth it.

They continued their way through the rocks and dry bushes that jutted out from the surface of the mountain, until they reached a flat, uninhabited clearing protruding from the mountains edge, giving them a full view of the sparkling ocean until it curved into the distant horizon. It felt like they were levitating on a rock over the vast, solid-like water.

“My gosh, it’s beautiful!” Clarke professed, shaking her head from disbelief.

Lexa took the blankets from Clarke’s grip, the blonde barely even noticing her remove it from her hands, and spread it over the rock. She laid the pillows down and carried the basket to rest atop the spread blanket.

“Yea, O and I discovered this spot our first year in college. We would come here to chill and smoke pot back then.” She smiled at the memory; some of her happier, carefree days. “I sometimes come here to think. As you can see, it’s a good place to reflect.”

Clarke nodded, sitting down besides Lexa on the blankets.

“I hope you’re hungry! I spent all last night and part of this morning packing and preparing everything! Indra helped.” Lexa spoke, excited and cheerful, and opened the flaps of the basket. She began retrieving item after item: plates, silverware, glasses, wine, champagne, juice, grapes, strawberries, bread, an assortment of meats and cheeses, condiments, and a cherry pie.

Clarke watched, suddenly feeling ravenous at how delicious everything looked. Lexa poured the champagne, and they started with the fruits. Slowly, the women consumed their way through the meats and cheeses and the entire bottle of wine. The pie was last, and Clarke hummed in approval with every bite.

“So… is this a second date? Or a fourth part to the first date? I’m out of practice with the dating scene so you gotta catch me up here.” Clarke asked in between bites, putting away the dirty dishes once the pie was finished and pushing the basket out of the blanket and to the side.

“It’s whatever you want it to be, beautiful.” Lexa replied, smiling at her, running her thumb gently across Clarke’s lower cheek and wiping away a smudge of leftover cherry juice. She brought her thumb to her lips and sucked it clean. “Hmmm, you taste quite delicious, Clarke.” She purred, and Clarke exhaled sharply at the double connotation.
“Well, I want it to be nap time.” She laid back, pulling Lexa down next to her. They lounged, both staring up at the bright sky, enjoying the feel of the warm sun above and the sound of the breaking waves below. Clarke eventually grew tired of the position, and moved closer to Lexa, resting her head just above her left breast and wrapping around her waist. Lexa’s arms instinctively pulled her in closer. “Thank you for lunch… it was yummy.” Clarke mumbled sleepily, causing Lexa to release a soft chuckle.

“I’m glad you liked the surprise. Does this mean I get sex on the next date?!” Lexa joked, earning a playful slap on the shoulder from the blonde. “I think I’ve earned it… isn’t there some unspoken rule about that… third date, you get laid…” she shrugged, “Just sayin’. I would not be opposed to it.”

“Not even in your dreams, Woods.” Clarke hissed gently, discreetly inhaling the addicting scent of Lexa and that goddamn cologne!

“Oh, you don’t want to know what goes on in my dreams, Clarke… It involves a lot of you…and a lot of rope and toys…and a lot of you begging me to f-“

Clarke slapped a hand over Lexa’s mouth. “If you don’t shut up, I will roll you off the edge of this cliff.”

“I’m kidding!” Lexa smirked, fanning her brows. “You’re cute when you’re feisty…” She pulled Clarke closer, placing a chaste kiss on the top of her head.

Clarke mechanically started tracing the patterns of Lexa’s intricate tribal tattoos from beneath the sleeve of her shirt all the way down to her wrist, fingers hopping over the rather large watch, and continuing her caressing down to her fingertips. She wiggled the watch around, watching as it shifted loosely around Lexa’s slender wrist.

“This is really big on you… you can get it adjusted you know. To fit better.”

Lexa nodded her acknowledgement, bringing the hand resting on Clarke’s waist to her wrist to run a finger across the glassy surface. “It was my dad’s. His favorite watch. Actually, I think it might have been his most prized possession.” Clarke tensed in her arms, and Lexa knew she was listening attentively. “My mom gave it to him on their 10th anniversary. The same year they opened their company. I was small, but I remember how excited he was… how happy they both were.”

Lexa allowed her mind to drift in sync with the breeze that found its way to where the two women lounged. She peeled the watch off her arm, so loose it slipped away easily. “My mom had a message and her name engraved on the back… so my dad would always remember that moment. Always remember their love and success.”

Clarke traced the engravings with her eyes when Lexa flipped the watch over. Faint scuffs and scratches were scattered across the titanium surface, yet the words read surprisingly clear.

*My love,*

*May We Meet Again*

*Always yours,*

*Victoria Woods*

“May we meet again…” Clarke whispered the words breathily, unaware that her index had moved to trace over the engraving as well.
“It was a joke between them. They met in college, and would constantly bump into one another unintentionally…or so my dad claims. My mother was always dead certain he used to stalk her.” Lexa laughed, reimagining the story told from her dad’s perspective; hearing the much younger and happier version of herself laughing whenever her mother would interrupt to correct a fact or two. “My dad would always ask my mom for her number each time. And my mom, hardheaded and proud, would never give it to him; the only answer she’d ever give him was ‘Not today. Maybe next time.’ So he would just nod, smile, and whisper ‘May we meet again, then’ before walking away.”

Clarke smiled. Lexa couldn’t see it, but the way Lexa’s breathing evened as she hopped through portals leading back to that moment, and the manner in which her heart, caged within her ribs, sprinted and then crawled in time to her emotions, revealing exactly what she was feeling in way words could not, just made Clarke want to drown into her.

“He never gave up, though. And after countless pursuits leading to just as many rejections, he finally succeeded. My mom surrendered her number, telling him he was the ‘most annoying prick she ever met…and to better not waste her time if he wasn’t dead serious.’ He wasn’t. That first date, he picked her up at her home where she still lived with her parents in a small, humble house. He drove around the block and parked right back in front of her home. She was super confused, as you can imagine, asking him why they went back to her place. He just shrugged and walked her back inside. When they opened the door, her parents were seated in the same place as when she left, on the broken, worn down couch in the living room. Only this time, there was a third person sitting besides her mother. My dad had my mom’s grandmother flown in from Australia, the most important person to my mom besides her own parents. My dad did some digging, you see, and started talking to her closest friends, who were few but loyal. He found out about her grandmother, and how she missed her dearly. My mom hadn’t seen her for over 15 years, since her family couldn’t afford to fly there or bring the elderly woman overseas.”

Clarke was on the verge of tears, holding it in for Lexa’s sake, picking up as the brunettes’ voice became increasingly unsteady as she spoke. “He stood in the sidelines, watching silently while the whole family reconnected. Watching the woman he barely even knew shed tears of happiness the second she embraced her grandmother. My dad wasn’t rich. He had humble beginnings just like my mom, but he had a little money saved up for a new car. He spent it all on buying that plane ticket. When the date ended, he walked away with only a hug and a heartfelt ‘thank you.’ But he won my mother over that night. Hell, he won her whole family over. He would say that at the time, a lot of his friends called him crazy for doing what he did. But he would smile and shake his head in disagreement, saying instead that it was the best investment he ever made; better even than the decision to invest in the stocks that eventually made them wealthy.”

Clarke swallowed thickly, desperately trying to compose herself. “Wow… that’s beautiful, Lexa. Your parents sound like they were incredible people.”

The blonde felt her nod, body trembling beneath her. “This is all I have left from him. From the accident. This watch… It was the only item that survived the crash. The watch… and me.”

Clarke’s head snapped to meet Lexa’s gaze then. Her breath felt like it was punched out of her lungs from the revelation. “You were… that can’t be… the newspaper clips never mentioned you.”

Lexa nodded, only too aware. “I was there. Strapped to the backseat behind my dad. I don’t remember it. Any of it. And I thank the heavens for that small sliver of mercy every day.” Clarke watched the rainbow of emotions course through her glassy eyes, feeling warm tears slip down her own cheeks. “Indra made sure that small truth was kept hidden. Mostly for my sake and to prevent people from asking questions. I woke up three days later, in the hospital. Doctors couldn’t figure out why I was out cold for so long since the only visible damage was a shallow cut on my cheek. I
walked away unscathed, Clarke. I walked away unharmed when both my parents died crushed beneath that 16-wheeler truck.”

Clarke was stunned. That she wasn’t expecting. An 8-year-old Lexa…alone, crying and in pain, trapped in the heap of twisted metal and broken bodies. The image made her release a soft sob, wishing she could bear some of that undeserving pain.

“Hey, hey, sweetheart… look at me, look at me.” Clarke coaxed her, running the back of her fingers across the flushed cheeks that were slick with Lexa’s own tears. “None of that was your fault. Accidents happen, ok, and you are not to blame. Your parents loved you and they would have never wanted you to feel this way. You’re a survivor, Lexa. That’s something to be proud of, not ashamed.”

Lexa slammed her eyes shut, tightening her lips and nodded. Positive she didn’t believe that. Certain of it. But Clarke was only trying to help. Clarke was lying to make her feel better… so she inhaled deeply, and tried to quell the urge to hurl herself off the edge.

Her eyes snapped open when she felt soft flesh press against her lips. Clarke looked down at her, questioning… concerned… unsure…

Lexa was numb for a second, before finally regaining control and moving her lips. She watched Clarke close her eyes, surrendering into the kiss, letting their lips take over and lead them through the tense moment.

“You’re worthy of life, Lexa.” Clarke parted their lips only to let the words slip from her mouth, tears racing down her cheeks. “And you’re worthy of love.”

Lexa slammed their mouths back together, cherishing the way that Clarke immediately deepened the kiss. A few minutes into it, Lexa felt the blonde straddle her waist and sink into her.

“Fuck…Clarke…” She groaned when she felt Clarke’s hips instinctively swivel, driving her close to insanity. “Clarke…”

Clarke ignored her, latching onto the back of Lexa’s head and pulling her into her greedy mouth. Her other hand gripping the edge of Lexa’s shirt just above her left breast and twisting the material. Her hips were gyrating with purpose now, rubbing down against Lexa’s chiseled stomach.

Lexa was powerless to stop it, allowing her hands to slide up and grasp Clarke’s plump ass, pulling the blonde down more fully into her. The moan that tore out of Clarke made Lexa further lose herself into her movements.

Slow it down, you idiot… slow. It. DOWN! Lexa swore she heard the voice cut through her foggy mind as clear as the whimpers dripping out of Clarke. At this rate, you’re gonna end up fucking this girl you claim you love on a fucking rock! Potentially rolling both your stupid, horny selves off of it and dying in the process. Much WOW… how romantic!

Huh?! She was seeing things now. Every time she closed her eyes from one of Clarke’s expert swivels, she saw this mini version of herself, sporting a halo and wings, shouting strange things at her…

LEXA! She’s different, remember? Stop thinking with your cunt and end this NOW!

“Lex, please…” Clarke rasped, rubbing against her abs so hard she thought they were going to spark a fire soon enough. “Please…”
Hey, Woods. She’s begging, dude. Stop listening to the idiot in the white dress and just take her… Look at her… all needy, and whimpering, and wet… you can feel her wetness, can’t you?

Another mini version of Lexa, this time dressed in black, biker attire and sporting horns and a pointy tail, appeared behind her lids.

Wait… what the fuck is going on? Am I crazy? Am I dead? Did I really jump off this cliff?!? Ahhh FUCK! Indra is gonna kill me!

Nice Mini Me: You’re alive, you moron! Beats me HOW that still is… but hey! STOP THIS! Clarke doesn’t want this… neither one of you is ready for this!

Mean Mini Me: Who invited her?? (Points to nice mini me). Pal, listen to me, iight. This chick is ready. Just take her. I know you’re dying to taste her… sink your fingers into her. Just fucking do it, you pussy!

“Lexa… hey…” Lexa felt the rough tug of a needy hand weave in her hair and pull. Clarke looked down at her, eyes lust-infused and wanting. Lips swollen and moist. Lexa’s eyes drifted to where her cleavage was visible through her black tank-top. Clarke smirked.

Fuuuuucckkk!

Evil Mini Me: YES!

Nice Mini Me: NO!

Actual Me: SHUT THE FUCK UP, BOTH OF YOU!

Their lips crashed back together, all tongue and teeth, pulling and tugging. Clarke was biting her lower lip, moaning softly against it while still working her heavenly hips. Lexa’s hand massaged the flesh of her behind through her jeans, ready to rip the fabric in a second’s notice.

Evil Mini Me: Do it! Do it! DO IT! C’monnn, Woods! You never hesitated before! Just flip her over and claim her!

Nice Mini Me: She’s SPECIAL! She deserves more than a quick screw, Lexa!

Actual me: Seriously! Who the FUCK are you guys?! Go away!

Evil Mini Me: We give you advice, you jackass! Now pop open that button and slide your hand down her pants…

Nice Mini Me: Alexandria Mae Woods, YOU STOP IT THIS INSTANT! Trust me, you will regret it if you don’t…

Actual Me and Evil Mini Me: But!…

Nice Mini Me: NOW!

Lexa pulled back, keeping Clarke at an arm’s length.

“Lexa… It’s ok… we can… it’s ok for us t;“

“No, Clarke… no, it’s not ok.” Lexa sighed, secretly cursing out Nice Mini Me in the process. “This isn’t how this should happen…“
Clarke smirked naughtily; lifting one of Lexa’s hands and placing it flush against her right breast. She placed her hand over Lexa’s and squeezed, watching the way the brunette threw her head back and gasped loudly.

Kissing down Lexa’s elegant neck, she husked. “Don’t you want to fuck me? You’ve been making sexual jokes since we met, Lexa… don’t tell me you’re all talk and no action…”

Lexa had to bite her lower lip to keep from moaning, extremely turned on by Clarke’s tone…and hands…and hips…

Evil Mini Me managed to slip back into her mind, waving and shouting like a tiny maniac.

*Evil Mini Me: JUST DO ITTTTTTTTTTTTTT!

Nice Mini Me rushed out after her, tackling her down and pulling her head back by her horns in an attempt to shut her up.

Some other version of her miniature self suddenly stumbled on the scene, looking around, scratching her head.

*Confused Mini Me: Uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh… I was told there’d be pot… sooooooooooo, where’s the pot, man?

Nice/Evil/Actual: Da fuck are you?!

“Where the hell did you go, Lexa?!” Clarke pulled her chin to face her. Lexa saw the mild anger and frustration embedded in her features. “What, am I not *good* enough for you? You don’t *want* me, is that it?!”

“Wha-NO! Clarke, god, no. Of course I do!” Lexa gently caressed away the worry, cooing her, wrapping her in a comforting embrace. “If only you knew how badly I want you…all I’m saying is that now doesn’t seem right. We’re emotional and slightly tipsy from the champagne and wine…not to mention we’re at least 500 feet up from certain death if things get out of hand.”

Clarke chuckled, burying her face into Lexa’s neck, still straddling the brunette but no longer tantalizing her.

“You’re right… I’m sorry… I got, carried away.”

“Shhhhh, don’t apologize. I did too… I have that effect on women; you don’t need to blame yourself.”

Clarke slapped her shoulder again; Lexa laughed and cradled the blonde more firmly into her.

“So, you know how I mentioned my cousin earlier?” Lexa asked, stroking soft lines on Clarke’s back, switching topics to help their sprinting hearts unwind. Clarke nodded.

“Well, she’s throwing a pretty big party this weekend. She rented out an entire venue for it. I was hoping you’d come…if you want. I’m inviting Raven too.”

Clarke nodded against her neck.

“Okay.” She whispered; the word coming out more breath than sound.

“Yea?” Lexa asked cheerfully.
Clarke nodded again, pulling back and giving Lexa a genuine smile. “Believe it or not, your parties are sorta magical. Last time I was invited to one, I got to meet one incredibly sexy, intelligent, talented and just downright wonderful girl…”

Lexa beamed at her then, and Clarke felt the brunette’s confidence and ego spike from the way with which she hugged her tighter; and the way her eyebrows kept quirking upwards in a smug agreement made Clarke want to roll her eyes.

Clarke smirked. “Yea… Katy Perry was pretty fucking incredible.” Lexa’s facial muscles loosened, and she narrowed her eyes at the grinning blonde. “I’m hoping you’ll have T. Swift or Fifth Harmony on this time around!”

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Monday Afternoon

Lexa: Hey beautiful… how’s work??

Clarke: Hey! Dull and slow. No drunken idiots to harass me today or for you to assault. Sorry. :/

Lexa: Darn it… I was semi-hoping you’d say there was so I’d have a valid reason to show up…

Clarke: What do you mean?

Lexa: Well… see, I didn’t have anything going on… and I figured you’d be bored at work since the bar isn’t usually busy Mondays… And, well… I missed you! I know it hasn’t even been two hours since we last saw one another but, I couldn’t help it… *Flushed Face Emoji*

Clarke: Spit it out, Lexa.

Lexa: Ok… I’m outside.

Tuesday Morning

Lexa: Gooooooood morning, gorgeous :D

Clarke: It’s 1 in the afternoon.

Lexa: Oh…right… I just woke up not too long ago.

Clarke: -_- 

Lexa: So, do you have any lunch plans?!

Clarke: Don’t you mean breakfast?

Lexa: Whichever you want, beautiful.

Clarke: Not really, studying at the library. Have an exam tomorrow.

Lexa: I know.

Clarke: Huh?

Lexa: Turn around, I brought us food *Face Throwing A Kiss Emoji*
**Tuesday Night**

**Lexa**: Um, so. Aden invited me over for dinner. Just wanted to make sure it was ok with you… you know, before showing up randomly.

**Clarke**: Aden is at soccer practice with Raven. He won’t even be home for dinner.

**Lexa**: …

**Clarke**: Lexa?

**Lexa**: Well, I brought the wine…. *Flushed Face Emoji* I’m outside.

**Wednesday Morning**

**Clarke**: Hey

**Lexa**: Hi!!!!!!!!!!!

**Clarke**: Just wondering if I should buy coffee this morning…?

**Clarke**: No pressure or anything, just seems silly to buy it if you already did…

**Lexa**: Well I’m pretty sure that the cup currently sitting on your desk would get jealous if you did that… so I’d advise against it ;)

**Clarke**: Thank you…

**Lexa**: Hurry up and get here, beautiful… I miss your face.

**Wednesday Night**

**Clarke**: Are you gonna “randomly” show up at my work tonight? Cuz if you are, let me know so I can save you a seat at the bar.

**Lexa**: Hmmm, is that your way of asking me to come over? Sounds like you miss me? ;)

**Lexa**: I’m actually at your place (I swear I didn’t just show up). Raven and Aden invited me over for dinner and video games. I hope that’s ok…

**Clarke**: Oh, really? Hmm, funny, Raven didn’t mention anything… but yea, of course it’s ok.

**Clarke**: Please don’t let Raven feed Aden cupcakes for dinner! I told her not to but I know the type of friend I have!

**Lexa**: We had cupcakes for dessert! *Smiling Face Emoji*

**Clarke**: Really?! Wow! I take that back… I honestly thought Raven would-

**Lexa**: She fed us brownies for dinner. *Frowning Face Emoji*

**Clarke**: Yea… yup, I knew it.

**Lexa**: I miss you.
Lexa: You don’t have to say it back! Just… letting you know that I do.

Lexa: Oh, and I sorta got you something! I left it on the kitchen table for when you get home from work.

Clarke: what is it?

Lexa: It’s a surprise ;).

Clarke: Well, thank you.

Clarke: And maybe, just maybe… I sorta miss you too.

Later That Night

Clarke: Lexa…

Lexa: Clarke…

Clarke: How did you… I didn’t even know… OMG I don’t even know what to say…

Lexa: Well, you can say ‘Lexa, you’re the most amazing, caring, considerate, sexiest chick I’ve ever met and I want to have your babies.’

Clarke: ---

Lexa: Orrrrrr, a simple ‘thank you’ will suffice.

Clarke: How about, ‘Lexa, thank you for getting me the unpublished manuscript of Pablo Coelho’s secret book.’ I have no idea how you did it, but… thank you! He’s my favorite author. I have ALL his books!

Lexa: I know… I wish I could be there to see that gorgeous smile. And you’re very welcome!

Clarke: *Selfie of her Smiling*

Lexa: *Face With Heart-Shaped Eyes Emoji* x5

Lexa: Gosshhhhhhh you’re sooo beautiful!

Lexa: Send another! Aim a little lower this time… less face, more cleavage!

Clarke: G’night, PG *Rolling Eyes Emoji*

Lexa: G’night, princess. Enjoy your book.

Thursday Morning

Lexa: Got an A on my Finance exam! Professor Snape told me I have a shot at getting a B in the class if I get A’s on the final exam and final paper!

Clarke: Yay!!!!! Congrats, see I told you could do it! Wait…Professor Snape??

Lexa: Yea… my given name to Prof. Kane… He stares at me like I’m the devil’s spawn. That man
HATES my guts.

**Clarke:** Lol. What did you do to deserve such wrath?

**Lexa:** His daughter 0_o

**Clarke:** x_x

**Lexa:** Hahaha, it was a long time ago and I had no idea. Are you studying?

**Clarke:** Reading. My new favorite book.

**Lexa:** Library?

**Clarke:** Yup.

**Lexa:** Lunch?

**Clarke:** The usual, please.

**Lexa:** Be there in 5. Save me a seat, beautiful.

**Thursday Night**

**Clarke:** What are you doing?

**Lexa:** Helping Anya set up for her party tomorrow. It’s been 20 minutes and she’s already called me incompetent, stupid, and fugly 45 times… I’m having a blast.

**Clarke:** I’m sorry… maybe you can come over when you finish? I can help… relax you. Treat you the way you deserve to be treated…

**Lexa:** Will you feed me cookies and tell me I’m pretty????

**Clarke:** Hmmmm, how does serving you beer while getting on my knees for you, sound?

**Lexa:** Ummm… sounds like a trap…wait, are you being serious???

**Clarke:** Absolutely, babe. You’ve been so good and working so hard… it’s about time I treat you back. God, I can’t wait to have my mouth on you…to taste you…

**Lexa:** Holyyyyy Duck.

**Lexa:** FUCK! I meant Fuck! Ducking auto-correct…Ugh! FUCKING!

**Clarke:** Hmmmm, well come on over… I’m already naked and ready for you… dripping on my sheets just thinking of your fingers sliding into me… your tongue swirling around me… gosh, Lexa, please hurry….

**Lexa:** Shit, Clarke… Holy shit. Ok, I’m on my way! My GPS is saying I’ll be there in 24 minutes! Just hang on!

**Lexa:** Clarke??
Lexa: Clarke, you there?!

Clarke: OMG Lexa, I am SO SORRY! RAVEN hacked my phone! That wasn’t me! I was in the kitchen making dinner when I heard her giggling in the bathroom… I am so sorry!

Lexa: Oh! HAHAHAHAHA that was funny! Yea, I totally knew it was her… I was just playing along. HAHAHAHAHA, silly Raven!

Raven (to Lexa): Thirsty much, Woods? Hmmm, somebody was just too eager to get their hands dirty ;)

Lexa (to Raven): You DUCKING Bitch!

Lexa: FUCKING! GAH!

Raven: Hahahaha, you’re too easy, PG. Man, oh, man I would have given anything to see the look on your face, muahahaha. Got yo ass!

Lexa: You have no soul, Reyes.

Clarke (to Lexa): So, umm… How’s the setup going? Everything ready for the party?

Lexa: Yea! Going good! Should be ready by tomorrow! You’re still coming, right?

Clarke: Yea, of course! Already got the babysitter for Aden.

Lexa: Can’t wait to see you! And tell the little dude I said ‘Hey’!

Aden (to Lexa): Please, please, pleaseeeeee let me come to your party, Lex! Pleaseeeeee! I’ll be with Lincoln the whole time!

Lexa (to Aden): Awww I’m sorry, kid! I wish I could… but Anya’s parties are no place for kids, Little Man. :/ I’ll make it up to you, I promise!

Aden: But I’m more mature than all of you guys! I can chaperone! I have years of experience in holding girls’ hair while they drunk puke into toilets and bathtubs. I do it for Raven almost every weekend!

Lexa: Please record the next time that happens… I need my revenge.

Aden: You want that in standard or HD?

Anya (to Lexa): Where the fuck did you go, you oversized maggot! Where’s my fucking confetti?!

Lexa (to Anya): Bathroom… had to take care of something. Be right there.

Anya: Stop jacking off and get back here!

Clarke (to Lexa): G’night, Lexa. :)

Lexa (to Clarke): Good night, beautiful. :)

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“Raven! C’mon! We’re already two hours late!” Clarke bellowed from the porch, already rushing forward to meet the limo driver, who held the back door ajar.

“I said one second! Jesus!” Raven bellowed right back, a hint of frustration clearly creeping into her tone. “Alright, he’s allowed to play video games until whenever he wants. Ignore what the crazy blonde yelling outside said. Also, yes feed him healthy crap if you must but let him have at least one cupcake after dinner. I bought fresh ones and they’re in a box on the top shelf in the fridge.” Raven quickly explained to the young, incredibly frightened babysitter, who stared up at her as if the she had a third eye growing in between her brows. “When he does decide he wants to go to bed, make sure to prepare his milk luke-warm, two spoons of sugar and one of honey. Give it to him AFTER he’s tucked in bed, not before, got it Frodo?!”

The girl was so short, Raven honestly thought she had been a playdate for Aden when she first arrived.

“Y-yes, ma’am. Got it. Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of him.” She stuttered through, gulping under Raven’s stern glare. Raven nodded and moved towards the door, shouting a hasty goodbye to Aden before following Clarke into the limo.

“Where did you find this girl, Griff? Midgetbabysitters.com? Poor thing probably can’t even make the kiddie rides in Disney Land.” Raven huffed, gratefully accepting the champagne offered by the driver. Clarke rolled her eyes, already accustomed to Raven’s habit of scrutinizing every sitter she ever hired to look after the boy.

“She’s probably already passed out drunk in a corner somewhere. Remember her party? I’m pretty sure she began pre-gaming for it the day before.”

Clarke remembered. Remembered the beauty that locked her in place with her mere stare. Remembered the way her lips ravaged that girl’s neck as if it was a lifeline for her. Remembered the way she felt proud at having “accidently” stumbled into the bathroom and interrupting them, and remembers feeling even more elated when Lexa chose to stay with her instead of following the thirsty slut back to the dance floor. She remembers every minute detail of that night.

“Yea, maybe so…”

The obnoxiously loud music greeted them yards away as they angled the vehicle down the narrow pathway towards the massive estate.

“What do you know of this Anya chick? Have you ever heard about her? From O maybe?” Clarke suddenly wondered, questioning herself for not asking Lexa sooner.

“I think she’s the head bitch in charge of the Wood’s company overseas somewhere. I think I remember O saying Lexa had a cousin running a branch in Australia. She’s clearly done well for herself…” Raven leaned into Clarke, gazing ahead to where the establishment blossomed into view. “I hear she’s about as fun as a getting an ass rash, according to O. Speaking of which… can you rub
ointment on my cheeks later? I tried to get Aden to do it but he threatened to call the cops on the grounds of child abuse.”

Clarke narrowed her eyes, sighing. “Yes, I’ll rub ointment on your nasty ass-fungus later, Ray.”

Clarke stepped out of the vehicle the second they came to a full stop. Party goers (whether in need to puff a cig or not-so-discreetly dry-hump one another against the wall) loitered around the entrance of the building. It was evidently clear that at this point into the party, majority of its attendees had long transgressed from slightly tipsy to stupid drunk.

Clarke waltzed in with Raven close behind, both expertly dodging stumbling idiots with full cups as they pushed their way further into the clubhouse. Clarke felt her eyes straining, squinting, and flickering from face to face in search of those intoxicating green eyes she blatantly denied she missed.

A gentle tug made her halt and spin around. Octavia was pulling Raven into an embrace, and leaning forward to whisper into her ear since speech was temporarily impossible over the thundering speakers. Raven leaned forward, trying to share the message.

“O is saying they’re outside by the pool!”

Clarke nodded, hugging Octavia and following her out towards the backyard. The pool was swarming with half-naked, fully-naked, and fully-clothed individuals, which didn’t really surprise Clarke in the slightest. It was an open bar party, with endless amounts of alcohol freely distributed; the term *sober* was definitely a foreign concept here.

Almost immediately, her eyes drifted to the table a few feet away from the bustling pool. Lexa was leaning over it, dressed impeccably as always in a freshly pressed white button-up and black slacks that tightened around her ankles. Clarke sucked in her lower lip and held it in between her teeth when she noticed the black suspenders Lexa had on; an image suddenly started to dance in her mind as one of her most cherished, shamefully naughty fantasies resurfaced. She made a mental note to share said fantasy with Lexa if they were to ever become intimate. Lexa’s sleeves were rolled up as usual and her hair was loose and wild. She held a white Ping-Pong ball in her hand, face scrunching up in deep thought and concentration, calculating her shot against her opponent. Clarke couldn’t resist her doting smile from forming; her insides fluttering and spiraling as she watched Lexa in her adorable, only too mesmerizing state. Intoxicated Lexa was something else to behold. Upon deciding, Lexa thrust her arm forward to full extension; tongue sticking out of her lips at the effort exerted, and released the ball. Her shoulders sagged and her supporters booed her the second the ball went flying straight past the target. Those boos immediately transformed into taunts and shouts of encouragement when the ball surprisingly landed right in the crevice of her opponent’s exposed cleavage.

Clarke frowned, watching curiously as a taller, swaying blonde approached Lexa. The woman, slender and athletically built, leaned forward and whispered something to her, which caused a grin to erupt over Lexa’s obviously intoxicated face. The woman gave her an encouraging pat on the shoulder and Lexa sauntered off after the ball. The girl with the ball trapped in between her breasts smirked, only too aware of Lexa’s intentions, and before Clarke had another moment to consider if she’d want to watch the next scene unfold, Lexa dove face first into the girls’ chest, mouth dramatically sucking the area around it until her tongue finally stumbled on the ball. She pulled back with it trapped between her lips, which converted into a smug smile when the crowd erupted into cheers and applause.

“Hey, um, let’s go get drinks, Griff…” Raven spoke loudly, clearly an attempt to distract her. To peel Clarke away from having to witness any more of Lexa’s careless debauchery. Yet her eyes
remained glued to Lexa’s infuriating face, looking incredibly accomplished rather than ashamed; smiling broadly at the blonde woman who had encouraged her when she retreated back to her end of the table. Clarke swallowed with difficulty. Her eyes began to sting from lack of moisture since her gaze was still locked in a death stare at Lexa, who had yet to realize she had arrived.

“Drinks! Yea! Here, follow me! Man, they’re making a mean mojito! You have to try it!” Octavia didn’t wait. She grabbed Clarke’s hand and tugged her out of the backyard and back into the crammed interior, all three making their way quickly to the bar.

Octavia ordered for all of them, shooting Raven awkward, apologetic glances over her shoulder every now and then, carefully gauging Clarke’s expressionless face and rigid posture for any sign other than indifference. Clarke met her glances with clipped smiles, quickly averting her eyes elsewhere, wondering what it was the two brunettes expected to see embedded in her features. IF they’re expecting me to fall apart over this, it’s not gonna happen...

“Clarke… listen she’s just super drunk, babe… its prob-

“I’m fine! Seriously, Raven, it’s ok. Lexa and I aren’t a thing. We’ve been on one date, that’s it.” Clarke responded loudly, gratefully accepting the drink the second it landed in front of her. “I mean it, I’m fine. She’s having fun and I sure as hell didn’t come out tonight to sit around and mope. ”

Raven nodded and let it go. They stood there downing drink after drink for a while. After her third mojito, Clarke was feeling bold enough to agree to join Raven and Octavia as they challenged one another in a ‘who can drink the fastest’ contest. Raven was handing Octavia’s ass over to her in a silver platter before Clarke had enough of Raven’s ego and challenged her herself.

“Alright, Griff! Don’t think I’ll go easy on ya! You may have everyone else fooled that you’re this perfect goody-goody princess but I know better… So I won’t hold back.”

They both took their drinks, Octavia was watching with half-lidded eyes and leaning against the bar countertop to steady herself.

“Goody-goody?! I’ll show you goody-goody…” Clarke narrowed her eyes at her. Bad idea, since it made everything go slightly unfocused.

The second O shouted GO, she let go of reason and control and just tossed the drink back with vigor. She felt some of it spill from her mouth and drench the front of her dress. But she didn’t care. No honestly, she couldn’t find any fucks to give.

Because if Lexa could stick her face in some random girl’s boobs, well… then why the fuck should she care.

She slammed the glass down on the countertop with more force than necessary, disappointed to find that Raven beat her by a nanosecond.

“Fuck! Shit!” Clarke yelled, wiping her mouth messily. Octavia laughed, already ordering another round for the trio. “Again, Ray! You cheating whore!”

“Alright… don’t say I never warned ya.”

They picked up their drinks and tossed it back the second Octavia gave the command. Clarke was chugging this time, determined to win. Frankly, winning didn’t matter to her, but it did give her a nice distraction over the other alternative she was wrestling with… to storm outside in front of everyone and just give the green-eyed brunette a piece of her mind and possibly give the chick with the big tits a shove towards the deep end of that pool. Seriously, how dare she! Who the fuck does
When she slammed her cup back down, she was rather proud to find that Raven followed suit seconds after her. She was about to brag about her victory when she felt herself be spun around in a sloppy twirl, coming face to face with a smiling, swaying Lexa.

“You’re here… when diyou get ‘ere?” Lexa slurred, both hands firmly positioned on Clarke’s waist, as if she needed confirmation that Clarke was solid and not an illusion. Clarke watched as Lexa pulled back slightly, running her eyes down the length of her body, biting her lower lip when they came back up. “Fuck, you’re so fucking beautiful.”

You fucking bitch… Clarke wanted to pounce forward and body slam her. Toss her scrawny ass to the ground and leave her there pouting for not having an ounce of shame for doing what she did. But she reeled her emotions in; despite what Lexa had done, Clarke knew she had no grounds to be jealous. Lexa wasn’t hers and she wasn’t Lexa’s. And her pride was at stake, something Clarke was not willing to damage for the chance at humiliating Lexa in public.

Clarke pulled out of her hold, hardening her features. “About half-an-hour ago.” She spoke in audible hisses by Lexa’s ear, ensuring she heard her over the music. “Around the same time your tongue was rolling around some girl’s boobs.” Her chest swelled with rage, and she puffed it out proudly as Lexa’s eyes widened. “Yea, I saw that.”

“Wait, Clarke, th-that was just a game… Anya dared me to! I don’t even know her… C’mon babe, you know I wou-“

“I’m NOT your fucking babe!” Clarke redirected harshly, which caused Lexa to lift up both hands and sprawl them; an apologetic surrender.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry…I didn’t mean it like that… Clarke, come outside. Where we can talk-“

“No, Lexa, I think I’ll stay here. I’m pretty sure your whore is waiting for you outside so why don’t you go tend to that.” The sheer look of disbelief and hurt that colored over Lexa’s eyes caused Clarke to sway back slightly. Maybe she had lost control too soon. Too quickly. Maybe she was over exaggerating.

She looked over to where Raven and Octavia leaned against the counter next to her, both quickly pretending to jump back into a nonexistent conversation the second Clarke drifted her attention over to them.

“Clarke… please let’s talk! Outside! It’s too loud and cramped in here.” Lexa leaned forward, making sure not to touch her, and whispered loudly in her ear. “Please.”

That plea. The aching. Clarke could not deny the desperate tone coating Lexa’s voice, lacing every word, and delivering it to Clarke like darts that pierced through her core.

She sighed. Prepared to relent and forgive. It was a minor infraction and it warranted an explanation from the brunette, at the very least Clarke could provide her that. Provide her with a chance before so irrationally shunning her away. And she was about to nod her head in agreement, about to apologize for being so paranoid, about to-

“Lexa?! Gosh, I thought that was you!” And all that she was about to do never did get to fruition because some skank, yes skank (Clarke was done differentiating the many women in Lexa’s life between friend or skank; odds were, majority were the latter), had placed a chaste hand over Lexa’s straining biceps, squeezing down mildly. Clarke recognized the touch the moment Lexa recognized...
its deliverer; there was nothing *innocent* about the gesture.

Clarke’s eyes narrowed almost instinctively. Her pulse immediately picked up its pace, and her hand clenched and unclenched, only to clench back more forcefully into painful grips. She got all the answers she needed the second she saw Lexa’s eyes nearly bulge out of her head when her gaze met the skank’s, and her jaw slacked in utter disbelief.

“*Costia?!*” Clarke heard Lexa whisper. Yes, it was a fucking whisper, over the blaring sound of music and people, and still those words were clearly delivered to her very attentive ears. “Wh-what are you doing here?! How did-“

Clarke’s gaze moved from Lexa to Costia, just in time to catch the smaller woman mouth some gibberish and then throw Anya’s name into the mix.

Octavia stepped in. Probably an effort to damage control before matters escalated out of hand. But it was futile. Because the way Lexa was staring at this petite, absolutely *stunning* woman (much to Clarke’s dismay), urged questions and insecurities to erupt like wildfire within her. Whatever history these two had; whatever story and memories they shared, Clarke understood that it had been more than a one-night stand for either party.

“Costia…” Lexa whispered again. And just like the last time, it felt as if there was a tiny bulldozer wreaking havoc inside Clarke’s tightening chest. There was a tenderness in the way Lexa said her name; a tenderness she had felt everytime Lexa would say *hers*. “I-I… wow, you’re really here…”

Clarke’s heart fluttered when she noted how Lexa’s tone and body language insinuated that the surprise, albeit one that shocked the brunette to a stuttering, stumbling mess, wasn’t being received as an unwelcomed one. Lexa’s eyes hadn’t drifted since they locked to Costia’s, who still had her claws on Lexa’s arm, traveling lower until she reached her hand.

“Ray…” Clarke croaked. It was too much. Too fucking much and why, she didn’t even know. Whatever was being transmitted between the pair via their connected gaze was not something Clarke was prepared, and much less willing, to further witness.

She tried to push away, tried to peel herself from this agonizing moment. Scolding herself for even experiencing these feelings. She shouldn’t. She knows better. She’s been through hell before because she chose love over all else. No, she wouldn’t do it again. She wouldn’t *survive* that again.

Raven was pulling her away in moment’s notice. Dragging her towards some uninhabited corner of this forsaken mess of heated bodies. Clarke thought she heard Lexa call out her name behind her, but she didn’t turn. She refused to. It hadn’t even been an hour since they arrived and already she had witnessed more of Lexa’s past than she ever cared to.

Raven pushed her into a bathroom, dragging out the couple making out inside by the hair and slamming the door shut. It was quieter in here. Speech was easier to divulge in, but the shouting and screaming unfolding in her dazed head made it difficult to concentrate on anything else.

“Clarke, wanna go? I can have the car come for us right now. We can wait in here until it arrives.”

Clarke nodded, pressing two fingers down on her stinging eyes. *Keep it together, Griffin. Don’t let her see you like this. She’s not worth it… She’s not worthy. It wasn’t Raven Clarke referred to. “Who the fuck is that… Raven, do you know?!”*

Raven shook her head, running a soothing hand over Clarke’s upper arm. “I don’t think she matters. Clarke, she clearly didn’t come here invited by Lexa. Her cousin, the *bitch* from hell, invited her…”
Lexa seemed just as surprised about it as you.”

Clarke nodded, more mechanical than from understanding. “It doesn’t matter… I’m ok. I’m alright. Let’s just go.” She meant it. She felt ‘fine’. The alcohol, finally taking effect, was numbing her into acceptance.

A few moments later, they exited the restroom, Clarke towing behind Raven and bowing her head low the second she saw the line of angry faces glare at them. Before she had a chance to walk a yard towards the exit of the building, a hand wrapped around hers, stopping her in her track.

Naturally, Clarke expected it was Lexa’s at first, probably chasing after her for an opportunity to explain and apologize. The idea made her inflamed insides calm slightly, only to be ignited full-force when, after a subtle caress of her finger against the calloused palm, she noticed the hand was bigger and rougher in comparison to Lexa’s soft and smooth touches.

Her disturber was tall, with a head full of dark, short curls combed and slicked back. His soft smile extended into a grin the second Clarke turned to face him.

“Excuse me, miss…I was wondering if you’d care to dance…?” He leaned and whispered, pulling back only enough to gauge her reaction. Raven was next to her the moment the question left his lips.

“Go away, McDreamy, we’re leaving.” She tugged, but Clarke remained firmly in place.

“Yes, actually… I’d love to.” Clarke responded, ignoring Raven’s groans, and allowing the handsome and charming stranger lead her to the center of the floor, where couples were joined in a sweaty, passionate tangle.

He pulled her into him, hands resting just above the swell of her backside. He leaned again; Clarke could feel his lips graze over her ear. “I’m Bellamy. And you’re incredibly beautiful… what’s your name?”

She swallowed with some effort. His words spilled out like velvet and made her slightly dizzier, adding on to the haze produced by the burning liquor. His fidgety hands were also of no help.

“Clarke.” She managed to share, feeling herself get lost into the rhythm he was leading them through, gradually picking up pace in sync to the music.

“It’s very nice to meet you, Clarke…” He spun her then, pulling her back into his front. It surprised Clarke… the effortlessness with which they moved. He was in control, and completely at ease. Not overwhelming and not intimidating. And soon enough she found it difficult to fight the yearning to sway her hips against his. Any thought of even attempting to combat that urge was rapidly dismantled when she locked eyes with a watching Lexa, lingering across the room, glare frigid and arms stiff against her side. Clarke watched the brunette watch her in return, emerald orbs that darkened to a shade of charcoal following every one of her movements.

Clarke smiled internally. Almost theatrically, she wrapped her arms backwards around Bellamy’s neck, pressing her backside more fully against him. As if on cue, his hands slid around her waist and pulled her closer, pressing her flush against his muscular front.

“I don’t believe I’ve seen you before… I would have remembered a face like yours…” He whispered hotly into her scalding ear, and Clarke could smell the liquor coating his breath. Clarke pressed her ass back and gave him a seductive swirl of her hips, earning her a gasp and a hiss. “Careful now… I’m not the best at retaining self-control… especially when you keep moving your ass like that…”
Clarke’s gaze still remained planted on Lexa. Even in the distance, and through the array of flickering lights in varying colors, she could see the tense muscles straining in her neck; vein prominently throbbing, jaw cemented shut, and eyes unwavering. Costia reappeared into her blurring vision, and Clarke helplessly watched as the woman, without a care to ask before proceeding, pressed back against Lexa’s crotch, bending forward at the waist for a surprised Lexa, and rubbing her ass against her.

Clarke wanted to crack everyone of her ribs at that moment. Lexa’s too. She just wanted to go on a rampage that would result in broken body parts and whimpering; then stuff this Costia bitch into a cramped crate and ship her back to wherever the hell she came from. Instead of allowing the rage bubbling within to dwell with her wicked thoughts, she instead converted it into energy, and started picking up the pace with her hips. She threw her head back against Bellamy’s shoulder, exposing her neck and conceding a perfect view of her upper breasts to his hungry gaze.

“Goddamn, you’re so fucking beautiful.” He whispered, and Clarke felt his hands travel south. Normally, she would have prevented the bold advance, but she was too lost in the moment to care. “You should come home with me tonight, gorgeous. I promise to show you a good time.” His fingers were toying with the hem of her dress now, which was pressed half way down her thighs. Pressing back, Clarke could feel the prominent bulge pushing forward into her ass. She assumed that Bellamy’s idea of a ‘good time’ didn’t involve Monopoly and popcorn. “I’ll take very good care of you.” She gulped at the implication, her feet and hips slightly faltered, but he guided her back into the rhythm, clearly desperate for the friction. “You look like you need a man who knows how to treat a woman such as yourself. I can do that for you, Clarke… I can give you exactly what you need.”

His finger finally slipped beneath the hem, and trailed upwards, dragging the cloth up with it. Innately, Clarke clasped her hand down on his, a warning for him to stop. But after stilling his hand for no more than a handful of seconds, he continued to move his finger up in a teasingly manner.

“No… I’m here with som-“

And suddenly all hell broke loose, and she was cutoff mid-statement the second a fist raced past her left cheekbone and landed right on the bridge of Bellamy’s nose. The punch had been so close, that it had wisped against her cheek before it crashed into Bellamy’s face. Hands were pulling her forward and away, and she was quickly in Raven’s protective embrace.

“YOU’RE GONNA BE FUCKING SORRY WHEN I’M FUCKING THROUGH WITH YOU, YOU PERVERTED SON OF A BITCH!” Lexa’s shouts spread uninterrupted through the suddenly quiet room. Clarke had a brief moment to realize that the music had been cut, and curious spectators lurked around them in the hopes of getting a glimpse of the juicy fight.

Lexa was straddling the sprawled Bellamy around the waist. One hand wrapped around his throat and the other coming up and forming into a fist ready to deliver.

“How the fuck was I supposed to know! I just got back in town, Lex!” Bellamy’s hands were up in a defensive gesture, pleading with Lexa to see reason. “You have a claim on every bitch here! Sorry if I can’t keep track of every single one of your sluts, Woods!”

The fist crashed into his cheek, and a spurt of blood leaked out of his mouth. “You fucking Dick. I swear-“

“Lexa get the fuck off of him!” Octavia lounged, drawing every pair of eyes towards the small but agile brunette, who effectively threw Lexa off of Bellamy with the impact. “He didn’t
Lincoln stepped in then, pulling Octavia off of Lexa. Octavia was thrashing in Lincoln’s arms, desperate to hand a well-deserve punch across Lexa’s face. “HE DIDN’T FUCKING KNOW!”

Murmurs started to float around the incredibly tense room; putting everyone on edge.

“Raven…” Clarke whispered, not needing to add anything more after stating her name. One of the perks of growing up together was the ability to just know when the other was in distress.

“Yea, blondie, I think it’s time to go.”

Before she had a chance to walk a foot, Lexa was on her feet and blocking her exit, pushing into her personal space.

Clarke felt the anger rekindle inside her. “Move the fuck out of my way. Now!”

“No. You and I are gonna have a talk outside. You’re not leaving until we do.” She stepped closer, holding her ground. Her eyes were cold and glassy; determined. Clarke knew people were still watching. From the grunts and groans coming from behind her, she knew Octavia was tending to Bellamy; knew that this could very quickly combust into a Round 2.

Lexa wrapped a hand around her wrist and pulled her before Clarke had a chance to respond. Raven tried to interrupt, but was also yanked back by the blonde Clarke had seen earlier with Lexa. The bitch from hell, as Raven dubbed her.

“Let them go, cutie…” The woman said huskily to Raven, smirking crookedly at her. “This doesn’t concern you.” Clarke was out the door and rounding a corner to a secluded part of the grounds before she ever got to hear Raven’s sure-to-be-a-smartass response.

Lexa faced her when they were alone. The distant look in her eyes melting into frustration, then sorrow, and lastly… anger?!

Oh, what the fuck do YOU have to be angry about?!

Clarke steeled herself. Preparing for the inevitable argument about to go down. She tilted her head back, staring daggers at Lexa, who reciprocated with an equally stern gaze. Lexa stepped forward, propelling Clarke backwards until her back was pressed to the wall.

“No one’s allowed to touch you like that! I don’t care who the fuck it is, no one touches you like that!” Lexa hissed, anger discharging out of her with each word spoken, only to have remorse and a hollowness enter in its wake. “No one, Clarke. Not even me. You’re far too precious to be treated like some common whore.”

Lexa took a step back, covering her face with both hands, crumbling into herself a little.

“I’m an adult, Lexa.” When Clarke managed to speak, she made sure no weakness was present in her voice. “I know what I’m doing and I don’t care what your intentions were, you had NO right to jump in and cause a scene like that. To act like you own me! I don’t need your protection. I can handle myself!”

“I saw your reaction! He was clearly trespassing boundaries! I wasn’t about to let that happen!” Lexa stepped closer again; eyes rid of her earlier vulnerabilities and replaced with the previous fire. “I will apologize for my behavior with the girl earlier. That was NEVER planned and I realize how STUPID it was. And Costia… I don’t even know if I need to apologize for that, but fuck, I do anyways. Because say whatever the fuck you want, I know that shit bothered you. And yes, I’m fucking sorry it went down like that. But I refuse… I REFUSE to apologize for putting Bellamy on
his ass, because frankly, if ANYONE ever puts an unwanted finger on you, Clarke, I guarantee you they will get a much worse treatment than that.” Lexa was panting from anger now. Even in the darkness, in dim lighting, Clarke could see the blood invade her cheeks; see the air rapidly enter and leave her lungs; see how her eyes bore into her in a way that made Clarke’s knees shake a little. She was angry, and upset, and embarrassed from the unnecessary attention she was given from the brawl, but FUCK…. Lexa looked damn sexy like this! All savageness, and anger, and possessive… in her cute little suspenders…

“Clarke!” The shout snapped her back to real time, and she strained to focus on the still raging brunette in front of her. “I went easy on him just because his O’s brother. But if it had been anyone else…” She paused, hands resting on her waist and chin dropping to her chest while her head bobbed in a little shake, “I would have broken every fucking finger on their miserable hand for even thinking they have a right to touch you like that.”

And she fucking meant it. Clarke exhaled; only too aware of the inappropriate effect Lexa’s outburst was having on her body.

Clarke could do nothing except nod. A silent agreement; an unspoken surrender.

Lexa stepped forward, running her thumb across Clarke’s jaw. “Come home with me…” she whispered, placing a gentle hand around Clarke’s waist. “Let’s get the fuck out of here… come home with me, Clarke.”

Clarke wasn’t exactly sure what Lexa was asking for. Her original understanding was that Lexa wanted to sleep with her; an invitation to be intimate. But soon she realized it was a little more than that.

“Lexa… tell me about Costia.” She needed to know. She wasn’t sure she wanted to, but she knew she needed to know the history there. “Why have you never brought her up to me? I told you about my past… why haven’t you mentioned her? You had plenty of opp-“

Lexa hardened, the mention of the brunette made her clench up a little and take two steps back. “She’s no one you need to worry about, Clarke.”

The answer was short and robotic. Revealing that the topic of ‘Costia’ was a sore spot for Lexa.

“You can tell me.” Clarke pressed, trying to remain calm. “I opened up to you. You can do the same.”

Lexa shook her head. “I said she’s no one. Just… leave it alone, alright.”

And the insecurities she had fought so hard to push away came flooding back in. Lexa wasn’t willing to share. Wasn’t willing to open up. So her defense mechanism clicked back into place, and Clarke shut back down.

“Here I thought you wanted to make some fucking progress. And yet you can’t even-“ A relieved voice shouted nearby, interrupting her.

“They’re over here!” Raven yelled over to someone, closing the distance and reaching the two. “Lexa is still alive!”

Lexa growled, clearly displeased at the intrusion. “Raven, seriously?!? Can’t you see we’re having a fucking conversation? Give us a minute, will ya?!” She snapped.

“PG, why don’t you get your ass back in that party before I drag you across this pavement.” Raven
snapped right back, leering at Lexa.

“You stupid bitch!” Octavia joined them, storming for Lexa, only to be held back by Raven who saw her small fist come up and prepare to strike. “You BROKE his fucking nose, you imbecile! He’s a fucking ACTOR! His face is his trademark and you just BROKE HIS FUCKING NOSE!”

Lexa grinned, cocking her head to the side in a smug taunt. “Well, he sorta fucking deserved it, O. Maybe now he learned the importance of keeping his filthy hands off my girl!”

“Oh, you little…” Octavia tried swinging at Lexa, who easily dodged, letting out a laugh aimed to annoy the brunette trashing in Raven’s arms even further. Clarke just watched, dumbfounded and immobile, still too tipsy to fully process everything at once.

“Hey! HEY! Calm your ass down, Rocky! No one else needs to get their snouts broken tonight, right?! Bellamy will recover and be back working for that heaping pile of fresh dog shit in no time.” Raven piped in, pushing Octavia back who seemed to calm down a bit. “The One Hundred will probably just make it seem like it was intentional. That POS is all about shitting on people anyways… dumbass piece of shit show.”

“It’s called THE HUNDRED, idiot!” Octavia snarled, adjusting her ruffled dress. “And I swear, if you ruin his career because you can’t control your urges, Lexa, I’ll personally-“

“That show is going to the shitter regardless, O! It’s been sinking since they killed off that hot ass chick! If anything, I did him a favor! You should be thanking my ass!”

Octavia was about to lounge, but was halted by Bellamy, who wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her back. “Chill, O. It’s fine… Anya popped my nose back into place.” He dropped her, showing her the corrected damage. “I’ll live.”

Turning to Lexa, he gave her a subtle nod. “I deserved that. Thanks for, er, keeping me in check.”

Lexa nodded curtly. Clearing her throat before speaking. “Just keep your hands to yourself, Blake. Or next time it will be the rest of your worthless face I mess up.”

Bellamy chuckled, “Fair enough, Woods.” Turning to Clarke. “I’m really sorry. I don’t know what came over me and I apologize for my behavior… I never meant to make you feel uncomfortable.”

Clarke nodded after a brief moment, still slightly tripping. I feel like I’m in the Wizard of Oz right fucking now…

Lincoln joined their growing party a few seconds later. “O, car is out front. Let’s take Bell to the ER and get that checked out.”

“Ahhhhhh! Quit being a bunch of diaper-wearing pussies!” Anya strutted in, one hand stuffed into the pocket of her pressed slacks, her flashy blazer slung over her shoulder and held there by a finger. “He’ll be fine! A broken nose never killed anyone.”

Anya’s gaze flicked over to Lexa, then Clarke. “Hmmm, I’ll admit… she’s hot, Lex. I don’t blame you for wanting to hit that.” Her eyes ran down Clarke’s body, and Lexa stepped in front of her, acting as a cover from Anya’s gaze.

“Get the fuck out of here, An. All of this is because of YOU.” Lexa accused, crossing her arms across her chest.

“You know what, I take that as a compliment, baby cuz.” The smug blonde smirked, moving closer.
“Stop being so damn whipped and get back to the party… plenty of willing pussy there waiting for you, Lex.”

And before Lexa had the opportunity to pounce, Raven did it for her, slapping Anya with intent right across her smug face.

Anya let out a small laugh, shrugged, and turned to face Raven, who pulled her shoulders back ready for a fight.

“Quite a hand on you, cutie…” Anya husked, leaning closer to the spirited girl. “Not bad… for a cripple.”

Raven huffed, smirking back. “Please… brace or not, I can pin your slinky ass down with both my arms tied behind my back.”

Anya’s smile grew wider, and she stepped close enough to breathe her next words directly against Raven’s pursed lips. “Oh, I’m counting on it…” She winked, pulling away and walking back towards the party. By the sound of it, the music had resumed.

Raven shook her head, slightly baffled. “NOW I see where you get it from, PG… I guess ‘massive asshole’ runs in the family. Clarke… car is waiting.”

Clarke nodded, walking towards Raven. Lexa’s hand reached for hers. It was careful and gentle, but full of meaning. “Clarke… wait… please, let me drive you home. So we can talk and figure out–”

Clarke pulled away, sighing heavily. “Lexa, I don’t think we have anything further to discuss. Enjoy the rest of your party.” And walked away, along with Raven, Octavia and her brother.

Entering the car after Raven, she glanced back, catching a rather devastated Lexa watching her depart. Clarke watched carefully, straining her neck as far as it would twist to get a better view. She thought she noticed Lexa pull her keys out of her pocket; noticed the two women exchange words and phrases, and watched Lexa move around Costia and head for her car. Good, she’s gonna leave. Good Lexa…good Lexa. Lexa purred the car to life with the push of a button, moving towards the driver’s side. Even though she was still monumentally pissed, she admired Lexa’s behavior to want to correct her wrongs. It was a passive, short-lived moment however, which resulted in her heart nearly succumbing to an abrupt stop the second she noticed Costia move after Lexa, walk around the car and open the passenger side door. Clarke inhaled a sharp breath, and felt Raven place a caring hand on her shoulder. She was watching too, Clarke guessed.

Unable to glance away, she continued to watch helplessly as a grinning Costia slid in eagerly and slammed the door shut. She watched further as the car reversed and started a slow crawl a few yards behind them. She finally faced forward only when Lexa’s car disappeared from view. It’s a funny thing, how hope works. Even in desolate moments, it still finds a way to slink into your mind, and you are helpless other than to hold on firmly to it until realization finally overcomes any chances of
that hope ever manifesting. Clarke knew Lexa’s plan the second the small brunette entered her car. She got further confirmation when Octavia texted Raven later that night, asking if Lexa was with her. Apparently, Anya had driven back to an empty mansion and found no signs of Lexa ever returning home.

She turned to Raven, who decided to spend the night and was currently sharing her bed. “You awake?” Clarke whispered into abysmal darkness.

Raven stirred besides her. “I’m here, babe.”

Clarke waited… waited so long that she was certain the silent interval had lulled Raven into sleep. And even when she was ready to speak; ready to utter the words that carefully aligned in her mind and transformed into a coherent sentence, she waited some more.

Finally, after what felt like hours later, she finally breached the silence. “If my only options are security versus uncertainty, I prefer security, Ray. I prefer safe, and boring, and pain free. I prefer ignorant bliss. I prefer a life capable of enduring…”

She croaked… swallowing down the emotions rippling through her; grateful that the darkness concealed the tears spilling from her eyes.

Raven stirred again. “You prefer a life without Lexa?”

Clarke waited. And waited. And waited.

And then nodded. “Yea… I prefer a life without Lexa.”

Chapter End Notes

...OK so PLEASE don’t hate us!! We just felt like this was an appropriate turn for the story and what we have in store for these two at this point in time.

Please feel free to vent, rant, and yell at us. We have a very open line of communication with everyone thus far and we will continue to have one!

We really want to hear what you all have to say about this chapter and where you guys think things might go from here ;)

Also don’t forget to come talk to me on Twitter @TaJat07 ...I would love to hear from you all!

I don’t use mine very often, but will start to if you guys want to chat privately...

@silver_snake222

*PS:

Chapter 8 will be out within the next 2 weeks but after that it is going to be a little while longer until we can get Chapter 9 out to you all. SilverSnake222 will be out of the country in Europe for a couple of weeks at the end of the month and I will be doing some traveling within the states so it is going to be a little difficult for us to write during that time. However, we do promise to give you guys an update as soon as we are back! :)

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR CONTINUOUS, AMAZING, UNDENIABLE
SUPPORT!!
WE LOVE YOU ALL <3

xoxo
Tajat07, SilverSnake222
Hey Guys!!! We Are BACK!

So before we begin we wanted to just say a few words first and address something that we felt was very important to us...
We understand you guys may not always agree with what we write or where we take the story, and we're open to hearing all your comments, good and bad, but please keep them courteous and professional. There is No need for bad mouthing or cursing or "telling us to die." It makes for a very negative environment for us as the writers and puts us in a bad spot. We always appreciate constructive criticism and overall positive reviews, but there is absolutely zero need for aggressiveness. We write this story out of love in hopes that it will bring people a little humor, love, and laughter into their lives.

OK so now that *that* is out of the way... HELLO!!! :)

We are SO excited and sooo sooo anxious about this chapter. We want you all to know that it has taken us the entire 2 weeks to write this. We put so much time, work, emotion, love and tears into this chapter. It has been truly an inner battle for us both to write it but we do believe it to be one of our best ones yet. We love everything about it...

After a lot of debating back and forth and reviewing it, we decided to split the chapter into 2 parts. It was already over 50 pages and not fully done, so we felt it best to split it for the better of the story and to be able to give you all an update as we promised.

We hope you all like it and hang in there with us for this crazy ride we are about to embark on :)

We LOVE you all and we are so grateful for all of your constant support that we have received for the story thus far!

SO with all our love here is Chapter 8 Part 1: A Life Without You.

xx
TaJat07, SilverSnake222

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The voices were becoming clearer with every shallow breath she gulped; fully aware of the burning sensation the cool oxygen produced as it found its way down her throat. Her tongue felt as bare as sandpaper and although she was still on the brink of consciousness and incoherence, she swore there was a sharp object jabbing into her shoulder blade.

“If she dies, do we get dibs on her fortune? You know… by association, and all? Is there still time to forge a will?” A small, still somewhat muffled voice spoke out, and even in her haze, Lexa determined the voice wasn’t an unfamiliar one. “If so, I call dibs on the jet skis and Porsche. It’s about time Papa Smurf retires!”

More poking. What is that?! Is John back? John is that you? Who the fuck is John? Why do I keep repeating the name John?! She wanted to speak, but although her brain had fully awakened, the rest of her body wasn’t ready to follow orders quite yet.

“Kid, between the ribs! Get a good, well-deserved jab in there.” Another familiar voice instructed, and she immediately felt the poking conclude on her shoulder and start between each rib. I’m gonna fucking kill John!... Once I can fucking move! GET OFF OF ME, you FAT ASS ELEPHANTS!

She tried stirring, and felt her arm plop off the side of the… Shit! Why is my bed so fucking hard and uncomfortable? Another small stir and her nose dipped into a crack between two wooden planks. Hey! Where the fuck is my mattress?! Did Indra get rid of it? Ahh, is this another one of Anya’s fucking pranks?!

Snickering. Chuckling. More poking. “She feels like mush. I might as well be poking a blob of jelly right now. Think she’s ticklish?!”

Oh, fuck. Oh, hell. YES, I’m VERY TICKLISH! She tried prying her eyes open, but a coat of eye gunk glued the lids together into an inseparable bond.

“Give it a go. Stay away from her nasty pits though. She smells like a mini bar that lost a fight to a garbage truck, only to get tossed into fresh sewage.”

Slim fingers suddenly dug into her sides, wiggling relentlessly until her body finally caught up with her brain and she jolted back into a semi-sitting, semi-kneeling position. Her eyes ripped open, and a yelp escaped her parched throat.

“It worked!” A startled Aden, hair tousled and grin widely spreading over his face, stared up at her in baffled amusement. “Goooooood morning, sunshine! Gosh, you really do reek…” His nose wrinkled, and Lexa had to blink a few times to bat away the confusion. “Did you spend the night out here?!”

Looking around, she finally noted that her bed had been transformed into an uncomfortable, wooden, public bench. Looking up at the second figure that stood a few feet away, arms crossed and face sporting a not-so-friendly scowl, it finally dawned on her that she wasn’t at home. Raven stood her ground, stiff and watching, while Aden continued blasting question after question.

“Did you drive drunk?! Lexa! That’s stupid! You could have been hurt or killed! Where is your car? Wait, where is the rest of your clothes?! Did you go to your party dressed like that? Are you trying to pull a Miley Cyrus? ‘Cuz honestly, it’s not really working for you…”

The question made her heart plummet to her stomach. She frantically looked down her body, eyes widening as she absorbed her less-than-proper appearance. Fuck. No… Please Lexa, tell me you
Grateful that her pants were still on, she cringed when she noted her belt was undone and loose against her waist. Her feet were covered in grimy socks but her shoes were nowhere to be found, and neither was her button-up shirt. She sat there in her under-garment, which made the situation all that much more disturbing.

“I, err, I don’t remember kid…” She grumbled; voice rough and unsteady. She blinked from frustration, trying to rattle her brain for information. “I guess I must have passed out.”

Aden snickered, leaning forward and wrapping his small arms around her neck, bringing her into a hug. “Well, at least you’re ok… just don’t do that again, Lex. Driving drunk is irresponsible.” He pulled back, brushing her wild, matted hair from her damp face. “I would have been devastated if something were to happen to you. Clarke too.”

The mention of the name triggered the suppressed memories to resurface, and her eyes met Raven’s steeled stare as it all flooded back into place.

“Kid, go and set up the field. Once you’re done, start doing your warm-up exercises. I’ll come train with you in a bit, alright?” Raven ordered, eyes never leaving Lexa’s in an unspoken warning.

Aden pulled away, giving Lexa another smile, before dashing towards the grassy field.

Lexa hesitated. After noticing Raven was making no effort to initiate the conversation, she sighed and opened her mouth to speak…not sure where to even start.

“Raven… I-I fucked up…” Lexa breached the dam with that damaging confession; feeling fresh tears well up in her eyes. “And I know, I know, an apology isn’t enough… but I am so, so, so sorry!”

She was choking on sobs now; trying to harvest what remaining strength she had left, but there was nothing. Just a profound hollowness that cut straight through her.

“Shove it, Woods. I’m not interested in listening to your half-assed apology. Now get the hell out of here before I lose my already thinning patience and call the cops!” Raven hissed, taking careful glances over her shoulder to where Aden arranged the bright, orange cones into a straight line and weaved through them with a soccer ball. “Aden doesn’t need this kind of shit in his life. Neither does Clarke!”

Lexa stood suddenly; arms outstretched in a plea at Raven. She swayed for a moment; her vision blurring and darkening as the blood rushed to her fragile head all at once. Her foot nudged a hard object discarded by the bench, which caused it to roll forward on the gravel. Looking down, she recognized the large, empty bottle of whiskey that came to a stop near Raven’s feet.

Lexa stared at the bottle for a while, trying to formulate thoughts in her head that still didn’t make much sense. *I never buy that brand of whiskey… Wait, John…*

Raven chuckled, giving her head a light shake. “Once a drunk, always a drunk. Once a player, always player.” She stated humorously, yet Lexa caught the rage mingled in her tone. “Once an idiot, always an idiot. Who was I kidding…? Clarke deserves better! Aden deserves better! You’re nothing more than a sad, pathetic, miserable excuse of a person!”

Lexa swallowed with difficulty. “Raven… Just hear me out. That wasn’t me… I never meant to hurt Clarke! Ray, I-“

“Oh, of course not! Your intentions are always impeccably innocent and pure, Lexa! I’m sure that’s
the lie you told yourself even while *pounding* into your pretty little side piece last night, am I right? *Costia*, is it? I’m sure Clarke will fully understand that reasoning.”

Lexa recoiled. The accusation left her breathless and stunned; she wrestled for a reaction but none came.

“Get the *HELL* out of here! Don’t make me fight you in front of a boy that *worships* the ground you walk on! Because I *will*! It will crush him to know the type of *idol* you are, but hey, what’s more pain on top of his already *fucked* up life.” Raven was holding back. Lexa could see the restraint building up in her tense muscles.

“Raven… I didn’t *sleep* with Costia. You have to believe me! Nothing *happened* between us, I swear that on my *life*!” Lexa could do nothing but beg. Not even sure if that statement was fully accurate, because in all honesty, the events of the previous night were still a little blurry. But *screwing Costia*?! I *would* NEVER! I *could* NEVER do that… right?

“And I suppose that hickey on your neck just *magically* appeared there?!” Raven scoffed, grinding her teeth at the rage she was trying so hard to control. “You fucking *pig*.”

Lexa’s hands shot up to her neck, gently massaging the flesh beneath her right ear; sure enough, she felt tenderness there. *But… I didn’t! I know I didn’t! I’d never ruin what I have with Clarke!* A thought suddenly occurred to her. *Sober me wouldn’t… drunk me…well, she’s just about capable of anything.*

And then it clicked.

*The Tesla swerved slightly off road, and in a panic, Lexa rotated the steering wheel in the opposite direction to correct it. Her eyes were slowly fading; zooming in and out of focus with every passing second.*

*She shook her head in an effort to prevent sleep and exhaustion from settling in. ‘C’mon, Lexa, only a little further to Clarke’s.’ She was pumping herself up internally, trying to push back the feeling of dread beginning to take over… ‘You fucked up but you can fix this. You can fix it!’*  

*Another swerve, a little more aggressive this time. ‘Ok, maybe I can stop for a little bit. Ten minutes to get my head together and then I’ll keep going. Clarke, I’m coming… I’m coming…’*

*She curved the car into the first empty parking lot she came across. It was eerily deserted. No surprise there though, Lexa thought, it’s 4 fucking AM!*

*Once the car was safely on park, she leaned her head forward and rested her forehead on the steering wheel, breathing in deep gulps to try and bring herself back to normal.*

*She closed her eyes, and immediately saw a staggering, stumbling, miniature figure of herself carrying a bottle of vodka begin to shout slurred words up at her.*

*Drunk Mini Me: ‘ey! Dumass! Down ‘ere, ya fuckin’ brainless twat!*  

*Lexa sighed. ‘Not you guys again… seriously, how many of you are there? You know what, don’t bother answering. Go away.’*  

*Drunk Mini Me (takes swig and burps): Why… so…serious, love? You and I…we used to be best pals, ‘member? Hang all the time and shit…”*
Lexa tried to erase the image. But the persistent little asshole wouldn’t leave.

Drunk Mini Me: You dun fucked up again… like you always do. My, my… Clarke will be upset. (Laughs wickedly, then burps again). It’s tight, cheer up…there’s always Costia. (She smirked). Yes, Costia… you missed her, didn’t you?

Lexa had enough. She snapped her eyes open and slammed her hands against the roof of the car, cursing in the process. The air suddenly felt suffocating, and she stepped out, waltzing over to a nearby bench. She sat on it for a minute, giving her lungs time to refill on much needed air.

The night was warm, surprisingly so for the typical L.A. night. In the deafening silence, she could hear the chirping of crickets in the surrounding trees and shrubs. The sound somehow relaxed her, and she reluctantly closed her eyes again; dozing off to the staggered tune that seemed to crescendo until there was only silence again.

She was pleased to discover that Drunk Mini Me appeared to have retired for the night and sighed from relief. ‘I never liked that tiny bitch anyways…’

She came to her senses when a rough hand shook her back to consciousness, scrambling to figure out at which point she had even fallen asleep. Blinking rapidly, her eyes adjusted well enough to make out a slim, disheveled guy hovering over her.

“Yo! Get up sleeping beauty, this is MY fucking bench! Go find your own!” He grumbled, sounding irritated, and Lexa shot up into a sitting position. Just as quickly as she created the space, the random stranger sat down next to her, placing a bottle of cheap whiskey in the space between them. “You don’t seem to be from around ‘ere.” He huffed, giving Lexa a good scan. “It’s not safe for chicks like you to be out here this late… you in some kinda trouble or sumthin’?”

He took a swig, extending the bottle over to Lexa, who accepted mostly out of habit and a tiny bit of fear of what could happen if she rejected. “Err, no. I was just on my way somewhere… too drunk to drive and decided to pull over.” She took a swig, relishing the warmth of the liquid gushing down her throat. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to steal your bench, Mister.”

“The name’s John the Bum.” He introduced himself, reclaiming the whiskey bottle and taking another shot. “You?”

“Lexa… the uh, Raccoon?” She offered, receiving a light chuckle from the strange guy, who once again passed her the bottle.

“Well, nice to meet ya’, ‘Lexa the Raccoon’! And welcome to my humble abode!” He stretched out both arms and waved them at the area around the bench.

Lexa gasped. “You LIVE here?” Another swig, and she felt herself relax more and more once she established John was far too passive, and too drunk, to be a threat. She looked over at him, finally taking a closer look. His beard was untrimmed and dirty. His hair, although probably straight, was tangled and sticking out in every direction. His clothes resembled rags and he was barefooted; feet black from filth and accumulated dirt.

“You! Ain’t it a peach?” He laughed, reaching for the bottle again. “Been here for a long time. Gotta say, you my very first visitor! Well, with the exception of the critters, of course.”

Lexa nodded, mouthing a bemused ‘wow’ at him.

“You seem to be a person of means, if that fancy little car over there is any indication… why the hell are you out here squandering like the homeless folk?” His question was genuine, derived from sheer
curiosity.

“I, um, I don’t know. It’s complicated, I guess.” Lexa explained, reaching for the bottle.

John nodded. His gaze shifted straight ahead this time. “Yea, if there’s one thing I understand, it’s ‘complicated’…”

Lexa took another swig, handing him the bottle back. “Can I ask what brought you here?”

John faced her then. She momentarily tensed when she saw his weasel-like face and cunning bright eyes squint at her. But just as quickly, the features softened, and his gaze returned to a spot straight ahead. “A lot of this…” He spoke, lifting the bottle of whiskey, which happened to be nearly empty. “And a lot of bad decisions…”

Lexa was silent, not entirely sure how to jump in. But John continued.

“Foster parents kicked me out six years ago, when I was seventeen. Wanna know why? Go on, ask me why, it’s always a good time!” He preened, suddenly excited for the opportunity.

“Oh, um, why?” Lexa asked.

“For calling the cops on them after my foster dad nearly beat my foster mom to death…” He chuckled again, taking another swig. “With a hammer, mind ya’. I got home from school one day and found her face down, drowning in a puddle of her own blood…”

Lexa looked away, feeling a pang of sorrow for him. A total stranger…

“She lived. But the son of a bitch… the bastard never even got booked. He walked away, scotch free. And in the end, kicked me out for calling it in.” Another gulp, a bigger one this time.

“Been a nomad ever since…moving here and there…never really staying in a single spot, you know. But this bench…I like this bench.”

An awkward silence held them both in place, Lexa wasn’t sure what to do or even say. She was about to form some shady excuse and leave, but then John spoke again.

“From one addict to another, it never really gets better, you know… The booze, the drugs… they never make anything better. It’s been six years, and I’m still waiting for the part where the pain ‘goes away’. ” He laughed, shaking his head, staring down at the bottle in his hand. “Still waiting for everything to get better. But it hasn’t. And I don’t know if it ever will.”

Lexa was floored. How is it possible that this man, this BUM, this filthy, smelly, nobody of a person, was giving her life advice?! She slumped back against the bench, feeling shamefully defeated the second she realized that she, Lexa Woods -rich, famous, POWERFUL – was far more worthless and less deserving than the homeless guy sitting next to her.

She placed a hand on his forearm. “It can. It always can, John. Here- “Inspiration hit her right then and there, and without a second thought or hesitation, Lexa began to strip.

John’s eyes widened, and Lexa saw that it wasn’t from excitement, but rather from pure terror. “Whooaaaaa, I’m not like that! Find some chill, lady! Gotta at least take me on a date first!”

Lexa laughed. “It’s not that!” She unbuttoned her shirt, completely at ease that she was in her undergarments and somewhat exposed to a complete stranger, and handed him the clothes. She moved to her feet, untying her brand new shoes and slipping them off her feet. She passed them over
to a stunned John as well. “For you... take it! I don’t need it. You know what- “

She pulled out her wallet, gave him all the cash in it (only 500 cash but better than nothing, she thought). Still feeling high on her newfound charitable spirit, Lexa dared to do one last act of contribution. Digging into her front pocket, she pulled out the keys to her Tesla. “Take it. It’s yours.”

John stared wildly at her, eyes nearly popping out of his scrawny face. He reached around the back of the bench and plucked a short twig from the ground. Lexa was distracted, thinking about what else she could do... how else she could help.

The sharp, stinging swap of the stick smacked her right beneath her right ear, and she screamed from the waves of crippling pain that washed over her. “OUCH! WHAT THE FUCK, JOHN! WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU?!”

“What the hell is wrong with YOU?!” He countered, throwing the stick away. “Why are you doing this?! Who are you?! Are you an Alien?! Am I being abducted?!”

He looked up and around, searching for UFO’s or signs of extraterrestrial life.

“What! NO! You fucking IDIOT! It’s a gift! Take the fucking gift, JOHN!” Lexa shouted, soothing the still stinging sensation on her neck. “Now GO, I’ll call a cab and head home and still have 9 other cars in my fucking garage... I won’t miss it. I promise.”

She saw his hesitation. And she understood. No one ever put him first, she figured. No one ever gifted him a present, or extend a helping hand in a time of need. Loneliness was probably all he’d ever known.

“Go, John... get yourself a room tonight and a good meal. Sleep in a REAL bed and take a shower!” They both laughed, and Lexa saw a tear trail down the short distance from his eyes to his beard. “Tomorrow, start fighting for a better life. Without this...” she took the empty bottle from his hand, “and I’ll do the same. What do you say?”

After another moment of hesitation, he acquiesced, giving her a single nod. He gathered his gifts, and reached for the keys. “Thank you... I’ll forever be grateful, Lexa the Raccoon...”

Lexa nodded back. “It's Woods, by the way,” she told him, she could have sworn she witnessed a flare ignite in his eyes upon hearing the name, but dismissed the thought. "Lexa Woods. Now go... safe travels in your journey, John.”

He hesitated a moment, this time for an entirely different reason that she could not identify, and then smiled appreciatively before making his way toward the car.

Lexa watched him reverse it and drive it cautiously down the road and out of sight. She sighed, heart swelling from happiness and pride. And then she realized...

“FUCK! MY FUCKING PHONE IS IN THE CAR!” But... she quickly let it go... because after surrendering a 200-thousand-dollar vehicle to a strange man she had just met, losing her iPhone in the process wasn’t really THAT big a deal.

Lexa plopped back down on the bench harshly, hands flying up to her face to press her stinging eyes against her palms. “Ho-ly shit.” Was all she could exclaim. “Ok, ok... Raven I’m just gonna need you to hear me out, alright? Please, let me explain...Look, I NEVER slept with Costia. I took her home and left, Ray. I was on my way to Clarke’s, to apologize! But I was still drunk and sleepy, so I pulled over…” Lexa continued with a step-by-step explanation of the previous memory, emphasizing...
the ‘why’ and ‘how’ she had been sleeping on the bench, still drunk, and partially undressed. She especially clarified the hickey and its origination.

Raven just stared at her, deep in thought, weighing Lexa’s peculiar story on a sensitive scale that was dangerously close to tipping against Lexa’s favor. She reluctantly considered the possibility of Lexa speaking the truth when she noted that one factor about Lexa speaking the truth when she noted that one factor about Lexa’s story made sense: Her car was nowhere to be found. Her scale dipped slightly the opposite way now; the side supporting Lexa’s story. Raven sighed deeply, deciding to give the frantic girl the benefit of doubt.

She closed the distance between them and sat down next to Lexa on the bench, casually glancing over to where Aden chased a lone, gray goose off the soccer field. “You’re a fucking basket case, PG… you know that?! That’s got to be the most delusional load of bullshit I’ve ever heard… John the Bum…” She scoffed. An idea graced her unexpectedly just then. She pulled out her phone and dialed Lexa’s cell number. Surely, if her story were true, this John the Bum character would be on the receiving end.

One ring. Two rings. Three rings. Lexa watched the entire process without blinking once. Raven picked up on the fact that the girl was turning an unnatural shade after a moment, possibly from the air she had forgotten to release.

“Uh, hello?” A coarse, sheepish male voice answered.

“Who’s this?” Raven spoke right away, throwing an inquiring look over at Lexa (who was neon blue now).

“This is John th- Murphy.” John cleared his throat. “Yea, John Murphy. Who are you?”

“Not important. Hey, Murphy, how did you get your hands on that iPhone?” Raven was ready to get to the bottom of this; she just needed a few more details for full verification…

“Uhh… Aliens?” He responded uncertainly, and then sighed. “Is Lexa asking for her things back? I can return them… I figured it was too good to be true…”

Raven glanced sideways, and then clicked her tongue. “Nah, kid, it’s all yours. Go H.A.M with that Tesla for all it’s worth…” She was about to disconnect but then…

“Ham? She didn’t gimme no ham! I would have appreciated some roasted ham to be honest… these dumb, leather shoes are more uncomfortable than my dirty underwear… and I haven’t had a shower in over a month! Oh and tell Lexa she has 35 missed calls and text messages… I tried to snoop but I need a passcode.” He finished and took a loud mouthful of air.

“Can you read me the names on the screen?” Raven asked, curious.

“Uhhhhhh…there’s Anya… Indra…Costia… Octavia… Ok, seriously, where do you people come up with these names? Oh, and a Clarkey. She only sent one message though. That’s all.”

Raven’s curiosity was now on full blast, and she was strangely surprised to hear Clarke’s name mixed with the bunch. She had been with the blonde the entire night. Before, during, and after the whole Lexa incident. When the fuck did Clarke text her?!

Oh.

The mini bathroom break, following her post-breakdown moment in bed with Raven. But what the fuck had Clarke texted Lexa then?!
“Woods, passcode, NOW. John needs to unlock the phone.” Raven demanded, just writhing to know…

“0000.” Lexa surrendered, without a moment of hesitation.

“Should have guessed… always putting the minimal effort into everything possible…” Raven regurgitated the numbers to John, who chuckled and grumbled a ‘could have figured that out on my own… stupid me…’

“Ok, I’m in. Which ones do you want me to look first? I figured that’s what you need right?”

“Clarke’s… what did she say?!” Raven blurted, receiving a panicked look from Lexa, who overheard and was now even more impossibly purple.

“Ok… hang on…”

Raven waited longer than she thought necessary.

“OK, she sa- “

“You know what, John. Don’t. I don’t want to know… I don’t need to know and neither does anyone else. It’s best this way…” And with that, she hung up.

“What?! RAVEN, are you MAD?! What if she wanted to talk?! What if she wanted to hear me OUT! Call him back right now, Raven! Please, I-I need to know! I need to!” Lexa begged, but Raven didn’t budge. She stood her ground. Whatever the message was, fate had intervened its delivery for obvious reasons.

She’d be a fool to meddle with whatever it was that the preordained had in store for the likes of Lexa and Clarke.

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John pulled the phone away from his ear the second the line went dead. He reopened the text message Raven had previously requested, the one with the name ‘Clarkey’ bolded on the top of the screen. He allowed his eyes a slower scan over the simple, five-worded sentence that had been received at 3:55 AM that morning, according to the time stamp hovering right over the blue-clouded message.

‘I could have loved you…’


He flipped back to the page listing the other threads of messages. He clicked on the most recent one, the name currently earning the top tier, which had five unread messages that had been received only a few hours ago.

‘I had a lot of fun last night. ;’

‘It was really good seeing you and… reconnecting, if you can call it that. ;’

‘I hope we can do it again soon?? I’m staying for a few extra days, and well, you are welcome here anytime, obviously. :D’

‘Maybe I can make you dinner one of these nights? And we can catch up? I’d really love that.’
‘I still care for you, Lexy. Always have, and always will. :*’

John pondered the information for a moment. Trying to puzzle the nonsensical pieces into place, but unable to fully grasp the foreign, elusive context that was key in this situation. In the end, he deduced that he liked this ‘Clarkey’ chick…just because she sounded honest yet wounded. ‘Costia’ on the other hand, well… he just plain didn’t like the bitch. Or her dumb over-usage of smiley faces…

Bored, he opened up the text thread from ‘Anya’.

‘Where you at? Got us each 2 chicks who are DTF tonight.’

‘Got 2 blondes for you… so you can forget about what’s-her-face…’

‘Hellooooo! They’re ready to go! Where you at, dickface?!?!’

‘FUCK, did you LEAVE?’

‘YOU FUCKING SHITBAG, YOU’RE WITH COSTIA AREN’T YOU??? I CAN’T FIND HER EITHER!’

‘I knew you’d enjoy my gift ;) Don’t ever say I never did shit for you.’

‘Well, I guess it’s just me and 4 sexy ladies tonight!’

‘I’m bringing them back to your place. You can have the girls once I’m through with them… just like old times.’

‘Oh, and later bring that Latin friend of blondie’s around. I’ll get her screaming in Spanish in no time.’

John was relieved he wasn’t pressed to share the contents of the messages with Raven. Whether for better or worse, some things were just better left unsaid.

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They sat in silence for another moment, the early morning haze dissipating with every readjustment of the rising sun in the horizon. The crickets had long quieted and now the birds chirped in their place, and both sets of eyes watched a golden haired boy zoom from one end of the field to the other; a pissed off goose now chasing Aden instead. Raven snickered next to Lexa when the bird landed a well-deserved peck to the boys’ butt cheek, laughing a little harder when Aden screeched from pain and picked up his pace, yelling ‘Sorry, Mr. Duck!’ in hopes the angry bird would understand and forgive him.

“I was there the day he was born… Clarke and I were 12 and forced to wait for the brat’s arrival in the visitors’ area while Abby screamed to the seven hells and Jake screamed right back at her begging her to not break his hand.” Raven stopped and laughed. Lexa smiled but remained silent, allowing her to sail through the old oceans of reminiscence undisturbed. “We both wanted Aden to be an Adriana, or you know, a girl. But alas, we were graced instead with this bleach blonde, smiley baby boy that took 3 firm slaps on pale ass cheeks to get him crying.”

Lexa was smiling; perfectly picturing the events unfold as if she was watching one of Raven’s personal home-made films.

“I loathed the little turd the second he was born. Clarke immediately fell for his dumb baby charms, and Abby and Jake were smitten even before he popped out. But not me. Nope. I saw right through
those chubby, reddish cheeks; that toothless grin; those round, doe-like eyes… I was not having it. I hated him even more when the kid started to crawl a few months down the line, and the little peanut would follow me everywhere. Or when he started to walk, and I’d dash from room to room, knowing he was trying to chase me, and would grow frustrated and stumble and fall flat on his padded butt…but not once did he ever shed a tear. No, the little weirdo would just start laughing madly, as if me making a fool out of him was the funniest thing in the universe. I hated him more when he started speaking that stupid baby gibberish… The kid sounded like a broken record, spitting saliva everywhere. I remember sitting out in the family room, all of us being there. Abby was trying to get Aden to say ‘Mama’, but he just kept laughing and spitting on her face. Clarke, Jake and I were playing scrabble, which I despised since Clarke would always win. But everything sort of stopped the second Aden spoke his first little word. ‘Waven’. He said it twice, turning in his mom’s arms to look right at me and smile his usual dumb toothless smile… and I just shrugged. Played it off like it was no big deal. But… that day, was the day I knew I loved the little doofus.”

Lexa had to look away when a tear raced down Raven’s cheek, and she quickly brushed it away.

“January 22, 2011. Beautiful Saturday, much like today surprisingly. Clarke and Abby were out running errands, buying a dress for Clarke for the junior dance at school. They asked me to tag along but I was feeling particularly lazy that day, so I opted to stay home and play video games and whatnot. A few hours passed and I get a call from five-year-old Aden, who was now fluent on phone usage thanks to me. He had stayed home with Jake for the day, and he called to say he was bored, that his daddy was napping and he had no one to play with. He begged me to come over, but I told him to stop being a little punk and keep himself company. Another hour went by and he called again, this time sounding a little more upset, which was unusual for Aden, who was always very happy and bubbly. I cursed and said I’d be there in 2 minutes, a short walk since I still lived down the street from the Griffins.”

Raven inhaled, blinking at an abnormally fast pace. Lexa saw the tears pool at the corners of her eyes, which she was desperately trying to fend off.

“When I got there…”Her voice cracked slightly, urging her to clear her throat and try again. “When I got there, Aden was clinging to an incredibly pale and frigid Jake, his little arms wrapped around his father’s neck and his little head pressed down against his unmoving chest. I immediately knew something was wrong. The way his body was…positioned, the way it barely budged even with Aden’s weight on top of him… the way he never responded to me calling his name over, and over, and over again…”

Lexa was biting her lower lip, teeth sinking into it until she tasted the strong traces of iron seep into her drying tongue. It was soothing, and it kept her somewhat intact, for the moment at least.

“Aden turned when he saw me calling his dad, and in his most serious, more calming voice he said, ‘I can’t hear his heartbeat, Ray-ray… is his heart napping too?!’ and I-I, just lost it, then… I couldn’t, couldn’t believe it, or understand it… still, somehow I managed to untangle Aden from his father, twisting him in my arms and carrying him out of there. Once we got to my house, I sat him down and stepped out to make the call. Once it was over, I walked back inside on shaky legs, picked Aden up and took him to the kitchen. My mom’s boyfriend of the week had brought cupcakes the night before, and so we sat there, eating cupcakes, until we heard the sirens. Aden never asked, and he never cried. Even after his mom and sister arrived, even after accidently witnessing his dead dad’s body being removed from his home on a gurney. He never once lost it. He just… held on to me, my hand. I wanted to cry, to break down and sob right alongside Abby, and Clarke, but I couldn’t. Not when I had a five-year-old staring up at me with conflicted eyes. Eyes that were only too aware and damaged, hurt and tainted…but never broken.”
Lexa sniffled. There was no holding this in. Not when it felt so familiar. Not when it felt this close to home.

“Clarke told me about the crash… about you being there, in the same car as your parents and all.” Raven lowered her eyes, a sentimental gesture to indicate her heartfelt apology without having to express it in words. “You and Aden have a lot in common…”

Lexa nodded, and after fully processing what Raven was indirectly indicating, she smiled.

Raven stood after a moment, and tossed Lexa her phone. “Call yourself an Uber. Go home and shower, for the love of all that is holy and sacred… the grass is starting to die from your horrid stench.”

“Raven…you think I still have a shot? Think she’ll forgive me?” Lexa asked shamefully, unable to make direct eye contact.

“She’s not one who easily forgives or forgets. For good reason. And even if you are telling me the truth, about Costia, I will not intervene on your behalf again, PG. I’ve vouched for you before…this time you’re on your own. Leave the phone on top of my bag once you’re done.” She instructed, glancing over at Aden at the precise moment the bird chomped down on his finger; the finger he had been using to nag the bird for being such a ‘bad boy.’ “Gotta go save the kid before he becomes bird food… may the odds be ever in your favor, Woods! Oh, and if you ever get a chance, bring this Murphy guy around… dude seems to have it all figured out, I tell ya’.”

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The weekend trickled by hour- after- uneventful-hour, minute-after-restless-minute; second-after-agonizing-second. The 4567392 text messages she sent, the 46475 calls she made, and the 463826 Facebook/twitter/Instagram/Snapchat/skype chat attempts all gone unanswered and ignored. Raven was no help either. Insisting on staying out of it, that she no longer wanted to contribute to Lexa’s mess of things anymore than she already had. She considered reaching out to Aden, but even in her desperation and frenzied state, she knew that decision was unwise. Aden was blissfully ignorant to the situation between Lexa and his sister, and so she knew it was imperative that it remain that way. She was so beyond desperate, she was even considering buying a fucking owl and training it to deliver hand written letters to Clarke’s fucking bedroom window, for fuck’s sake.

Monday morning provided her with a much needed sliver of hope. Although her mood was slightly misaligned with her usual overconfident spirit, she still managed to arrive to class astonishingly early, dressed impressively dapper, and of course, carrying a large Starbucks coffee in one hand and Clarke’s favorite breakfast in the other: bagel with cream cheese and two strawberry frosted donuts. Lexa had the donut lady at the donut shop write out the word ‘Sorry’ on each one with blue sprinkles.

She sat in her usual seat, behind Clarke’s usual seat, and waited. The coffee had cooled by the time class started, Jaha immediately jumping into business the second the clock hit 9 am, even while students still slowly and drowsily made their unhappy way to their seats. Yet Clarke’s remained vacant. Lexa looked around, that sliver of hope shrinking to a decimal of its size with every second that ticked by.

Finally, her eyes zoned in to a mess of blonde curls streaking down the rows of chairs on the opposite side of the classroom. Clarke, carrying her own cup of coffee, aimed for a seat at the farthest possible angle from Lexa, sitting down nonchalantly, as if the change was almost imperceptible or unimportant, and pulled out her books.
Lexa felt her soul shatter a little; crackle and wrinkle every time her gazed floated automatically over to Clarke, who never once returned her silent calling. She new this was planned. Clarke was a creature of habit and comfort. This small, insignificant change in her seating arrangement was calculated and strategically executed to reduce Lexa’s interaction with her. It was expected. It was foreseeable. It was understandable.

Still…it was a slap in the face, nonetheless.

The sliver of hope had all but vanished now.

Clarke seemed at ease, Lexa noted, after glancing over at the blonde once more and absorbing every detail she could. Her brows weren’t creased, as far as she could tell, from worry or sorrow. She looked beautiful, as she always did: wearing ripped jeans rolled up above the ankles, a fitted white V-neck showcasing her perfect cleavage (undoubtedly one of Clarke’s most powerful weapons against Lexa), hair up in a loose messy bun, and mild makeup on. She looked intact, and unruffled, and serene. And Lexa supposed she should feel glad and elated that Clarke was, at least exteriorly, unaffected and undamaged. She supposed she should feel relieved that Clarke was truly over it… moving on… forgetting her… Yea, no. The mere thought made her spew a fiery, dragon-like breath potent enough to send the entire building into a fiery hell.

By the time class was dismissed, reason and control had evaporated along with common sense, and anticipating Clarke’s rash escape, Lexa prepared to dash in pursuit. Sure enough, as predicted, Clarke quickly grabbed her school bag and darted for the door before any other student had even properly packed up, and Lexa followed suit, rushing after the blonde to the outside of the building.

Lexa was determined. She needed to talk to her… to explain, apologize, beg for forgiveness, grovel for it if it came to that, and ask for another chance. She had the words already carefully laid out; the conversation already prepared in her mind over the weekend, but the second her feet finally caught up to Clarke; the moment her hand reach ahead and grabbed her wrist, bringing her to a halt; the second Clarke turned in a furious whirl, scowling and baring teeth…that carefully assembled conversation crumbled to a pile of ashes.

She gulped.

“Don’t.” Clarke warned through clenched teeth, neck straining to maintain her voice and diminishing patience in check.

“Clarke, hold on one minute. Please… please just- I need to explain… can we talk? Please?” Yes, begging! Just beg. Beg like your life depends on it, child, because the way she’s looking at you right now, that may as well be true. Indra’s voice randomly popped into her mind, guiding her and rendering advice as always. Great…more voices… now I have a mini Indra in my head… how lovely.

“Sorry, all out of minutes and fucks to give.” Clarke said spitefully, stepping away in the process. “Whatever you have to say, I’m not interested.”

Clarke turned, and was moving again. Moving away. Moving in the wrong direction…

“Wait- No, Clarke, please!” Lexa rushed ahead of her, and Clarke stopped, arms coming down and hands constricting into fists. “Clarke, nothing happened Friday night with Costia. I just dropped her off, I SWEAR to you, Clarke…”

Clarke was glaring lethal laser beams at her now, aiming one right in between her brows. “You think I fucking care about what you did or didn’t do, Lexa?” She chuckled and then shook her head. “Tell
me, what exactly are you expecting from this, huh? Running after me, blurring out an apology that I never asked to hear… What? Did you think everything would suddenly reverse and all would be swell? Did you think I’d run into your arms and tell you ‘water under a bridge’ or ‘we’re fucking stronger now, so it’s ok’? Because if that’s how you envisioned this little scene playing out, let me give you another scenario… I never forgive you. Why? Because in the end you and I are acquaintances who owe nothing to one another. Two strangers who shared a date and a few, insignificant moments that led absolutely nowhere. And then they parted ways, each to their own life and lifestyles, never to meet again.” Clarke paused, pursing her lips the moment Lexa parted hers to let out a shaky breath and to mouth a pained ‘Clarke…no’. It made Clarke reel back, recoiling her anger a bit, but her gaze remained firm.

“Clarke…” Lexa commanded every fragment of strength left to mutter the word, which still came out wavering and feeble; fragile just like her inner core. “Clarke, I fucked up, I know… I don’t deserve you or your time or your forgiveness, but I’m begging… please, just, give me another chance to fix this.”

Clarke deliberated, but slowly shook her head, and Lexa swore she could feel her soul quiver against her tightening ribs.

Clarke’s eyes softened then, upon seeing the ripple wash over Lexa. And she felt her humanity slowly return. Regardless of the current situation between them, Clarke did care. Still cared. Would always care. But in the end, herself and Aden and Raven were still her priority. She had to care for them first.

“You’re perfect, Lexa… even with all your flaws and vices, you’re perfect…for someone else. And I have no doubts that you’ll find that someone someday…” Clarke gave her a feeble smile, turned, and walked away.

Lexa let her. She made no effort to stop her from leaving, mostly because she didn’t have the strength to. Even thoughts hurt.

She swallowed, and breathed, eventually regaining mobility back.

She knew that Clarke had spoken a lie. Knew it the moment she had said it. Because what Clarke had just stated was an absolute impossibility. And if Lexa was certain of anything, it was that she would NEVER find that someone Clarke was referring to.

Because she already had.

The night of her 23rd birthday, while getting yelled at by Indra at the bottom of her staircase.

The night she fell in love with a masked stranger in a black gown and piercing blue eyes.

The night she felt, for the first time in a long time, that she was finally home.

Because Clarke was that someone… Clarke would always be that someone.

Even if for Clarke, Lexa was no one.

***

Day 1

Lexa: Clarke, I’m so so sorry.
Lexa: I know I hurt you and don’t deserve you, but I just want you to know I’m truly sorry.

Lexa: I’m dumb.

Lexa: Like, if they were to make another *Dumb and Dumber* movie, I’d be cast as both.

Lexa: I know it’s not funny, but… I mean it. I really am sorry.

Lexa: I meant it, you know… I didn’t sleep with Costia. She just needed a ride, and I couldn’t say no… I should have but I couldn’t. I just couldn’t…

Lexa: I miss you, Clarke.

Lexa: A lot.

*Day 2*

Lexa: So I made a vow to quit drinking. And partying. And just being my stupid, dumb self.

Lexa: I know it sounds like an excuse or a pointless promise, but I mean it.

Lexa: I guess I just wanted you to know that…

Lexa: I miss you… and Aden. I hope you’re both doing well.

*Day 3*

Lexa: I got an A in my Econ and Management classes.

Lexa: Good chances of graduating on time, according to my professors and adviser.

Lexa: Just wanted you to know.

*Day 4*

Lexa: I really wish I had a fucking time machine…

*Day 5*

Lexa: Got any plans for the weekend?

Lexa: I was thinking… maybe we could grab dinner?

Lexa: or coffee?

Lexa: I’d do just about anything, Clarke… anything to get you to talk to me.

***

Lexa lugged herself out of bed and down the stairs to the kitchen Saturday morning, irritated that no breakfast had been prepared since the cooks were off on the weekends. She groaned, pulling open the fridge doors in search of sustenance. Her eyes immediately landed on a case of Coronas, chilled and inviting, and her hand did that twitchy little thing it always does when she feels the need… the crave… the *pull*. She reached forward; carefully dodging the beers and grabbing the carton of eggs nestled right behind it.
She knew before she even started her attempt at making eggs that this would end badly. She sighed, and proceeded anyways, figuring Indra was probably out running her usual Saturday errands and wouldn’t be home to cook anytime soon. She pulled down a frying pan and a spatula, and placed the pan over the crackling fire. She realized she poured a little more oil than needed and reached for the eggs, cracking four into the already sizzling liquid.

Her phone pinged, and Lexa darted for it, dropping the spatula against the granite countertop carelessly. She smiled once she read the name reflected on the screen.

Aden: Hi Lexa! Where have you been?? I miss your face *Alien Face Emoji*

Lexa: Been home, moping. Sobbing. Being a big, fat baby since your sister dumped me. Which I totally deserve, because I’m a dick.

Lexa: Hey Kiddo! Been… busy. School, and other things.

Aden: When are you taking me on a tour of Woods, Inc.?!?!?! Huh?? HUUUUUHHHH???

Lexa: Never. Probably never… since Clarke hates me, and will probably send a torpedo up my ass if she ever catches me anywhere near you… which sucks, cuz you’re cute, and funny, and just an incredible little dude and I actually love spending time with you, but now I can’t do that… because I’m a big, fucking dick.

Lexa: Yes, I did promise! Soon, ok?! We’ll see.

Aden: Ok. :)

Aden: You’re the bestest.

Aden: Raven bought me a new game today! So excited! You should come over and play! We can tag team against her!

Lexa: God, how I want to… I want nothing more than to be there, near you. Near Clarke… how is she, Aden? Is she sad? Is she happy? Is she indifferent? Has she talked about me? Has she said anything about me at all?!?! Is she eating properly? And sleeping ok? Did she watch last week’s episode of Fear the Walking Dead and tell you all about it?! Because she didn’t tell me… and she’d always call me, to vent and yell. Talk about how she loves watching it because there’s some hot actress in it, and that she reminds her of me… because apparently she’s an emotional airhead. I wonder if she’ll watch tomorrow’s episode. I guess I’ll watch it in case she calls…

Lexa: I wish I could, little man. But, I have to study… so that I can graduate.

Aden: I understand. It’s ok. Can you come to my game tomorrow morning? Please pretty, pleeeeeeese

Aden: eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Aden: eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeease!

Aden: Clarke will be there!

Lexa: I want to be there Aden, but I can’t… I can’t because I’m an idiot and I fucked shit up with your sister, kid. I’m like King fucking Midas, only everything I touch turns to shit instead of gold. Heaps and heaps of mushy shit.
Lexa: You’ll win it, kid! I know you will. Tell Raven to take lots and lots of pics for me, ok?

Aden: :/

Aden: Ok. I will.

Aden: And Lexa?

Lexa: Yea, kid?

Aden: I love you.

Lexa: I love you too.

Lexa: :)

An earsplitting screech disturbed her silent haven and she was forced to drop her phone in order to save her hearing canals. Pressing both hands to her ears, she rushed to the stove, where the eggs had all but turned to ash. The fire alarm was still bellowing, due to the insane amount of smoke that had accumulated (which she somehow failed to acknowledge) and she quickly moved to open every window and door in the area. Grabbing one of Indra’s old newspapers, she stepped on a chair and began to fan the smoke away from the unrelenting alarm, her ears popping and thrumming in her head feeling as though it was dangerously close to popping.

After a few seconds, the sound abruptly cut off as the smoke dissipated, and Lexa exhaled in relief.

“WHAT THE HELL, LEXA! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING, YOU LITTLE SHIT!”

Lexa turned to face a semi-nude (wearing only boxer briefs and wife beater), red-faced Anya as she bolted into the kitchen, hands still protectively clasped around her ears.

Lexa ignored her, picking up the pan and tossing it into the sink, letting cold water flush out the remnants of what was supposed to be her breakfast.

“It’s fine, Anya! I took care of it. Go back to sleep or…whatever.” She moved back the fridge, but nothing else seemed to appease her.

“You nearly gave me a premature heart attack, you dumbass.” Anya scowled, moving to the fridge next to Lexa and pulling out a beer.

Lexa was about to counter when a soft, unsure voice called out from the kitchen’s entrance.

“An? Everything ok?” Lexa rolled her eyes at the sight of the frightened, partially dressed girl leaning against the wall, and shot Anya a ‘seriously?’ look that spoke mountains. Anya winked in return.

“Fine, baby. Go on and get your cute ass back to bed… I’ll be down in a minute.” Anya ordered, the girl nodded and retreated back to the basement.

“Indra will murder you if she catches you bringing chicks here. Remember last time? I have the video if you’ve forgotten.” Lexa spoke as humorlessly as possible, trying to keep the disdain clear in her tone.

Anya shrugged. “Indra doesn’t have to know… besides, there’s an extra one downstairs if you’re interested. Blonde, cute, good at taking orders just like you like ‘em.” Anya offered, smirking broadly and without a hint of shame. “Be a good way to get over your princess.”
Lexa glared at her, clenching her fists until her knuckles strained. “You’re a piece of dog shit, you know that? I’m only in this fucking situation because you put me here! I don’t know why I even fucking listen to you.”

Anya let out a guttural laugh, startling Lexa. “Me? Please… you’re just as much responsible for your own shitty behaviors as I am for mine. Only difference is, I at least embrace who I am and what I do… whereas you always try to find the easy way out, Lexy. Always blaming everyone else and never taking responsibility. Tsk tsk… no wonder everyone leaves you.”

That did it. Lexa jumped from the stool she was perched on and sprung forward in Anya’s direction, aiming a fist directly for the smug smirk on her face. Anya anticipated the reaction, and dodged accordingly, grabbing Lexa’s wrist and twisting her arm until it was pinned behind her back. Once the girl was properly subdued, she slammed her against the fridge and pressed her head into the cold, metallic door.

“Always so predictable, Lexy.” Anya teased, pulling her arm up and stretching the muscle out until Lexa yelped. “So pathetic… seriously, cuz, I thought I taught you better. You put the Woods name to shame, you know that?”

Lexa chuckled, even through the pain and humiliation; Anya’s logic somehow baffled her. “The only thing you ever taught me was how to take advantage of girls and being a dick, Anya. And every time I had something good happen, every time I tried to push away from your twisted version of what happiness entailed, you’d burst in and ruin it. Just like you did with Costia. And now Clarke. You never had my fucking back, you bitch. Not ever. Not once!”

Anya pulled Lexa back, only to slam her forward again. “You’re an ungrateful little shit, you know that?! If only you knew all that I did for you… you’d appreciate what I did to you, you spoiled little brat.”

“Get your hands off of her this fucking instant, or so help me I will feed your lifeless corpse to the crows!” Indra bellowed from the hall, dropping the bags she had clutched in her hands, ready to spring forward in a second’s notice.

Anya huffed, but stepped away, letting Lexa pull herself together.

“Alexandria, up to your room.” Indra instructed, eyes glued to Anya. “NOW!”

Lexa obeyed, throwing Anya a guarded glance before retreating to the second level.

“Relax, aunt Indra… Lexy and I were just having a friendly little chat. Your golden child is fine.” Anya grumbled, taking a sip out of her beer. “You really ought to stop coddling her so much, she’s about as useful as a kidney stone nowadays. Should have seen her trying to cook just now… pitiful.”

Indra took two ginormous steps, pausing inches away from Anya. She yanked the bottle out her hand, and wrapped her free hand around the girl’s tensing chin.

“What has happened to you, child…?? Lexa is fragile! You know she looks up to you! You used to be her protector, her best friend and caretaker and now… now you are her tormentor, Anya! Now you build her up only to tear her down! Why, child? She is all the blood you have left, and you are all she has…does that mean nothing to you anymore?” Indra had hoped her voice would be enclosed in a layer of anger and disdain, but the hurt in it was taking prominence.

Anya returned her questions with a pained glare. A look that spoke volumes of the truths and suspicions Indra always subconsciously knew but never wanted to admit to.
“It’s always about precious little Lexa. It has always been about Lexa. I was forced to drop my friends… forced to drop the only foster family I ever loved and that loved me back… forced to drop the love of my life and MOVE here after her parents died to be a distraction and play thing for her! NO ONE cared about how I felt! No one asked me if I was ok! I was fourteen, Indra! I was adjusting back in Sydney! I was falling in love and finally finding happiness! But no, fuck me, right?! Lexa needed attention, and a friend, so let’s go ahead and fucking ship Anya across the fucking pacific all because wimpy little Lexa wasn’t dealing. All because her eleven year-old-self couldn’t stop wallowing in self-pity!” Anya was livid. Desperate to pull out of Indra's hold but her feet were cemented to the floor beneath. “I sacrificed EVERYTHING! And what do I get in the end? Shipped back to fucking Sydney after little Lexa decided I wasn’t needed anymore. Sent back at the age of 16 to a new, abusive foster home and a friendless, lonely life, only to find the girl I had loved since I was 10 years-old ‘happily’ married to a man with a kid on the way! And Lexa? Well… Lexa was living the good ol’ life… blowing mommy and daddy’s money and living it up while I was broke and left to fend for myself! And you… you let it all happen. I trusted you! I loved you and you just let them take me back! You could have adopted me like you did her, Indra! You could have s-saved me, but it was always about fucking LEXA!” She was sobbing now, tears running down her cheeks freely and she let them.

Indra was stiff and shaking. Anya could feel her fingers soften around her cheeks, but they never fully detached. Indra didn’t know about any of this. If there was one thing she didn’t want from Indra or her spoiled cousin was their useless pity. By the shocked, bewildered look on Indra’s face, she knew she was about to get exactly that. She sighed.

“Indra… I’m not blaming you, or Lexa, for what happened to me. I know you care, and that you tried… I’m just sick of Lexa always getting her way. I’m just tired of her bullshit. I get that her life hasn’t exactly been peachy, but neither has mine. Or yours! She needs to grow the fuck up, is all I’m saying.”

Indra didn’t respond. After recovering her senses back she did what had been long overdue; she brought Anya into her infamous bear hugs that just about crushed every rib and squeezed the bejesus out of her.

“Oh baby… oh, sweet child why didn’t you tell me! Why! I could have used that to get you back here with us!” Indra was crying into her shoulder now, and Anya rolled her eyes. “I’m sorry, dear child. I’m sorry… but I never stopped loving you, An. Not for one second!”

Anya patted her back, a little uncomfortable by Indra’s show of emotion. “It’s ok, Aunt Indra. I’m ok now. And the ridiculous share of money I received when I turned 18 from my Uncle’s firm sorta helped…a lot. Let’s just… start over, is that alright? Can we hit the refresh button and go from there?”

Indra pulled away, smiling, wiping the tears from her face. “Of course, child. I’d love that.”

The two girls Anya had stashed in the basement appeared in the doorway then, and Indra’s smile immediately collapsed the second she took on their less-than-appropriate appearances.

“Oh, how about we hit that refresh button again in say, two minutes? After I kick- err, call them a car?” Anya gulped, laughing nervously.

Indra rolled her eyes, but nodded. “Still a brainless idiot. You and your brainless twin upstairs… damn shame!” And with an angry puff, Indra strutted out of the kitchen, headed to have a much-needed conversation with Anya 2.0 tucked beneath a cocoon of blankets in her bedroom upstairs.
Enough was enough. By early afternoon that Saturday, Lexa’s mind had been made up. A week! She had given Clarke her space, respected her wishes (more or less) for a week! And still her text messages went unreciprocated. Her calls unanswered. She knew she had fucked up. Oh, how she knew it. But… Jesus, at least give me a chance to fucking talk to you! To explain! To apologize for the millionth time!

So without wasting another moment of rational thought; before she could talk herself out of the deed she was about to hurl herself into, she slid into the Audi and pulled out of the garage.

Her mind was turned off for the short drive and strangely at ease; a stark contrast from the chaos it had been the last few days. Upon arriving at the Griffin’s, Lexa parked and jumped out of her car, dashing for the door in a few, determined strides before her mind could reawaken and jolt her back to her senses.

She knocked. Once. Twice. Thrice. And finally the door was peeled backwards and Aden stood just yonder, looking up at her first with confusion, then in pure joy; he beamed up at Lexa, who was powerless to do anything other than beam back.

“Lexa! Hi!” He closed the short space between them and engulfed Lexa’s midsection in a tight embrace. “I missed you sooooo much! Come in! Clarke’s upstairs in the shower, want some hot cocoa? I was just about to make some!”

Before she could even reply, she was tugged forward, Aden slamming the door shut behind them, and leading her towards the kitchen.

“Aden, um, I just need a few minutes with Clarke. Will she be long?” Lexa asked, rubbing the back of her neck at the strain she began to feel pent up; still slightly uncertain if showing up unannounced was the right move.

“Nah, she’s finishing up her hair I think. We’re already running late, so she’s rushing. Hey! Are you free right now?!” He asked, dropping the packets of hot cocoa on the counter when the idea flashed across his mind.

Uh-oh. “Well, um, yes, I am. As in I have nothing planned, but I should… You know what kid, can you just let Clarke know I stopped by? I should really get going…” And with her confidence slowly disintegrating, she turned and dashed for the door, ignoring Aden’s pleas for her to stay. She had her hand on the handle and was about to turn when -

“Lexa?” An unsteady voice cracked behind her, and she froze, suddenly afraid to turn. She heard the cautious sound of footsteps take on one step at a time until both feet finally stopped on the first floor landing. Lexa exhaled, swallowed, and spun.

“Hey…” She managed to speak, which only evoked a scowl from the blonde, and she knew she was in deep shit right off the bat. “Listen, I shouldn’t have come here… I’m sorry. I was actually just about to walk out but-“

“Lex, you don’t have to go! You’re always welcome here… right, Clarke?!” Aden had reappeared from the kitchen, and had now joined the two women in the parlor. Lexa wondered if the kid could hear the crackling sound of the bubbling tension erupt between them.

“Aden, go and grab a sweater. It might get chilly later and we can’t have you getting sick.” Clarke ordered, without ever removing her eyes from Lexa, who would occasionally trade off between looking from Aden to Clarke.
“Lexa, why don’t you come with us! Holy moly, yes, come! It’s gonna be so much fun! And anyone is invited! Please?! You said you were free…aaand Raven is coming too! It will be fun, right, Clarke?!”

Lexa saw Clarke shut her eyes nearly painfully for a brief moment. “Aden… sweater. Lexa and I are gonna have a little talk outside on the porch, ok, sweetie? Grab your sweater and go make your cocoa. We’ll be right back.” Although her tone was soft and soothing, Lexa didn’t miss the hiss that was delivered the second her name was spoken. She wanted to lie and say she wasn’t scared shitless, but the frightening glare and the tightening muscles around Clarke’s jaw made her intestines loosen a bit.

Aden, ever blissfully unaware, ran off to do his duties. Clarke motioned Lexa to escort her to the front porch; reluctantly, she followed.

“You have… SOME nerve showing up here! I thought I had made myself perfectly clear, Lexa!” Clarke went off the second the door snapped shut, pinning the brunette down into a stupor with only her stare. “This type of shit is NOT acceptable! Who the hell do you think you are, showing up, unannounced, when I specifically told you to STOP pursuing me! I meant it, Lexa! What part of that did you not understand?!!?”

“Clarke I… I just can’t do that… I care so much about you, so much about Aden. It’s hard for me to just, turn that switch off! It’s damn near impossible to do so in all honesty!” Lexa sighed, biting her lower lip to extinguish the urge to cry. “I came here to apologize and to beg you for another chance… I came here, because you have been ignoring my texts and calls, and frankly left me no other choice. I’m sorry, I understand it’s unexpected but I just had to try…”

Clarke sniggered, shaking her head in disbelief. “Why is it so damn difficult for you to just swallow the fact that I want nothing to do with you? That I meant what I said. Why can’t you just accept things for what they are… over. Whatever we were, and we weren’t much to begin with, is over, Lexa!”

“It doesn’t feel over. Not for me. It doesn’t have to be over, Clarke.” It was a pathetic explanation, she knew, but it was exactly the words her heart was transmitting to her tongue at that moment. So she allowed the message to take fruition. “Not if you’re willing to give me another chance.”

Clarke dodged the question, deciding instead to redirect this conversation to a more pressing matter. “Aden has been looking forward to this class for weeks, and I’m not about to be the one to ruin it for him. He’s been… asking about you nonstop and apparently he clearly misses you. So… IF he asks again, I won’t object to you saying yes… but only if he asks, got it?!”

Lexa swallowed the smile that started pulling at her lips, certain Clarke would behead her on the spot if she so much as hinted at the happiness she felt from receiving an invitation to… who cares! “Yes, ma’am.”

The door opened suddenly, and both women involuntarily took a step back and away from each other.

“So… are we going? Lex, you’re coming, right?! Please! It’s gonna be so FUN!” Aden, in his excitement, did a cute little jump that made Lexa’s moody little heart lighten.

“Yea, kiddo, I’m going.” She confirmed, and it earned her another warm hug. “Um, is Raven coming by to pick us up or would you prefer I drive?”

Clarke rolled her eyes, already uncomfortable by the situation. “Raven had a soccer match to attend
with O and she’s going to be meeting us there. I’m driving.”

Lexa gave Papa Smurf a thorough lookover, and the thought of getting in the heap of rolling junk made her cringe. “You sure? I can have a car come for us if—”

“Listen, you’re the invitee, so you’re gonna suck it up and get in my damn car or else you’re staying behind. Capisce?”

Lexa nodded furiously, already moving towards Papa Smurf. Aden followed closely behind, hopping into the backseat and letting Lexa take shotgun.

The second Clarke turned the key in the ignition; the car spurted slowly from its slumber, almost lazily awakening with every gentle rev of Clarke’s foot against the accelerator, until the sound had become a more steady rhythm. By the looks of its interior, Papa Smurf must have been as ancient as a goddam fossil. The seats were battered and dirty, practically lacking cushion from the years of use and abuse it had taken. The front windshield was cracked in at least five different places, and every damn light was on in Clarke’s dashboard. Lexa swallowed thick.

“Alright, buckle up.” Clarke instructed, and Lexa reached back to grasp the seatbelt, only to find there was no belt where there was supposed to be one.

“Use the rope, Lex. Here…” Aden leaned forward, pulling a rope from between her seat and the doorframe and handing it to her. Oh, you have GOT to be kidding me! She lost it then.

“Seriously?? A rope? How the hell is that even safe, Clarke?!” She pulled the rope around her torso, and Aden tied the loose end to the original seatbelt clicker.

“Relax… it’s only a temporary solution. I’m getting it fixed…. Next week.” Clarke responded, pulling out of the driveway. “There’s still time to back out if Papa Smurf makes you uncomfortable…”

Lexa huffed, crossing her arms across her chest, bracing herself. No way in hell she was about to leave now, even if it meant taking a wild chance with Papa Smurf. “I’m fine. Just… be careful, alright?”

***

Clarke was holding in her breath for majority of the ride across town to a skit class Aden had signed up to do. Sometime in the middle of the ride, Lexa had, without asking mind you, pushed the A/C button on, which immediately caused both Griffin siblings to shout a panicked ‘No!’ at her. But it was futile. Instead of chilled, soothing air they were greeted instead with a god-awful stench that made Lexa gag and stick her head out the window.

“What the hell is that?! Holy hell… god have mercy!” She exclaimed, which caused Aden to gargle out a muffled chuckle.

“That’s what you get for being so damn fidgety and touching things you have no permission to touch!” Clarke snapped, frustrated. “You’re worse than a kid! Just… sit there and don’t touch anything else, alright?!”

Lexa grumbled, head still out the window. “Well, excuse me for assuming the A/C was working… how very idiotic of me.”

When they finally arrived at the location, Clarke hopped out of the car and rushed over to Lexa’s door, pulling it open for her. Lexa smiled.
“Aww, that was sweet. Thanks, Clarke!” She beamed at Clarke, and stepped out.

Clarke let out a snort. “Uh no. The door only opens from the outside. I figured you’d probably have a tantrum if I told you to stick your arm out and I didn’t want you bitching about anything else.”

Lexa’s radiant smile slumped. “Oh… well… thanks anyways, I guess…”

Clarke nodded, ushering Aden out of the car and towards the mid-sized building, secretly cursing herself for wiping away that stunning smile for no fucking reason.

“So, Aden… where are we exactly?” Lexa asked, looking around the wide, open space upon entering the building. Rows of chairs and a crudely made stage being the only effects in the rustic, windowless space.

“Oh, we’re doing a skit class! I found the ad online and well, I thought it would be fun! It’s part acting, part improvising, and 100% talent! Plus, it’s funny! You wouldn’t believe what people come up with when under pressure!” Grinning, he darted ahead and took up a seat on the very first row, waving them forward.

Clarke moved first, taking the seat to Aden’s right. Lexa contemplated her options for a moment, deciding if it would be wise to sit in the vacant seat by Clarke or take up the closest available seat to Aden’s left. She shrugged and plopped down by Aden, not missing the way Clarke exhaled a little louder than necessary.

Aden twisted in his seat a second later, hand stretching up and waving. Lexa turned, catching Raven’s amused glare as she approached.

“Well… didn’t expect to see the likes of you so soon, PG…” She commented, bending over to give Aden a nipple twirl as a greeting, to which Aden yelped. “Kid, next time you make me come out to some abandoned shithole like this, in the middle of bumblefuck nowhere, I’m gonna sell your tiny little organs in the black market.”

Aden smirked. “Love you too, Ray.”

Giving Clarke a hug, Raven used the opportunity to extract more information. “Lexa?! Are you experiencing short-term memory loss? Early onset of Alzheimer’s, possibly? Or is this just a clear-cut case of the “Dumb Blonde” syndrome finally kicking in? Gotta catch me up here, Clarke, having a hard time following you lately…”

“So showed up at the house uninvited and Aden asked her to tag along. Plain and simple. I meant what I said, Ray… I won’t do this again.”

Raven nodded and pulled back, throwing her friend a saddened look laced in comfort and understanding.

Silence gradually washed over the bustling room when an attractive woman, adorning a skintight red dress, stiletto hells, and charcoal-black hair pulled back in a secure ponytail, addressed them in a welcoming greeting.

“Hello everyone, and welcome to Skit 101: The Benefits of Improv.” Becca, the expressionless instructor, announced. “Today, we will practice adjusting to situations and molding to fit new, unexpected scenarios. Improvisation is a crucial skill to have for those of you wishing to pursue careers in acting or theatre.” Aden did an excited little squirm in his seat, Clarke glanced over and saw his eyes widen with crackling electricity. “So, there’s really not much secret to this… it’s an adventure that must be delved into with as little guidance as possible in order to stay true to the nature
of improvising. With that said, let me get two brave volunteers up here… would anyone like to go first?”

Clarke wasn’t the least bit surprised when Aden shot his hand as high into the air as it would go; releasing a high pitched squeal to get the woman’s attention. Becca smiled and motioned him forward.

“Ah, I believe we have our first victim! And now for a second…” She inquired, glancing over the crowd. Aden did not waste time, and lounged across Clarke’s lap to wrap a hand around Raven’s slender wrist.

“I volunteer Raven as tribute!” He shouted loudly, causing a roar of laughter to erupt and a string of profanities to drip from Raven’s lips.

Aden skipped forward, bouncing on his heels from enthusiasm, not the least bit ruffled by the numerous pairs of strange eyes watching him. Raven followed in tense objection, grumbling and pouting along the way.

“Ok… good. Now, give me a location or scenario.” Becca turned to the crowd.

“Ummm, Hollywood! Or, a movie set!” Someone shouted.

“Movie set. Good!” Becca agreed. “Now, who are they to be portraying? Give me roles, names, title, anything you wish to see unfold.”

“Actors! Well, the kid is an actor. The girl can be a crazed, smitten, fan girl meeting her idol for the first time.”

“Very good!” Becca nodded, turning back to the two waiting parties. “You have your roles. Your job now is to create a scene from that and just roll with it. Got it?”

Aden nodded very enthusiastically. Raven groaned.

“Ready, set, action!”

Aden’s demeanor switched the second the command dropped, and he straightened his posture, tilted his chin mightily into the air, and strutted towards Raven, who still stood much in the same fashion as she did before: arms crossed around her chest and a scowl twisting her facial features.

Aden paused before her, giving her a snobby, overly entitled look from head to toe. “Yes? May I help you, miss?” His tone was indignant and superior, with a hint of irritation coating it.

Raven just glanced over at him, scoffing. “Um, no. I’m all good. Thanks.”

That made Aden pause. “Uh, well, aren’t you here for an autograph? Or a picture? Well, sorry but I’m a very busy man. I don’t have time for neither right now.”

Raven shrugged. “Umkay. Wasn’t really interested in one anyways…”

Clarke could see Aden pause yet again, and throw Raven a ‘WTF dude’ glance, but he quickly recovered. “On second thought, I have a few minutes and wouldn’t mind showing my appreciation to such a dedicated fan such as yourself! Here,” he reached into his pants pocket and pretended to withdraw a pen, “and who am I making this to? Don’t be shy now, Hun!”

Raven looked him over again, arching up a brow. “Ok, I’m sorry… who the hell are you supposed
“Are you trying to be, you little weirdo?!”

Aden’s jaw dropped in disbelief, and Clarke saw his face scrunge in a disapproving scowl. “I’m Brad Pitt! *Brad Pitt,* Raven! Jeez, I even used his signature smile! See!” Aden cracked his lips apart, giving Raven a forced, and slightly creepy, half-teethed smile.

“Oh! Of course, my apologies Mr. Pitt! For a second there I had you wrongfully mistaken for an Oompa-Loompa. The height similarity, the annoying presence, and the appalling hairstyle threw me for loop.”

Aden seethed, throwing his hands in the air. “Cut! I can’t work with this! The disrespect, I tell you! You know what… I QUIT!” And letting his inner diva run loose, he stormed out of the stage and back to his seat, but not without a round of applause.

“Alright, how about we switch up here? Can I get two more volunteers?” Becca called to her audience. Aden implored Clarke to participate, and after a brief moment of reluctance, she agreed if only to see his face ignite into his beautiful, loving smile. Aden waited until Clarke had shyly stepped onto the stage, until she had crossed that line of no return. Once there, he flung his carefully crafted trap.

“You know what, suddenly I’m feeling artistically drained.” He spoke breathily to Clarke, who gave him a questioning look. “Maybe someone should take my place?” turning to the crowd. “Lex, would you mind stepping in for me? I need a break.”

Clarke and Lexa both shared a panicked look and the blood immediately drained from Lexa’s face. Before she could refuse, Aden was already pulling her onto the stage by her hand and pushing her towards Clarke, who looked equally pale and terrified.

“Ok, good!” Becca’s overly cheerful voice cut through the lingering silence that had descended upon the observing spectators. “Now that we have our volunteers, I need a location and roles.”

“IKEA!” Some random imbecile shouted.

“No, the grocery store!” Someone else countered, and Becca nodded, agreeing with the second option.

“They’re a couple! Madly in love and married! Discussing healthy food options!” Aden blurted before anyone else had a chance. Clarke scowled at him, and Lexa turned ghostly white. Raven leaned in.

“I know what you’re doing, kid. And I approve. You have learned well, my little grasshopper.”

Aden smirked, shrugging innocently. “Dun’ know what you’re talking about, Ray.”

“Alright, you have your instructions.” Becca announced, and the entire room fell silent; the tension between the two women was palpable even to the strangers present. Aden and Raven scooted forward on their seats, watching intensely.

“Action!”

Clarke cleared her throat, and Lexa clenched her hands into tight fists near her sides. *I’m gonna murder, my infuriating kid brother. I’m sure dad would understand...*

After a moment, Clarke heard Lexa release a deep sigh and carefully approach her. “Err, so… um, hey there… my lovely...*wife*?! Yea..! Ummm, so healthy foods… because, we’re… on a DIET!
Yes! So… maybe we can get some… healthy fruits? Like peaches? Bananas? Wait, do you like bananas…babe?” Lexa stuttered through, frantically rubbing her nape while her eyes flickered from Clarke, to Becca, to a grinning Aden, to a bewildered Raven, and back to Clarke.

“I’m guessing I’ll revert back to bananas now… after you, you know… cheated on our diet.” Clarke hissed, arms crossed protectively across her chest and decided to play along, using the moment to teach Lexa a much needed lesson. “Remember that night, baby? When I just happened to stumble in on you licking those two, massive cupcakes, hmm? After you promised you wouldn’t do it again, after you made me believe you were really committed… guess once a cheater always a cheater.”

Lexa’s eyes widened and her knees slightly bucked forward. “I only had a taste! I never actually ate them! You gotta give me credit for that incredible show of self-restraint, Clarke!”

Clarke scoffed, releasing a low chuckle. “Are you being serious right now?! Give you CREDIT?!” This FUCKING BITCH! “YOU would have devoured them if I hadn’t shown up when I did! And you know what else?! You would have probably had seconds, and thirds! Especially since apparently your favorite flavor of CUPCAKES just happened to show up out of thin air and started rubbing itself all over you! Bet you couldn’t wait to get that in your mouth now, right, babe?? Self-restraint my ASS!” Clarke was spewing venom now, unaffected by the wide-eyed crowd watching. “You probably did just that… later that night. After I left.”

Lexa groaned, throwing her hands up in the air dramatically and rolling her eyes. “I already TOLD you I never ATE those damn CUPCAKES! I don’t WANT those stupid cupcakes, Clarke! The only cupcakes I want are YOURS! Why can’t you just put aside your infuriating stubbornness for one second and just give me a chance to explain! Jesus, woman!”

The two were facing each other now, squaring off and seething rage.

Aden, dumbfounded and equally impressed, leaned into a similarly bemused Raven. “Why is Clarke freaking out about Lexa eating cupcakes?! What’s wrong with having cupcakes every now and then? You always let me have cupcakes… now I understand why you never let me tell Clarke about that… yikes!”

Raven nodded. “See Aden. There’s ALWAYS logic to my madness, kid…”

Clarke stormed forward, driving a finger into Lexa’s upper chest. “I have given you a chance! I did and YOU ruined it with your stupidity! And do you want to know something else? It was actually going somewhere, Lexa! I was beginning to trust you but you and your insatiable HUNGER just HAD to go and screw it up!”

Lexa recoiled, and gasped. “Are you calling me a cupcake slut?”

Clarke rolled her eyes and stepped away, shaking her head in disapproval. “You’re ridiculous! I swear, I’ve tried with you but you’re just a selfish, self-centered, entitled little brat who only thinks about herself and her needs!”

“Tried?! You’ve TRIED?! When, Clarke? Please, enlighten me! Because yea, I may be all those things but YOU… you’re equally stubborn, and proud, and just WAITING for me to mess up so you have an excuse to peace out! And yea, I know I gave you the right ammunition to do just that but… I apologized! I feel like shit for even LOOKING at the fucking cupcakes!” Lexa was panting now, rage transforming to despair. “But I need you to believe me when I tell you I NEVER ate them. I would NEVER, Clarke… not when I have you. Not when I want to make this… diet work with you!”
Clarke relaxed some, and Lexa let her shoulders drop. “I’m sorry, Clarkey. I promise to stay on track. I promise to only eat the wonderfully disgusting but incredibly healthy green smoothies you make for me. I promise to never, ever, ever betray your trust, and your faith, in me again. I swear it!”

Now the crowd gasped.

“Give her a second chance, Clarke!” Someone in the audience shouted.

“Yea, blondie! You may regret it if you don’t!” Another voice joined in. Soon enough the entire crowd was chanting ‘Give Lexa another chance!’ in a continued rant that just made Clarke blush wildly.

She swore she even heard Aden and Raven’s voices jump in but was too embarrassed to look anywhere but her feet. A light finger under her chin brought her attention to lively, forest-green eyes that, if she hadn’t been so incredibly uncomfortable, would have surely melted her to oblivion.

Lexa smiled softly at her, grazing the tip of her nose gently over Clarke’s. “Shut your mind off for one second, and just hear your heart out, beautiful.” Lexa instructed, feeling Clarke’s sharp exhale drip over her parted lips. “If that doesn’t work, hearing the crowd out is also not a bad idea.”

She pulled back, winking and smirking. And for a brief second, Lexa swore she saw the faint trace of a small smile conquer those perfect thin lips. But it quickly vanished, falling back into a stern scowl.

“As if I’d make that mistake twice…”

The response was nearly inaudible, but it might as well have been a scream to Lexa’s ears.

Clarke pulled away, carrying herself off the stage, and then out of the building, past the rows of people who one-by-one silenced their chant.

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The ride back was about as pleasurable as a having a dozen needles driving into your pupils while being forced to simultaneously swallow rabbit droppings as you inhale one of Raven’s rancid farts. Clarke drove without ever throwing a glance towards the very taut, very silent passenger sitting to her right. Aden, picking up on the layered tension between the two, plopped his headphones in and lounged in the backseat, making himself as invisible and his presence as unnoticeable as possible.

It was moments like these that Clarke wished she had a functioning radio, but just like every fucking feature in her shitty car (and life), nothing ever worked fluidly like it should. Her hands wrapped around the steering wheel a little tighter.

Raven, who randomly had a “soccer match” to attend on Octavia’s request, politely declined Clarke’s offer to drive Lexa back to retrieve her car. Clarke knew it was a ruse, yet she could do nothing but nod and understand.

Unbeknownst to Clarke if it was fate, - or fucking destiny… or just a sick, twisted, joke placed on her by a couple of deuchy, prankster gods - Papa Smurf’s engine suddenly began to sputter loudly, causing the car to quake in violent vibrations, and a cloud of white smoke began to seep from beneath its rattling hood. Worst yet was that in an effort to avoid traffic, Clarke stuck to the back routes (against Lexa’s advice), and the road they just happened to be driving on was barren and stripped of civilization.

Clarke groaned. Not now Papa Smurf? C’mon buddy! You can do it, just… just believe you can! Just
remember our good times together! Think of all our journeys and adventures together! Just think positive thoughts and you'll make it!

Papa Smurf came to an abrupt halt right as she finished her silent, internal encouragement; shutting down with a furious screech. **YOU TRAITOROUS PIECE OF TRASH! WHY PAPA SMURF! WHY? NOW, OUT OF ALL TIMES! UGH! NOT COOL!**

Clarke tried turning off the engine and reigniting it, but it was useless. The engine would merely stutter a few times before falling into a stall again.

“Fuck!” She shouted, slamming her palm against the steering wheel and startling Aden and Lexa with her outburst.

“Should have let me drive…” Lexa quietly raged, and it had the desired effect on the already distressed blonde.

“If you want to make it back alive, I’d highly suggest you keeping your snarky comments to yourself right about now.” She spoke through clenched teeth. “This happens all the time… just – give him a few minutes to breathe and he’ll start up again.”

“It’s **100** degrees in here, Clarke! I highly doubt I’ll be alive in a few minutes!” Lexa retorted, wiping the sweat beads already pooling against her brows with the back of her hand. “Just... pop the hood, will you?!”

Clarke finally looked at the angsty brunette, who was removing her outer jeans vest and rolling up the short sleeves of her white T to settle just above her shoulders. She pulled her hair back into a tight ponytail and stepped out of the car.

“Clarke, the **hood**!” Lexa yelled, both hands placed firmly around her hip, and Clarke glared at her through the cracked windshield. **Bossy bitch. Humph.** She did as she was told, and stepped out to help Lexa access the situation. The brunette creaked the squeaky lid as high as it would go, one hand supporting it up above her head while the other hand fumbled around in search of the prop. “Where the hell is the hood-prop?!”

Clarke shrugged. “What’s that?”

Lexa sighed, ready to perform a serious face palm. “The stick that keeps the hood propped, Clarke. Every car has one.”

Clarke shrugged again. “No clue. I’ve never noticed it before. Just leave it alone, it’s not like you know what you’re doing anyways…”

Lexa scoffed. “Just make yourself useful and hold the hood up, will ya?! I need both hands.”

**The NERVE.** Clarke **reeled** from the unmannerly tone, but eventually did as asked.

“I swear, if you break my car, I’ll- “

“Highly doubt I can do any more damage to this ancient piece of junk.” Lexa cut her off, hands carefully skirting the hot engine, looking for the flaw. “Seriously, ever considered upgrading? This is more of a liability than it is a benefit to you at this point. Not to mention, completely unsafe. You drive Aden around in a car that has a **rope** for a seatbelt for crying out loud!”

“Well, not everyone has an insane amount of money to blow on a fucking car, Lexa! **Excuse me for being born broke and unprivileged!** Ever stop to think about that? Ever stop to think that maybe
feeding my little brother with the money I earn is just a little more important than the kind of car I drive?!” Clarke was about another comment away from letting the surprisingly heavy, metal hood drop on Lexa’s ginormous head at that point.

Lexa sighed, pausing her ministrations. “Clarke… that’s not what I meant. I’m sorry… I didn’t mean to sound like a dick.”

It was genuine enough, Clarke figured, so she shrugged in response and offered her a weak ‘whatever.’

Lexa returned her focus to the overheated engine, squeezing her hand deep into the jungle of wires, and parts, and black soot. “Either you have a very unprofessional mechanic… or you’ve been patching these wires up with duct tape. No wonder nothing works…”

“It’s been like that since I was in high school. Finn was the one who fixed it for me back in the day. It worked fine and saved me money, so I never took it to get it properly fixed.”

Lexa chuckled. “Finn sounds like a real treat. Maybe if I ever get the pleasure of meeting him, I can teach him a thing or two on how to be a man.” Lexa grumbled, stuffing the cable back in its slot and moving to another section of the extremely confusing landscape that was covered in black dust. “He clearly didn’t know jackshit about cars!” She fussed with bolts and screws, parts and pieces that Clarke had no fucking idea what purpose they served. “Knew even less about how to properly worship the beautiful Queen he had…”

“You’re not doing a much better job, if we’re comparing.” Clarke pointed out, but Lexa’s comment had abated her anger, and her tone came out softer than expected. She allowed her eyes to indulge in just how undeniably hot Lexa looked at that moment. Bent over at the waist, sleeves rolled up and ponytail slung over a shoulder, arms and hands covered in smudges and oil streaks. Clarke could clearly trace every straining muscle in her exposed arms; how her biceps bunched up when her arms contracted; how a thin sheet of sweat coated every inch of her skin, making it glow in the dying sunlight.

Clarke quietly confessed that Lexa, frustrating as it might be, had the unrivaled capability to set every single microscopic cell in her body ablaze, be it from irritation or arousal. By the way she was rubbing her thighs together, Clarke figured the latter was currently taking place.

Lexa grunted, trying to tighten a bolt with her bare hands, and the low, guttural sound just about caused her panties to flood. She bit her lip to hold back the whimper dying to escape.

“So, how did you learn to do this anyways?” Clarke asked, fascinated by how intuitively skilled Lexa’s fingers were with each piece, knowing precisely where to aim and what to do.

Lexa continued working, determined to arrive at the problem. “My cousin… Anya. Whom you had the pleasure of meeting… she and I used to buy old cars, repair them, and sell them for a profit. It’s how we used to pass time during the summer when she visited.”

Clarke nodded in response, finding speech or breathing suddenly a challenging task to fulfill. Mechanic Lexa was becoming too much to handle.

“I see.”

Finally, her deft hands stumbled upon an out of place screw, and once she adjusted it back into its slot, she urged Clarke to try turning the engine on again. She beamed proudly when the car hitched back to life, engine purring loudly and somewhat unevenly, but alive nonetheless.
Fucking hell, I'll never hear the end of it now… Clarke prepared herself, watching Lexa strut back to the passenger side and slip in, all filthy and reeking of smugness.

Aden had somehow managed to fall peacefully asleep in the meanwhile, unbothered by the heat or their car troubles.

Lexa cleared her throat loudly. Here we go…

“I guess now you owe me, huh…” She assumed, relaxing into her seat as Clarke drove, and even without looking at her, she could practically taste the tease in Lexa’s tone. “A lap dance should more than cover it… maybe let me get a taste of your cupcakes as a tip?”

Clarke wanted to strangle the boldness out of her. Yet her body wasn’t quite as furious with Lexa as she would like it to be… not if the way her core muscles furiously clenched served as any indication. She was about to respond when Aden sat up abruptly, sticking his face through the space between the two front seats.

“Oooooo, can I get some of your cupcakes too, Clarke?! Raven’s are good but a little hard at times…”

She cringed, knowing she’d never be able to hear the word ‘Cupcake’ ever again without having the image of big, juicy breasts popping into her head.

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When they arrived at the Griffin Residence, Lexa offered to carry Aden - who had fallen back into sleep on their drive home – up to his room. Clarke nodded, wishing to avoid towing Aden’s heavy self up the flight of stair at all costs. Lexa did it flawlessly though. She carefully watched as Lexa leaned and wrapped the limp boy around her neck, pulling him onto her, and followed Clarke towards the front door.

It softened her a bit more; watching how gentle Lexa was being with him, cooing soothing words to Aden when he began to stir, and smiling when he plopped back down comfortably against her shoulder. Somewhere, deep down in her naïve unconsciousness, she gathered that Lexa would make a great parent someday…

The brunette laid Aden down gently, careful not to rouse him, entering and leaving his room without even releasing a breath. Out on the second floor hallway, Clarke observed her; absorbing the smudges and stains that had dried on her tan skin. She saw blobs of greases smeared across her forehead and cheek, upper arms and forearms, and her hands were entirely coated in the stuff. Her once-upon-a-time plain, white T had been transformed into a canvas; displaying random patterns of grease all across her front.

“Well, umm, I guess I’ll head out now… so, um, thanks, for letting me tag along today.” She said awkwardly, not quite sure where to look. “It was a lot of fun. Well, I had a lot of fun at least… I always have a lot of fun with you, and Aden!” She chuckled. “Well, um, bye Clarke…”

Clarke nodded, and opened her mouth to wish her a good night. “Would you like a shower?”

What the fuck?! Brain, WTF?! That is NOT what we agreed on! Tell her ‘Forget it’ and bid her ‘Goodnight’!

She cleared her throat and tried again. Nevermind and goodbye… simple. “You can use my bathroom… if you’d like… to get cleaned up. Wouldn’t want your car getting filthy and all.”
Clarke was about to correct herself and say farewell to Lexa yet again when—

"Yea! I’d really appreciate that actually! Thank you, Clarke!" Lexa admitted, beaming that fucking stunning smile again… *sigh*

Brilliant.

She led Lexa through her room, secretly glad she had taken the time to put everything in place and clean up earlier that morning, and into the small, but quaint bathroom.

“Um, there’re towels under the sink. Feel free to use the soap and hair products I have in there. Just, yea… is there anything you need?”

“Uh, I can reuse my pair of jeans, but…any chance I can borrow a clean shirt and maybe a pair of underwear? Anything you have is fine, really!”

Clarke scoffed. “Oh, yea? I have a few pairs of thongs that might fit you nicely.” Lexa’s eyes bulged, and Clarke snorted. “I’ll see if Aden has anything more… appropriate for you. Anything else?”

Lexa hesitated, suddenly uncomfortable. “Umm, this might be a little awkward but… think you can help me with my jeans? I don’t wanna get it dirty…”

Now it was Clarke’s turn to let her eyes grow exponentially larger. “You want me to undress you?!”

Lexa blushed. “Just help me out. I don’t want to get my jeans dirty, they were expensive!”

“Of course they were…” Clarke mumbled, but moved forward and closer to Lexa. She knew there was no comfortable way to do what she was being requested to do so, after locking gazes with the still blushing brunette, she let her hands climb their way to the waist of Lexa’s jeans. Once the button was unfastened and the zipper undone, she gave a gentle tug and it was enough to get the material to pool at her feet.

“There.” Clarke husked. “Anything else?”

Lexa smirked, shyness suddenly abandoned. “Yes… join me in the shower… I could use a hand getting the smudges off.”

Lexa removed her shirt, contracting the chiseled muscles in her stomach and shoulders purposefully, feeling elated when she followed Clarke’s eyes as they raked her up and down thoroughly.

She was about to drop a rather inappropriate comment when Clarke, probably realizing what she had done, spun around and flipped open the shower valve.

“If you need anything else, just… shout. Or…whatever.” And slipped out of the bathroom, cursing herself for her unwarranted lack of control.

A few moments later, Clarke rapped gently against the bathroom door, hearing the stream of water cascading down into the bathtub. She exhaled, trying to control the emotions running ramped inside her. She bit her lip when she heard the voice beyond the door respond with a ‘Come in.’

The small space was enveloped in steam and the soothing smell of lavender bath products, pulling her into a relaxed embrace of sorts, and she momentarily forgot why she had stepped into the
bathroom in the first place.

“I, uh, got you a clean shirt and a pair of Aden’s briefs that may fit you. It’s large on him so he never
wore it.” She spoke; loud enough to be heard through the spraying water and the thin, protective
curtain that currently shielded Lexa’s naked and wet body from her. “Let me know if you change
your mind about the jeans… I can get you a pair of basketball shorts if you want…”

The water cut off abruptly and the curtain slid open so impossibly fast, Clarke’s only plausible
reaction was to drop her jaw open as Lexa came into full display.

“No need, beautiful.” She husked, smirking at Clarke’s reasonable reaction. “This will do.”

Clarke finally regained some sense of control and spun around, giving the woman her privacy.

“You can turn around, Clarke. I’m not shy…” The tone was low and inviting, and Clarke knew
Lexa had pulled that little stunt on purpose.

“I didn’t see anything.” Clarke responded, a little too quickly. It was a big, fat LIE, of course. The
image was still burning into her retinas as she spoke; fresh and perfectly clear. She slammed her eyes
shut but it was useless. Lexa’s perfect, toned body was swirling behind her lids more vividly now
than before.

“Shame… you’re missing out. There’s still time… if you want to turn back around.”

Clarke would have darted for the exit and left, only Lexa just
happened

happened
to be standing between her
and the door; barring her much needed escape.

“Nothing I want to see. So I’ll pass.” Was the first response to reach her lips. Another big, fat,
fucking LIE.

“You know… I think I’ve figured out why you’re so uptight; so tense pretty much all the time…”
Lexa continued, and Clarke heard the sound of fabric slipping over dried skin as Lexa pulled on the
briefs and shirt. “Tell me, beautiful… when was the last time you pleasured yourself?”

The question floored Clarke out of her senses. She opened her mouth to respond, to yell, and scold,
and shout every profanity at Lexa’s blatant question, but the words were lodged; trapped.

“Hmm? Tell me… when was the last time you satisfied yourself with your own fingers… or toys. Or
even with another human being?” She continued, and Clarke thought she suddenly sounded and felt
closer; hovering just an inch or so from her back. “When was the last time you were properly fucked,
Clarke?”

It was the tone. The rough manner in which Lexa uttered that word, that made her hand reach out
and grab the edge of the sink for support. The small, enclosed space suddenly felt hotter and
infinitely more suffocating. She wanted to counter; to speak and defend herself, but instead all that
leaked past the tight knot lodged in her parched throat was a weak moan. Her head was swirling; lost
in a haze of lavender, and steam, and Lexa… she could practically smell the mint in the brunette’s
breath.

She heard a chuckle, just behind the shell of her ear. “I figured… it’s been a while, huh, baby? A
while since you’ve had a tongue on you… a while since you’ve had two, maybe even three, fingers
stuffed deep inside you… or do you prefer cocks? I can provide that too… if you’d like.”

Her eyes fluttered shut at the image; at the promising tone and seducing words, and although speech
was still a struggle for her, she clenched down hard on her lip, refusing to let the moan bubbling deep
in her chest escape.

“Clarke… turn around and look at me.” Lexa asked softly. “I’ve missed your beautiful eyes…” Clarke felt soft lips graze her neck, and she exhaled sharply when she felt them latch and suck her pulse point. “I’ve missed your beautiful face…” Now she felt fingers dig into her hips, and move slowly down towards her backside. She fought the impulse to push back into the touch. “I’ve missed you… I’ve missed all of you, Clarke. Turn around for me.” 

And she did. Her gaze immediately dropping to the parted, swollen lips that drew her in. And it seemed it was all the confirmation Lexa needed to advance. Lexa lounged, locking her lips to Clarke’s in record speed, driving Clarke back roughly against the stretch of wall near the sink.

Clarke returned the kiss in earnest, sucking in Lexa’s eager tongue; wrapping her lips around the muscle as it thrust into her mouth. She bucked her hips forward, grinding it against Lexa’s, who wasted no time kicking Clarke’s thighs apart and driving a knee right into the blonde’s warm center.

Clarke’s head swung back and slammed into the wall, stretching out her neck which Lexa took full advantage to ravage. “I fucking want you, Clarke.” Lexa rasped in her ear, and this time she didn’t hold back the moan that erupted from her throat. “God, I can feel you… I can fucking feel you through your fucking jeans.”

Clarke drove her fingers into Lexa’s wet, loose hair and pulled her impossibly closer, pushing down against the knee in between her legs, wishing desperately that there was no barrier between them.

“Is this what you want, Lexa?” Clarke finally willed herself to speak, even if said speech came out but a raspy, breathy sound and barely intelligible. “To fuck me and then move on to the next?” Another moan escaped her lips when Lexa drove her knee up a little harder than before. “Tell me… tell me that’s what you want… and I’ll give it to you… I’ll let you take me right here in this goddamn bathroom, let you bend me over the goddamn toilet. But prove me right… prove to me that you’ve only ever wanted my body and I’ll let you have it!” To further emphasize her point, she started gliding her hips up Lexa’s thigh, grinding along to the thrusting.

But then Lexa stopped. Pulling her knee from the warm nest between Clarke’s legs and stumbling a few inches back, caressing a wild lock out of Clarke’s face.

Clarke saw her throat bob as she forced herself to swallow, giving the blonde a slow shake of the head. “I want ALL of you, Clarke.” Lexa whispered, tears staining her cheeks as she admitted the only thing that she knew to be true at that moment. “I want your body, your mind, your soul. I want your grumpiness and stubbornness, and unparalleled cuteness. I want Aden, and Raven, and everything that comes with having YOU! But above all else, I want your heart, Clarke.” She leaned, pressing her forehead against Clarke’s, releasing the deep sigh she had been holding. “Because I think mine already belongs to you…”

Clarke held her breath for a moment, processing the information, giving Lexa a minute to gather herself. Once she felt the necessary amount of time to accomplish that had passed, she spoke.

“You know what I want, Lexa?” the tone was soft, but stern; she needed the message to be clear and free of potential misperception. “For you to leave.”

Lexa retreated and blinked a few times, digesting the information in slow, tasteful bites. It took her a moment to react, partially from disbelief, partially from hope that Clarke would change her mind. But Clarke, staring back with a gaze potent enough to reduce every one of her enemies to ash, never did. And so Lexa was left powerless to do nothing except nod, wiping away the fresh tears that had spilled down her face, and with as much dignity and pride as she could feign…
She left.

Chapter End Notes

To be continued.

Remember this is NOT the end... more is to come.

We would love to hear your amazing comments from all of you! It might take us a little bit longer to reply to the comments this time as we are both in the middle of traveling at the moment but know that we will be reading all of them as usual and getting back to you all as soon as we can!

Come say hi on Twitter @TaJat07 and Silver_Snake222 :)

Until We Meet Again!

xx
TaJat07, SilverSnake222
Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Silversnake here... I wanted to write everyone a quick note to individually explain the reason WHY this chapter took so long. First off, I was out of the country for a little over 2 weeks during this hiatus. That complicated planning and writing of the chapter with TaJat seeing we were in different time zones and frankly, the last thing on my mind was worrying about anything other than my expensive/wonderful vacation abroad (P.S. Anyone here live in Paris? OMG AMAZING! Def going back lol! Spain was beautiful as well... and UNF, Rome and the FOOD! AHHHHH!) Secondly, once I did return from Europe, I went on yet ANOTHER trip to Cali, this time with TaJat, so again, that hindered our progress so it was hard for us to really sit down and focus on the story when the beach was kinda right there, calling our names... along with some delicious margaritas... and very, very HOT gi- anyways, back to my explanation... Thirdly, we were in NO RUSH to write this one out (and you will come to discover WHY once you conclude the chapter.

It was an important one - crucial chapter! - and it deserved every ounce of attention and focus on our part so that YOU may enjoy it!

So yes, while we do apologize for taking THIS FREAKIN’ LONG with it, I hope you also appreciate that it is yet the LONGEST chapter we've produced (50 pages and nearly 23k words long), and one of the most dynamic sections yet.

We will like to say that, while we enjoy giving you all long chapters, please know that it takes ALOT of time and effort, not to mention planning and editing time as well. We will probably NOT be releasing chapters this long again, so please don't expect future ones to be this massive. We want to start getting chapters out to you all more frequently, and in order to do so, we will have to reduce the length of them to make that possible.

Thank you all for continuing to stick with us. We appreciate and value everyone of you and we are sincerely sorry for making you wait so long. We only ask that you take a moment when you finish reading it to leave us a comment with your thoughts and opinions. Thanks again!

I know ya'll waited long enough for this shit to come out so.... ENJOY!!!!!!

PS: LOVE YALL and it was one nice ass vacation hehe ;) -TaJat

Monday morning greeted a gloomy Clarke with equally gloomy, turbulent weather that shook the Griffin house with every one of its thunderous vibration. Clarke lounged in bed a moment longer, contemplating the possibility of skipping Jaha’s class in favor of staying in and binging on Netflix with Aden. She frowned. She couldn’t remember the last time she had one-on-one bonding time with her kid brother.

Just as she finally prepared to slip from under the covers and get ready for the day ahead, Aden burst into the room, latching onto a life-sized stuffed turtle and gasping for air.
“Clarke!” He blurted, eyes widening in reaction to yet another bone-rattling thunder. “Clarke! Mr. Turtle is a little scared! He needs cuddles, stat!”

Aden, frantic and jumpy, didn’t wait for a response, but crossed the room in record time and pounced up on the bed with the smirking blonde, who wiggled backwards to make space for him.

“You sure it’s Mr. Turtle and not you that needs cuddles?” Clarke questioned, earning a scoff and an uncertain shake of the head from Aden.

“I’m a big boy. I’m not scared of stupid thunders!” He protested, handing over Mr. Turtle with shaky hands. Another loud thunder exploded above them, inciting a high-pitched, girlish scream from Aden, who quickly pulled Mr. Turtle out of Clarke’s arms and wrapped them around himself instead.

“Oh! OK! Just… hold me for like, a minute.” He instructed, snuggling into her like he used to when he was younger. “Don’t you dare tell Raven about this! I just upgraded from ‘crybaby’ to ‘lame-ass idiot’ and trust me, that’s a much better nickname.”

Clarke smiled, and pulled him closer. “I won’t, kiddo. And it’s just thunder, it won’t hurt you. You know that, right?”

Aden nodded, but made no effort to pull away. “I know… Hey, Clarke, can I ask you something?”

“Of course, sweetie…what’s up?”

Aden hesitated, even considered recalling his question and changing the subject. But a nudge and a smile from Clarke encouraged him to continue. He sighed.

“Do you… do you think mom is ever gonna come home for good?”

Clarke felt his body coil from tension in her arms, and she drew him closer whilst caressing his unruly hair.

“Well… yes. I think eventually she’s going to realize that her life is here. That her home is here. And that you are here, sweetie. I wish I could say when that will happen, or if it will happen, but I at least believe that she’ll come to her senses one day.” Clarke paused, trying to read Aden’s scrunched, pensive expression. “Why, honey? Do you miss her? We can call her, if you want to speak with her. Or type out an email?”

Aden shook his head slowly, absorbing the information. “No… I-I just wonder about her sometimes. Not a lot. I just… don’t understand why she left. Dad would have never left us… dad would have been here right now if he was still alive. Why did she leave, Clarke?!” His question wasn’t derived from anger, or hatred, or pain, but instead it sounded like it was birthed from years of suppressed misunderstanding and lack of answers.

Clarke inhaled. “I don’t know, babe. I wish I did… but if there’s one thing you should know about mom, is that she was an expert at pushing away the people she loved. Keeping her distance from those who cared about her. But she loves you, Aden. Ok? That will never change, I promise you that.”

Aden twisted his lips at the response, connecting dots in his overactive mind. “You and mom are a lot alike, you know… You push away everyone that tries to love you too.” He admitted in a low whisper. “That’s what you did with Lexa…”

He shifted from under her arms then, pulling Mr. Turtle back into his embrace and slid down from the bed. “She just wanted to make you happy… but you’re pretty good at pushing happiness away
too.” He leaned forward and graced Clarke with a kiss to the forehead and a broken smile. “Here... I think you need Mr. Turtle more than I do now…” Aden said softly, handing her the stuffed animal who had been his bedtime partner and protector since his fourth birthday; a gift from their father, and one that he treasured with every fiber of his gentle soul. “He served me well, Mr. Turtle. Brought me happiness even after daddy died, and after mommy left. And when Raven had her scary bike accident.” He paused and inhaled sharply, fighting the emotions resurging. “And when Finn left us... he was there for that too. He’s done his duty to me... I think it’s time he helps you find some happiness too.”

Clarke clenched her jaw the second she saw his boyish smile breach through his pained expression. “Gosh, when did you grow into such a wise kid, huh?” She croaked, trying hard not to fall apart.

He smiled even wider, and shrugged. “What can I say? I’ve been blessed with good looks and intelligence... Someone in this family had to be born with both.”

He strutted out with a grin and a wink, unaffected by anything as always, a trait Clarke always envied and admired in Aden. “Get ready for school, hot shot! Raven will be by in 20!”

And after squeezing Mr. Turtle for good measure and a bit of luck, Clarke pounced into action, got dressed, and prepared for the sure-to-be-interesting day ahead.

It was the last day of classes. As expected, the class was full to capacity when she barged in, a few minutes late and soaked to her undergarments after walking the distance from the parking deck to the classroom.

Her day had already decided to go to shit the second she pulled up to the deck and realized she forgot her umbrella. L.A.’s continued aridity is rarely interrupted with voluptuous rain, surprising many Angelinos who probably didn’t even own an umbrella. Clarke plopped down into the first seat she found, a few rows away from where she usually sat closer to the front, and to her dismay it provided her with the perfect view of the brunette she had rudely kicked out of her house less than 48 hours prior.

Lexa’s neck stretched invitingly as she bent her head down to glance at the opened book on her desk, hair up in a messy bun, following attentively along with Jaha’s lesson. Finals, for better or worse, was finally upon them, and Clarke knew Lexa must be grappling with herself to manage the necessary grades required to graduate.

An hour later Jaha concluded his final lecture and bid farewell to the class with a ‘good luck’ and a small bow, offering his office time to any student in need of help before facing his sure-to-be-brutal final the following Monday. Clarke stood, gathered her things, and watched Lexa do the same. Just out of plain curiosity Clarke lingered in place a little, observing the brunette a few feet ahead, sapphire eyes watching as the brunette slung her bag over heavy shoulders and dashed for the exit, marching right by Clarke yet her eyes never swayed to meet the blonde’s.

Clarke continued to watch even as Lexa pushed open the doors and left, and Clarke noted how throughout the entire duration of the class, Lexa never once twisted her elegant neck to look for her, as she usually did. Nor, now that she really thought about it, did she see a Starbucks cup in her hand, or a white paper bag carrying her favorite breakfast. She did however, notice the deep, purple rings around the usual vibrant, green eyes. The loss of effort behind Lexa’s usually pristine outfits was also noticeable, and Clarke, although such reaction was expected, couldn’t help but feel a tinge of... disappointment? Or maybe guilt?

She briskly followed suit, more curious than concerned at this point, wondering where Lexa was dashing off to in such a hurry. Any signs of the downpour earlier had long evaporated and was
replaced by blistering sunshine and cloudless skies. She stopped right outside the entrance of the building, eyes leering straight ahead where, a few yards from where she stood, Lexa was greeted by a girl that was not unfamiliar to Clarke.

Clarke watched, mesmerized by the scene taking place, as the woman ran an exploitive hand up Lexa’s exposed arm as she spoke to her through perfectly painted, red lips that curved into a seductive smile. The same smile, Clarke finally recognized, that the strange girl had given Lexa at her birthday party some weeks earlier, which felt light-years away now, when Clarke had barged into the bathroom and interrupted the pair.

Clarke continue to watch helplessly, half wishing that her intense gaze would be a sort of beckoning for Lexa; a silent plea powerful enough to make the smiling brunette turn and see her. She watched as Lexa gently brushed off the girl’s hand and stepped back a few inches to create a bigger wedge between them. She watched, heart becoming ever lighter with every second now, as Lexa bid her a polite goodbye, declining whatever it was the girl was offering, and without a moment’s hesitation, walked away.

She was smiling. She didn’t even realize it until the girl, still confused by Lexa’s reaction, turned and locked eyes with her. The girl scowled, and Clarke felt her features loosen and produce a similar response, and both walked away; the girl towards the building Clarke had just exited and Clarke after Lexa, all the while telling herself that it was mere curiosity that made her do so, of course.

The library was packed. Fuller than Clarke had ever witnessed since the beginning of classes back in January. Students littered every open area of the building, and Clarke skillfully zig-zagged her way around sprawled bodies blatantly flipping textbook pages across the library floor, to groups that gathered in the more concealed corners and engaged in semi-hushed discussions. She made her way to the fourth floor, where cubicles were usually more prominent to be free, and where she and Lexa had shared many lunch dates together.

She smiled, recalling a recent moment to mind when Lexa, ever thoughtful, had surprised her with her favorite chicken wrap and fruit smoothie. She rounded a corner, between two giant bookshelves, and almost immediately jumped back, narrowly avoiding colliding into another student.

“Shiiiiit, I’m so-” dull, Green eyes peered over the upper edge of the encyclopedia-like textbook that hid her beautiful face. They widened instantly, Clarke saw, and she swore she saw the dullness escape them for a moment. But it was only for a moment, and just as quickly, they returned back to its unusual tiredness. “Lexa… I’m sorry, I-I wasn’t watching where I was going…” Clarke chuckled, and cleared her throat. “Um, funny bumping into you here…”

Lexa shot a brow up at the statement, slamming the book shut. “How so? It’s final’s week. I think the entire UCLA population is jammed in here.”

Clarke nodded, a little taken aback by the slightly irritated tone. “Right. Yea. Um, I guess, I don’t know… just didn’t expect to see you. Here. Or well, in class… today. Silly me, I guess!” Clarke let out a weak laugh, waving a hand in a dismissal gesture.

Lexa quirked her head to the side, not one bit amused Clarke realized. “Oh? And why is that, Clarke? What, did you think I’d be too depressed, or…broken, after you shredded my heart to pieces and shoved it down my throat?” Now it was Lexa who let out a weak, weary laugh. “Sorry to disappoint you… but this isn’t about you, I’m actually serious about passing these exams. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m gonna go ahead and get back to that.”

Lexa turned on her heels and started to walk in the opposite direction, unwilling to wait for a response.
“Lexa… Lexa! Wait! Please, just… I never meant to hurt you, alright? That’s not what I tried to do!” Clarke called after her, relieved when the brunette paused before she vanished into the maze of shelves and books. “I hope you can understand that. I hope you can eventually forgive me for it.”

Lexa turned then, face expressionless but deflated. “There is nothing to forgive, Clarke. And believe me, I do understand. You were plenty clear Saturday night. But just like you asked something of me that day, I also have something to ask of you…” Despite her tired features, her tone was undeniably strong and clear. “IF you see me around, ignore me. Let’s pretend the past few weeks never happened. That we never met. And that I never -” Lexa stopped herself, and regrouped. “Never liked you. It’s easier for both of us that way, you know? At least for the time being.”

Clarke was too stumped to act. This she wasn’t expecting. This… surrender. The Lexa she had come to know never gave up. Never stopped trying, even after the countless times Clarke had turned her down. It was so foreign; so unexpected, that it took her breath away…

“Clarke?” The far away voice slowly lured her back, but she still had no answer. Could she do what Lexa was asking her to do? Without faltering? Without regretting it?!

Their eyes met again, Lexa’s still veiled; still guarded.

“That’s… that’s really what you want, Lexa?”

Lexa scoffed, shaking her head. “What I want?? Hardly, Clarke. But since I can’t have what I want, this is what I need. “

Clarke nodded, not really sure why but the impulse took over.

“Don’t worry… I’m not gonna go jump off a bridge or… drink my weight in booze. For once I actually believe I’ll be ok, you know? Honestly. But… I need this. And I need you to respect my wishes. Just like I’m trying to respect yours.”

Clarke nodded again, this time her lips reclaimed control. “Yea. Sure. I can do that. I can pretend.”

Lexa nodded and inhaled deeply. “Cool. Ok. Let’s do that then.” She turned to leave again, but paused, and turned back around. “Bye, Clarke.”

And walked away.

“Bye, Lex.” Clarke whispered to no one in particular; her only witnesses the hundreds of books that suddenly appeared to be closing in and trapping her.

Whether Clarke wanted to accept it or not, a ‘good-bye’ had only ever been that painful when she had whispered it to her dead father, years ago, as he was being carted away in a gurney. The pain she felt after whispering it to Lexa was just as damaging; the pain that one feels only after losing someone they lo-… care about dearly.

Yea… care about…

Nothing more.

Right?

***

Tuesday consisted mostly of studying and more studying. Clarke called off from work for the
remainder of the week, and seeing Aden still had a full week of classes to go, she was using her free, unperturbed time wisely.

Except… who was she kidding. The only thing currently occupying her mind was the conversation she had with Lexa the day before… which she kept on replay over, and over, and over again. There was nothing that needed to be deciphered or decoded from it. Lexa’s message had been painfully clear. Yet part of her refused to fully accept it; to truly believe that that was Lexa’s unrelenting wish.

After spending a wasted morning “attempting” to study, and failing miserably at it, Clarke decided to try her luck elsewhere.

*Maybe a change of scenery will clear my mind. I could use a coffee break.*

The nearest coffee shop had shaded tables outside, and she bee-lined her way to the furthest one away from any type of potential interruption or loud conversations. Book in hand, she settled into her seat and let her mind be infiltrated by someone else’s fictional world and made-up characters. She wanted to relinquish control over her own problems, even if only for a brief moment, and indulge in someone else’s troubles, be they real or not. It was a welcomed relief. A needed escape. And soon enough, Clarke found herself relaxing as she usually did when enraptured by a good book. Loosing herself more and more with every turn of a page.

She was so enthralled by the story; so irreversibly lost into it in her need to elude her own reality, that she audibly gasped when a physical, living, real-world idiot forcibly snapped her out of it.

“It’s Clarke, right?” The real-world idiot, now quickly promoted to dumb-ass moron, asked, and placed a large cup of black coffee in front of her.

“Uhh, yes.” Clarke responded, gazing up only to be greeted by overwhelmingly large sunglasses that blocked nearly half of the moron’s face. The woman, whoever she was, smiled. “Excuse me but… do I know you?!”

The moron’s hands rapidly flew to her face, and the second she peeled off the glasses, Clarke’s already downcast heart dipped a little more.

“Sorry! Yes… well, sort of.” The girl mumbled, the nervousness in her voice was clear from the way her words wavered. “You may not remember me, but I’m C- “

“Costia.” Clarke finished for her. The girl nodded, and visibly swallowed. Clarke stared in both awe and wonder, unsure what to make of this.

“I was, er, stopping by for a coffee and I noticed you. I wasn’t gonna come by, if I’m honest. I had no intentions of coming by and, well, putting myself in an unnecessary awkward situation,” she laughed nervously, Clarke waited for the shoe to drop, “but, umm, I felt like I needed to. So… here I am!”

Clarke straightened in her seat a little, and gently lowered the book. She eyed the coffee, and then Costia, who was still standing in front of her. Costia picked up on Clarke’s unspoken question.

“Oh, the coffee is just a gesture of good faith. A white flag, if you will.” She released another nervous laugh. “I come in peace!” She randomly threw up her right hand and parted her four finger’s down the middle in an alien, peace-sign motion. Clarke quirked a brow.

“Yea, ok. I get it.” Clarke responded, a little harsher than she intended. “What I don’t get is why you’re here in the first place.”
Costia nodded, and then motioned to the chair across from Clarke. “May I? It will take five minutes, I promise.” She explained. Reluctantly, Clarke nodded, and watched intrigued as Costia pulled the chair and sat rather awkwardly. “I, er, thought about reaching out to you a few times over the past few days. I know that may sound strange, and I get it if you think that way, but… its something that’s been nagging at me and when I saw you here, I thought ‘it’s a sign’.

Clarke continued to stare, making sure to keep herself from revealing any expressions other than confusion and bewilderment. Costia continued.

“See, Anya and I, well… we’re close. We weren’t always… when Lexa and I were together, and this was a long, long time ago, we used to hate each other actually. I don’t even know why, really… anyways, she’s been staying with Lexa and she tells me that Lexi hasn’t really been the same since Anya’s party. She’s been down and gloomy and well… she said it’s because of the fight you two had.”

Clarke wasn’t sure where this conversation was headed, but the mention of Lexa’s name uttered from Costia’s lips was enough to make her highly uncomfortable. She was about to excuse herself and leave. Whatever the moron had to say, she didn’t want to hear. She didn’t care to hear.

“I promise I have a reason for being here. Just… please hear me out?” Costia seemed to sense her next move, and like the idiot she is, Clarke nodded. “Thanks… Well, I understand that fight may be in part my fault. I promise you, I don’t know details, or anything… I haven’t talked to Lexa at all since that night, I’m just assuming here. Am I close?”

You’re spot on, you little… ugh! Not even worth it.

Clarke nodded once.

“I see. I want you to know that, that night… yes, we left the party together but I promise you, nothing happened. I was too drunk to drive and asked Lexa for a ride back to my hotel. I’ll admit, I had… other intentions, yes, and I did invite her up to my room…”

BITCH! TOTAL B-I-T-C-H!

“But, Lexa refused. She wouldn’t even hear it. I pleaded with her, but she just told me to go because she was in a rush. She kept saying she had to go see you. I think she was planning on driving over to your place that night and talking to you. I’m not sure what happened after she left, but that’s what she said to me.”

Clarke nodded again, eyes now glaring daggers at the girl across from her.

“I texted her. Called her a few times. She never responded. Not a single message or call. So I left it alone. After that night I didn’t try again, and she hasn’t reached out to me in any form or fashion either.”

Costia paused to take a sip out of her coffee; Clarke never bothered even trying out the one she had bought for her.

“I wanted you to know that. Lexa and I used to be a thing… once…many, many years ago. But she’s 100% over that. And I am too. She deserves a real shot at love and happiness, and I think you may be it, Clarke.” She offered the blonde a weak, but honest smile. “I do hope I didn’t fuck that up for either one of you…”

Clarke, thawing a little from Costia’s earnest confession, shook her head. “Not all of it was on you…”
Costia stood, offering her yet another smile. “Well… I just wanted you to know the truth, from my own lips. I’m leaving in the morning. Heading back to Australia… I thought coming here would rekindle whatever Lexa and I had and lost but… that shall forever remain only in the past. I see that now.”

Costia was preparing to leave when Clarke was struck with a wave of questions that suddenly needed answers.

“What happened, Costia? Between you two?” She blurted out before common sense had the opportunity to reel her in. “Are you the one responsible for fucking her up? Is that why she’s like this?!”

Clarke watched her head drop in what appeared to be resurfacing sorrow, and then turn to face her with equally burdened eyes. Slowly, she nodded her answer. “We were in love. We were each other’s first love. It was really beautiful, looking back… the relationship and the love we had. Lexa always saw its beauty, always relished in it. I unfortunately, never fully saw it the way she did… I do now.” She paused, eyes scanning the heavens as she reminisced earlier days. “Anya, who was already back in Sydney at the time, called me with a job offer that, as an aspiring stylist, I just couldn’t refuse. It required me to relocate to Australia, but it also meant giving up on our 3-year relationship if I did. Lexa tried persuading me out of it, saying I could find opportunities in L.A., and that she’d help. But… I had already been looking, for months! L.A. was just too cut-throat. Anya had a guaranteed spot for me. It was a done deal… all that it required was for me to pack up and leave…”

Clarke’s throat clenched along with Costia’s. She already knew where this was going.

“So I did. I chose a career over love. I picked Australia over home… and essentially, I chose Anya over Lexa. Right away we ended things. It was rushed, and messy, and painful, but… it lacked explanation and closure. After I moved, we didn’t speak. We carried on with our lives acting as if the other never existed. Never mattered… but I did love her. I know now that I was just never in love with her…but she was, with me. So, yes… I’m the one responsible for breaking her and I’ll forever blame myself for it.”

Clarke continued to sit in silence. Conflicted on whether to despise the heartless woman… or thank her. Unsure whether to offer compassion, or dish out wrath. In the end, she continued to sit without offering either. Silence is always the better option.

“Lexa’s not perfect. Even whilst she was with me, she showed signs of possible substance abuse and mild depression. I think those issues originated with her parent’s death. I was the trigger; the last straw that sent her over the edge… and I never thought I’d see the old Lexa again, if I’m honest. Yet it seems you’ve brought her back… are bringing her back.”

“Lexa and I aren’t together.” Clarke wasn’t even sure why she said it. The words sort of just formed and escaped on their own accord.

Costia lowered her eyes, dipping her head in pity once more. “That’s a shame… Lexa may be many things. But if there’s one thing she does to perfection is loving someone. I was just too much of an idiot to realize that.” She pushed her chair in, signaling that she was departing. “I hope you don’t make a similar mistake…it may not be too late for you two.”

Before she walked, Clarke had to ask one final question that nagged at her.

“Why, Costia? Why are you telling me this? What do you have to gain from it?”
Costia smiled. Truly smiled. And Clarke couldn’t help but appreciate the girl’s beauty then, the way her perfect, pearly smile contrasted her dark eyes and dark hair… she was stunning. “Just honoring a long gone, but important relationship… I owe Lexa that. And…peace of mind, if you will. I owe myself that.”

A last smile was shared between the two as Costia took her leave, walking out of her life (and Lexa’s, it seemed) for good. In need of something to grasp, she reached for the still steaming cup of coffee the girl had offered her. She took a sip, expecting it to be bitter and unappealing. Surprisingly enough, it was sweet and tasty; almost exactly how she liked her beverage.

She let the information sink in for a moment. Let the revelation simmer and unfold over and over again in her mind, all while slowly sipping her coffee. Once she had finished, she tossed the cup, and grabbed her book and her car keys, and left. One sentence floated in her brain that she just couldn’t shake off…

*I think I’ve already made that mistake…I think we are too late…*

Lexa had made that pretty clear yesterday.

***

Wednesday morning Clarke awoke before the sun had breached the horizon. Desperate to salvage every minute before her first final later that afternoon, she wanted to get to campus early enough to secure her favorite study room in the library.

Clarke carefully entered Aden’s room to check up on him before departing, and she wasn’t the least bit surprised to find Raven sprawled next to the boy; both parties tangled in a wild mess of limbs, covers, and countless soda cans. Clarke entrusted Raven to assist Aden with his end-of-the-school-year project, but looking around she found no signs of one being developed.

“Raven…. Ray! Wake up!” Clarke hissed, shaking Raven gently enough to not wake Aden. “For goodness sake, woman, wake up!”

“Go away, demon.” Raven mumbled, shifting away from Clarke and pulling the covers over her head. Clarke sighed and rolled her eyes before dragging the covers back down.

“Don’t you forget to feed Aden and drive him to school! I’m leaving now and he needs to go, get it?! Don’t call him in sick again or I swear to god, Ray, I’ll personally – “

“In the name of the father, son, and all that is holy… I command thee, hellish monster, to retreat back to the inferno you slithered from and let us innocent folk sleep in peace!” Raven grumbled, forming a cross with her two index fingers and pushing it towards Clarke. “Damn that was good…I should be lead in the next exorcist movie that is bound to come out…”

“Raven, stop fooling around… Make sure Aden gets to school ON TIME!”

“Yea, yea… I heard you the first time…” She mumbled, drifting off to sleep again. “Next time I’m spraying you with holy water.”

Clarke snorted. “And make sure he finishes his project. It’s due Friday and I haven’t seen much of it.”

Raven huffed in frustration and pulled the covers back over her head. “Yea, got it… now, leave, Satan!”
Dawn was lightening the sky when Clarke arrived on campus. She had expected it to be deserted, and although it wasn’t as littered with students as it would be a few hours from now, there were still quite a number of people who had her same idea.

She darted towards the library, deviating her course slightly on the way to grab a quick coffee at the campus Starbucks and a couple of croissants. The library was peacefully quiet; free of the usual buzzing and soft conversations.

The room she wanted was located on the 5th floor of the building, which consisted mostly of private, enclosed, yet small rooms with a round table; perfect for one to two students desiring distance to work on a project or to study. This room in particular, however, had the best view and offered the best natural lighting than the others. It faced the eastern side of campus, and provided a nice distraction and opportunity for people watching during study breaks. It was also conveniently located nearby the cappuccino and snack vending machines, which Clarke took full advantage of.

She had spent many moments in that room alone, she acknowledged as she casually walked in its direction. And many other moments, she realized, with Lexa. It had become an undiscussed agreement, to meet every Monday and Wednesday in between classes in that room for lunch and study sessions. Clarke wasn’t sure if she enjoyed the arrangement at first. She preferred her space and her silence when she studied, and Lexa’s obnoxiously loud chewing and slurping noises were not only distracting, they were downright nerve-wrecking.

Yet, even with Lexa’s annoying quirks, she came to find that she preferred having her there rather than not... that she not only enjoyed, but missed Lexa’s presence when she wasn’t there. Maybe it was the way she’d catch the brunette not-so-subtly staring at her over her books; or the way Lexa’s lips would quirk up into a smirk whenever Clarke slammed her fists down on the table from frustration, and without needing much else, she’d slowly get up, walk over to the vending machines and return with a coffee and a honeybun in hand and give the items to Clarke. Or maybe it was the way Lexa would occasionally surprise her by helping her with a homework problem that she just could-not-fucking-solve. It didn’t take long after they started studying together for Clarke to realize just how incredibly smart Lexa was. She swore the girl was a secret genius who preferred to downplay her intelligence rather than show it. It impressed and equally infuriated the bejesus out of her.

And every now and then, there were touches. Gentle touches. Simple touches. A soft stroke of Lexa’s thumb over her hand. A gentle brush by deft fingers over her cheek, usually to push aside a stray strand of hair. Comforting hugs and neck massages were also occasionally exchanged when one or the other would get wound up from leaning over a textbook too long. Gosh, Lexa’s hands were magic. The way her fingers explored her skin as if they were on a goddamn all-or-nothing mission. And the way her smiles were so freely given; so easily offered over to Clarke, always without a hint of hesitation or nervousness. Clarke never said it, but Lexa’s smiles were always her favorite part.

Clarke strolled into the private room drunk from the intoxicating memories; the image of Lexa’s cocky, crooked smile still fresh in her mind when she realized, seconds later, that her favorite room wasn’t vacant as she had expected it to be. A mess of wavy, chestnut hair lay scattered across the surface of the round table, effectively concealing her intruder’s face. Yet Clarke knew, from the moment her nose picked up on the deliciously familiar scent in the air the cologne that she seriously believed she was addicted to and would need rehab to part from, to whom said hair and smell belonged to. Soft snores filled the room, and the person that currently slumped atop an open biology book and tons of spread loose-leaf papers wasn’t a stray or stranger, but the only other person she had ever invited to share this space with her while she was still using it; the one person she cared about enough to welcome in and even allow her to claim the room as her own.
“Lex…” She whispered, gently placing her books and backpack down on a chair and slowly approaching the slumbering girl. “Hey… Lex…”

The girl was knocked out cold. Clarke knew Lexa was a heavy sleeper. Lexa had shared that bit of information with her in past conversations. So she tried rousing her with a soft nudge on the shoulder and a more audible tone.

“Lexa. It’s me… wakey wakey, sleepy head.” She giggled at herself for her silliness; there was just something about the sleeping brunette that made her guard plummet and her inner goofiness take over. Maybe it was due to the fact that Lexa just looked too darn adorable in her sleep… sprawled and carefree, and so lovingly innocent. Her features were soft and relaxed, and although Clarke could still see the faint shadows of loss of sleep around her eyes, she was at peace in that moment; engulfed in an invisible blanket of bliss and serenity.

Very carefully, she brushed aside a loose curl covering part of the girls’ face, and couldn’t resist the smile that formed on her lips when the brunette wrinkled her nose and pouted her lips; much the same way Aden reacts when being forced to wake up.

Clarke had half a mind to leave Lexa be and walk away, but the yearn to stay was far greater; the desire to stay, she corrected herself, was too strong a force to resist. Her thumb, suddenly moving at its own accord, traced down around Lexa’s perfectly shaped ear – bare and free of piercings – before dropping down to contour her pronounced jaw. She never intended to brush it over the girls’ lower lip… but the way it jutted forward, the way it begged for attention, well… she was powerless to fight the urge.

It quivered slightly under her touch and she froze. Another desire suddenly rising within her that demanded far more than a simple touch. Clarke bit down on her own lip and before she could continue her private appreciation of Lexa’s oblivious face, she decided to sit down and distract herself with her studies instead.

Forty-five minutes later Clarke had deduced that Lexa’s statement of being a “heavy sleeper” was dramatically minimalized. Clarke’s effort to wake Lexa began rather modestly; flipping pages a little louder than usual, humming, tapping her pen against the table and her foot on the floor. Once that didn’t work, she progressed to more direct methods, such as ‘accidently’ knocking heavy textbooks off the table, or occasionally bumping her knee on the under side of the desk, even making a fake phone call to Raven and speaking about as loud as one would if they were in the midst of a heavy-metal concert, and all to no avail.

*Jesus Effin Christ, you have GOT to be joking*?!

Phase II was more aggressive. Clarke had obtained useful intel from Octavia that revealed Lexa’s inspiring and dedicated hatred towards Justin Bieber. So after raising her phone’s speaker volume to the max and positioning the phone as close to Lexa’s ear as possible, she pressed play and smirked when ‘Sorry’ roared through the room.

Lexa doubled back with such velocity, the chair slid backwards and jammed, causing both to topple over.

“Holy SHIT! OW! What the-” Lexa spewed, and Clarke immediately lounged for her phone, slamming a finger down to pause the music. Lexa, still panicking, smashed her head against the underside of the table while trying to scramble back up. “SHIT! That HURT! Mother-“

“Hey… hey it’s ok… sorry! I didn’t mean to startle you!” Clarke attempted to downplay her involvement by offering Lexa a hand and helping her back to her feet. “My, err, phone went off.
Dumb ringtone…I ought to change that.”

Lexa brushed her shirt down as Clarke swallowed the nervous lump forming in her throat. “Sure it did…” was all the brunette said as she pulled the chair back up. “What are you doing here, Clarke.”

The lump suddenly dissolved, and Clarke scoffed. “Um, this is my private room? Remember? This is kinda where I come to study. You know that.” She rolled her eyes at the glaring brunette across from her.

“Last I checked, it’s open to the entire student body. Doesn’t belong to you, princess… you’re not that special.” Lexa responded with her usual arrogant attitude, sitting back down as if the conversation and Clarke’s feeble claim had no significance to her. “There’s plenty of other rooms available… try one of them. This is occupied.” And shifted her attention back to the open book.

Clarke chuckled from disbelief. “Are you serious?! You KNOW I always chose this room, Woods. Why can’t you relocate to another one?”

Lexa looked back at her, appearing annoyed and uninterested. “Because I was here first. And because we can’t always get what we want, Clarke. Tough luck. Now, I’m trying to focus here… kinda hard to do with you interrupting.”

Oh, you little… how dare… who the fuck do you think you are!

Clarke was seriously considering changing tactics and resorting to physical combat, but decided against it… she knew Lexa could put her on her ass in a second if it came to that. So, she tried a more peaceful approach.

“Studying for bio? Maybe I can help… If you want. I have an idea of what the final will focus on and I was thinking that maybe we can, I don’t know, study together? I don’t mind sharing the room…” She gave Lexa, who watched her with an amused expression now, her most genuine smile. “We’ve done it before, I don’t see why it has to be any different now.”

Lexa continued to stare at her after she finished, and then, after what felt like a decade, Lexa shrugged. “Whatever… stay if you want. Just try not to distract me, got it? I need to ace this fucking test or I don’t graduate.”

Clarke nodded and moved closer, pulling out the chair and opening up her own book. “How early did you get here… you look like shit.”

Lexa scoffed, shaking her head. “Never left. Been here all night.”

Clarke’s eyes naturally widened, that she had not been expecting. “Oh wow! I had no idea that was even possible… doesn’t the building close at 11 PM? How did you manage that?”

Lexa’s face relaxed a bit, and she gave Clarke a sly smirk. “Just talked it up to the hot chick that manages the front desk downstairs… convinced her to let me stay, in exchange for a favor or two. It was too easy…”

Clarke’s posture stiffened at the implication. “Oh… should have figured…” her words came out cold and clipped, revealing exactly what she felt at that moment.

Lexa rolled her eyes. “No, not sexual favors. She’s graduating soon and asked me to put in a good word for her at my parent’s firm. Said I would.” Lexa explained, sighing heavily and letting her eyes fall back to the book. “I’m not interested in fucking around anymore, Clarke… I meant what I said to you… still do.”
Clarke nodded in agreement; noting how sincere Lexa’s tone was as she spoke. “Can I ask you something? Why do you keep referring to your family’s company as your ‘parent’s’ firm? I mean… I guess I understand the why but, that place is yours too, Lexa. You shouldn’t feel ashamed to claim it.”

Lexa looked at her then, with heavy eyes that appeared frail and lifeless. “I have nothing to claim… carrying their last name and their legacy gives me zero right to anything.”

Clarke shook her head in disagreement. “Maybe not yet… but if you want, you can change that.”

“Yea… maybe. Will be hard to do that if I don’t pass this final… which I won’t if you don’t stop distracting me.”

Clarke smiled. “Well, I can help! I feel very comfortable with the subject and I’m sure I can – “

Lexa raised a hand, and Clarke stopped talking on command. “Clarke… please… just, leave me alone, will you? This is hard enough as it is… the last thing I need right now is you around, rubbing it in my face, acting like nothing fucking happened…” It wasn’t just Lexa’s words that were striking Clarke with the momentum of a thousand poisoned daggers, it was also her demeanor - weak and defeated - as if all fight had been drained out of her soul. “I’m not exactly ready to… to be near you yet. Maybe one day, but not right now. You being here, trying, gives me hope. So please, for my sake, don’t try. Just… go.”

Clarke watched Lexa dip her head as low and close to the book as she could, an effort to conceal whatever emotions and truths were currently being reflected across her face that she clearly didn’t want Clarke to see. Clarke was left without a reaction. Lexa’s statement diffused her out of whatever argument, or counterargument, or just anything, that she could say – wanted to say, to the brunette. She knew the words that Lexa wanted to hear; the words that could make this uncomfortable, painful situation go away. Yet she couldn’t bring herself to say it… even though she felt it; even though she honestly believed that what she had said Saturday night wasn’t true… no. She had made a mistake.

“Lex… listen… you know, I was, am… still trying to figure everything out.” She started, trying to guide herself to the point of confession; of surrender. “But I-I, look… truth be told, I really do like you. And I think, that maybe I didn’t quite mean what I said, Saturday night… I made a mistake, Lexa.” Her voice was quivering, and her hands were dancing wildly in the air without a tune or rhythm, but her words seemed to be making sense, because Lexa’s face was igniting with a happiness Clarke thought she’d never see there again. She needed to continue, to give the girl more than that; more explanation, more closure. More of that happiness that made Clarke’s heart melt at witnessing the raw beauty of it all. “I want you in my life, Lex. I want you present. I care so much about you… I think that you’re a great person.” Yes, that happiness was growing, finally reaching into those dull eyes and rehabilitating them too; electrifying the dreariness back into the vibrant forest green that Clarke could just gaze into for hours. “I think you’re just… an incredible friend.”

Clarke thought she noticed a blaze erupt within those glistening eyes; consuming the forest in them and leaving devastation and destruction in its wake… only sadness and darkness now remained. “Friend?” Lexa repeated the word in a mocking whisper. “Friend. That’s what you’re categorizing me as, Clarke? A fucking friend?! Oh, this is just GOLD…”

“Wait… no! I didn’t mean it like that! Wait, Lexa, just let me explain… I didn’t mean it like – “

“You know what… I think I’ve had just about enough of this… of you.” Lexa stood, gathering her things in one angry sweep of her arm. “You can have your fucking room back. I thought there was something special about it… that’s why I came here in the first place, you know… thought maybe it would bring me better focus or better luck…” She chuckled, shaking her head in disbelief and
shooting Clarke a heated glare that made the blonde squirm. “Turns out it’s just another fucking room… you were what was so special about it; you’re what made this room alive and lucky for me… but now it’s starting to feel more like a fucking crypt.” She picked up her bag from the floor and moved to the door. “It’s all yours. Enjoy it, friend.” And with a parting scoff, she left.

Clarke shook her head. Shook her head until the tears began to sprinkle down her cheeks. It had all happened so, so wrong… the words had come out wrong; the intention had been transmitted wrong; everything about them was just wrong! She stayed there a minute, thinking up a possible solution; a way to fix the mess she had put them in. But none appeared to her. Every scenario, every solution, would only feel forced and meaningless. No, that time had passed. She was simply too late for amendments now.

With shaky hands, she quietly wiped away the tear streaks on her face and cleaned her smeared makeup. Once she felt like she had composed herself, she stood, collected her things, and left the room. Lexa was right, there was nothing special about it; not when the brunette wasn’t there to make the natural lighting that filtered in a little brighter for her; or to make the room smell of the delicious cologne she adored so much. There was no annoying chewing to irritate her; no obvious staring by a girl with the most beautiful green eyes potent enough to hypnotize her; no slender fingers to brush away her wild curls or soothe her anxiety.

Now it was just a room. Vacant, dark, ordinary.

Nothing like it once was…and never again would it ever be the same.

***

Thursday afternoon wasn’t spent with textbooks and notes but rather with Anya, lounging by the poolside at the Woods Mansion; a much needed and well deserved break from the turmoil she had found herself in. Indra had retreated to the common room to watch endless hours of her favorite soap opera, leaving Lexa and Anya to enjoy the blazing sun undisturbed.

“It’s not too late to change your mind, baby cuz…” Anya spoke after about an hour of stretched, heavy silence between the two. “Let’s go out tonight. Just you and me. We can hit up your favorite strip clubs, just like old times. No pressure, I promise. Might do you some good…”

Lexa processed her words but offered no reaction to it; simply continued to stare straight ahead with hooded, uninterested eyes hidden behind her aviator shades. “I have to study, An.” She finally responded minutes later. “And I already told you to stop bugging me about going out… not in the mood.”

Anya slurped the rest of her frozen margarita loudly. “Alright, alright… I’ll put it to rest. It’s just… well, I’ve never seen you this bummed before, ya know. It’s sorta worrying Indra.” She stood, empty cup in hand. “Worrying me too, leashy.”

Lexa chuckled faintly. “It’s nothing. I’m just worried about these exams… I need to ace them. I need to graduate. I’ll be good once it’s over.”

Anya just nodded. “Yea sure… I’m sure that’s all that’s been eatin’ at ya…” Anya was semi-tempted to pull the truth out of Lexa, well aware that by doing so, she’d equally risk pulling her wrath along with it. So she dropped the subject. Another matter for another time, she figured. “Hey, I’m gonna make myself another one of these bangin’ margaritas. Want one?”

Lexa shook her head. “I told you, I’m done drinking, An. You can stop trying me.”
Anya shrugged and trudged back to the bar. “Jeez, just asking. Why so serious?!”

Leda relaxed back against her chair and shut her eyes, blocking out the stinging rays of the blazing sun. If only she could block out everything else as well, she thought… she’d start with the incident Saturday night, erase that burden from her memory bank. But… would that be enough? No… what else was she willing to delete? What other moments was she ready to part with for the sake of her well-being and sanity? What about the moment she met Clarke…? Or the moment she undoubtedly fell in love with her, would she? Could she?

“Lexa! Door!” Anya shouted from behind the bar, clearly insinuating that she was far too busy with her frozen margarita to answer it herself.

A consecutive range of knocks against hard wood greeted her as she approached, and through the glass panel she saw a police officer standing just beyond it, a hand on his hip, impatiently waiting for a response. Perplexed, she pulled open the door, only to come face-to-face with a friendly stranger she never expected to see again.

“Miss Woods? Pardon, your porter granted me permission into your property… I hope this is a good time?” The officer, a seemingly kind and proper young man, spoke. Leda nodded, exchanging looks with John who, for someone currently in handcuffs and being escorted by an armed police officer, looked incredibly at ease. The odd situation brought a smile to her face.

“Miss woods, we caught this gentleman here sleeping inside a vehicle we think belong to you.” The officer continued, shooting a look over at John, who simply crinkled his brows and smiled, entirely undisturbed.

“Mr. Murphy here claims you gave him the vehicle? He blatantly denied it when we accused him of theft and insisted you had handed it over willingly, so we are just stopping by to verify these theories. We weren’t really sure what to believe since the property is still under your name.”

John huffed, and shook his head. “Sorry about this, Raccoon… I told this gentleman multiple times what happened, and he still refuses to believe me… no one ever believes the homeless dude. Shaking my head.”

“Well… when we first asked, you did claim that ALIENS had bestowed you with a brand new Tesla all because you shared a beer with the Alien King and he liked you… anything after that was just a tad hard to swallow.” He spoke this second part directly over to Leda, who laughed.

“It’s true, officer. I, umm, John here is a good friend. It was a gift. You can let him go now.” Leda explained, and the officer who still looked a little incredulous, sighed and removed the cuffs.

“Very well. However, you still need to transfer car ownership over to crazy here otherwise this will keep happening.” The officer said humorously, patting John on the shoulder when the cuffs were off. “Sorry about that, John. I had to do it otherwise my superior would have chewed my head off, ya know…”

John nudged him back playfully. “Ahhh no worries, Wells. But hey… listen to me right, don’t just go back to her like that. Give her time to process, to miss you… then make your move. But pace it out!”

The officer laughed, and nodded. Leda watched just as confused as before. “Ya I will! Thanks again, man, that was the best advice I’ve gotten from someone other than my ma… appreciate it!”

“Anytime, see ya around, bud!” He waved the cop off and turned back to the dumbfounded Leda.
“Lexa! Man!” He jumped forward and engulfed her in a bear-crushing hug that practically lifted her off her feet. “So good to see you! You look… like shit! Jeez, and I thought I looked bad.”

Lexa chuckled. “Yea, well… I’ve seen better days.” She patted him softly on the cheek, strangely glad to see him. “You know, I can’t really say why but… I’m glad you’re here, John. Care for some coffee? Tea?”

“Rum?” He pitched, smirking after seeing the surprised look on Lexa’s face. “Ahhh just kidding… we made a promise to each other remember. Now… I don’t know about you, but I’ve been making good on my word.”

She led him out to the pool where she had been lounging a few minutes earlier. Anya was back behind the bar, either still working on that same margarita or making a new one.

“Who the hell is this?” She blurted once John came into view, scanning him from his tangled hair, down to shoeless toes.

“This is- “

“Hey there! I’m John! John Murphy!” He said, extending a hand over to Anya, who looked at the limb as if it had just been digging through a pile of cow shit.

“Holy hell… no fucking way….” She shot Lexa a look. “This is the bum?! Your bum?!”

Lexa nodded, and John smiled.

“Well… shit! You weren’t kidding… God, he’s even more interesting in person!” Anya nodded a weird approval. “Tell you what, once you two are done here, come find me in the game room, John. From what Lexi here tells me, you give great advice. I’d like to throw a few ideas your way, yea?”

John nodded curtly. “I am indefinitely at your disposal, tall one.”

Anya smiled. “Yea. I like him. Don’t take too long with our guest, Lex.” She padded off towards the game room, allowing Lexa and John a private moment.

“No one believed me about you, John.” Lexa smugly shared. “Until now.”

“Ah! Well, happy to help… I guess. Oh! I have something for ya…” He remembered, reaching into his front pocket and pulling out an iPhone. “It’s yours. You left it in the car and I figured you might want it back…?”

Lexa waved a hand dismissing it. “Keep it. I already got a new one. I figured you had deleted the content in there by now… nothing but nudes from random chicks and meaningless conversations.”

Lexa divulged, handing him a soda and pulling one for herself. “Where you been staying, Murphy? I thought you were trying to get your shit together. What’s this about sleeping in the car and all?”

John smiled. “Well… I need money first! Ya know… in order to afford rent and all that. I started as a part time janitor down at a local bar but, it will take a while until I’ve saved up enough to afford anything.” He said, as unbothered as ever, whereas Lexa shot up both brows. “No need to worry there, little raccoon. I’ve dealt with worse… this, this I can handle.” He softly tapped his head with his knuckles. “I’m sober now!”

Lexa smiled, and lifted her soda can to his. “Cheers to that.”

John watched her for a minute, quietly analyzing the damaged girl before him that was so desperately
trying to keep it together. “So… you got your heart broken, eh?”

Lexa’s widening eyes was enough answer to satisfy his question. “I see… well dear, the question now is… what are you going to do about it?”

Lexa let her head hang, the pressure of gravity too strong to fight off. “What I’m doing now, John… trying to move on. Trying to forget and trying to graduate. I have no other choice…”

John reached back into his pocket, and after some digging he pulled out a pair of die. Lexa watched closely, noticing how the once white dice were now dirty and scuffed. The black paint in each small crater had faded and the edges were no longer pointy but dull and eroded. “You know… there’s always a choice. Even if sometimes you are forced to pick the one that isn’t necessarily easy.” He rolled the dice in her direction, and curious, Lexa picked them up. She immediately dropped them when she noticed the dried, smeared blood that covered a side on both cubes.

“What the hell… John, why is there blood on these?”

John collected the die once again, and once again he racked and dropped them across the countertop. “When I was a kid, no more than 8 or 9, I befriended the wrong group of kids, you see…” He spoke, his tone was no longer light nor did it contain any humor. “One day I met a boy who must have been one, maybe two, years older than me. He was on a mission, he told me. It appeared he was also involved with the wrong group of kids… only his group and my group weren’t exactly friendly… He was the enemy.” He continued, running a soft thumb across the surface of one of the die. “He had been sent to find one of us and kill us as an initiation task, and lucky for me, I was it!” He laughed, but it felt forced; misplaced. “So, after apologizing, he lifted a pistol to my face. Of course, my only reaction was to just stand there and stare in his direction, I never even considered begging. I knew how those encounters worked; it was kill or be killed, so… I braced myself and waited for it to come. But… he hesitated. And I noticed then that he couldn’t keep the weapon steady because his hands were shaking so much.”

Lexa listened without releasing her breath; afraid that even that insignificant shift in air might snap John out of whatever daze he had entered… she needed to know how this would conclude.

“I never tried saying anything to him. I should have… I think. But I never did. I just stood there, waiting. And waiting. And waiting. Until I saw the weapon lower… until I saw tears stream down his grief-stricken face that at that moment appeared to have aged decades into the future. I remember… I remember we made eye contact for a split second… and I remember thinking, ‘man, this kid is a fucking coward.’” Another laugh, even weaker than before now. “And right when I finished thinking that, I saw the gun raise back up, only this time the barrel wasn’t pointing at me… instead he pushed it as far into his mouth as it would go, looked me right in the eyes once again, and this time he didn’t hesitate. I still remember the sound it produced…. I still hear its echo in my head every single day…”

Lexa finally exhaled. “Fuck… John… oh wow… I’m so sorry…”

He picked the dice back up and shook them. “I found these in his pocket. By the time I had mustered enough courage to approach his lifeless corpse, the blood had already reached down to his waist and drenched his clothes. I don’t know why I kept it, really… I guess it’s a reminder for myself, for whenever I start feeling like you are right now.” He dropped the dice once again, one cube settled with the singular dot facing up; the other cube with all six dots facing up. “There’s always a choice, Lexa. Always… It’s honestly the only reason I’m even here today, talking to you. Because some stranger chose to let me live… at the expense of his own life.”

He stood, smiled, and placed a hand on her shoulder. “So… do yourself a favor and reconsider your
options, because I guarantee you there’s another alternative. Life is funny that way, eh?” He pointed at the dice and chuckled. “Maybe fate is on your side this time? Some say the number 7 is supposed to bring you luck... why not test out that theory.” He winked at her and scooped back the cubes.

“John… wait. You can stay here... we have the space. You don’t have to go back out there…” Lexa reacted when she saw him start to leave.

He nodded, and saluted her. “Why... I appreciate the offer, but... out there is where I lost myself. And I have to find him before I can move anywhere else. But, before we part ways once again... here,” He pulled the phone back out, and passed it to her, “keep it. Don’t keep it. Again, the choice is yours. But if I can give you one more piece of advice?”

Lexa nodded, taking the phone. “It’s never too late to restore something that could have been... remember that, Lexa the Raccoon.” He bowed, and took his leave.

“Yes! Wait, how- “

“John! Wait, how- “

He shouted over his shoulder. “Life is funny that way!” And crossed towards the game room, laughing as though nothing could touch him. “Plus, it seems I have a date with your freakishly tall cousin...who knows, maybe she’ll give me another car!” He waved and disappeared into the house; his heartfelt laughter still ringing in her ears.

Lexa turned the mobile device in her hands, impressed that it was still in impeccable condition. She connected it to the charger and heard the device buzz to life a few minutes later. Her fingers easily navigated through the screen to the Messages app. Her eyes scanned the threads in her inbox, surprised to find Raven’s name taking top spot. After scrolling through the messages, she discovered that Raven and John had been texting frequently.

*Leave it to Raven to befriend a drunk, homeless stranger...*

Clarke’s name was fourth on the list. She clicked it open, confident that whatever she was about to uncover could not affect her... could not hurt her any more than the pain she was already drowning in. Her eyes stopped at the very last message.

*I could have loved you...*

She read it once again. Out loud this time.

“I could have loved you...”

And once again, trying to focus on each word.

“I. Could have. *Loved* you...”

She had been wrong, of course. Out of everything she had endured, this was by far the hardest thing to swallow. The most soul-crushing truth to come across... and all a tad *too* late.

*Always* a tad too late.

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“RAVEN! What the heck is that?!” Aden screeched, startling Raven out of her concentration, causing her to drop the round, silver-painted object.

“Crap... *Aden*!” She shouted back, grabbing the item with two very careful fingers and bringing it
up to where she had it prior to being interrupted. “What’s it look like it is?! It’s your damn project that I’ve been slaving over for the past HOUR while you were upstairs doing… what was it? Oh, yea… Painting *UR-ANUS!*” Raven burst into laughter for the 70th… wait, no 71st time now over that same joke. “Tight, my bad… ok, I think I got it all out of my system now…”

“RAVEN! Why are the planets positioned like that?! I gave you a map!” Aden shook his head, trying to understand Raven’s brain but deciding after one second of entering that territory that she probably lacked one to begin with. “Why do they range from smallest to largest?! Why are they in a linear position?! Raven! We’re SUPPOSED to be making a small, but ACCURATE diagram of the Solar System!”

Raven blinked a few times, analyzing her work. “Yes, and that is precisely what this is! Ok, kid, listen… you want to stand out, right. So, I thought, let’s change it up a bit… That kind of thinking is how you get an A, you little fart.”

“NO! What?! This is how I get an F and end up repeating fifth grade!” Aden shouted, dropping to his knees before the model. “It’s all wrong! Jupiter is supposed to go here! And, Venus is supposed to go there, Ray! And Planet X… wait, where’s Planet X?!” He looked around, counting all the different shaped, sized, and colored disks.

Raven started to laugh deviously, and Aden threw her a scalding look. “Ok, now… don’t be mad… but I thought, not only would it be funny… but also, inspiring!” She pulled an ‘X’ shaped figure from the box containing all the moons that had yet to be put into place. “Planet X! Get it, kid?! Funny, right?!”

Aden burrowed his fingers into his hair and yanked. “FUCK! I’M SO GONNA FAIL!”

“HEY! Watch that mouth, you little rascal! Relax, brat… you’ll pass and come back to thank me later…”

Aden dug through the box for the spare Styrofoam spheres. “Where’re the extra orbs we bought?! The spares?!”

Raven reached into a second box and pulled out a string of orbs tethered to one another by colored thread. “It is now room decoration… DAMN, I’m talented… I should start making shit like this to sell. Yea! I can design T-shirts too! Watchu think, kid? Wanna be my partner? We can split the profit 75/30.”

Aden gasped, bringing his hands to his mouth to suppress his shock. “Raven… those were the last pieces we had… the Arts and Crafts store is closed by now. How the hell are we gonna fix this?!”

Aden’s clear agony was finally realistic enough for Raven to want to take him seriously. “Ok, listen, not all hope is lost… ok, where’s that map. All we gotta do is just… rearrange the balls around. Problem solved, kid!”

Aden growled. “They’re planets! Not balls, you buffoon! Plus, you ruined Planet X, and I don’t have a spare to fix it!”

Raven shrugged. “We just gotta work with what we got! Stop crying and help me!” She started to carefully pull each orb out of place. “Since when do we have a planet called X, anyways?! Did they add a new planet or sumthin’?”

Aden rolled his eyes. “Planet X is a name given to planets that haven’t been explored yet… it’s a place holder! Pluto was called Planet X prior to it being named Pluto.”
Raven nodded, helping Aden with the balls. “Uh-huh… so, wait?! So Pluto is Planet X? Or Planet X is Planet X? OH…my…god… just had another brilliant idea… we should make Pluto, look like the Disney character… Pluto!”

Aden just looked at her with pitiful eyes. “You know… how did you make it to college?! Wait, scratch that… how did you make it to adulthood?!”

Raven scoffed. “Alright, so maybe astronomy isn’t my thing.”

Aden worked furiously, rearranging the orbs and carefully placing every moon in its designated spot. “Clarke will be home any second now and we told her the project was already finished when she called earlier! This is all your fault, Raven!”

“Ohhh, no. Nah-uh, I am NOT going down for this… first of all, this is YOUR project. I’m merely HELPING. Secondly, it was your BRIGHT IDEA to pretend to be sick just so you could take half of the day off from school to come and finish the project that you hadn’t even started on! Yea, I bet she won’t be too happy to hear that, huh?”

“ME?! You TOLD me to pretend to be sick! I was following your orders! And then when we got home you just HAD to have a FIFA tournament, didn’t you?!”

Raven laughed. “You’re just mad that I schooled your little ass in FIFA…”

Aden plopped Uranus into place, followed by Planet X. “Whatever… Clarke is gonna kill us both if she gets home and this isn’t done.”

Raven helped him fill in the moons, grinning her unashamed Cheshire grin. “Ahh, relax, kid. It’s gonna be fine. This is a pretty great project, if I do say so myself… you’re gonna get an A, Clarke is not gonna find out, and I’ll even consider a FIFA rematch after your last day tomorrow. Deal?”

Aden couldn’t contain his smile from forming. Annoying as she may be, Raven was always there when he needed her… even if she did complicate things more often than help. “Yea… ok, fine. Deal.”

Clarke barged in through the front door right that second, causing the smiling pair to jump to their feet and scramble for safety. “FUCK!” They whispered simultaneously, and Raven rushed to meet her at the door while Aden stayed behind.

“Clarke, heyyyyy… so, how was your day?!” Raven reached her, attempting to create a blockade and a temporary distraction while Aden came up with a plan to remove the evidence of their unfinished task from the kitchen floor.

“Um, fine. Thanks.” Clarke responded dryly, trying to swerve around Raven, who only slid in front of her again. “Ok, wanna tell me what’s going on, Ray? Where’s Aden?”

“Aden is… feeding himself! Yes. He is feeding. That kid has been eating like a wild hippopotamus, I tell ya. Yeesh!” The nervous chuckles that followed earned her scrutinizing looks from the blonde.

Clarke sighed deeply. “Ray, I know the friend and brother I have… and by the looks of it, he’s probably in the kitchen trying to cover up a project that has yet to be finished even though both of you told me it was already completed. Am I close?”

Raven pouted. “Ok… but look, if anyone is dying today, it should definitely be Aden, iight. What a procrastinator that kid is?! Wonder where he picked up that nasty habit… shaking mah DAMN head. Tsk.”
Just then Aden casually walked up and stood by Raven, munching loudly on an apple. “Hey sis! Gosh, you look extra lovely today!” He tried, putting on his most genuine face. “Is that a new shirt? Cuz it just looks great on you! Blue is definitely your color.”

One look from Clarke and his façade crumbled. “Cut the crap, kid… she knows.” Raven confirmed, and Aden nodded his defeat and prepared to accept certain penance.

“Alright, what’s the punishment this time?” He asked Clarke, who smirked and brushed past them towards the kitchen.

“Hmmm, let’s see….” Clarke put on her thinking face, pulling out pots and pans out of the cabinets to prepare dinner. “House chores for a month. I’m talking dishes, laundry, lawn, dusting and mopping. You two can split the work amongst yourselves.”

Raven and Aden shared a look before…

“DIBS ON DUSTING!” They shouted together.

“No, Ray! You’re older, it’s only fair YOU get the heavy chores!”

“Pffff, over my dead body, you little weasel. You should be volunteering to do them all seeing that it was your-“

“Enough!” Clarke threw herself into the argument. “You will BOTH rotate the work. No one gets stuck doing the same thing. Got it?!"

The duo nodded. “Good.”

Once dinner was over, Clarke shooed Aden up to his room to finish the project while Raven lingered back to help with the clean up. There was no communication between the two; the clinking of ceramic and plastic the only sound infiltrating the room as they washed up.

"You know... whatever it is that's bugging you, you know you can tell me, right?" Raven suggested, just putting the offer on the table.

Clarke nodded. "I know, Ray... It's nothing, really... I'll be ok, I promise."

Raven smiled but didn't press, she knew Clarke would confide in her when the time was right.

"Alright, I'm gonna go help the kid out before he ruins my work. Oh! And if you get a call from the school tomorrow asking why Aden wasn't in school today, just assume it's a huge misunderstanding. Ok, good talk! Love You!"

"Raven!" Was all Clarke had time to say before the sly brunette disappeared up the stairs.

***

Friday was spent shooting hoops with Anya down at the country club, followed by an hour or two sweating out the weeks’ aggravation in the hot-stone sauna while sipping on grade-A, ice-cold… water.

“You look like the biggest fucking wimp holding that, you do realize that, right?” Anya mocked, pausing only to take a massive sip of her extra-strong margarita. “Ten-year-olds look more badass than you right now, baby cuz.”

Lexa shrugged, immune to Anya’s teasing by now. “Glad you find my being sober pathetic.”
“Good grief, woman… Clarke really did a number on you…” Anya mumbled into her margarita cup, downing the rest in a swift shot.

“What did I say about using the ‘C’ word, An…”

“Oh… right, SHE-who-must-not-be-named really did a number on you…” Anya rolled her eyes and waived down a passing server. “She outdid Costia… now THAT’S impressive. Speaking of which, she went back you know… to Sydney.”

Lexa nodded slowly; the information holding no significance to her. “Good.”

The server entered the sauna with fresh drinks, earning an over-generous tip and a promising wink from Anya. “Miss Lexa, I know you asked me to screen your calls but a boy has been calling nonstop asking for you. He asked me to pass on the message and to return the call immediately. He says it’s urgent.”

Lexa perked up at the news, concern starting to bubble in her stomach. “Did he leave his name?!?”

The server nodded. “Aden. That’s all he told me.”

Lexa hopped from the bench and reached for a towel before the waitress had even finished saying his name. “How long ago did he call?! Did he say what the urgency was about?! Why are you just now telling me this?!”

“I’m so sorry… I-I was under the impression you didn’t want to be disturbed!!” The girl nervously spoke, unsure what to do or say.

“Bring my car around right away and get him back on the phone NOW!” She ordered, throwing on the damp basketball jersey over her spandex Sports Bra and hastily pulling on her grey jogger pants. “I swear to god… if something happened to that kid, I will take your ass to court for incompetency!”

“Hey, yo, Lex! Chill!!” Anya stepped in between Lexa and the frightened girl, who bowed her head and rushed out to follow through with Lexa’s orders. “I’m sure everything is alright, ‘kay? No need to chew the girl’s head off… she was just following your instructions, dude.”

She brushed past Anya and jogged to the front desk, where she snatched the phone rudely from the girls’ hand and dashed for the car waiting for her.

The phone rang three times before a shaky, whispery voice answered. “Lex?” Was all that was said.

“Aden! Hey, kid, what’s wrong?! Are you ok? Is Clarke ok?!” She couldn’t even try to conceal the worry that was seeping out of her, impatient for answers.

“Umm, yea, I’m ok… Clarke is ok too. Listen… can you pick me up at school? Something happened, and I need to be picked up.” The way his voice shook over the receiver was enough to get her moving. She entered the car and revved the engine, already gunning towards the elementary school.

“Yea, kid, I’m on my way right now, ok? What happened, Aden? You can tell me.”

“I’ll explain when you get here. Just… hurry.” He was adamant, firm in his answer. “Oh, and please don’t tell Clarke. Or Raven. Please, Lex?”
Lexa clenched her jaw, reanalyzing to which Griffin her loyalty belonged, and concluding that at the current moment, Aden was it. “I won’t, kid, I promise. I’ll be there in 15 minutes.”

Lexa made it in 11 minutes flat, secretly patting herself on the back and making a mental reminder to try out for Formula 1. Aden spotted her as soon as she pulled up, sloppily parking the car into the first curbside spot she found, and waited for her by the schools’ entrance. He stood alone, Lexa noted, putting a few yards of distance between himself and a group of older boys that were being obnoxiously loud and taking turns roughhousing with one another across the street.

As she approached Aden, she noticed his hand pressing against his cheek; noticed how he shot quick, worried glances over to where the boys were, and noticed how afraid he appeared at the moment.

“Aden…” She called, and his eyes relaxed with relief upon seeing her approach. “Oh, kid…” He lowered his eyes and his hand, giving her a view of his injured face. There was a shallow cut beneath his left eye, and there was signs of swelling and bruising starting to form. She lowered herself to her knees to look him directly in his eyes. “Aden, kiddo… what happened? Who did this to you? You can tell me… you can trust me.” She kept her voice as calm and controlled as possible, but the fury was slowly taking over, and she figured she was about two minutes away from letting it loose.

A girl, about Aden’s age, rushed out to where they were. She had a small Ziploc bag packed with ice. She didn’t stop to greet Lexa, barely even acknowledged Lexa’s presence at all, but instead pushed through to Aden and slapped the ice pack on his bruised cheek. Aden winced and yelped softly.

“You idiot… that’s what you get for trying to act tough and take them on by yourself.” She scolded, and little Aden lowered his eyes once again, this time from shame. “I told you, I can handle myself, Aden. I don’t need you to always come swooping in to rescue me!”

“Someone care to tell me what happened here?” Lexa demanded, standing back up and towering over the girl, using her size to intimidate her into relenting some form of explanation.

“Aden tried to fight off the school’s bully on his own… stupid, right? I told him not to but he didn’t listen. He never listens! Men are so damn stubborn!” The feisty half-human responded with a head tilt and a hip twitch, not one ounce frightened by Lexa. “That obviously didn’t turn out well… Press it up against your cheek, Aden!” She growled, causing Aden to whimper and slap the frigid package of ice back up against his face. “I suppose it was a nice gesture though…” At the comment, Aden beamed a proud, unashamed smile at her. “Stupid…” Smile faded slightly here. “But… nice.” The tiny tyrant in the flowy, yellow dress gathered her schoolbag then. “My mom is here, so I have to go… please take care of that bruise. And don’t be stupid again, ok?!” Aden nodded his head furiously, still beaming like a mesmerized fool. The girl hesitated a moment, but shook it off and leaned into Aden, giving him a quick, chaste, and unsure kiss on his undamaged cheek. Lexa watched slightly surprised, tempted to burst into laughter at Aden’s blushing expression. “Take care of him? Ok?” The question was directed at Lexa, who nodded, and waved goodbye as the girl sauntered off to a parked minivan waiting around the corner of the block.

Lexa rolled her eyes at the overwhelmingly cute display of puppy love that had transpired between the two. “Ok… Aden…” She pinched the bridge of her nose, feeling the headache quickly developing. “Kid, what were you thinking?! You could have been seriously hurt! And all for what… a girl??”

Aden smirked. “Isn’t she great, Lex?! She’s so great… the greatest…” Another roll of eyes from Lexa.
“Ok, alright… let’s go see the nurse. Or should I just take you to a hospital?” Lexa spoke somewhat unsure, pulling down the ice pack and analyzing the darkening bruise. “Clarke will lose her shit, you know that, right?”

Aden somewhat snapped out of his daze then, eyes widening and jaw slackening from sudden terror. Lexa sighed. “It’s ok, kid. We’ll figure it out together. You were just trying to defend someone you care for… Clarke can understand that.”

“Lexa… can we go… we need to go.” Aden mumbled, gaze fixed somewhere behind her. “Please, let’s leave now.”

“Are you Aden’s sister?” A high-pitched, annoyingly sharp voice screeched a few paces behind her, and she swiveled around to face a tallish, big-boned boy who appeared to be far too old to still be in fifth grade. Aden shriveled up a little where he sat, swallowing heavily. The boy stepped closer to them, a group of younger boys tagging behind; Lexa figured this must have been the bully the girl was referring to. He grinned, releasing a loud snort after scanning Lexa from head to toe. “Nah, you can’t be…. His sister is a delicious looking blonde… not some butchy dyke like you.”

Aden stood rapidly then, swerving around Lexa and readying himself for round 2. The boy laughed, amused by Aden’s outburst. “Where’s your little bitch, Aden? Did she leave already?” The boy taunted, Lexa instinctively put a hand on Aden’s shoulder to hold him down, impressed at how furiously they shook beneath her touch. “Shame… cute little thing like that deserves a real man… not some homo dork like you!”

Lexa doesn’t recall when her hand decided to disconnect from Aden’s trembling shoulders and launch forward; nor does she remember feeling any sort of remorse once she saw the crimson liquid drip from the boys injured nose. All she remembers is feeling glee…and satisfaction… and yea, maybe just slightly proud, especially when she saw the bully’s face twist from pain and fear.

She decided to go with it, and after landing the well-deserved punch to his nasal area, she grabbed onto the collar of his shirt with both hands and tugged, lifting the chunky bully straight off the ground. “You think you’re tough shit? Huh? What, just because you can bully around a boy half your size, you think that makes you badass?” She hissed loud enough for everyone of his bully army to hear, spitting along the boys’ face for good measure. “By the looks of it, you’re just jealous that Aden here got the girl you were probably drooling over for months, heck…maybe years, but she never even gave you the time of day, did she? Nah, wanna know why? Because who would? Have you seen yourself? Nothing more than a hairless, oversized baboon who takes out his insecurities by preying on smaller kids.” She tossed him back down, sending the rest of the group a look the emitted certain death to any who dared help him. She leaned back over the bully, who was practically shitting himself at this point. “Don’t you ever pick on Aden again, you hear me? It will be the last fucking thing you ever do.”

The boy nodded, mumbling a stuttered and half-choked apology, and with one signal from Lexa, they all scrambled away in different directions. Some even shouted apologies to Aden over their shoulders as they ran, looking over their shoulders to make sure Lexa wasn’t chasing them.

“See, kid? Problem solved.” She tapped his shoulder, only to be greeted with a loud scoff.

“Yea… not really. Problem just beginning,” Aden replied, pointing towards the entrance of the school, where a lady in pointed glasses and an outdated suit stood; arms crossed over her chest and right foot tapping the concrete.

“Ahh, fuck… is that the- “
“Principal.” Aden replied in a clipped tone. “Sure is. We call her Cruella for a reason…”

“Mr. Griffin!” Cruella greeted with a suppressed smile as she approached them. “And, you are…”

“Ahh, um, L-Lexa, Ma’am. Lexa Woods? Listen, it’s not what it looks like…. that boy, he hurt
Aden and I was just- “

She lifted a hand. “I won’t hear any of it. As far as I’m concerned, I have just witnessed an adult
bully a child! Now, I will need you both to come with me.” She turned and started back towards
the school, her heels clipping the ground with every step. “NOW!”

“Yes, Ma’am!” Lexa and Aden replied in synchrony, scrambling after her, throwing each other
worried glances along the way, certain this wouldn’t end well.

***

Aden and Lexa sat defeated on the bench outside the principals’ office, pouting and gloomy, waiting
for Clarke to arrive and bail them out.

“This is all your fault you know… I had it handled!” Aden spoke through clenched teeth and with a
sideways glance.

Lexa scoffed. “Yea, sure you did… that kid would have pulverized you if I hadn’t stepped in to
rescue you.”

“No, he wouldn’t have! I was ready to counter! You just interrupted me.” He explained, shaking his
head. “Clarke is gonna kill you!”

“Or she’s gonna kill you… for calling me instead of her. Did you stop to think about that?”

Aden sighed. “I called you because you’re sometimes the most rational one out of everyone…
Clarke would have just scolded me for even trying to do anything remotely wrong. And Raven…
well, Raven would have probably killed that kid, to be honest…”

Lexa laughed. “Touché… well, we’re both in deep shit, kid. Let’s just stick together, alright?
Whatever happens, it was no one’s fault. We just need to have each other’s backs. Deal?”

Aden nodded, extending a hand for Lexa to shake. “Yea. Deal!”

The sound of rushed, quickened footsteps echoed down the hall to them before Clarke even
appeared. Aden groaned near Lexa, and she felt the warmth escape her body at the impending doom
approaching.

Clarke’s stare screamed unending, relentless punishment, aimed at both of them, which only made
them shrivel up into spineless worms. Lexa thought she had heard Aden snivel quietly besides her.

“I will deal with BOTH of you in a second! Don’t you DARE leave this bench, you hear me?!”
Clarke ordered as she approached, not bothering to stop but instead kept marching straight past them
and barged into the principal’s office.

Once the door slammed back shut, Lexa and Aden exhaled and exchanged careful glances.

“I’m her baby brother… I think my chances of surviving are pretty decent.” Aden husked playfully,
smirking boldly. “But you… Don’t worry, Lex. I’ll say good things about you at your funeral.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure, kid… She might just wanna be an only child and get rid of your pesky ass.”
Lexa mocked and elbowed him. They tried to listen to the conversation surely occurring behind the closed door, but to their dismay, it was confined to the room; no audio leaked out to where they impatiently sat.

“Whatever happens, I got your back. And you got mine, right?” Lexa nudged Aden again, earning a nod from the boy. “Good. It was an accident. No one’s to blame. We say that, and she’ll have to believe us.”

“Right. Yea. Just… gotta stick together. Got it.” Aden mumbled back. The door was finally pulled open a few moments later, and Clarke stormed out, arms crossed over her chest, glaring down at the fear-stricken pair.

“Alright, you two have a lot of explaining to do… What the HELL happened here?! And I SWEAR, if either one of you so much as try to LIE to me, you will get what’s coming to you, understand?!” Clarke scolded, finger waving from Lexa, to Aden, and back; neither one capable of meeting her gaze from shame… or terror. “So what HAPPENED?!”

Aden shot a finger in Lexa’s direction at the same time Lexa shot a finger back at Aden.

“She did it!”

“He did it!”

“What???!? You little rat!” Lexa bellowed.

“Hey! You’re the rat! You betrayed me too!” Aden countered.

“Only because YOU would have sold me out FIRST! When all I’m guilty of is helping you!”

“FALSE! I reacted to YOUR attempt at throwing the blame on ME! And I never asked you for help…I told you I could handled it on my own!”

“Ungrateful! Seriously, Aden?! If I hadn’t come in when I did to help you and your little girlfriend, Clarke would have been scraping your remains off of the concrete right now! Don’t even!”

“Pfffft, first off, Harper is NOT my girlfriend! She’s just a friend who HAPPENS to be a girl. Secondly, I’m an advanced white belt, FYI… I knew exactly what I was doing.”

“Yea, sure you did… cuz clearly your “white belt” skills did nothing to prevent that alien forming on the side of your head right now… you little bullshitter.”

“I bullshit NOT! I tell the whole truth, nothing BUT the truth, so help me –“

“ENOUGH!” Clarke shouted, cutting them off abruptly. “The principal saw what happened. She filled me in, so there’s not need to LIE.”

“I’m not… WE’re not- “

“I said quiet, Aden!” She snapped, and Aden’s brows furrowed in shame. “You know what… Aden, go to the car and wait for me there. It’s parked right in front of the school and I’ll be out in a minute to take you to soccer practice. I need a moment alone with Lexa.”

Aden hesitated, looking from Lexa to Clarke. “But- Clarke, I’m sorry… it wasn’t Lexa’s fault. It was mine, ok?! She came because I asked her too! She came because I needed her! It’s not her fault, I take back what I said earlier! It’s my fault, ok?!” Aden pleaded with Clarke, who kept her frigid gaze
locked on Lexa. “Ok, Clarke?”

“I said go to the car.” She repeated. “NOW, Aden!”

Aden scurried to his feet, unsure whether to obey his sister, or stay and try and defend Lexa. In the end he chose the former, departing only after wrapping his arms around Lexa’s neck and pulling her into a tight hug. “I’m sorry… I didn’t mean to get you in trouble…” he whispered by her ear.

Lexa hugged him back with a smile. “It’s alright, kid. I’ll be ok. Now listen to your sister, ok? Go on and wait in the car.”

Once he was out of range, Clarke took a few steps forward until she was a mere inches away from Lexa, who still remained glued to the bench.

“I’m gonna say this only once, so listen closely…. Aden is MY obligation. He is MY brother, MY family, and that makes him MY responsibility, not yours! Next time he tries to contact you for anything, you tell ME about it, you understand?! You don’t come rushing over and make a mess of things like you did today! What the hell were you thinking, Lexa?! You punched a fucking KID!”

Lexa stood then, forcing Clarke back a few paces to give her space. “I was thinking that I’ll do whatever it takes to keep Aden safe! And if that means punching a “kid”, which I’m pretty sure that boy was at least 13 but that’s besides the point, then that’s what I’ll do! If there are any issues with the parents, my lawyers will take care of it, you don’t have to worry about any of that, ok?”

Clarke scoffed. “You just don’t get it, do you? You think everything can just be resolved with a snap of your fingers and by throwing money around! You think you can just act on impulse and worry about the consequences later! That’s not how life WORKS, Lexa! You know what… I’m not doing this again. It’s useless!”

Clarke turned to leave, but Lexa cut off her escape by dashing in front of her. “Clarke, no, wait…”

“Lexa… please, just go home. This is between Aden and I. You have no business here, ok? Not anymore.” She swerved around the brunette blocking her path and walked away, unable to brush off the weight that seemed increasingly harder to bear with every passing second.

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“We will talk about this once you’re home from practice, Aden, now go! Raven is waiting on you to start practice!” Clarke ordered, gripping the steering wheel a little tighter as she fought the temptation to hug the sadness out of him. She knew she needed to be tough. To be harsh right now. Otherwise, how else was he supposed to learn?

His cheek was bruised, but it wasn’t serious. The swelling had improved with the ice and the cut was bandaged and covered. Still…she wanted to cover the area with kisses instead. To shower him with hugs and ice cream and endless cupcakes, but she already knew Raven would take care of all of that. She needed to be his parent right now. Not his friend. Not his loving big sister. She needed to remain firm.

“Ok, but… it wasn’t Lexa’s fault. She was only trying to protect me, Clarke.” He said for the 50th time since she had entered the car. Imploring her to put all the blame on him instead and let Lexa off the hook. Yet how could she?!

“Aden… don’t keep Raven waiting any more than she already has. I said we will discuss this later, so go! Now! Please!”
Aden nodded and stepped out of the vehicle with a bowed head. “Bye, Clarke. Love you.”

“Love you too. Now, go.” She drove off with a new layer of guilt on her already loaded shoulders, shedding a few tears on the silent drive home. It was impossible to prevent her mind from wandering to faraway places in such moments; when a quick escape was all she craved. She especially enjoyed dwelling back in time; back to her favorite era… when her father was alive and her mother was around. A time when decisions consisted of petty things like, what to wear that day or what movie to watch with Raven that evening. Yet there were other moments that brought happiness to her gloomy life that she also often visited; more recent memories that she fought to suppress but kept resurfacing every now and then… a picnic over a floating rock. A masked birthday party and a mask-less green-eyed stranger. A helicopter ride. A star-dotted sky. Starbucks coffees and library encounters with delivered lunch and smiles…

she was lost in these peculiar memories when she reached her driveway, parking her crumbling sedan and walking up to the front porch when she realized she had company.

Lexa sat on the top step of the porch, a bouquet of roses rested on her lap, and she slowly stood when she saw Clarke approach. Both women froze in place. Neither really knowing how to react.

“I couldn’t leave things off the way we did back at the school…” Was the only explanation Lexa offered.

Clarke nodded, climbing the steps slowly, almost cautiously. “There’s nothing left to discuss… I thought I made that perfectly clear. You should go…”

She stepped around Lexa and entered through the front door, moving to close it behind her, but Lexa wasn’t having it. Something clicked inside the brunette and she jolted forward, kicking the swinging door back in, startling them both. “Is that your answer for everything?! ‘Leave!’ ‘Go!’ ‘Disappear from my life’… I’m just trying to have a normal conversation with you! Jesus Christ, Clarke… are we really incapable of that?”

The question wasn’t unreasonable, Clarke granted Lexa that…but the anger still fervently simmered within for her to just relent. “If only you LISTENED the first time, I wouldn’t have to keep repeating myself over, and over, and over again! What part of what I said to you was unclear, exactly? Don’t play the victim in all of this, Lexa, you’re the one to blame for putting us both in this fucking mess.”

“Oh, get real, Clarke! Me?! So you’re pinning this all on me?! You know what… I TRIED to follow your wish; to stay away from you. But YOU were the one seeking me out! Yea, no, don’t you DARE roll your eyes, you KNOW it’s true!” Lexa exclaimed, unbothered by the searing stare the blonde was shooting her; that alone told her she was on the right track. “YOU were the one chasing me after class, and in the library! This whole week, I did nothing to go after you. I kept my distance, I respected your wish, yet YOU were the one to break it. So do NOT throw this on me when you’re the one to blame!”

“Oh, please! Exaggerating much? I did NOT ‘chase’ after you. We just happen to have the same fucking class and study in the same fucking building! Don’t mistake coincidence for programmed!” Clarke couldn’t help the blush forming on her cheeks; she knew her statement wasn’t necessarily true and she hoped Lexa wouldn’t note it. “And in reference to today, yes, this was entirely YOUR mess! You were out of place today… it is my job to take care of Aden, not yours!”

Lexa scoffed, and shook her head at the anger and disappointment that continued to bitch slap her across her face. ‘Out of place? I was out of place when it came to HELPING out the kid?! How could- “
“Don’t you start with that bullshit… you damn well know it was out of line and don’t you TRY to make me feel guilty for telling you like it is!”

Lexa was certain her blood pressure just about exploded; fury and irritation quickly eclipsing reason and control, and she flung the flowers in her iron-like grip harshly at the wall, causing petals to shower across the floor space between her and a wide-eyed, wider-mouthed Clarke. “You’re insufferable, you know that?! Absolutely, positively infuriating! I don’t care what the FUCK you say, Clarke, but if Aden calls me, begging me for help, you DAMN best believe I will cross hell and high water to be there for that kid! I don’t CARE if you don’t approve. I don’t CARE if you think it’s out of line or out of place. I could give three FUCKS about how you feel… because believe it or not, I fucking LOVE that kid! I’d do anything to make sure he’s safe, and if that means breaking one of your stupid rules, then, hell, that’s exactly what I’ll do! So, yea, unleash your wrath on me like you fucking LOVE to do and get over it, because truth be told, I’d do it all over again. Only thing I’d do differently is making sure I break that little fucker’s nose next time.”

Clarke tried to speak but was greeted with only a choking, utterly inhuman sound that came out of her mouth. There were simply no words available to express what she felt. Her brain shut down, unable to decode the emotions running haywire through her suddenly too heated body, and it was during that momentary gap; that unlikely event, when her brain and soul somewhat disconnected, that her heart leaped into action and finally took over.

Her body willingly obeyed. Her feet began walking, no-jogging. Her arms, while crossed throughout the entire argument, dismantled and opened. Her vision decelerated and focused directly ahead at the only object that was worthy of her attention, and when she finally thrust herself at the angry, passionate brunette in front of her, she knew – without a shred of doubt – that she would catch her.

Lexa did. It was almost an instinct; automatic and needless to decide. Her arms welcomed the insufferable, infuriating blonde only too effortlessly; wrapping around her waist and pulling her closer like a dying need to have her there… to feel her without even a milliliter of space separating them. Their lips also acted on their own accord, quickly finding each other and latching on for dear life in a kiss that evoked fire and ice; teeth and tongue and passion that had been stifled for ages now finally free to roam and burn.

Lexa spun them, quickly propelling Clarkes’ body back until the door stopped their movement altogether. She used the point of leverage to grasp the girls’ cheeks and pull her into a deeper kiss while her other hand traveled up Clarke’s bare thigh, pausing just on the underside of her butt.

“How the hell is she even capable of talking right now?

Clarke didn’t bother with words. She was too gone; too immersed to produce speech. She flipped them against the door, slamming Lexa back onto it and pressing her front to hers, all in the course of a second. Her lips continued to ravage and attack the brunette’s, argument and unresolved issues be damned.

“Clarke… god… Clarke…”

“Ok… She needs to shut the fuck up like, right fucking now… seriously, my lips are doing some
serious damage here and she’s got enough air left over to produce words?

“Oh, Jesus… Clarke, seriously, if we don’t pause this NOW, I won’t be able to- “

“LEXA SHUT UP AND KISS ME!”

Clarke leaned forward to continue the interrupted kiss when Lexa grabbed on to each thigh and lifted the blonde straight off the ground to straddle her around the waist.

“Holy fuck…” Clarke gasped out a moan, arms and legs wrapping around the slender brunette, her head suddenly heavy and dizzy with the sudden jolt of arousal the move incited in her. “Shit… shit…shiiit that’s sexy… oh god…”

“Now who’s the one who can’t shut the fuck up…” Lexa breathed back with a teasing smirk, quickly crossing the distance from the door to the nearest decoration table adorning the hall. With a quick sweep of her hand, she wiped the surface clean of the picture frames and trinkets on it, and dumped Clarke roughly on top of it instead.

“Ow! Bitch!” Clarke yelped the second her ass made contact with the wooden table, pain quickly disappearing when Lexa yanked her forward by her legs and moved between them; her core now pressed flush against the brunette’s abdomen, who started grinding slowly against her.

Clarke threw her head back and released a low moan, but Lexa grabbed her by the nape and drew her head forward, their mouths once again meeting in a savage, flesh-tearing kiss.

Clarke’s hands flew to Lexa’s hair, not to fight her off but pull her impossibly closer, starting her own rhythm with her hips everytime Lexa’s would push up against her.

“Clarke… you have two seconds to tell me where you want to take this… otherwise I’m about to start tearing your clothes off and taking you right fucking here.” Lexa pulled back moments later, breaking the kiss, and making the deadly mistake of gazing upon Clarke’s sex infused facial expressions; all parted, swollen, glossy lips and half-lidded, darkened eyes. Her calm, perfect curls now transformed into unruly, wild hair that glowed with the dying sunlight peering in from the window. Her chest heaved rapidly and her legs… god… her legs parted, enveloping her; welcoming her in.

“Upstairs. Second room to the right. That’s where I wanna take this…” Clarke husked, licking her lower lip for good measure. “Hum? All talk and no action?” Clarke didn’t wait for a reaction,

This was an order Lexa was more than happy to oblige. Eager to impress and serve, she slid both hands under Clarke’s plump ass and lifted her off the table, lips reconnecting and more moans escaping Clarke’s throat as she moved them step-by-step up towards Clarke’s bedroom. It took them way longer than necessary, partially due to the fact that Lexa would occasionally slam Clarke against the wall and tease her with shallow thrusts of her hips. She enjoyed seeing the frustration building up in the blonde right along with her dilating pupils and needy whimpers.

They eventually stumbled into the darkening room, hands and lips still attached and at work on the other, and Lexa did not hesitate to kick the door shut and press the woman she held against it, slowly lowering her to her feet to allow her hands the freedom they yearned for. Both however, decided to stay glued to Clarke’s ass, squeezing and massaging the flesh while they kissed.

“What happened to tearing off my clothes?” Clarke questioned in a heavy whisper, biting the brunette’s lower lip for emphasis. “Hum? All talk and no action?” Clarke didn’t wait for a reaction,
instead decided to take some of the control back by spinning them and trapping Lexa between the
doors this time. Her hands dropped from Lexa’s neck to the perky breasts hidden
beneath sports bra and basketball jersey. “I guess I’ll be the one doing the tearing then…” And with
that announced, she grasped the hem of the jersey and pulled up, sliding it over Lexa’s head and
extended arms. Once the material had been discarded, her hands found its way back to Lexa’s
breasts, which she continued to fondle through the bra.

Lexa kept pace, still working Clarke’s ass with her hands and sealing her lips around Clarke’s neck,
pulling the blonde even closer to her. She felt Clarke’s fingers play around the edge of her sweats;
tugging carefully at the elastic band. It’s an unspoken question; they both know once permission is
granted, there’s no turning back… in retrospect, maybe there never really was. Maybe this was the
point in time they had both been moving towards whether they knew it or not. And Lexa isn’t one to
fight off fate that plays in her favor. Her head dips. A single nod. And Clarke’s hands quickly yank
the pants down until they are pooled around her feet.

The atmosphere shifts then, and both women feel it simultaneously. Their kissing slows; deescalating
from sloppy and rough to precise and intimate. Hands remain on breasts and butts, but instead of
desperate grasps, it becomes loving and gentle. Clarke steps back a little, detaching herself from
Lexa’s front, and continues to take slow, precise steps backwards until she’s standing besides her
bed, pinning Lexa to the door with only her gaze.

Lexa on the other hand is completely frozen. Desperate to move; to chase after her girl. To continue
what they started, but something about Clarke’s demeanor and stare prevents her from doing so.
Instead, she leans back against the door and observes; anticipating the next move, waiting until her
goddess releases her from whatever spell she’s under.

Slowly, as if to clearly display what she’s doing, Clarke begins to peel off her outer garments. First,
she starts with her blouse, skilled fingers teasingly working to undo each button down its middle as
slowly as unimaginably possible. Lexa swears it takes roughly a century to reach only the third
button from the top, the one she’s most excited about, except Clarke’s hands pause and jump instead
to the last button, working their way up now. Lexa releases an impatient growl; biting her lip when
she catches the knowing smile forming on those insufferable lips.

“Problem, Woods?” Clarke asks, biting her lip playfully, working even slower on the buttons.

“None, Griffin…” Lexa shot back with a wicked smirk. Somehow her response pleased the blonde,
and Clarke flew through the buttons after that. She pulled apart the two halves, showcasing her
laced-covered breasts to a pair of lust-infused green eyes that widened in appreciation. She then
dragged her hands down her breasts and stomach seductively, running her thumb underneath the
waistband of her shorts before popping the button through its slit and undoing the zipper.

She watched Lexa’s expression carefully; watching Lexa’s gaze follow her shorts as it slipped down
her legs.

“Fuck…” She heard the brunette whisper and gulp loudly immediately after, and she did nothing to
conceal the proud smile that formed on her lips.

Lexa was incapable of blinking. Even once her eyes began to sting and ache, they could not part
with the vision that rested before them, Clarke. Partially nude. Only in her black, lacey underwear,
was just too good, too surreal to believe.

“Like what you see?” Clarke asked, continuing to tease.

Lexa nodded. “Y-you’re absolutely breathtaking…” She heard her own voice shake as she spoke.
Her knees buckled under her weight, and she suddenly felt heavy and out of her element. Even though they were both equally exposed to one another, Lexa felt infinitely more inferior; as though Clarke truly was this majestic goddess and she but a humble mortal.

The blonde must have noticed her sudden case of stage fright, and she walked her way over to the trembling brunette, kissing her lips softly and lacing their fingers together. Clarke led them from the door to the bed, and lowered the brunette down on the edge of the mattress, watching Lexa’s eyes bore into her own in a questioning stance, anticipating the inevitable yet unsure if either of them was prepared to face it.

Clarke took the plunge first, and straddled her, sitting fully on Lexa’s still trembling lap and wrapping her arms around her neck.

The kiss that followed was slow and patient. Clarke set the pace, giving Lexa a moment to recover and find herself before picking up the speed. Her hips were still at first, but the second she felt Lexa’s tongue push into her mouth she began a steady rotation against Lexa’s pelvis, making sure to rub right over the brunette’s core with each swing. Lexa’s hands found their way back to her ass, and the squeezes quickly transitioned from mild to rough, encouraging Clarke to continue gyrating her hips and kissing the girl beneath her.

“I left my bra and panties on for you to remove…” Clarke whispered in her ear, nibbling her lobe in the process. “You should get on that…”

“Fuck… Clarke, are you sure…? We don’t have to – shit.” Lexa husked, head thrown back at a particularly effective swirl of Clarke’s hip.

Clarke was done being patient. She reached behind her back and unclasped the bra herself, peeling off the piece with a smirk and a short performance for Lexa’s feral gaze. She lifted herself up slightly, to make sure her breasts were perfectly aligned with Lexa’s mouth.

“Now all you gotta worry about is the panties…which by the feels of it, is probably ruined…” She husked, bouncing a little on the mattress and watching Lexa watch her breasts jiggle. “Suck them.”

Lexa didn’t move. She didn’t blink. She didn’t breathe. She just continued to sit, perfectly still, hands on Clarke’s hips and gaze directed at the blonde’s chest as if it was the most magnificent thing she’d ever seen.

“Lex…” Clarke breathed out again, finally gaining Lexa’s attention. “I want your mouth on them…”

The brunette wasted no time taking an erect nipple in between her lips, using a hand to caress and massage the perky mound of its sister. She had fantasied this exact moment countless times, yet reality far surpassed any fiction she had ever conjured up. She spent a great deal of time worshipping them; feeling their weight on her palm, teasing and nibbling each nipple with her lips and teeth. If the sounds coming out of Clarke’s mouth was any indication of her skills, she’d say she was doing a damn good job at giving each breast the attention they deserved.

“Lex… fuck…” Clarke spoke in between moans. Her hands were circling Lexa’s own breasts, playing with the sports bra she still had on. “Lexa… I want this off…”

Lexa couldn’t agree more, and moved to remove the inconvenience herself when Clarke’s hand shot up to stop her. “Wait! May… I?”

Once the permission was exchanged, Clarke made quick work of it, and practically yanked the cloth off Lexa’s sculpted body. She kissed her way down to the perky mounds with eager lips, alternating
needy sucks and licks between each nipple, relishing the hisses and curses that dripped out of Lexa’s mouth each time her tongue flicked.

“Fuck… Clarke…. Oh my god…”

Clarke didn’t stop. Riding on a wave of confidence and lust, she pushed Lexa fully down onto the bed by her shoulders, and started making her way down her toned abs, kissing and licking each area where the muscles flexed beneath her tongue. She ordered Lexa to scoot upwards to give her space to continue her invasion, and once the brunette was fully on the bed, she gradually worked her tongue down past her naval, and down to where the next barrier prevented her from continuing her exploration.

She kissed along the edge of the briefs’ waistband, occasionally grasping the elastic band with her teeth and letting it snap back into place. She enjoyed watching Lexa squirm and jolt with each crack. Clarke contemplated tugging them down with only her teeth, but once that image played itself out in her head, another image surfaced.

Fuck… and then what?! I’ve never fucking done this before… what if I suck!

She let her head rest against Lexa’s lower stomach, unsure what to do next. Contemplating between fessing up or just going with it and hoping for the best.

“Lex…” She spoke softly to the girls’ stomach, her mere breath causing the muscles there to tense and quiver. “Lex… I… I, um…”

A soothing hand weaved through her hair then, pulling her head up. Lexa’s eyes were warm and comforting.

“Come here, beautiful… I want to kiss you.” Clarke eagerly crawled back up to where the brunette needed her. Kissing her in earnest and in a silent ‘thank you’. Clarke was about to ask her for instructions… for assistance on how to properly… service her, when Lexa spun her over and pinned her underneath her muscular body.

“Tonight is all about you, princess…” As though Lexa had tapped into her brain and picked up on her hesitation.

“I want to please you too… just, tell me what to do… I’m a quick learner.” Clarke tried to reason, but Lexa smiled and shook her head.

“Trust me, this will give me plenty of pleasure. You’ve no idea how long I’ve been waiting for this, Clarke…” and with one deep, passionate kiss to launch things off, Lexa started her journey down Clarke’s writhing body.

She showered kisses across the blonde’s jaw and neck, sucking the skin into her mouth here and there. Next, she spent some more time admiring Clarke’s succulent breasts; moisturizing every inch of skin with her tongue. She takes twice as long admiring the girls’ stomach; kissing every section of exposed flesh not once, but twice, ensuring every square inch received proper attention. By the time her tongue dips into the crevice of her naval, Clarke’s legs fall apart, opening to full extent and practically purring for Lexa to accept the invitation.

The brunette conceals the smirk widening on her face by pressing her lips to the girls’ lower abdomen and giving it another kiss, her head starting to cloud over with the heady scent of Clarke’s arousal rapidly invading her nostrils. Lexa knows she won’t be able to maintain this extent of self-control much longer if Clarke keeps smelling and moaning the way she is...
Lexa positions herself between Clarke’s parted thighs, still maintaining her wavering focus on Clarke’s lower stomach, feeling the muscle rise and fall from pleasure and impatience. Clarke’s moaning increases with every inch she travels lower, a delicious symphony to Lexa’s ear, and one she’s not quite ready to relent to just yet. She dodges Clarke’s visually moistened panties completely, aiming instead for her inner thigh and running her tongue as close to the apex of her legs without actually going there.

The sudden unleash of huffs and puffs and sighs from the blonde suggests her plan is working, and she continues her teasing by swerving over to the other thigh and repeating the same process. She knows Clarke’s type. Knows that the blonde will not submit herself so easily and beg for it, much as her body may be screaming otherwise. So Lexa kept a torturous pace, curious to see how far she could take it, and how long Clarke could resist.

Her hands plunged between the mattress and Clarkes’ scalding body, cupping her ass and massaging it in tune to every suck and lick she dished out on the girl’s inner thighs, skirting alongside the edge of the damp underwear with the tip of her tongue and occasionally dipping it just beneath the panty line. Clarke’s hips were bucking wildly now, desperate for further contact; desperate for friction and relief.

“Lexa… fuck…” Clarke groaned. Lexa deciphered her plea and latched onto the underwear, dragging it down toned legs without an ounce of hesitation from Clarke.

“I want to make sure you’re nice and wet for me, Clarke…” Lexa husked, once she had the liberated panties in her grip, tempted to bring it to her face for a sniff but deciding against it. “I want you dripping for me, beautiful.”

Clarke’s only response was guttural moan that vibrated through the room. Her fingers gripped the sheets beneath her until her knuckles turned white. “Fuck!”

Lexa dove back in between the spread thighs, dipping her nose into the patch of golden curls adorning Clarke’s sex and inhaling deeply. “This is a nice surprise…” Lexa husked, taking another much needed whiff of the scent that was entirely Clarke. “In my mind, I imagined you bare… but this… this is so much better. This is so much more you, Clarke….”

That confession must have triggered something in Clarke, because her hand flew to Lexa’s now loosened hair and pushed, trying to bring the brunette lower to her aching clit. Lexa grabbed both her wrists and pinned her hands down to the bed, clicking her tongue in a playful disapproval. “Patience, beautiful. All in good time…”

Pulling away slightly, Lexa hovered over the glistening lips, using two fingers to part the folds and open Clarke up to her deprived gaze, her mouth already watering at the gorgeous sight. Still determined to have Clarke cave first, she tentatively blows a gush of air directly onto the moistened flesh, groaning when Clarke’s body curved into a tight bow off the bed and collapsed with a loud huff.

“Fuuuuuuuck!” Clarke shouted, releasing a string of loud moans and whimpers along with a few more profanities. “Fuck! Fuck! FUCK!”

Lexa’s eyes dart back down to the fresh trail of slick gathering around Clarke’s tightening entrance, which started to drip down and stain the sheets directly beneath, awakening the inner beast that she’d been struggling with all night to keep in check. Her restraint had finally reached its limit.

“Lexa! Fuck! Lex… GOD! Please… just… PLEASE!” There it is. The words Lexa had been waiting weeks to hear. And coming out of Clarke the way it did… all breath, and passion, and
NEED… well, it was enough to dismantle the last shred of restraint she had in her, and so she lounged.

Lexa licked upwards from the slick hole to clit in one sweep, gathering the heady fluid she had dreamed of savoring for longer than humanly possible… tasting every bit as sweet and every bit as intoxicating as she had imagined it would be. Clarke was already a mumbling mess beneath her. Hands switching between gripping sheets and hazel hair; lips far too busy spurting curses and moans to demand anything, to say anything… exactly how Lexa wanted her.

Putting her tongue to work, she focused on the twitching clit. Swirling and sucking… occasionally kissing the bud in a show of admiration before returning to more flicking and sucking.

“SHIIIIITT! LEXA, YES! OH… MAHGOD!”

Lexa didn’t ease up. She continued putting pressure on the swollen bundle of nerve by pressing her tongue flat against it, and then pulling back, only to repeat the process again and again. Clarke seemed to enjoy it… by the way both her hands pushed down on Lexa’s scalp… and the way her hips ground up against Lexa’s waiting mouth.

Lexa abandoned the clit for a moment to dip her tongue inside the warm, succulent, clenching hole that nearly sucked her in.

“Ohhhhhhh fuuuuuuuckkkkk! Oh, YES! Don’t stop, Lex…. Holy- God, don’t you DARE stop!”

_Duh._ She pushed the muscle as deep as it would go, swirling it around and tasting her favorite new flavor directly from the source. “Fuck… Clarke, you’re so fucking delicious…”

She kept her tongue there for a while. Driving it in and out, while simultaneously driving the blonde dangerously close to the edge.

“Lex… lex, oh shit! Lex… please.” Clarke moaned loudly, trying to get her breathing in control to continue her plea. “I…I need you inside of me…”

Lexa planted one last kiss against the still swollen clit before crawling her way up the perfect, trembling body. Clarke pulled her to her lips, moaning against Lexa’s parted mouth when she tasted herself on her. “Lex… _god_, I need you _now_…”

Lexa slowly ran her fingers the length of the slippery slit, massaging the clit in circular motions, watching Clarke’s face twist into desperation and pleasure. She lowered her fingers to the entrance, circling its edge.

“You’re absolutely perfect…” Lexa felt the need to whisper it; to admit to Clarke the only way she knew how that this moment was more than just sex for her. It was Clarke’s smile that encouraged her to proceed, and without sparing another second she carefully pushed a finger inside the tight tunnel, watching Clarke’s eyes roll behind her head the deeper she plunged. It didn’t take long for a second finger to join, and for the slow, passionate momentum to increase to a ravenous, punishing pace.

Clarke’s face showcased everything she was feeling with every dive and twist of Lexa’s talented fingers. Lexa watched utterly mesmerized; eyes dashing from the blonde’s swollen lips releasing heavenly tunes and cadences into the air, to the way her darkened irises would disappear somewhere behind fluttering lids. Needless to say, the full breasts equally drew her attention, from the way they bounced in sync to her fingers dancing inside of the woman beneath her. It didn’t take long for Lexa to feel the familiar pressure of walls closing in around her fingers… Clarke was close.
“GOD! Lex… ohmahgod… Lexa, I’m gon-I’m gonna-“

Lexa leaned into her, pressing their foreheads together but keeping the same pace with her hand. She felt the stinging of nails digging into her back, but it didn’t distract her from her current goal… especially when she was so close now… “Cum for me, beautiful. I got you… cum for me, baby.”

The blonde stiffened beneath her; her entire body suddenly tensing and coiling, before unwinding fully over to the earthshattering orgasm that washed over her, gracing Lexa’s fingers with fresh wetness.

Clarke was spent. Drained and exhausted by the time Lexa slowly withdrew her digits. “Good job, baby…God, you’re amazing…” Lexa presented the drowsy blonde with a smile, bringing up the hand responsible for it all up to her lips. She wasted no time sliding them into her eager tongue, sucking the flavor from it, swallowing her newfound addiction.

“Oh, lex… fuck, that’s hot…” Clarke whispered weakly, trying to lift herself up only to crumble back to bed. “Just-gimme a minute… and then it’s your turn…”

Lexa took the opportunity of Clarke’s incapacity to function to slide next to her and pull her into her arms. “Rest, princess… you earned it.” She spoke lovingly, placing a kiss over Clarke’s temple. “This was all about you, remember? I’ll find a way for you to reciprocate some other time…” She gave the smirking blonde a playful wink before drawing her even closer, pressing Clarke’s head to her chest and running her hands up and down Clarke’s naked back. A few moments of silence crawled by with only the sound of Clarke’s normalizing breathing disturbing the stillness, a sound that was just as appealing to Lexa as Clarke’s moaning had been. She smiled at the now profound darkness, hand still drawing lazy circles on Clarke’s back while enjoying the warm comfort of having her pressed up against her. “So…where does this put us? Where do we go from here?”

Clarke was silent for a moment, pondering the question carefully, finally sighing once no clear answer seemed to dawn on her. “Well… I don’t think I’m ready for a relationship yet. But… I’m willing to give us a shot. To try and see where it goes… if-if you’re also willing to…?”

Lexa nodded, pressing her smile to the top of Clarke’s head and exhaling soundly. “It’s really all I’ve ever wanted… a chance.” She tilted Clarke’s chin towards her and kissed her with intent. “However long it takes, beautiful… I’ll wait. You’re fucking worth it…”

Clarke smiled, snuggling a little closer against Lexa only to immediately pull back and jump into action when the unmistakable sound of the front door slamming shut won both their attention. Clarke pounced off the bed, nearly rolling Lexa off of it in her frantic state, already collecting the tossed garments strewn about the floor. She tossed Lexa’s pieces rudely in her direction, giving her a panicked, ‘hurry the fuck UP and get DRESSED’ look, while slipping on her own clothes without even bothering to flick on the lights.

“Clarke! What the HELL happened down here?!“ Raven’s voice carried up to them, causing both women to freeze for a second, before continuing what they were doing.

“Shiiiiitt!” Clarke hissed, dashing over to Lexa to help her with her shirt. “Fuck! You have to go! They can’t find you here! They’ll know!”

Lexa nodded, slipping on her shoes while Clarke crossed the room over to the window.

“You’re gonna have to leave through the window… it’s not that high up…” Clarke spoke, sticking her head out of the opened frame and gazing the height. “You’ll be fine!”
“Are you out of your MIND?!” Lexa nearly shouted, crossing over to where Clarke stood and looking down. “Clarke! I can fall and break my neck! I’ll just come down with you! We can say we were studying together for our final on Monday!”

Clarke shook her head. “Absolutely not. Raven will know right off the bat… here, if you step there,” She pointed out the window to the edge of the canopy that covered the roof, “you can scale down the post. It’s all grass, so you can jump off when you’re close enough. Worst case scenario, you’re looking at a twisted, possibly fractured ankle. Not a twisted neck.”

Lexa glared at her in utter astonishment. “Wha- NO! This is SUICIDE! Nope. Nah-uhh. Not doing it.”

“Lexa, I’ve done it a thousand times! Stop being a big baby and GO! Hurry, before they come see what the hell is taking me so long!”

“But-“

“NO! NOW! Go!” She practically shoved the brunette through the window, repeating the instructions she told her earlier and pleading her to be quiet. “Come around the front door in 5 minutes once you get down there… they’ll ask about your car. Just… make something up. Now GO!”

Clarke turned, ready to make a run for the stairs, when Lexa grabbed her wrist and held her in place. “Wait! I’m about to possibly kill myself for you and I don’t even get a kiss farewell?!” She smiled, tugging Clarke closer. “C’mon, Griffin… Plant one on me.”

Clarke growled, but stuck her head out to meet Lexa halfway. “You’re so dramatic… you’re NOT gonna die!” With that said, she leaned forward and crushed their lips together for a quick, but fervent, kiss. “But please… be careful…”

Lexa pulled back and saluted before slowly starting her daring escape-of-shame.

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“Sheesh, kid, you weren’t kidding.” Raven said, taking in the chaos that littered the entrance hallway. “I know you said she was pissed, but… I wasn’t expecting her to go all Hulk-Smash on the innocent picture frames. Yikes.”

Aden sighed. “Yup… she lost it.” He huffed, looking around. “Hey, why are there flower petals scattered everywhere?”

“Heyyyyy, guys…” Clarke called out to them as she descended the stairs two at a time, patting down her shirt nervously. “You two are home early!”

Raven and Aden exchanged a confused look. “Uhhh, no we’re not.” Aden corrected, throwing the blonde a wary glance. “It’s past 9 PM. We’re actually home late.”

Clarke glanced at her phone, clenching her jaw when she registered that Aden was right. “Oh! Wow… well, will you look at that?! Jeez, that was one long nap… made me lose track of time. Ha! silly me!”

Raven approached Clarke with crossed arms and a skeptical look, taking her in entirely and shooting up a brow. “So… you were napping?! You never nap.”

“Well, I was tired. Long day and all.” Clarke brushed it off, running her fidgety hand through her
frizzy hair. “No big deal.”

Raven nodded, narrowing her eyes. “Uhh-huh. Sure, no biggie…except… you NEVER nap. Care to tell us what happened here?” Raven motioned to the ruckus around them.

“Yea, Clarke… what’s with all the flower petals? And the broken frames? There’s glass everywhere!” Aden threw her a baffled look; not quite making sense of it all. “By the way, you put your shirt on backwards… the tag is sticking out.”

Clarke’s eyes immediately dropped to the shirt, which was embarrassingly put on inside-out and backwards. “Oops!” She snorted, shaking her head and shrugging. “This is what happens when I get dressed in the dark! Gosh… where is my head at today…”

The round of more awkward laughing that followed led Aden and Raven to exchange more concerned looks. “Uh, so… why did you attack our family pictures?” Aden pressed.

“Oh! I, uh, tripped on my way into the house… accidently knocked down the pictures.” Clarke chuckled, moving closer to the scene and pulling Aden away from the shards of glass. “I’ll fix it tomorrow, ok kiddo? Just… careful.”

“And the flowers?! There’s like… hundreds of them.”

“Yes! Right! Well… I… got… them for YOU! Yes, it was my way of apologizing… for, you know, being such a meanie to you today. That was uncalled for.”

Aden looked her dead in the eye, furrowing his brows. “So…you’re saying… you got me a bouquet of roses to make it up to me?”

Clarke nodded and smiled. Just…nodded…and…smiled.

Aden gasped, dropping to his knees and scooping up the lonely petals off the floor. “And you thought it wise to kill them? What kind of an apology is that? The poor little flowers…”

Raven clicked her tongue behind them, tapping her foot down. “Well, how very nice of you, Griff. Tell me… what’s Lexa’s car doing parked out front, eh?”

Clarke stiffened, momentarily forgetting Lexa and the car situation. “Uh, well… how are you so sure it’s even her car, Ray?” She countered defensively.

“Well, excuse me for inquiring but not many of our neighbors happen to own, much less even dream of affording a brand, spanking new benz.”

A loud thud spurring off the side of the house brought all of them to silence. “What was that?!” Raven called out seconds later, moving towards the front door to go investigate.

“Huh? I didn’t hear anything…” Clarke shrugged, looking for a quick distraction. “Aden! Sweetie, how’s your cheek?” She pulled the boy up and close to her. “Wait… why does it look worse than when I dropped you off?!”

The distraction worked, and Raven halted her pursuit of investigating the odd sound. “Ok… So, I sorta kicked the kid in the face during soccer practice…and it might have opened the bruise back up but it was TOTALLY an accident, right kid?”

Aden nodded in rapid succession. “Totally. One-hundred percent not intentional. No need to go breaking more stuff, ok?”
Clarke smiled, secretly furious but trying to keep it from showing. She had bigger issues to deal with at the present time. “Why don’t you go put more ice on that?”

“Okay… but… back to the original topic, that’s definitely Lexa’s car outside. That’s what she was driving when she came to the school.” Aden confirmed, back to busying himself with the petals. “Wait? Is she here?!”

“What! NO! Why would Lexa be here?!”

“Because… her car is parked outside our house… “Aden shot back, pointing out the obvious. “Duh!”

“Like I’ve stated before, that could be anyone’s car. Maybe it’s just a massive coincidence.”

The doorbell rang that instant, and Raven jumped towards it, pulling the door wide open.

“Hey!” Lexa waved overenthusiastically to the trio. “I’m, er, just stopping by to grab my car.” She smiled forcedly, twirling her fingers nervously and rocking back on her heels. “

“My, my… Lexa Woods. In the flesh… So maybe it’s NOT a massive coincidence after all.” Raven spun back around, taking in Clarke’s wide-eyed response and palming complexion.

“Lexa!” Aden rushed over to the brunette, wrapping her in one of his infamous bear hugs. “You’re ALIVE! I swear, I thought Clarke had killed you and buried your body somewhere in our basement and-“ He paused his babble, taking a long sniff of her jersey before pulling away suddenly. “Gross. You smell just like Clarke’s nasty, old-lady perfume. She thinks it smells good but really… it reeks.”

Lexa’s jaw dropped open at the comment, and her panic only escalated when she saw Raven’s eyes light up with this new information.

“Is that so?!” Raven leaned forward and took a sniff, a smug smile forming on her face. “Well, how very interesting… didn’t think you were into old-lady perfumes, Woods!”

“Oh! No! See, I-I was at the mall! With… Anya! Right, yes, Anya! Shopping and all… and we just happened to cross one of those crazy mall ladies that enjoy bathing people with perfume and well, I was the target of that incident.” Lexa stumbled through her explanation, flicking her gaze from face-to-face. “That’s also why my car is here! I, well, Anya wanted to ride together, so she picked me up!” She finished with a dazzling smile, as though her logic was fail-proof. Except…

“Wait… so you did come here? And then decided to leave your car… So, you came to see Clarke?!” Aden wondered, not understanding.

“Oh, that’s right! She stopped by to drop off my biology book, that I let her borrow.” Clarke jumped in to the rescue. “Sorry… I forgot to mention that!”

“Y-yes, and then my car just wouldn’t turn on for some odd reason. I guess the engine overheated or somethin’.” Lexa piped up to help out. “So I had to call Anya! For a ride.”

Raven burrowed her hand into Lexa’s hair, pulling out a long twig still covered in leaves. “Funny… I don’t remember there being trees inside the mall… Care to explain where this came from, Woods?”

Lexa opened and closed her mouth, closely resembling a fish out of water. “Well… see, I-“

“I know what’s going on here!” Aden blurted, shooting a finger straight up in the air as though he’d just uncovered the answer to every unearthed mystery.
“You do?!” All three women asked in unison, eyeing him with panic/amusement/dead-set fear in the moments that followed.

“Yes. Indeed, I do!” He continued. “Don’t you see, Ray? It’s really obvious… Now, ok, maybe not obvious to you, because you’re about as bright as that twig you’re holding, but… just look at these two!” Aden pointed at Lexa and Clarke, who were turning a deep shade of purple. “Look at how embarrassed they are! Acting as if they were just caught in the middle of an intense- “

“Study session!” Clarke interrupted abruptly.

“Video game contest!” Lexa shouted along with Clarke, tone equally hysterical.

“Quickie!” Raven barked immediately after, gaining appalled looks from the pair in question.

“Hide-and-Seek match!” Aden reeled it home, disappointed when all he received in turn was conflicted looks. “It’s ok… no need to be ashamed. I still play it with my friends sometimes… it’s a fun game, what can I say! Right?!”

A moment passed without anyone reacting to his question.

“Wait… so is that it? Were you two playing Hide-and-Seek? Isn’t that why Lexa was lurking around in the bushes?”

“YES! God, Aden, when did you get this smart?” Clarke jumped at the opportunity to kill this subject.

“You got us there, kid… man, nothing gets past you.” Lexa joined in, ready to move on from it as well.

Raven just rolled her eyes but kept quiet.

“Yea… don’t let the hair fool you. I’m no dumb blonde, I tell ya. I’m a natural-born Sherlock!” He nudged and winked at Lexa, then turned to Raven, all serious and business-like. “Now… what’s a ‘Quickie’?”

“Alright! Who’s hungry?! I’m thinking… pizza? Yes?” Clarke flung herself between Aden and Raven, dragging the kid towards the door. “Lexa, can you drive?”

They locked eyes for a moment and shared a subtle smile. “Absolutely… I already ate but… I guess I can have seconds.”

She threw the blonde a knowing wink that left Clarke breathless and blushing, and even more paranoid.

Chapter End Notes

Well well well… Was it worth the wait? Hope you all loved it! SO excited and anxious to hear from you all. Don't forget to leave your comments and kudos!

Until we meet again!

Come chat with us on Twitter @TaJat07 @silver_snake222
Prelude To Our Love

Chapter Notes

Hi!!

Hope you all are having a lovely day. We just wanted to say thank you so much to all of you for your continuous support and love for our story. We love and appreciate all the comments, tweets, and shout-outs that you all give us on the daily.

If you guys haven't done so, please see the beginning of Chapter 1 for we added something new. It might not make sense to some of you at the moment but we promise it will all be clear by the end of the story.

OK, so this chapter is lots of fluff and happiness. Seeing we're only 5 chapters away from concluding our story, expect the next few chapters to pick up the pace a bit and to be more lengthy as well (we were trying to keep it short but there's just so much we want to say that it's hard controlling the length!)

Anyway, we hope you enjoy it! ;)

Sorry for the wait,
Love you all!

TaJat & SilverSnake

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I am happy to report that the little monster is down!” Raven strutted into the kitchen, taking up a place near Clarke where she busied herself with the dishes. “He knocked out like an elephant on tranquilizers after drinking his milk… maybe I should use just one sleeping pill instead of two next time…”

Clarke froze, turning a heated gaze toward the brunette. “You spiked his milk, Raven?!!”

Raven raised both hands in surrender. “Now, now… It was a mild sleeping drug, totally safe for kids. I just figured he’d need help crashing since he’s in pain. You can calm your titties.”

Clarke sighed, narrowing her eyes in a warning. “Ray… please tell me you at least did some research prior to drugging a ten-year-old!”

Raven nodded. “Look, you got nothing to worry about… WebMD is highly reliable. Plus, I saw it be done in a Brazilian Soap Opera once and it totally worked! The kid woke up three days later alive and well…”

“Oh my God, Raven!”

“I’m kidding! Sheesh! Of course it’s safe, Clarke. You really think I’d be that irresponsible?” Raven questioned with a sassy hand to the hip and a curved brow.

“Uhh, YES!” Clarke responded, but there was no menace in her tone; Clarke knew Raven wouldn’t
risk anything that might endanger Aden. “Irresponsible is your middle name.”

Raven chuckled. “Oh, I think you earned the ‘irresponsible’ award tonight, Griff… I can’t believe you made that girl sneak out through the second floor window! What’s wrong with you?!”

Clarke felt her skin flare up; even her dim, faded reflection mirrored back at her through the kitchen window suggested her face was more than a little flushed. She saw no point or reason in avoiding the subject. “I panicked, ok?! I didn’t want Aden asking questions. He’s already so confused, the poor thing… It-it would just have been too much for him!”

“You and I both know that he’s Lexa’s biggest stan… he wouldn’t have minded.” Raven brushed the thought off with such certain conviction that even Clarke could not debate with. “Soooo….” Clarke picked up on the cheerful/mocking/questioning tone and braced herself. Here we go… “How was it?! Tell me everything! And don’t you DARE spare the juicy, dirty details… I want to hear all about it! Ah!” Raven actually squealed from excitement, and Clarke couldn’t help the smirk and blush that reconquered her face then.

“Ray… C’mon… You know that’s highly inappropriate. I mean, I’m not one to kiss and- “

“Oh, quit the cowshit and spill, Clarke! NOW! Was she good?!?”

Oh, who was she kidding! Clarke was on the verge of bursting from euphoria as it was. And it’s not like she ever kept anything from Raven. “Holy shit, Ray, she was- she was…. Gah, yes! I mean… Jesus effin Christ, talk about talent!”

Raven’s eyes just about exploded from their sockets. “Talent?! Wait… wait… Are we talking MVP or Bench warmers here? As in, was she a LeBron or a Tiger Woods?”

Clarke furrowed her brows. “Huh? What kind of analogy is that, Raven…? I dun know, I guess, maybe… LeBron?”

Raven nodded excitedly. “Good! Yea, no one gives a shit about Golf, fuck Tiger… Ok, ok, so, who topped who here?! Walk me through it, my Lesbian sex knowledge is embarrassingly limited. PornHub’s Girl-on-Girl selection sucks, lemme tell ya…”

Why Raven was even into Lesbian porn was a question for another time, because Clarke suddenly needed a very cold glass of water. Recalling the earlier activities back to mind was having a rather telling effect on her body. “Oh, um, well… I was the one who, er, made the first move.”

The brunette let out a loud gasp, clearly shocked at the unexpected revelation. “No. fucking. Way! You go, Griffin. I knew you had it in you! So, what, you started things off by doing what exactly? Catapulting flowers and picture frames at the poor girl? Is that what she’s into? Cuz I still can’t quite figure out what happened down here.”

Clarke sighed, and carefully broke it down for Raven, recanting the moment she arrived home and caught a rather pitiful Lexa slouching on her porch, to the urgent decision to push the girl out of her bedroom window.

“Oh, so… Now tell me, how was the sex? What kinda moves did PG have? Did y’all…” Raven used her hands and fingers to demonstrate the position she was inquiring about with a bold grin; Clarke merely blinked, unsure what Raven was suggesting.

“Oh, Ray… I just told you, I didn’t know what I was doing! Charades isn’t gonna be any better!” Clarke huffed in frustration. “What the hell does that even mean?!”
“Scissoring! What else did it look like, Clarke?!” Raven blurted, tossing her hands in the air. “Well? Did you?!”

“Wha- No! I-I, well, I told you… I didn’t know what to do! Lexa… she sorta just- “

“Ok! Wait, how about…. This!” Another hand motion, accompanied by a ‘Yea?’ and a wink from the brunette.

Clarke creased her brows. “Ok… Raven…”

“Aw, C’mom Clarke! That one was easy!” Raven growled. “That’s the classic, international symbol for ‘Finger and/or penis in vagina’! You know… I’ve been curious about PG since I first heard of her back in Metaphysics class a few years back.”

For a split second, Clarke was positive she had misheard… “Excuse me, what class?” Surely Raven hadn’t meant to say-

“Metaphysics. You know… with Professor Pike.”

“Ray… when did you ever take Metaphysics? That class isn’t even required for your major. Not to mention it’s the most difficult course offered at UCLA.”

Raven scrounged her face up as if she had just sniffed the foulest odor known to man. “Who said anything about taking it. I just happened to be lost and sat in the wrong fucking classroom. Man, what a day that was… took me the entire class period to realize I wasn’t in Spanish.”

Yea, that’s more like it, Clarke thought.

“Anyway, while I was blissfully disoriented, I overheard these chicks talk about Lexa. About some party she was throwing and how her parties were all the rage, yada yada. Well, it was kinda boring at first, until one of them mentioned something about her packing an extra… part.”

Keeping up with Raven was become increasingly difficult. “Like what? I don’t get it.”

“Like, you know… a dick.” Raven said casually, as though it was abundantly obvious to everyone but Clarke.

It took Clarke a few heartbeats to maneuver through her disbelief. “Raven! Wha- Lexa doesn’t have a fucking PENIS!”

Raven looked a little too disappointed. “Ah fuck… I’m gonna lose a lot of money over this.”

Clarke groaned. “You made bets?”

Raven shrugged. “Ah, just, ya know… 1 or 2… or 37.”

“Raven…” She let it go, energy and brain cells plummeting with every second spent attempting to understand Raven.

“Oh, we’re getting off track. Did she at least drink from the furry cup?” Raven pressed, clearly not ready to drop the subject.

“The what?!”

“You know… did she have the Egg McMuff?”
“Why would she have McDonald’s?!?” Clarke was already mentally calling a therapist for her friend…

“DID SHE FUCKING EAT THE KITTY, CLARKE!” Raven uttered loudly, smacking her palm against her forehead.

Oh! “Bloody hell Ray, YES! Yes, she did! She spent a good 45 minutes going down on me – and yes, it was incredible!” Clarke added, a range of emotions from embarrassment to frustration coursing through her as she spoke, cutting Raven off every time she saw the brunette begin to ask a question. “Yes, she finger fucked me. Two fingers! Yes, they may be slender, but trust me when I say, they are LONG! No, there was no dick, or any variation of a dick involved! No, I didn’t reciprocate, she wanted this to be about me! Yes, I came! And then came again in the shower from my own fingers and from just thinking about what she did to me! And yes, Raven, before you ask, I plan on doing it again! Hell we’d probably be doing it right now if you and Aden hadn’t interrupted! Gosh, that was hands-down the best fucking sex I’ve ever had!”

Clarke was breathless by the time she finished, panting and heated. Raven stared, blinking profusely, slowly processing the information overload that might literally be causing her brain to short circuit.

“Damn, Griff… I believe it. Shit, I nearly orgasmed just listening to you talk about it.” Raven grinned. “So, what does that make you two now that you’ve evolved from mortal nemesis to… Friends? Fuck buddies? Girlfriends?”

Clarke had to admit, she thought she had covered every possibly question Raven could throw at her, but this… this one she hadn’t expected. “Oh, I don’t know… I don’t know what to feel.”

“Oh, I think you do.” Raven said it confidently, her tone bordering the edge between sarcasm and goading; not quite indignant but lacking her usual humor. “You just haven’t the balls to face it yet.”

***

“Oh, I am SO totally kicking your ass!” Aden boasted, tapping his small, deft fingers agilely against the buttons on his wireless remote, moving closer and closer to the TV screen. “I’m one round away from having you as my private chauffer for the next month! Oh, and I’m gonna need you to rotate between all your cars…”

Lexa scoffed. “Fat chance, kid. The only thing you’re getting out of this is another beating.” The brunette drove her point home with a knock-out punch to Aden’s avatar, effectively winning the Mortal Kombat match and a scowl from Aden. Lexa winked. “You were saying…”

Clarke waltzed into the living room, carrying a tray of PB&J sandwiches and milk and placing it on the coffee table. “Snacks are ready!” She announced, grabbing one for herself and plopping down on the couch next to Lexa. “Ooo! Aden! You finally beat Lexa?! Congrats buddy!”

Lexa snorted. “Beat me?!”

Clarke nodded, pointing at the television. “Good choice going with Kitana, Lex. She’s my fav. But not against Scorpion… even I’m not stupid enough to make that rookie mistake.”

Aden huffed loudly, blushing slightly at the comment. “Lexa isn’t Kitana, Clarke. I am!” He consciously admitted, glaring at a grinning Lexa. “What can I say… she’s my favorite too. I like her outfit…”

Clarke swallowed another bite to refrain from laughing at her kid brother’s adorably sweet expression. “That’s ok, kiddo. We’ll get her next time! What’s the bet this time?”
Lexa leaned back into the couch arrogantly, still grinning. “I just won a week’s worth of free labor.” The smug brunette exclaimed boldly, taking a massive bite of her sandwich and humming in approval. “Kid’s gonna be helping me with a few projects around the house. I hope you don’t mind, beautiful.”

Clarke nudged her, but otherwise shrugged. “Nah, not at all. As long as the kitchen cabinets get fixed, I’m all for upholding illegal child labor.”

Aden growled, taking a furious bite out of his sandwich. “No fair! I demand a rematch!”

Clarke wagged her finger. “No rematches. Lexa came over to study, not play video games. I only allowed it while I was making lunch.”

“Oh, c’mon Clarke! Just one more…please?! It’s Saturday! And, I got an A on my final project! That’s gotta be worth at least a rematch!”

“Do I need to remind you that you are also grounded for getting into a fight at school?” Clarke raised an inquiring brow, to which Aden dodged with a-

LEXA got in a fight at school! I was the defenseless victim!” He answered with a melodramatic tone, clearly putting on a false show.

“Did I say a week? I meant TWO weeks of labor… just for that, you little twerp.” Lexa shot back. “I guess that means no Harper for two weeks either, huh.” Lexa chuckled when Aden’s jaw slackened.

“Who’s Harper?” Clarke questioned, conscious of Aden’s sudden discomfort upon hearing the name.

The boy hesitated, flickering nervous glances over to Lexa for help, who chewed silently on her sandwich and offered none. “She’s… just a friend.”

The tint in his cheeks and the quake in his voice was enough to make Clarke narrow her eyes.

Aden’s shoulder slumped forward. “Fine. I like her! But… hear me out Clarke! She’s really nice! A- and really smart! And well… she’s really, really pretty! I think I may have a shot with her!”

Clarke cleared her throat and straightened her posture. “You know you’re far too young to be thinking about girls, A. Maybe when you’re a little older we can-“

“But I love her, Clarke!” Aden blurted, unashamed, leading Lexa to choke on her sandwich and Clarke to exhale sharply; neither one were expecting such a radiant burst of passion from the ten-year-old. “I can wait! I’ll wait as long as it takes… but, I do love her! And I’ll still love her. Be it now or ten years from now! But just to be clear… how long are we talking? Two? Three years? Four max, Clarke, I can’t wait that long.”

Clarke was about to argue back, already preparing a composed statement listing all the reasons Aden should focus his attention elsewhere. She stopped, however, when a telling hand sheathed her own. Lexa graced her with a small smile and pleading eyes. Leave it be, beautiful. She could hear the unspoken words echo in her mind. Clarke nodded and sighed.

“We will discuss this later, ok?” Clarke spoke to the hopeful boy. “Now go and get ready. You have practice in an hour and Raven will be here any minute now.”

After Aden had scurried out of the living room with happy bounces, Clarke let herself lean into Lexa, allowing that intoxicating scent lure her closer and closer to the welcoming brunette.
“For what it’s worth… she did seem like a good kid. And Aden is smart. He knows what he wants and he goes after it. I’ve no doubt this girl will end up being his wife one day.” Lexa chimed, tone meant to be delivered with a tinge of humor but failing to do so. She legitimately believed every word she had spoken; as though she had just recanted an inevitable prophecy.

Clarke sighed, curling into her for a few more minutes before resuming their studies. “I know he means well… but he’s young and naïve. He doesn’t know what love is. He doesn’t know that love can be complicated, and confusing, and hurtful, and-”

“Beautiful.” Lexa added, pulling Clarke closer, smiling down at the woman that retransformed the very definition of ‘love’ for her. “Undeniably beautiful.”

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Clarke tried keeping her nerves under control, a task that became increasingly harder to manage with each passing second. She allowed herself a quick glance at her watch. Twenty-minutes.

Her foot resumed it’s persistent tapping on the floor and her teeth found comfort by nibbling the inside of her lower lip. Twenty-minutes since the exam had concluded and still no Lexa. Twenty-minutes since Clarke had been impatiently waiting just outside of Jaha’s classroom; the sole occupant in the otherwise deserted corridor. Twenty-minutes since she saw concerned green eyes lock with hers as she strolled past a fidgety brunette after turning in her exam. The memo there was clear.

I’m fucked!

Clarke gave her her most reassuring smile, and mouthed a ‘You got this, Lex’ before exiting. Still, if Lexa had meant it, it would also mean the brunette would not pass the class. Which in turn meant Lexa would not be graduating this semester.

That possibility irked Clarke beyond reasoning. After spending Saturday and Sunday studying together and quizzing one another, she was confident in Lexa’s ability to not only pass the final, but ace it. Lexa surprised her time and again, never missing a question, responding back each answer verbatim to the textbook; regurgitating the information back to the blonde like a well-versed prayer. It mesmerized Clarke; the ease in which Lexa absorbed the material. Mix that along with how enticing Lexa looked and smelled, along with her know-it-all pompous attitude and infuriating sexy smirks and Clarke found herself wondering multiple times how in the universe she had been able to resist the sex-appeal that is Lexa Woods for so long.

In the end, she was able to keep her thighs shut and her naughty thoughts in check, but her self-control had its limits. The weekend consisted of studying, yes, but there were many…. many… many breaks, and almost all of them to serve one single purpose: ravage the other’s lips and necks with as much savagery as humanly possible.

Clarke mindlessly ran the tips of her fingers against a particularly impressive mark Lexa left behind, just beneath her right ear lobe. At the time of it’s birth she was too lost in the deed to care that the brunette had been latched to that particular spot for far longer than necessary. The damage, however, was evident only earlier this morning, as she prepped for class. Messy bun was sadly not an option.

Her phone pinged, and Clarke scrambled for her back pocket.

**Raven:** Griff, on the way to the restaurant with O. You done?

**Clarke:** Hey, Ray… Yea been done. Waiting on Lexa, she’s still in there.
**Raven:** Dang, homegirl taking her time… poor thing is prob in there blowing ol’ Jaha for an ‘A’. Fuck being gay when you need to graduate.

**Clarke:** Ha-Ha, very funny. Tell O I said hey and that Lex and I will be on our way as soon as she’s done, k.

**Raven:** *Lex and I?!* Oooooo it’s gettin’ serious ;).

**Clarke:** Shut it.

**Raven:** Just hurry your girlfriend up already, we hungry!

**Clarke:** She’s not my girlfriend, Ray.

**Raven:** Yet ;)

Clarke typed a rushed goodbye and took another glance at her watch. *Twenty-seven minutes.*

She was about to storm into the classroom and demand answers when the door began to swing outwards, nearly catching her face.

Lexa stepped out, looking flushed and flustered, eyes twinkling from the leftover tears that had evidently been there only moments ago. Clearly she hadn’t expected to bump into Clarke out in the hall, and she froze, gasping from the sudden surprise.

“Clarke.” Lexa croaked, voice rough and shallow, slightly confused at seeing Clarke there.

Clarke swallowed her own budding disappointment, and made sure to steel her voice before she spoke. “Oh, Lex…it’s going to be ok, I promise! I can’t believe Jaha made you cry! What a fucking douche… come here, sweetie!”

Flinging her arms around the brunette, she brought her into a comforting embrace. “You’ll get it next semester, I just know it! It will just be one more class… easy-breezy. Plus, I can help! I still have all my notes and I’m sure you’ll fly through it! I know you were looking forward to graduating with Ray, O, and I but… hell, graduation is such a hassle! Who needs that anyway!”

Lexa chuckled, but hugged the smaller woman back in earnest. “Uh… Clarke. Thanks but… that won’t be necessary.” Clarke pulled back, watching as Lexa pulled a crumpled piece of paper out of her pocket and held it up for the blonde, whose eyes widened upon taking it in. “I passed.”

“Jaha wanted to grade my exam right away since graduation is in two days and I’m the only student in his class without a clear standing. So I stuck around, and trust me…I was just as surprised as you!” Lexa was beaming now, waving the paper before Clarke’s stumped face. “Turns out, I aced it! He wanted to chat for a few minutes before I left. That bastard said some sappy shit and made me tear up… talking about how proud he was and blah, blah… kinda embarrassing. Don’t tell Raven, please!”

Clarke exhaled sharply before enveloping Lexa’s lips with her own. The blonde pounced with such enthusiasm, the off-guard brunette was shot backwards toward the wall, but much like a well-coordinated choreography both women quickly caught on to the other’s movements, falling deeper and deeper into the kiss.

“So… unf… proud…of… you!” Clarke panted with each break. “Knew… you… shit…could…do...
“Liar…” Lexa rasped into her mouth, and Clarke could taste the sweetness in her breath. “You… were worried. Admit it.”

Clarke hesitated, but eventually nodded. “I just… want this for you. To witness you finally bring this part of your life to a conclusion…I don’t know, it just- I just wanna see you through it, I guess.”

Lexa smiled, running her thumb below Clarke’s lip. “You wanna know the best part about it all?”

Clarke nodded her head.

“That we get to do it together…” Lexa silently revealed, catching the slight tremble in the blonde’s chin in reaction to her words. She kept her gaze fixed on the quivering lips in front of her just before diving in to recapture them, inhaling the shaky gasp Clarke released.

Jaha, having completed his last duties as an educator for the semester, stepped out of the room just then, a stack of papers in his hands. It all nearly splayed across the hall floor at the sight of Lexa and Clarke attempting to tear the lips off of each other’s faces.

“Griffin! Woods! Get a room!” He barked, holding back a smirk once he took in the girls' shocked expressions. “NOW!”

Lexa and Clarke both scrambled away from each other, mumbling hasty apologies and rushing for the exit.

“Oh, and Griffin?” Clarke stopped and turned, facing a smiling Thelonious. “Congratulations. You got the highest grade on the final. I took the liberty of grading the rest of the exams after Miss Wood’s. You beat her by 1 point.”

“No!” Lexa protested angrily, stomping her foot down and near ready to throw a tantrum.

“Yes!” Clarke exclaimed, nudging a pouty Lexa with her elbow. “In your FACE, grumpy!”

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The Woods’ manor was void of its usual serene atmosphere today, Lexa noted, once she stepped past the threshold separating her bedroom and the long, narrow second-floor hallway. The sounds of laughter and the smell of bacon infiltrated her nose the moment she flung the door open. A smile played upon her face, and she adjusted the cuffs of her button up and tucked in the edges beneath her slacks. This was it. Today was the day. Today she would forever bid UCLA a long, overdue farewell.

She stood there for a moment, eyes lazily scanning over the shallow ridges engraved upon the door frame; marks indented there by her parents to measure her growth. She grazed the tip of her finger against the most recent one; the height measuring a little below her breasts.

4’11”.

She knelt before it. Lowering herself to the size she was at age eight; the last age her parents would ever witness her reach. Slowly rising to her feet, she allowed them to carry her to a room she rarely ever visited. A room that resided only a few paces outside of her bedroom, yet much like an omen, she dutifully avoided it.

But not today. Turning the knob, she took a faithful step inside, slowly swiveling her neck in small
angles as she took it all in. It felt as though she might as well have taken a step into a time machine.

Each object a different memory. Each trinket, some worth thousands and others valueless, a different story. She carefully analyzed each and every one, granting each piece an audience, as though they all had something special to share with her. The weight on her wrist was suddenly unbearable as she felt her father’s watch sink into her arm, as though it was trying to break free and join its comrades on the shelf.

Her hand traveled to a nearby object, one she wouldn’t usually dare disturb. Yet unlike the other times when she had wandered into the room, this time it felt more like a calling. As though she didn’t merely wander in by choice, but rather by a summon.

The ring felt light against her palm; a stark contrast to how she remembered it weighing. She stroke it gently with her thumb; eyes glancing over the scuffs and marks on its silver surface, which was surprisingly polished and clean, as though it’s wearer had tended to it just moments earlier.

That wasn’t possible, of course. The last time it had been tended to was well over a decade ago.

She looked for it’s partner, strangely noticing that it was nowhere to be found. She felt an uncomfortable pang pierce her heart; wondering how long her father’s ring had been unaccompanied. How long it had to endure being separated from it’s other half.

“You’re wondering about your mother’s ring.” Indra’s voice gently pulled her back. In turning, she found Indra leaning by the doorframe, a soft, sorrowful smile playing on her lips. Lexa didn’t have to speak or explain. Indra understood. “Leave it to you to ruin a graduation gift…” Indra sighed lightly, smile never altering.

She stepped out of the room and quickly returned, only this time she carried an item with her. “I was going to wait to give you this until after the ceremony today…” She explained, holding up a beautifully crafted jewelry box. Her initials. ‘AMW’, were engraved on its lid and traced over with small crystals. It was undeniably beautiful. “I spent many weeks trying to come up with a suitable graduation gift for you, child. A difficult challenge seeing you already have everything.”

Lexa smiled, narrowing her eyes. “Weeks? I only told you I was graduating two days ago…”

Indra nodded. “Yes, well… something told me long before you did.” She spoke with a wink, and slowly opened the box. Inside, nestled within a cocoon of silk, rested a silver chain with a ring through it. “Your parents may not be here physically today, Alexandria… but their spirits have never once left your side.” She spoke in hushed whispers, fighting the urge to break into tears. “Today is no exception. They may not be there, cheering you on as you walk across that stage, but you best believe they’re here,” she pressed a hand to Lexa’s heaving chest, just above her heart, “I know you feel lonely, child. But you are never alone. Always remember that.”

Lexa nodded, releasing the stinging tears and tightening her grip around the ring in her hand. “Your mother once mentioned to me that she had plans to one day pass down her wedding band over to you. She never did specify the day, so I figured today would be as good a day as any to fulfill one of her wishes.”

As soon as Indra draped the chain over her neck, Lexa felt the hand suffocating her father’s ring relax, along with every muscle in her body. The ring itself brought minimal comfort. It was the presence, the knowledge that her mother’s entity was currently resting so close to her heart that brought her peace.

“Thank you, Indra…” was all she could say; the tears still streaming down her face spoke her true
sentiments.

“They would have been so, so proud of you, child. As am I.” After a hug and a kiss, Indra took her leave.

She exhaled once she was alone. The room no longer having a hold over her; now, as she looked around, it was just that. A room.

She carefully placed her father’s ring back in it’s place. Although it felt cruel to separate them, she knew she needed her mother with her today, in whatever form she may be.

And maybe that’s what she had been missing all along.

All these years.

A tether. A bridge.

To both her parents.

***

“RADEN!” Raven shouted, swiveling in the passenger seat to face a scowling Aden tucked away in the back. “I’m older! I get the final say!”

“AVEN!” Aden barked back, tone rising a few octaves. “It was my idea, so I get the final say. Right, Clarke?”

Clarke sat behind the steering wheel, drumming her fingers against it in excitement and anticipation, not registering Aden’s question. The rush of emotions becoming increasingly overwhelming with every passing minute. She glanced over at Raven, already adorning her cap and gown, and perfectly at ease; as if graduation was just one more day.

But not to Clarke. Today symbolized a conclusion to a journey that seemed almost unreachable in past times. Yet here she was, accompanied by the two people that mattered most to her: her best friend and kid brother. The only people that had accompanied her from beginning to end.

Upon arriving, the trio were thrown into utter, disheveled chaos. The multitude that gathered around the premises was enormous; making it difficult to move through the crowd. They pushed their way around in search of familiar faces; Clarke herself had only one face in mind, the only face she wished to see at that particular moment.

“Mom!” Raven yelled, and waved at a middle-aged woman looking equally lost. She smiled and strutted toward them, towing a much younger man along. Raven scoffed. “Ugh. Shoulda known… whachu think? 28?29?”

Aden shook his head. “No way. He looks more like… 31.”

“Nah, below 30 for sure.” Clarke pitched in, participating in their usual ritual of ‘Guess The Age of Ms. Reyes’s New Boy-Toy’!

“Oh, mi hija!” Mama Reyes pounced on Raven, showering her with kisses and a bone-crushing hug. Raven grumbled a weak, “Maaaaaaaaaa, we’re in publiicce!” at which point Ms. Reyes directed her attention to a smirking Clarke.

“Y Klarke! Ven aqui mi amor!” Clarke’s Spanish was pathetically basic, but she moved forward and
allowed herself to be equally humiliated.

“Good to see you, too!” She managed to squeal once the hug had lessened.

“Aden! Mi hijo! Goodness, you’re so big!” She was wooing over Aden now, who unsurprisingly extended his arms and puckered his lips, actually excited to receive the onslaught of kisses and hugs.

“En donde esta mi regalo?!” Aden blurted in Spanish, which made Clarke and Raven exchange surprised glances.

“Hey, ma. Clarke and I need to go and get ready to walk. Keep an eye on the kid, ok?” Raven handed Aden over to her mother, who instinctively latched on to his tiny hand and tugged him closer.

Clarke kissed him goodbye before rushing to join the rest of the graduating class. The madness was just as prominent among the students as it had been outside where the family members awaited. Clarke did a quick scan of the crowd as she stood in line to sign in, disappointed when she couldn’t locate the face she had been searching for earlier.

“Don’t worry, your girl will be here…” Raven nudged her, and Clarke cracked a ‘you caught me’ smirk. “She’s probably just late. I don’t see O anywhere either and I know they’re carpooling.”

“Yea, you’re probably right. Hey, how long is your mom staying this time?” Clarke asked as she picked up her tassel and pin.

“Pfff, who knows. A day or two. She said something about flying out to Hawaii when she called today.”

Clarke nodded, mindlessly helping Raven with her tassel. “You ok?” The brunette asked, scrounging her brows when she noticed the blank look that settled over Clarke’s face.

“Oh, yea! Just, you know… a bit nervous.”

“Clarke…just because she isn’t here today doesn’t mean she’ll never be.” Raven, as usual, was spot on. “Whatever it is your mom’s going through, she will return when she overcomes it. You’ll see…”

Clarke nodded, and accepted Raven’s embrace, hiding her face in the crook of her neck to conceal the tear that managed to escape.

“I know… I just, wish she would figure her shit out sooner. Not even for me you know. For Aden!” Clarke mumbled into her shoulder.

She felt Raven nod and strengthen her hold. “I know, I know… everything will work out. I just know it will. All that you have accomplished, Clarke. Everything that you’ve fought for, it’s gonna pay off. It’s already paying off. We’re graduating today because you had the good sense to want to pursue a college degree, and drag me along. I honestly don’t know if I’d be standing here today if it weren’t for you. So many times I had wanted to give up, especially after my shitty accident… but you were always there. You’re my family, Griff. You and that annoying, blonde pest that follows us everywhere.” Clarke released a pained, hoarse chuckle at the comment, fully crying into Raven’s gown now. “And just like you have always been there for me. You best believe I’ll always be there for you…you’ll always have me.”

Clarke could only nod in acceptance and gratitude. She had no words. No appropriate reaction to demonstrate her love to the girl that has been by her side since they were mere toddlers.
“And me…” The familiar voice called to her like a delicious lullaby, and she beamed into Raven’s shoulder upon hearing it.

“She’s all yours, PG. Oh and watch out for the snot… I’m pretty sure my gown is ruined.” Raven joked, winking at Clarke before joining Octavia across the room.

Lexa’s arms wrapped around her midsection and she swiveled into them, wrapping her own around Lexa’s neck. “There’s my gorgeous, snot-leaking princess…” the brunette leaned and captured Clarke’s smiling lips with her own. “Everything ok?”

“Yes, better now that you’re here…” She answered, burrowing her nose into Lexa’s neck and inhaling the only scent potent enough to reduce her to a quivering mess. “For a second there, I thought you might not show.”

Lexa chuckled, and Clarke nearly lost it when she felt it vibrate straight to her core. “If I’m being honest, so did I. But… no more running. No more dodging. I’m done disappointing the people that care about me. Indra… my parents…” Lexa breathed the words out almost painfully. “especially you.”

Clarke lifted her gaze and found Lexa’s already waiting; expecting and anxious. She sensed the direction the conversation might take if she were to allow herself to indulge too deeply. So instead of diving into depths far beyond their limits, Clarke settled for a simple smile and kiss against her lover’s lips. Now was not the time for heart wrenching emotions. “For what it’s worth, I’m super fucking proud of you, kid.”

Lexa beamed, and Clarke was momentarily caught off guard, wondering how a smile could be so conflicted, fragile, and dauntless all at once. There was no conclusive answer to her question, of course. The smile was the untainted, perfect representation of Lexa.

It found balance in the silver lining that best reflected her soul.

Where chaos and order convened.

Where sorrow and harmony collided.

Where hate and love clashed in an endless struggle for survival.

***

~ The Suicidal Squad ~

Raven: If only the dean could stop babbling and give us our fecking degrees already…that’d be great!

Clarke: You would create a group chat in the middle of graduation!

Octavia: Guys, I can’t believe we’re done! We’re almost there, babes! :D

Lexa: I’m kinda nervous… is anyone else nervous? I mean, I’m like, sweating bullets. This gown is so fucking hot. It’s suffocating!

Clarke: Lex, where are you? I see Octavia and Raven, but I can’t find you.

Lexa: I’m behind the giant with the afro. This giraffe is blocking my view and it’s stressing me the fuck out. How am I supposed to see the stage!
Octavia: Lex, breathe dude. All you’re doing is walking across a platform and accepting your diploma. No big deal.

Raven: … in front of hundreds, no thousands, of people.

Clarke: Ray, stop. Lexa, you’ll be fine! Just don’t make eye contact with anyone.

Raven: …or trip. The possibilities of falling are pretty high if you think about it.

Octavia: She’s got a point there. Remember Monty from last years’ graduation?

Lexa: Uhhh, no. Who’s Monty??

Raven: Exactly. Poor kid fell off the stage during his walk and was forced to transfer states. It’s rumored he still can’t find a job or get a girlfriend.

Clarke: Guys! Enough! Lex, you’ll be ok! Just… think of something that makes you relax :)

Lexa (to Clarke): You make me relax ;)

Clarke (to Lexa): Shoulda seen this coming *sigh*.

Clarke (to Lexa): Wanna know what I do? I picture the audience in their underwear! I know it sounds stupid but it really does help.

Lexa (to Clarke): Oh, god. Oh, gross. I just pictured Professor Jaha in his tighty whities. How am I supposed to walk up there and shake that man’s hands now?!

Lexa (to Clarke): Can I just picture you in your underwear instead?! It makes for a much better visual, lemme tell ya.

Clarke (to Lexa): Fuck the underwear, picture me naked… ;) How’s that for a visual?

Lexa (to Clarke): …

Lexa (to Clarke): …

Lexa (to Clarke): …

Clarke (to Lexa): ?

Lexa (to Clarke): Sorry, got distracted. Yea, that’s definitely a much better image. Holy fuck…

Clarke (to Lexa): If you’re good, maybe I’ll even let you live it out once this is over…?

Lexa: Fuck Clarke… don’t tease. You’re making it hard to focus. Making other things hard as well… ;)

Raven: I KNEW IT! I KNEEEEEEWWWW IT!

Octavia: We’re you two sexting just now?!

Clarke: RAVEN! SHE DOESN’T HAVE A DICK!
Lexa: Someone please kill me now… Mercy kill. Do me the solid. Please.

Lexa: Wait… you thought I had a dick?! What the actual fuck, Raven!

Octavia: She’s one of the 25 other girls on campus that you haven’t fucked to think that… jealous bitties.

Clarke: Ok, enough. All three of you. Octavia, you’re almost up. I’m gonna put my phone down now since they’re about to call us. Good luck everyone, love you guys!

Lexa: I’ll deal with you later, Reyes… Yea, good luck! :)

Octavia: Yes! Love you all! Class 2016, bitches!

Raven: Lexa WOODs… I totally get it now ;)

Clarke/Octavia/Lexa: RAVEN!

Lexa (to Clarke): Good luck, beautiful. :) See you on the other side?

Clarke (to Lexa): Wouldn’t have it any other way :)

***

Octavia was the first one to strut across the stage. Swagger high and smugness even higher, walking from one end to the other in upmost poise and grace. Clarke clapped enthusiastically as the brunette swiveled her tassel around and lifted up the diploma case for her parents, Bellamy, and Lincoln to applaud and cheer in sync with the rest of crowd. Her smile was magnificent, Clarke noted, and she felt that common sting she usually does when she sees similar smiles displayed on known and strange faces alike. The realization that her own could never be as illuminating. Never as complete. She didn’t have much time to ponder the why’s or if’s because her row was being called up and directed toward the stage. She inhaled deeply as a wave of nerves cascade over her, and she suddenly felt a lot less sure about this than she had five minutes prior.

Scanning the crowd as she impatiently waited for her name to be called, her eyes immediately locked with Aden’s, who upon noticing he had his sisters’ attention, stood and waved at her with both arms. She gave him a clipped smile and a quick wave back, noticing that other people were now also standing and waving at her.

She recognized Bellamy, Ms. Reyes and her boo thang, Anya, and Lincoln. A middle-aged, African-American woman stood next to Aden, bringing him into her arms as she also waved and smiled. Although they had never properly met, she was certain that was Indra.

“Clarke Abigail Griffin; Summa Cum Laude.” The speaker announced, and without missing a beat, Clarke sprung across the stage. Shaking all the appropriate hands with renowned strength. Sure, maybe her version of a family was slightly skewed from the norm and heck, possibly the furthest thing from ‘traditional’, but …family is family. She was finally beginning to understand that, even if her mother had failed to do so.

Upon terminating her walk across the stage that suddenly seemed so small, she swiveled her tassel around; the official gesture that the past four years were finally over. She received screams and applause as she stood for pictures and crossed back to her seat, catching Raven and Octavia smirking and mouthing ‘congrats’ over to her. Looking back toward the last row of students, she found Lexa,
staring back with moist eyes and a pursed smile. Clarke couldn’t help but giggle to herself as she sat back down, understanding just how soft Lexa’s interior was once you cracked past that outer façade.

Raven was up next. Clarke insisted on her wearing her knee brace, but the brunette being about as stubborn as a Trump supporter (oops, did I really just say that?), refused. Clarke watched her closely, observing how she limped up as her name was called, wincing from the sharp pain that was usually abated by the brace and medication, but never fully eliminated. She moved slower than the other students, however no one seemed to mind. In fact, it sounded like the crowd were keen on joining forces to give her vigorous praise and applause. Clarke joined in of course, and looking up at the stands she spotted Aden, bouncing up on his heels and squealing Raven’s name in celebration. Clarke noted the tears that were running down his pale cheeks, even from a distance. She never paused to examine the reality that this graduation was a victory to him too.

Once Raven completed her walk, it was only a matter of time before the last row of students were called up, Lexa among them. The brunette walked on unsteady legs and her hands clenched into tight fists where they lingered by her side. Jaw set and eyes swimming over the crowd of spectators that fell silent as the names started to be called out, it was obvious to everyone that Lexa was on full freak-mode.

“Alexandria Mae Woods.”

Clarke immediately launched into a tirade of claps and shouts, ignoring the weird looks from her peers sitting nearby. She didn’t care. Her outmost priority at that moment was to create a haven where Lexa felt encouraged and safe. Octavia and Raven jumped in, and Aden was practically roaring her name. Anya, ever the Joker, snuck in a megaphone and the words ‘About damn time, Lex’ echoed through the crowd, urging more claps and laughter to ensue.

Clarke giggled along to the obnoxious cheers. All in all, it made Lexa an uncomfortable, stumbling mess – the girl zoomed across the stage so impossibly fast, she nearly forgot to grab her diploma cover, much less shake anyone’s hand. Jaha tapped her on the shoulder as she accelerated past the row of professors standing to greet her, heading straight for the picture and then her seat, not bothering to swivel the tassel over to the left.

The graduation concluded rapidly after that. Leading to yet another wave of cheers and applauses as the students and spectators began to file out row-by-row.

“Clarke!” Octavia shouted once she spotted her, running to embrace her in a hug powerful enough to crack ribs. “Oh my god, congrats! You looked incredible up there! So regal! Oh, I almost forgot. We’re having a graduation party at Lexa’s tonight. Well, in a few hours really. It’s a surprise, so don’t say anything!” She implored, squeezing Clarke’s hands as she spoke. “Please come? Aden and anyone you want to bring are welcome to join, of course.”

Clarke nodded. “Yes, of course I’ll be there, O. Should I bring anything? I mean, I’d like to help.”

“Nonsense. You’re a guest. I’m sure your presence will be everything Lexa will require anyway.” O winked at her playfully, and ever suggestively. “Whatever it is you two are, I’m happy for you both. I hope you know that.”

“HEY!” A shout from behind rescued Clarke from having to respond, and she turned to see Raven analyzing the inside of her diploma case. “This shit is EMPTY! Those bastards forgot to put my fucking diploma in here! The incompetency, I tell you…”

“You fucking idiot!” Clarke and Octavia burst into laughter. “They MAIL it to you!”
“I think them giving you that degree is a liability to the school, Ray. God knows the kinda shit you’re gonna taint their name with.”

Raven scoffed. “Very funny. I was just kidding… I totally knew that.” Raven slapped the flaps shut and pointed to a pitiful looking Lexa slowly approaching them. “Oh, here comes Monty 2.0!”

Clarke shot Raven a warning look before meeting Lexa halfway, who looked up at her from beneath her cap with pitiful eyes. “I blew it, didn’t I? I totally made a fool out of myself. Now I’ll never get a job or a girlfriend or… man, I’ll be that Monty kid!”

Clarke swallowed the smile bubbling inside her, the act was just too overwhelmingly cute to resist. “Well… in regards to the job portion, there is a firm out there with your name on it – literally – so I wouldn’t stress it.” She lifted the girl’s chin with a finger, running her thumb beneath the pouting lip. “And maybe I can help with the girlfriend part…” Lexa’s eyes ignited, widening beyond capacity at the words, and Clarke couldn’t detain the breath that was stolen from her lungs when she saw the well-known green landscape she had practically memorized transform into unexplored, unfamiliar grounds. “What do you say?”

Lexa was debriefing, digesting the question and its validity. Possibly searching for any signs of insecurity in Clarke’s tone. “You really mean it?”

Clarke nodded. “I do.”

The joy that spread across her features then revealed the answer long before her lips could. “Fuck YES! I say YES! HELL TO THE MOTHERFUCKING YEAH!” She kissed Clarke fully on the lips, unable to contain the outburst of energy and happiness exploding in her chest. “Man, if they had told me I’d get a fine-ass girlfriend just for graduating college, I would have done this shit YEARS ago!”

***

“Ah, you must be Clarke.” Indra spoke in a sing-song voice, embracing the flushed blonde the second she stepped through the front door. “I can finally say it is a pleasure to meet you, child. I have heard many wonderful things about you!”

Clarke chuckled nervously. She had heard of Indra, sure. But being here, back in the mansion where everything began, seemed slightly surreal to her. Especially taking into consideration that their first encounter had been under less-than-friendly conditions. “It’s, um, really nice to meet you, too! Officially! Lexa speaks very highly of you.”

Clarke chuckled nervously. She had heard of Indra, sure. But being here, back in the mansion where everything began, seemed slightly surreal to her. Especially taking into consideration that their first encounter had been under less-than-friendly conditions. “It’s, um, really nice to meet you, too! Officially! Lexa speaks very highly of you.”

“Oh, I like you already!” Indra laughed, ushering Clarke further into the house’s interior. Raven and the gang had already crossed to the back yard, where the grill was being managed and decorations were being put in place. Aden had volunteered to keep Lexa away from the house until all was in order, probably sending the poor girl down an endless, pointless goose chase. “Now, I could use your help in the kitchen. Lexa mentions you’re a very skilled cook?”

Clarke blushed again, feeling incredibly pressured to meet standards. “Er, absolutely. I’d be more than happy to help.”

Indra led her to the kitchen, quickly explaining the meal she was trying to prepare, and giving Clarke a tour around the cabinets for familiarity purposes. Once they were situated, they worked in relative silence, exchanging conversation when the situation called for it.

“So… I suppose I have you to thank for Lexa’s sudden will to graduate.” Indra finally managed to
dive into the heart of the topic she was itching to bring up; her reason for even having Clarke help her in the first place. Plus, getting to know the girl Lexa professed her love to had peaked her curiosity. Sensing Clarke’s hesitation, she presented the shy girl with a warm smile. “You know… I have been trying with that girl for years now, and she would just not give me the time of day. But here she is, a college graduate. No longer interested in leading a meaningless, intoxicated life. She even spoke about possibly reclaiming the family business!” Indra kept her gaze low, watching the knife she wielded slice effortlessly into the tomato she currently mutilated. “All of this, because you inspired her to.”

Clarke swallowed heavily, unsure how to approach the subject. “I think… I just gave Lexa a motive. Completely unintentional, if I’m being honest. Truth be told, she accomplished all of this on her own. I had nothing to do with it, Miss Indra. I didn’t even want anything to do with her at first.” Clarke chuckled, shaking her head at the baffling realization of how much had changed in such little time. “At first?” Indra questioned, zoning into the one part of her statement that incriminated her to the point of no return. Clarke’s throat felt parched.

“Ah, yes, er – um… See, I… I sorta asked Lexa to date me. Officially. Exclusively, you know… I mean, maybe I should have asked you? I-I, wow, um that’s silly… Lexa is an adult, I know. But, well, see, I’m sure you would have liked to know. Or at least have met me first!” The babbling was just pouring out. “I assure you, I’m not a weirdo, or creep, or… trying to take advantage of her in any way, I promise. I would never! Lexa- she’s good. She’s special. And I don’t mean special in the, you know… no, I mean like, her heart is special. A-and I sorta like her. well, no, not sorta… sheesh, bad word choice there. I do like her. A lot.”

She snapped her jaw shut once the incoherent nonsense had all but spilled out. She avoided Indra’s gaze, which she felt resting right at the side of her head, and she steeled herself for the blow that was to come. Prepared herself for the worst.

“Well, it’s about damn time, girl!” Indra spoke, shooting casual glances over to Clarke as she resumed her vegetable chopping. Clarke was left speechless, lifting her eyes to Indra’s only to find warmth and acceptance there. “You nearly drove that child mad! Drove me mad with her constant babbling about you! Clarke this… Clarke that…” Indra chuckled. “I don’t know what you did to make my Alexandria so smitten so quickly but, whatever it was… thank you, Clarke… for bringing her back to me.”

Clarke responded with silence and quaking lips. She remembered the despair she had seen in Indra’s eyes the night of Lexa’s party; the hollowness and accumulated sorrow that had been there. Searching them now, all evidence of that was gone. What she did find instead was freedom. A chance at a new beginning.

“Oh, come here, child. Come here…” And there was just something about how incomparably welcoming Indra’s arms were, and the way in which the woman created a cocoon of comfort and safety, that just made Clarke fall apart. “Just let it all out… there, there…”

***

“Here,” Raven spoke coldly, dropping the heavy, metal tray carrying the uncooked meats on the brick countertop, “as requested.”

She was already spinning on her heels to return to the game room where the boys waged a fierce FIFA competition when a persistent hand pulled her back.

“Whooa, just a second there. What’s the rush, mami?” Anya cocked her head to the side, indiscreetly
scanning Raven’s luring body. “I could use a hand… what do you say?”

Raven rolled her eyes with such vigor, it hurt. “Would you like that hand making contact with the right side of your face or the left? I’ll let you choose this time around.” Raven spat, adding an equally infuriating smirk of her own.

It had the reverse effect however, serving to only spur Anya on. “Still bitter about last time, sexy? How about you let me make it up to you… I’m known for being highly skilled with my mouth…” She winked, pulling Raven even closer.

Raven scoffed, raising a curious brow. “Well, maybe you should start using your highly skilled mouth to blow on that,” Raven pointed with her eyes to where a steak long ignored was now on the brink of bursting into flames, “trying to spit game when you can’t even grill a steak. Pathetic.”

Anya growled, frantically fanning the burnt steak with her hand, feeling a flush creep over her cheeks from embarrassment. “That one is for Bellamy, he likes his steak well done.” She tried a cover, trying to deter the earlier blow to her ego, but Raven saw right through it.

“How about you go help out in the kitchen, and I can finish out here… I would hate to see the rest of the meats suffer a similar fate. That poor steak deserved better.” Raven, unwilling to back down now that she pinpointed Anya’s sore spot, dug a little harder.

“Do you even know how to handle a grill, sweetheart?” Anya defied, flipping a few burgers as she taunted the brunette. “Why don’t you go fetch me a beer and let me handle this.”

Raven was a measly second away from shoving raw meat down Anya’s unbelievably pestering mouth. “How about you stop flaunting your nonexistent swagger around and flip that patty over. Also, the sausages have been ready for three minutes now, yet you choose to let them sit there and shrivel up unnecessarily. No one wants to eat dry sausages!”

“My sausages aren’t dry! My sausages are big and juicy!” Anya waved the spatula around as she growled through clenched teeth. Unable to contain the bubbling anger. Raven was one in a million, she thought. One in a million to make her feel this loss of control. “I don’t need your advice on how to grill. I know what I’m doing!”

Raven snickered, popping her hip. “Oh, is that why you have the ‘How to Grill For Dummies’ e-book open on your phone?!?”

Anya’s bulging eyes shifted to her iPhone, perched near the grill and reflecting a ‘Grilling 101’ emboldened title. In all her excitement at seeing the brunette, she had completely forgotten about it. She closed her eyes the second she felt the heat flash wash over her. There was no coming back from this monumental mistake.

She should apologize. Might as well bite the bullet now and get it over with, Anya reasoned. Who knows, you might get lucky and get rewarded in the end. Lexa made an idiot out of herself and succeeded in getting the girl of her dreams. Heck, maybe she could too.

“I’m sorry! Alright!” She managed to spit out. “Sorry for being a dick to you when we met. Sorry for being a dick to you right now. Just… sorry!” Raven’s peaked eyebrows and hanging jaw encouraged her to continue, understanding that compassion and humility are important traits to gaining entry to a woman’s heart. And some other, more appealing parts. “I see the errors of my ways. Truly, I do. And I’m ashamed… I’m actually a caring person. I am the way I am because of a rather difficult past, that I must admit I never quite got over. Women like you… intimidate me, if I’m honest. I look at someone like you and I think, ‘Man, not only is she beautiful, intelligent, and strong,
but she’s so damn out of my league,’ that it changes me from the sweet, loving person I am to this…
manipulative, insecure bitch. I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”

She bowed her head respectfully.

Raven stirred in front of her, and Anya heard a slow, elongated sigh leave her lips. “Yo, Shakespeare…” She perked up the second Raven called to her. She made sure to keep her gaze sully and ashamed. “I just want to say that… And trust me when I say this isn’t necessarily easy for me to bring up…”

Anya couldn’t resist the smile that played on her lips. “Yea? Whatever it is, you can tell me, babe.”

Raven nodded, the gap in between both brows wrinkling as she drew them close.

“Your sausages are burning.”

***

“You really think she’ll like it, kid?” Lexa asked, studying the intricate details engraved in each sphere. Jewelry had never been her forte. With Costia, she would simply ask the cute salesgirl to point out the most expensive or most popular piece in the store, and buy it without ever even sparing it a glance. This time, however, was different.

“Yea, she’s always wanted a Pandora bracelet! She’d fawn over the pictures in the magazines every time. One time I even raised enough money to buy her one, but she wouldn’t let me.” Aden spoke giddily, looking over the endless options of charms that lay scattered before them. “Oh! Lex, this one! A graduation charm!”

Lexa smiled and analyzed the charm, nodding to the saleswoman behind the counter in indication she’d take it. “Ok, that’s one. Let’s get her one more…”

“Good idea! You pick this time!” Aden gestured, shifting his attention to the other pieces of jewelry around the store.

Lexa nervously looked the charms over again. So many to choose from, so many moments that had meant the world to her, that it simply rendered her speechless. She finally jumped into action the moment her eyes crossed paths with a unique, yet incredibly fitting charm. She reached for it, feeling the smooth yet indented surface as the piece rolled between her fingers.

“Is that the one, Miss Woods?” The saleslady, who had been closely observing her, asked.

Lexa nodded. “Oh yes… this is the one.”

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“Clarke just texted me. She’s saying she’s still getting ready and to take me home with you until we all meet up for dinner.” Aden made sure to speak firmly as they left the store, trying to keep the deception clear from his voice. “Hey, Lex! Can we stop by Harper’s and pick her up? I asked her to tag along tonight!”

Lexa sighed, aware that arguing with a love-struck Aden was a pointless battle. “Sure, kid. Let’s go get your little girlfriend…”

“She’s not my girlfriend!” Yet his tone said otherwise, wavering ever so slightly as he spoke, revealing the truth of what he wished for was the exact opposite.
“So, um, listen, Aden…” Lexa spoke after a few minutes of driving in relative silence, trying to piece together the appropriate words for the message she was trying to deliver. “Look, I may be overstepping my boundaries telling you this… but, er-well… I’m just gonna tell you like it is, alright?”

Aden stared at her and nodded.

“Well, your sister and I… we’re sorta official now.” Lexa finally choked out the words. “Clarke asked me to be her girlfriend right after graduation. And, well, I said yes, obviously!” She laughed nervously, keeping her gaze directly ahead. “I hope that’s ok… I really like her, Aden. A lot. And I know how important you are to her and how important she is to you. And, well, I just want you to know that this won’t change anything, ok? I’d never come between the two of you. You’re the priority here.”

Aden stared in bewilderment, momentarily frozen at first but then slowly thawing once the coin of what Lexa was saying finally settled. “Well, it’s about damn time!” He responded once he regained his senses, laughing jubilantly and reaching over to give Lexa a well deserved high-five. Lexa relaxed immediately, beaming over at the happy kid riding shot-gun next to her. She had never seen Aden’s face light up more than this moment. “Welcome to the fam! Well, you’ve been fam for a while now… but hey, now it’s official!”

Lexa let out a heartfelt laugh. “I don’t know if I’d say all that. Clarke and I are dating, not getting married.”

Little Aden wiggled his brows and graced her with a mischievous grin. “Not yet.”

***

“They’re here! They’re here!” Octavia raced out to where everyone gathered outside in the massive yard, motioning for everyone to be silent. “They just pulled up!”

Aden was the first one to reach them, followed by a small girl Clarke had never met before, and then, stumbling out with a handful of bags and a rather nagging attitude, came Lexa.

“Surprise!” All voices united to congratulate the shocked, surprised brunette the second she made sense of the scene. Lexa audibly gasped, dropping the bags she carried as she brought her hands up to her face.

“Eeek! My cupcakes!” Aden squealed, realizing the soft and fragile pastries could not have survived the fall.

“Congratulations, my girl!” Indra broke from the crowd and enveloped the motionless Lexa in an unbreathtable hug. “I’m so damn proud of you!”

Everyone followed suit, taking turns congratulating Lexa and one another. Clarke was last to approach her, purposefully waiting until everyone else had their moment.

When she finally approached, she did so with a sly look and a mischievous smirk that screeched danger. “Hey there, girlfriend…” She husked, allowing herself to be pulled by slender fingers at the waist. “Oh, and don’t freak but everyone already knows… Indra sorta blabbed. Oops.” Clarke tried to look as apologetic as necessary, fully aware that apologetic was the furthest thing she felt.

Lexa laughed. “Oh, Indra blabbed, huh?” The brunette spoke, pulling Clarke closer. “Then I guess they won’t mind if I show my new girlfriend the love and affection she deserves.” Lexa kissed her shamelessly, as if they were the only two souls present. “I sorta blabbed to Aden. Hope that was
ok… He was extremely enthusiastic, to say the least.”

“Of course he is. The kid has been rooting for you since day one.” Clarke mocked, rolling her eyes as Lexa’s smugness started to pierce through. “No one else ever even stood a chance in his eyes…”

“Well… I’m glad he made you see I’m worth a shot…” Lexa breathed out warmly.

Clarke shook her head. “Aden didn’t show me that. You did.”

Lexa figured that statement should be answered with another kiss. “You look absolutely breathtaking, you know that…” The brunette rasped by her ear, kissing the skin just beneath the lobe. “That’s a very naughty black dress you have on…”

Clarke gently slapped her shoulder. “Behave… there’re children around.”

Lexa shrugged, placing a kiss lower down her neck. “Raven is the only child here we need to worry about.”

“WOODS!”

Lexa sighed. “Speaking of the devil…”

“Hey! Who’s the girl?!” Raven demanded, pointing with a stern finger. “What’s she doing being nice to Aden? No one is nice to the brat but me!”

Clarke followed Raven’s gaze, and sure enough, the girl was hand-feeding a grinning Aden chocolate-covered strawberries.

“Oh! Sorry, forgot to introduce. Clarke, Raven meet Harper. That’s Aden’s little girlfriend!” Her tone was light and cheerful, which apparently was a huge mistake.

“She’s WHAT?!?” Clarke and Raven responded in synchrony, eyes widening at the revelation.

“Er… well, Aden likes her. And she appears to like him back. He wants to ask her out. You know… to go steady.”

Raven was practically fuming. “Oh, the only thing about to go steady is my foot up her-“

“He’s TEN!” Clarke interrupted (thankfully). “He’s a KID! You encouraged this?!”

Oh, hell no! I just got a girlfriend and I’m not about to lose her! Sorry, Aden, but…

“Me? What?! NO! Absolutely not! Nah-Uh. Not a chance! Completely against young, harmless love. All for destroying their innocent little hearts right now.”

“Clarke, she’s gonna ruin him! We need to act! What’s the game plan? Toss her in the pool? I can make it look like an accident you know…” Raven suggested, stretching her neck in preparation.

“Let’s just go over there, sit them down, and explain that they’re too young to be… worrying about that! I thought I was clear when I said no girls until he’s older!”

“Clarke, babe… don’t you think that’s a little… drastic?” Lexa, feeling guilt begin to creep up on her, tried. “I mean, Aden is a good kid. Harper appears to be one too. Why not let them hang out and explore this out? She makes him happy, look at him…”

Just then, Aden began to choke on a chunk of the strawberry he chewed on. Causing him to heave
and cough obnoxiously. Lexa sighed. **Welp, I tried.**

“She is TRYING to kill him! Clarke! This is only the beginning. We still have roughly two good years with him in this pre-teen, pre-hormonal stage! You know once he reaches puberty, our little boy will be gone…” Raven’s voice cracked with emotion. “He’s our baby, Clarke.”

Clarke’s eyes were swimming in unshed tears, watching a whole future flutter by along to Raven’s rant. “You’re right, Ray… I’m sure Aden can lead a perfectly happy, loveless life.”

Lexa rolled her eyes, stopping both of them before they did something irreversible. “Ok. Now, I know you two love Aden and want what’s best for him. Truly, I get it. But… if you barge over there and tear them away from one another, he’ll never forgive you for it. So, please. Just, give him the benefit of the doubt with this? He took a punch across the face from an army of bullies for her, for god’s sake, let him have this!”

It took a bit more convincing to diffuse the determined pair, but eventually both agreed to back off and permit a mild interaction between the two as long as Aden and Harper were always ‘closely monitored.’

The rest of the afternoon and evening consisted of good food, some pool time, more food, a FIFA competition, another round of food, and dancing.

By that point, everyone with the exception of Lexa, Aden and Harper were happily buzzed off of Anya’s special margaritas. Even Indra swayed to the music with a dopey smile plastered across her face.

Lexa’s eyes tracked Clarke, watching the blonde dance off-beat with Raven and O, laughing when Raven lost equilibrium and landed on her backside, pulling Clarke and Octavia down with her. Lexa was ready to rush to the rescue when she heard Clarke erupt from laughter, and she eased back into her chair, chuckling as she watched the trio struggle to stand up.

“You seem overly chirpy.” Anya grumbled, plopping down on a seat near her. “It’s disgusting.”

“Let me guess, still no luck with Raven?” Lexa teased, accepting the orange juice her cousin handed her.

“Pff, that one is harder to crack than that preacher’s daughter I defiled back in high school!” She took a long swig of her beer, eyes focusing in on Raven. “She irks me. Why is she over there being all happy and attractive! She should be the one moping, not me.”

Lexa scoffed. “Can’t have them all, An. And that’s Clarke’s best friend. Please don’t do anything stupid.”

Anya rolled her eyes. “Relax… I’m not trying to fuck this up for you.” Anya tapped her shoulder and sighed. “I know what she means to you.”

“Thanks, An… that means a lot.” There was nothing but sincerity in Anya’s expression as she leaned forward and gave Lexa an awkward, sideways hug. “You know… Raven responds to sarcasm and humor. Your usual game won’t get you far with her. So… if you want to get through to her, play by her rules. Not yours.”

Anya clicked her tongue. “For the first time in your life, I think you have a point there, Lexi.” Without warning, she sprung to her feet. “I’m gonna go ask her to dance. Wish me luck. Have 911 on speed dial in case things go south.”
Lexa observed. Anya’s initial approach was meek and docile, extending a hand over to a tipsy Raven who stared at the limb as though trying to understand it’s purpose. Clarke pushed the confused girl toward Anya after Raven failed to react, and Anya caught her as their chests slammed together, wrapping her arms around Raven’s waist in case she tried to escape. To Lexa’s surprise, Raven didn’t. She put up a weak struggle, throwing senseless insults at Anya, but other than that her body moved willingly to the rhythm Anya was creating.

Lincoln pulled Octavia away as a slower song started to play, leaving Clarke partner-less and uncertain on what to do. Lexa made her way over to her, approaching from behind and pulling her back until their bodies molded into one another. “May I have this dance, beautiful?” She asked, spinning a smiling blonde until they were face-to-face.

“Oh, baby…” Clarke husked back, breathing hotly against Lexa’s neck. “You’ve no idea just how bad I can get…”

Lexa had to clutch the fabric of Clarke’s sinful dress to ground herself, looking around frantically to make sure no one was watching them. “Clarke…” She rasped out in warning, feeling her resolve crumble to pieces when Clarke swirled around and pressed her ass against her crotch, grinding her it in a subtle but precise manner that drove Lexa wild. “Clarke, there’re people around. Aden is-“

“Aden passed out from a chocolate crash twenty minutes ago. Everyone else is too drunk to care…“ Clarke said, driving her hips back with intent. “So stop worrying and dance with me.”

Lexa obliged, meeting Clarke’s hips with every gyration, appreciating the image that is Clarke - slightly bent at the waist, ass jutting out and moving against her, hands burrowing into wild, blonde curls - as she danced. Her fingers tingled, wanting nothing more than to hike up the blonde’s dress and seek out the cozy warmth between her legs.

“Clarke…” She gasped out, straightening the blonde so that she could press her lips to the shell of her ear. “Jesus baby, you’re so fucking sexy…”

Clarke turned, pulling Lexa’s bottom lip with her teeth. “Take me upstairs, Lexa…” She demanded, tone low and dangerous; the urgency in it causing Lexa to grab her hand and tow her away.

Once they reached the stairs that led to the second landing, Lexa stopped and pulled Clarke into her arms. “Hey, remember this…” She whispered, a reminiscent smile playing across her lips. “Remember how you stood up there,” Lexa pointed, pressing her cheek to Clarke’s head, “and locked eyes with the most handsome, irresistible woman you now have the privilege of calling girlfriend?”

Even in her drunken haze, Clarke managed to scoff and look adorably unconvinced. “Here we go…“

“I remember every detail… your heels clacking against the granite… the way that dress you had on
dipped a little too low. I’ll admit, your boobs were the first part of you to catch my attention. I just
couldn’t help but appreciate the way they bounced as you came down the steps.” Lexa smiled when
Clarke chuckled against her lips. “They were so mesmerizing, time felt like it slowed to a crawl… I
could hear Indra yell but she sounded distant. I didn’t even notice Raven until minutes later, to be
honest!” She brushed a curl behind Clarke’s ear. “That’s until I found your eyes. Piercing and
captivating, and time simply froze… I could have spent forever standing there, staring at you. You
are by far the most perfect thing to happen to me, Clarke.”

Clarke whimpered, eyes torn between love and lust, unsure whether to hug or fuck this divine
woman in front of her. “Lexa… Of course I remember! God, you stole my breath that night. That
was the second most magical moment of my life…”

The brunette twisted her lips and wrinkled her nose. “What’s the first?”

Clarke grinned, the side in favor of lust rapidly conquering the battlefield as abysmal black eclipsed
shimmering blue irises. “Why don’t you take me upstairs and I’ll show you…”

***

Within two seconds of stumbling into her room, Lexa found herself clad in only her briefs, bra, and
tie, which Clarke currently used as a leash to tug her toward the massive bed.

“Clarke… you’re tipsy… Maybe this isn’t such a good idea.” Lexa spoke in between steps, assessing
the situation. “I-I think maybe we should wait a little… we can talk! At least you know, until you’re
sober…”

Clarke gracefully spun around when she reached the end of her walk, pushing a stuttering Lexa
down on the bed and straddling her waist before the brunette had a chance to sit up. “Oh, I’m
perfectly lucid.” She rasped, driving her core flush against flexing abs, dress bunched up around her
waist and parted thighs as she glided across the expanse of Lexa’s stomach. “It’s rude to keep your
girl waiting, wanting, and wet you know... I’ve been wanting to feel you all day, baby…”

Clarke continued to move her pelvis, dragging her warm and moist center along. Lexa realized that
Clarke must be pantieless beneath her dress if the wet streaks her cunt was leaving behind was any
indication. “Fuck… Well, maybe I enjoy watching you get all hot and bothered, beautiful. Work you
up until you beg…”

Lexa pushed off the bed, sitting up and hoisting the blonde along, only to toss her unceremoniously
on her back. Clarke smirked, pulling Lexa down to her lips by her dangling tie. “I don’t remember
giving you permission to top me tonight…”

The question threw Lexa momentarily off guard, causing her to pull back and search Clarke’s facial
features for further explanation. Scanning her eyes, she found desire and yearning reflecting up at
her, along with something a bit more sinister; defiance. Lexa knew exactly the kind of challenge
Clarke had just issued; and she boldly accepted.

“Oh? That’s because I never asked.” Lexa softly snarled by her ear, using a knee to spread her legs
roughly apart and drive it forward to the blonde’s waiting core. Clarke inhaled sharply, trying to
gather her dimming senses before wrapping her legs around Lexa and swinging her down, settling
back on top.

“What was that, babe? Can’t hear you from up here…” Clarke winked, pinning Lexa back down to
the mattress by her shoulders when she tried to reverse their position. In one fluid move, Clarke shed
her black dress, also stripping Lexa of any impulse to wrestle the blonde for control the second her
breasts were on full display. “Now… be a good girl and stay down.”

Lexa’s eyes transformed from wide appreciation to a warning squint. “Clarke…” She grumbled, ready to toss Clarke back on the bed and ravage her.

The blonde ignored her, making her way down the length of Lexa’s body with a new determination and sense of self-possession Lexa hadn’t seen in her before. She wanted to sit back on her elbows and just watch Clarke’s slow, but incredibly seducing progression south, and at the same time she was tempted to pull her back up to her mouth by her wild, untamed hair and kiss the smartness out of her. The second Clarke’s lips made contact with her erect nipple through the fabric of her bra, she knew she was already too gone to try and stop whatever it was Clarke had on her wicked agenda.

“Fu- Ah!” Lexa half-gasped, half-hissed when she felt the sharpness of teeth tug the sensitive bud. “Clarke! Easy!”

Clarke laughed, hands already busy removing the bra. “What? Don’t like it a little rough?”

It was a tease intended to test her, and Lexa huffed, growing incredibly frustrated and increasingly more turned-on. “Careful, beautiful… this is my area of expertise.” Lexa spoke octaves low, palming one of Clarke’s breast and squeezing it in the process.

Clarke didn’t let the smugness deter her from diving back in and continuing her slow decent toward the one area of Lexa’s body she had yet to acquaint herself with. When she reached the waistband of her briefs she didn’t hesitate. Instead, she drove her fingers beneath the hem and pulled it down her long, slender legs until it became just one more piece of discarded clothing on Lexa’s bedroom floor.

“Spread ‘em.” Clarke ordered, tone steeled and rough. Lexa was so incredibly surprised, so beyond shocked, that it paralyzed her. Yet the urgency in Clarke’s eyes reeled her back to action, settling back on her elbows as she watched Clarke closely. Slowly, she began to pull her knees apart, smiling when she caught the subtle bob in Clarke’s throat as she swallowed the desire lodged there.

“Hey… you sure?” Lexa asked, relaxing when she received a nod and a mouthed ‘yes.’

The blonde settled in between her legs, glaring at the exposed, surely moist (from the cold breeze that caressed the heated flesh from Clarke’s breathing) flesh.

“Just, umm… the key is to ease into it. Start by maybe kissing and licking the area around it, you know…” Lexa offered advice, interpreting Clarke staring blankly at her open cunt as a sign of hesitation. “Let your own intuition guide you. You know, a great man once said, ‘The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself.’ I can’t remember who that man was… I’m thinking it might have been Brad Pitt but that doesn’t sound—”

Clarke dove right in, determined to shut the gibberish up, but not before hissing out a polite “FDR said it, you idiot!” to a wide-eyed brunette. She aimed her tongue directly for the throbbing clit, creating a pattern that switched from flicks to licks to sucks, occasionally using her fingers to swivel it around. Lexa dripped crisp curses and groans every now and then, and Clarke felt incredibly proud when a hand buried itself in her hair, taking the gesture as encouragement to continue with her talented tongue. That feeling quickly evaporated when she felt the hand guide her head slightly to the left.

“Ok, ok… you’re doing great, baby. Really, so good… but um, a little to the – YES! Right fucking there.” Lexa breathed out, immediately releasing a guttural grunt when Clarke’s tongue hit the mark. “Yesssssss, that’s the fucking shit right there… fuck!”
Clarke continued the pace for a while, but grew tired of it after a few seconds, and let her tongue explore Lexa’s folds on it’s own. She dragged it low to Lexa’s entrance, swiveling it around before pushing it in, eagerly swirling the wetness around her tongue to properly taste the musky, heady, tangy fluid. It was everything and nothing she expected. The taste was exceptional.

Clarke wanted to spend the rest of the night driving her tongue further into Lexa’s tunnel, wanting nothing more than to keep tasting and exploring her, but Lexa had other plans. The gentle upwards tug on her hair caused her tongue to slip out and return to the still engorged clit.

“Right here, baby. Remember, left-right, left-right. Up and down is overrated.” Lexa instructed, moving Clarke’s head along to her directions.

“Lexa…” Clarke rumbled, growing frustrated at being continuously interrupted. Once the brunette settled back down, she continued her oral invasion. And it was going rather well until-

“Just… how about you try sucking it in with your lips? Just wrap your lips around it and like, suck it all in. Oh! Maybe you can-“

“Holy fucking hell, Lexa! Stop talking!” Clarke couldn’t help but go off, slightly offended that her efforts were driving Lexa to hold full conversations instead of euphoric bliss. “I know what I’m doing! I watched countless videos and I-“

“What kind of videos?” Lexa interrupted, genuinely curious.

That made Clarke pause. “Uh, just… videos! Y-you know… on how to eat a girl out…”

Even through the darkness, Lexa could practically see the blush conquering those pale cheeks. “Porn videos? Like, girl-on-girl action videos?”

“Yea! Well, s-sorta. They were more like, I dun know… tutorial videos…”

“What the fuck does that mean?” Lexa questioned.

“Why the fuck does it matter! Are you seriously interrogating me right now?! I could be using this time to give you head!” She moved to lower her lips back to the brunette’s warm core when a hand stopped her. Clarke sighed.

“Ok. Ok. Good point, but… now I just need to know. I mean were they, like actual porn, or maybe-“

“They were YouTube videos, for crying out loud!” Clarke blurted, ready to toss the towel. “There! I admit! I googled educational, tutorial videos on how to properly eat a woman out! But before you go throwing judgment around, I’ll have you know that the instructor was highly versed in the craft of pussy eating! He had great credentials, nearly fifteen years of experience, and has occasionally succeeded in making his partners not only cum, but also squirt!” She was panting now, trembling from embarrassment at having her cover blown. “He even demonstrated on a grapefruit!”

The way Clarke spat the last sentence at her, as though the grapefruit tutorial was the key to proving she knew what she was doing, caused Lexa to burst into a merciless fit of laughter.

If Clarke had been frustrated earlier, she was seething with rage now. “It’s not funny! I’m dead serious!”

“I-I know you are! I know, and that’s what makes it hilarious…” Lexa expressed, coming down from the sudden fit. The disappointed, discouraged look on Clarke’s face snapped her out of it. “Hey! Hey, no- come here…” Lexa pulled the grumpy blonde onto her, placing her head just
beneath her chin. “I’m just kidding, beautiful. I know it was your first time, and in all honesty, you did great! You just need more practice and guess what…” Lexa lifted her gaze to meet hers, “we just happen to have all the time in the world.”

Clarke sighed, jutting her lower lip forward in a small pout. “But… he had fifteen years of experience! He called himself the ‘Vagina Whisperer’!” Lexa realllyyyyy tried to hold it in this time, swallowing down the laughter and nearly choking on it. “I just wanted to make you feel good…”

The brunette placed a kiss on her damp head. “If only you knew how good you make me feel everyday, just by being near you… you’d understand that I need nothing else.” The change in the atmosphere made Lexa remember, and she pounced from the bed (tossing a confused Clarke aside) and dug into her pants pocket.

When she returned, she made sure to pull Clarke back up onto her before opening the jewelry box.

“It’s for you.” Lexa explained. “Aden and I wanted to get you something special for graduation. He advised me that you have always wanted a Pandora bracelet?”

Clarke nodded, already toying with the bracelet and charms with numbed fingers. “Yea… Lex, you shouldn’t have…”

“I know. I wanted to.” She whispered lovingly, pulling the bracelet from its box and wrapping it around Clarke’s wrist. “This charm right here is from Aden…”

Clarke traced the small symbol etched against its surface with her eyes. “Aw, it’s a graduation charm! It’s beautiful!”

“And this one,” Lexa pointed out the second charm on the metal cord, “is from me.”

She watched the blonde slowly press her fingers to it, eyes lit with humor and zeal as they identified and recognized the unique icon on the shiny surface. “A mask…”

Lexa nodded. “Symbolizing the moment we met… Without a doubt the most magical moment of my life.”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t forget to leave us your comments and come chat with us on Twitter!
Hope you all enjoyed it!

@TaJat07 @Silver_Snake222
Hey guys!!!!

Enjoy the chapter! We made it extra, extra long to make up for how long it took to update :D

Again, we can't stress enough how grateful we are for all your continued love and support! TaJat and I truly pour everything we have into each chapter and it's wonderful to receive such lovely comments. We're beyond thankful and we hope you stick with us until the very end (which is sooner than you probably expect ;))

So... enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Five.*

Clarke smiled to herself, feeling a sense of accomplishment and self-pride at having memorized Lexa’s incredibly entertaining facial expressions as she slept.

She waited in silence and in perfect stillness, the only movement she indulged in was the shift of her indigo eyes as they traced and studied the peaceful, oblivious face only inches away from her own. She observed the straight, narrow design of Lexa’s nose, paying particularly close attention to how her nostrils flared right before taking in a deep breath.

She observed the curve of her brows, untamed yet naturally molded, hovering just above closed lids that currently hid intoxicating green eyes. Clarke had never noted prior to that moment - as she lounged in bed bare and silently awake, studying the trivial details of the girl she had spent countless hours the night before making love to - how long, luscious and arched Lexa’s eyelashes were. She admired how they glistened in the sunlight that breached in from parted curtains, enhancing the natural beauty that Lexa so effortlessly exuded.

She observed the glow coating Lexa’s equally bare skin - from her upper breasts that peaked out from beneath a mess of covers, pillows and limbs, to the top of her forehead where skin merged with hairline – and interpreted the glow as a declaration of corporal satisfaction, in both the physical and emotional sense. The night before had been filled with sexual exploration and outbursts of laughter from both parties, as they took turns conquering the other, Clarke quickly discovering Lexa was pitiable ticklish and easily subdued with just a few jabs of her fingertips.

She observed the slightly parted, rosy lips that every now and then would alternate from exhaling soft breaths to soft snoring, a staggered symphony that was both irritating and undeniably cute.

*Six.*

She observed the subtle twitch of muscles just above her upper lip, bringing the parted mouth into a quick, uncontrolled smile. After having witnessed it occur five – well, six with this one - times,
Clarke came to the realization that Lexa was possibly dreaming (by the looks of it, possibly something good… and dirty).

Without any thought behind it, her hand moved upwards to caress away the creases that appeared on Lexa’s forehead, disrupting the smooth, peaceful skin there. Hazy, green eyes fluttered open slowly at the touch; confused and slightly apprehensive at first, but soon transitioning to relief and contentment as awareness settled in. Clarke beamed.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to wake you…” She rasped, catching the roughness in her throat as she spoke and clearing it. “You can go back to sleep, if you’d like.”

Lexa smiled, using the arm she had wrapped possessively around the blonde’s lower waist to bring her closer. “You’d be crazy to think I can just fall back asleep after waking up to this…” Her hand dipped below the covers to grope Clarke’s plump behind. “I think it’s time for round… jeez, I lost count after five.” Lexa teased, smirking arrogantly. “I do clearly remember you screaming my name, multiple times as you came undone over and over and over again…”

Clarke huffed, and rolled her eyes. “I definitely wasn’t screaming. You forget we’re not alone in the house? Aden is somewhere downstairs. And if my memory serves me right, you came undone multiple times too last night!”

Lexa let out a chuckle, retracting her grip from Clarke’s ass and moving her hand down to the heat she felt beckoning her in between parting legs. “I gotta admit… That crappy video you YouTubed actually came in handy…” She dipped her fingers through already slick folds, drawing a sharp gasp and throaty moan out the blonde. “But you still have a lot to learn before you can measure up to my skills…” Lexa dipped three fingers in without warning, watching with a satisfied smirk as Clarke’s face twisted from shock, to mild pain, and then to heavenly pleasure. “Good morning, beautiful…”

Clarke’s eyelids slammed shut as a wave of pleasure invaded all her senses, and she dug her teeth into lips that were ready to bellow just how incredible that pleasure was.

Lexa rolled on top of her then, settling in between already quaking thighs. She drove her fingers in and out of the constricting channel mercilessly, holding herself over the blonde and watching Clarke as she neared the edge for the fifth… nah, sixth… time. It didn’t take long for Lexa to map out Clarke’s body and all the tricks that made her come apart.

For example, Lexa discovered during her exploration, that Clarke more than tolerated a bit of rough treatment. That was evident when she dug her teeth into a hardened nipple and simultaneously felt the walls of Clarke’s slippery tunnel nearly crush her fingers. Or how when she flipped the whimpering blonde to her front so that she could ravage Clarke from behind, the girl practically orgasmed when Lexa weaved her hand through golden locks and tugged her head backwards. All useful knowledge of course, Lexa noted at the time, tempted to land a well-deserved smack to the glorious ass Clarke willingly offered up to her but refraining; an experimentation for another time.

But there were other things she learned. Clarke did not enjoy to be teased. She did not enjoy being made to wait. Lexa learned that little lesson the hard way. She had Clarke face down on the pillows, driving her fingers in slowly as the blonde ordered her to pick up the pace. Lexa, always the instigator, slowed it even more. In her frustration, Clarke pushed off from under the brunette, flipped onto her back and drove her own fingers in; finishing herself off. Lexa was helpless to act, forced to sit back and watch Clarke fuck herself, feeling both elated at the scene taking place and a little envious that she wasn’t the cause of that particular orgasm.

More importantly than learning all the tricks on how to properly drive the blonde to climax was what she learned after. The way Clarke would purr as she peppered tender, loving kisses across her back.
That lulling her to sleep took only a few, calculated strokes of her fingers across her rib cage. Clarke never vocalized it, but it was no secret that the blonde loved cuddling in bed. That much was clear from the way she practically curled up into Lexa, pulling the brunette’s arms over her waist to sheathe her. Lexa hadn’t vocalized it either but she loved the cuddling just as much.

A sharp moan and muscles abruptly tightening pulled her back. She lowered her mouth to a breast, helping build the sensation, and it didn’t take long after that to feel the suffocating clenching around her fingers quickly followed by a gush of wetness. Clarke plopped down onto the mattress, panting and spent.

“Good girl…” Lexa husked, bringing up her fingers and pushing them into her mouth. “Hmmm, breakfast is served.”

Clarke chuckled. “You’re…so… lame…” She spoke in between heavy breaths.

Lexa rolled back to her side, leaving an arm still draped over Clarke’s midsection. “Oh is that so? Well, do you wanna know a secret?” Lexa wagged her brows as she drawled. “You snore. Pretty loud actually. For a moment last night I thought I was sleeping next to a chainsaw.”

Clarke propped herself up on her elbow, glaring at the smug brunette. “I do not snore! But since we’re sharing, I must say…”

Lexa grinned, waiting for Clarke’s comeback.

“You have terrible morning breath!”

Lexa burst into laughter, unfazed by the indelicate comment. “That’s actually pretty true… I ain’t even mad.” She moved to roll off the bed. “I’ll be right ba-“

“Wait. No.” A hand around her wrist brought her to a pause. “No, don’t… don’t leave. I don’t mind it…”

Lexa settled back next to a giddy blonde, who took no time curling herself over her. If there was ever a moment Lexa had wished for, this was it. She honestly could not recall a memory when she felt this liberated and light; a moment when life felt this easy. It was blissfully disquieting, because with her past experiences, moments like these were always temporary. It felt eerily similar to the peace that settles after a war, delicate and brittle, one bullet-shot away from crumbling to nothingness. She swallowed. “Clarke…”

The drowsy blonde stirred next to her, but offered no verbal response.

“Did you mean it? Yesterday… did you mean it when you asked me to date?” Lexa was embarrassingly aware at how her voice shook as she spoke, laden with anxiety and emotions, and by the way Clarke’s eyes snapped open to meet her own it was plenty obvious the blonde noticed as well. “I-I’m just curious… It sorta took me by surprise. And I was thinking that maybe… perhaps you regret it. We were both on a sort of high from having graduated, and well… basically I get it if you’re not ready for this. No hard feelings. And I’m willing to wait however long you need me to, if that’s the case! I’m not going anywhere…”

Clarke saw the tortured conflict concealed beneath a faltering smile on full lips. She knew that conflict well. It was a similar struggle she herself had been living with; a raging war between mind and heart; between logic and emotion. Majority of the times when the two would engage in battle, logic would reign victorious. A trait Clarke somewhat took pride in.

Yet that all started to change when Lexa entered her life. Her rational decision-making process
became muddled. Her ability to distinguished feelings from duty became unreliable. Her brain, the one constant voice and ally in her life, became more and more silent. Yesterday she hadn’t planned on dropping that question, she admits. But it wasn’t her usual monotone ally speaking to her when she did.

“You know… a wise person once said, ‘Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.’” Clarke spoke confidently, smiling when she noticed the creases in Lexa’s brow fade and relief wash over her features.

“Aww, Clarke! You finally listened to me! You know, I am honored to be your inspiration and I appreciate.”

“Steve Jobs.”

“Huh?”

Clarke chuckled. “Steve Jobs. That was his quote.”

Lexa cleared her throat, blushing mildly. “Right. Of course. I knew that.”

“But to answer your question… No, I don’t regret it. I meant what I asked of you, and I admit… I hadn’t planned on doing that, right then and there. But… it just felt right. I mean… I’d still like for us to take it slow… build on it, you know. There’re still a lot of things that I think you and I need to overcome before we’re ready for more.”

Lexa breathed out, partially in relief and partially from suppressed glee, and pressed her lips to Clarke’s forehead. “No rush, babe. We can go as slow as you’d like. Just… talk to me, if at any point it becomes too much, okay?”

Clarke pulled back slightly to watch her. She understood exactly what Lexa feared could happen. Clarke… ever the expert at avoiding her feelings and refusing to give her emotions the power to influence her decisions, could one day come to the realization that this was a huge mistake and abandon ship. She knew that was the restricted zone Lexa’s mind had wandered into, and she knew… given her history, that such scenario was almost imminent.

“I will.” She said, with a clipped smile. “I promise.” Clarke further solidified her answer with a kiss, which she deepened almost immediately, sinking her tongue as far into Lexa’s mouth as it would go. The kiss quickly evolved into a struggle for dominance as they began to roll around the mattress, Clarke determined to obtain the upper hand this time, a difficult thing to manage when Lexa was equally determined to pin her down. Inspiration hit right when she needed most, and before Lexa could trap her beneath her sculpted body, Clarke slid from the bed to the floor beneath, perching herself up on her knees. Lexa, startled at Clarke’s surprisingly agile move, stared, smirking when she saw Clarke motioning her over to the edge of the bed with her index finger and a stare that dripped of honey and passion.

Lexa did as instructed; parting her legs to the wicked blonde that stared up her with a sex-infused gaze and a promise that she’d be seeing stars by the end of it. Still unwilling to relinquish control so easily, Lexa dug her fingers into her hair and tugged her forward, watching Clarke’s pupils become impossibly darker at the show of power.

“Hmm, you like that, don’t you…” She husked, giving another tug forward. Clarke eagerly went to work. By this point, she had enough knowledge to understand Lexa’s preference. The brunette was strictly a ‘clit-only’ kinda gal; penetration of any kind was highly discouraged. She would occasionally swipe her tongue over her entrance for a more… precise taste, but that was the extent of
Not that clit work was easy by any means, mind you. It took approximately an hour the first time she successfully made Lexa cum. Once she got the hang of it, that time-frame increasingly dwindled down to thirty-seven minutes; her best record thus far. Keeping her pace steady and alternating between lateral to circular flicks, she felt the brunette latch onto sheets and hair a whooping twenty-five or so minutes later, and she proudly flicked her gaze upwards to watch Lexa come undone in her usual silent, controlled manner that was so incredibly opposite of her own.

“Holy fuck!” Lexa exclaimed, pulling Clarke up onto her lap and kissing her in earnest. “God, that tongue of yours will be the death of me one day, beautiful.”

Clarke laughed, wrapping her legs and arms around a still trembling Lexa as she slowly descended from her high. “I think that was a new record. And def worthy of a massage, breakfast in bed, and two more orgasms for the doer.” She wagged her brows, smiling when Lexa connected their noses.

“How about… a massage and those two orgasms in the shower, and we join the others for breakfast downstairs? I don’t think I want you breaking up with me just yet over my terrible cooking.”

Clarke agreed with a series of giggles, followed by a howl when Lexa smacked her ass loudly as she stood, Clarke still clinging to her as she carried her toward the bathroom. By the gush of fresh wetness coating her lower abdomen, Lexa knew the blonde more than appreciated the unexpected ferocity, though of course, Clarke refused to admit to it.

***

Aden padded his way into the kitchen where the crew gathered, lazily scratching a butt cheek with one hand, while the other rubbed on a sleep-deprived eye. Indra was the first to notice the boy as he made his way across the room, watching him from behind her mug, as he lugged himself toward the coffee pot.

Clarke noticed as well, surprised her kid-brother had been the last one up in the household, which is usually never the case. “Aden, what are you doing? You know you’re not allowed to drink coffee.” She scolded as she watched him pour himself a cup, the mug so large and heavy that he needed both hands to hold it up.

Aden yawned, shrugging. “A man needs his caffeine, Clarke.”

Indra chuckled. “Oh, let him have a cup, child. No harm in it.”

The group continued to enjoy their breakfast in relative ease; a variety of chatter unfolding between different parties at once. Raven and Anya resumed their bickering from the day before, as though no time had passed. Lincoln was hyper interested in Bellamy’s latest project regarding a new TV series he landed after being killed off in his previous show. Octavia was teaching Lexa how to properly make pancakes while Clarke prepared the batter, unsure if she should be irritated or impressed at Lexa’s unfailing ability to burn every pancake in her care.

“Lex, focus dude! You’re letting them sit there too long!” Octavia shouted after the 15th pancake was lost to pancake heaven. “People are hungry!”

Lexa scowled. “Well, maybe if you didn’t pour them so thin, we wouldn’t be having this problem!” She proved her point by picking up a sample pancake, which in her defense, was nearly see-through. Clarke rolled her eyes. “Look at this, O! This right here is a disgrace to pancakes everywhere! The IHOP founder is probably rolling in his grave right now!”
“Guys, here move over. I’ll cook the pancakes. You two can make the batter.” Clarke pushed in between the two, passing the batter bowl and wooden spoon over to Lexa. “You do know how to make the batter, right?”

Octavia gave her a rushed nod. “Duh.”

Lexa followed suit with a scoff. “Of course we do.”

Five minutes (and ten eggs sacrificed in vain) later, she discovered that neither knew the meaning of ‘following directions’ and she found herself in the middle of batter battle.

“I SAID TWO EGGS LEXA! TWO!” Octavia yelled, yanking the bowl from Lexa’s hands.

“YOU SAID TEN! I HEARD YOU SAY TEN, O!” Lexa screeched back, heading to the fridge for more eggs after exhausting their earlier supply. “Next time try and enunciate your numbers more clearly!”

“ALRIGHT, Enough!” Clarke had it. “Aden! Aden, get over here and help me with the pancakes!”

In turning she found Aden, face deep into his glass coffee mug, snoring into the dark liquid to the point that bubbles started to form on the surface.

Raven, sitting closest to the boy at the table, nudged him to, jamming her elbow right in between his ribs. “Yo, kid. Clarke’s calling ya.”

“Aden, what’s the matter, sweetie? Why are you so tired? Are you feeling okay?” Clarke, ever the concerned sister, dropped the pancake duty and rushed over, placing the back of her hand against his forehead to check for any signs of illness. Indra followed, pulling away the coffee mug and placing chopped fruits in front of him.

“Eat, child. And then it’s off to bed. He was probably just up all night playing video games downstairs, dear.” This last portion was directed at Clarke, who nodded her agreement.

Anya, in a sports bra and swim trunks, walked around the table and dropped a stack of pancakes on Raven’s plate. “I made those myself. Eat.”

Raven scoffed, a little too theatrically. “Uh, I don’t remember asking you.” She pushed the plate toward Anya, rejecting it.

“Why are you so damn difficult?” Anya, on the verge of losing her patience, inquired. “I’m trying to be nice to you! So take the damn pancakes, woman!”

Raven, deliberately trying to add fuel to Anya’s already raging fire, did as instructed. Well… sorta. She scooped up the stack of pancakes handed to her and flung, aiming directly for Anya’s face, letting out a high-pitched laugh when one slapped the scowling woman’s cheek with a satisfactory smack.

“There… happy?” Raven snickered, Anya on the other hand, casually wiped her face clean of the sticky food, leering at the smirking brunette.

“Is that the best you got, Reyes? How very mature of you…” The tone was indignant and meant to ascertain her superiority. “Why don’t we settle this little debacle in a more grown-up manner, eh?”

Raven’s response was a single quirk of her eyebrow. She played it off with sheer indifference.
Anya extended her palm over to Raven. “Thumb War!”

Raven pondered the challenge, eyes narrowing at the rather serious blonde sitting across from her. “Deal! Best two out of three! Loser has to lick the sole of Lincoln’s clammy feet!”

“Hey!” Lincoln paused his conversation with Bellamy upon hearing the indirect insult.

“Will you two just quit it! Does everything have to be a competition between you two?!” Aden, who was desperate to return to his snooze, found it extremely hard to do so with Anya and Raven violently shaking the table beneath him. “I’m trying to nap here!”

“Jeez, kid. What’s got your panties up in a bunch?”

Anya chuckled. “He’s upset that I had to drop Harper off home last night. In my defense kid, she was the one who asked for a ride. Her mom didn’t want her spending the night at a stranger’s place.”

Aden growled softly. “Nooo, this is not about Harper. I’m tired because the two of you kept me up all night with all your loud whispers and grunting! Seriously, who in their normal mind spends all night wrestling around?!”

Raven and Anya both stopped what they were doing so abruptly, it earned the attention of everyone else around the room. Pale faced and bulging eyes, both women looked at the ten-year-old as if he had just prophesied the end of the world.

Raven chuckled nervously after taking in Clarke’s confused expression. “The kid was probably just dreaming… Haha, what an active imagination you got there, A!”

Aden shook his head. “Um, I’m pretty positive I wasn’t dreaming. I woke up, in the middle of the night to get a glass of water, and when I walked by your room, I heard noises. It sounded like you were screaming or in pain so, I cracked the door open and peaked inside…”

Everyone froze. Not a breath was exhaled, not even eyelids fluttered.

“… Why you and An decided to have a wrestling match in the middle of the night baffles me, but it was pretty clear who the winner was from where I was standing.”

Indra, only too aware of where this was headed, sighed and excused herself from the room, leaving the other perplexed/stunned/speechless spectators to deal with the mess.

Bellamy cleared his throat. “Umm, Aden… care to clarify? As to who the winner was…”

Raven and Anya both shot Bellamy a look that spelled out death.

“It was dark. So I could only make out the shadows but… yea, Anya totally won. Raven was struggling beneath her and pleading for her life. Sorry Ray, but you should know better than to let your opponent pin you down.” He answered nonchalantly, digging into his fruit bowl without a second thought.

Clarke crossed her arms, glaring at the accused in a silent declaration of certain doom. “Raven, Anya… do either one of you have something to say to Aden?! It was clear what Clarke was implying… ‘explain. CLEAR THIS UP. Tell the kid that he saw something… benign.’”

Raven nodded. “Yea… matter of fact I do!” Turning to Aden. “I’m not sure at which point you witnessed our little… wrestling match, kid. But I was definitely the winner! You should have seen the way I had her in a chokehold… she was the one doing all the begging then!”
Anya scoffed loudly. “But you wish… you made it too damn easy to just pick your scrawny ass up and toss you-”

“ANYA!” Lexa bellowed. Clarke was left speechless, trying to decipher if she was processing this correctly. Did Raven really just…?

O and Lincoln were struggling to hold back their knowing smirks and chuckles. Bellamy shot Anya a proud wink.

“What? Wait… am I missing something?” Aden, finally catching on to the hushed whispers and scripted looks being shot around the room, asked. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing, sweetie! Hey, why don’t you go play video games downstairs with the guys, yea?” Clarke jumped into action, rushing Aden to his feet and tugging Bell and Line along. “Take a nap. Binge on a series. Go crazy with the leftover snacks and cupcakes. Just…have fun!”

Once Aden was safely out of reach, she turned a scalding gaze toward the two women, still sitting at the table, as though awaiting judgment. “RAVEN. OUTSIDE. NOW!” Clarke rasped out in a rather menacing whisper that might as well have been a scream. She stormed out through the kitchens’ massive glass doors toward the massive yard.

Once Raven followed after Clarke, Lexa stomped up to her surprisingly calm cousin, slamming the table with both palms. “What the actual $\text{fuck}$, An! How can you be this stupid?! Please, just… please tell me she wasn’t drunk when you… $\text{fuck}$!”

Anya leaned back against her chair, draping an arm over its back as she eyed Lexa sternly. “Of course not, Lex! I went into her room to give her a pair of clean Pajamas and bathroom toiletries! I never even intended on-“

“$\text{sleeping}$ with her!” Raven exclaimed to Clarke, who had yet to stop shaking her head. “Look, I know… I know you’re upset. I get it! Anya- she hasn’t necessarily been the most… charming of humanoids, but trust me when I say that-“

“it just happened, okay?!” Anya blurted to an aggravated Lexa and Octavia. “She was… there! In her room! In just her underwear, ya know… looking all, good and shit… and I-I just happened to walk in right then! I tried to leave but then-“

“my $\text{fucking}$ leg brace got caught in the fabric of the bed covers and I couldn’t lean down to untangle myself, so… I mean, I had no other choice! I just had to… you know… ask her for help! I mean, what are the odds!? One minute we were arguing about-“

“who would win in an epic battle between $\text{Superman}$ and $\text{Batman}$…” Anya explained, rubbing her neck nervously, “and I totally shut her uneducated ass down, talking about-“

“$\text{SUPERMAN}!” Raven shouted with such confidence, she practically spat it on Clarke’s face. “I don’t get how it’s even a question?! I mean, aside from his fancy little suit, Batboy is completely powerless! He’s a fucking human, for cryin’ outloud. Superman is the real deal. He is the motherfucking thing. He is-“

“a $\text{pussy}$! Are you $\text{shitting}$ me?! Just toss green, glowing rocks at the dude and he’s practically $\text{mush}$! But noooooo, she wouldn’t listen! She kept $\text{insisting}$, talking about how $\text{Superman}$ would serve Batman up in a bucket like fried chicken wings! Ooooooohhhhh, $\text{hell}$ nah! So-“

“So… I challenged her to a dual! You know, mano-a-mano!” Raven rose her chin to the air and spoke the words proudly. “I had to defend $\text{Superman}$’s honor.”
“I accepted.” Anya admitted proudly. “You know… for *Batman* and all.”

Clarke, predicting the rest, let her head drop in resignation. “So… I’m guessing that led to…”

Raven nodded. “Us Screwing? Yea… And don’t ask me for details because frankly, I don’t know what the *hell* happened. I mean, one minute we’re wrestling, and I *swear* I had her in a chokehold ready to tap out. But then… all of a sudden-“

“we’re *fucking* and none of it was my fault! I had her pinned down during the match, beat her fair and square, and suddenly… she’s leaning forward and tugging at my lower lip with her teeth and… what was I *supposed* to do?” Anya smirked, running the tip of her tongue across her lower lip. “I gave her what she wanted.”

“Jeez, no wonder Aden looked ready to sucker punch the pair of ya…” Octavia pitched.

“I’m *sorry*, Clarke!” Raven professed, entirely honest and ashamed. “I forgot to lock the door! I mean, I didn’t imagine the night would… *lead* in that direction.”

Clarke nodded and offered her a weak smile. “He doesn’t seem to know what really happened but… Ray, that aside. Are you okay? I know it just *sorta* happened but…

“…is this what *you* wanted?” Lexa asked her cousin, who had managed to keep her expressions impartial up until now.

Anya shrugged, lips pursing as she put some thought behind the question. “I don’t know what it meant… Maybe it didn’t even mean anything. Maybe it was just-“

“fun. Two consenting adults falling into bed together and having some uncomplicated fun. Yup. Nothing more, nothing less… ya feel me?” Raven’s face slackened, and her lips tightened. “A one time thing that shall never, and I repeat, EVER-“

“happen again. Scouts honor.” Anya used her index to draw an invisible cross over her heart. “I got it all out of my system.”

“But… you made her *pancakes.*” O pointed out. “When have you *ever* done anything remotely sweet for any of your hit-and-quits? I’ll tell you when…. NEVER! I can understand you being sweet prior to getting laid but… not *after.* That’s totally *not* an Anya thing to do!”

Anya shrugged, at a loss for a suitable argument. “Yea, well… I think I’m coming down with whatever disease Lexa has… you know, the thing that makes you wimpy and dumb around women.”

Lexa couldn’t help but chuckle. It was entertaining watching Anya scramble for an explanation. “You know… a wise person once said, ‘Have the courage to follow your heart-*“

“*and intuition.*’” Clarke spoke, sensing the need to offer some much needed advice to her best friend in this moment of emotional conflict.

“Aww, *Clarke*! You *finally* listened to me! You know, I am honored to be your inspiration and I appreciate you *finally-*“

“Not you, *Steve JOBS!*” She rolled her eyes, sending a mental apology to the man for the *second* time today.

“You lost me… What does *Steve Jobs* got to do with this? Why do you have to *Gandhify* every
conversation we have and make it all poetic, and full of wisdom, and all that hippie crap that—"

“Ray, all I meant by it is to just… do what feels right.” Clarke clarified. “No need to overthink it. Let whatever is meant to happen take its course, okay?”

Raven was certain an invisible shard of glass had fallen into her eyes because it was suddenly much wetter than usual. “Okay… I’ll do that. But not because Steve Jobs said so. Which, by the way, he totally jacked that quote from me… I’ll do it because I, Raven Lindsey Reyes, said so.”

“You don’t have a middle name.” Clarke sighed.

“Sounds more badass, just go with it.”

***

The following Tuesday, Lexa awoke before the sun had breached the horizon, jumping in the shower to wash off the remnants of sleep that still clung to her. Her stomach felt unsettled, and her thoughts whirred chaotically in her head as she dressed, slipping into freshly pressed black slacks and a black button-up which she tucked in, all the while running and re-running the possibilities in her mind.

It was early. Far earlier than she had intended to be up by. Still, she had much to occupy her time with while she waited for her partner’s arrival.

Downstairs, she was greeted by a rather cheery Indra busying herself with breakfast, humming the echo of a song entirely foreign to Lexa.

“Ah! You look absolutely stunning, child!” Indra pressed both her cheeks and leaned up on her toes to give Lexa a kiss. “There’s fresh coffee and breakfast will be done shortly. Also, Gustus is set to arrive in an hour. I have called and reminded Nia of your appointment and that you will be arriving on time. Everything is taken care of.”

Lexa crossed over to the coffee pot, pouring herself a cup. “Indra… you didn’t have to do any of that. I told you I’d handle it.” She took a sip. No sugar. Bitter. Dry. She took another. It was exactly what she needed. “I was actually planning on doing all of that this morning. Kinda why I woke up so early.”

Indra scooped the eggs and bacon onto a plate, and walked it over to the island where Lexa was perched. “I know… you didn’t have to do any of that. I told you I’d handle it.” She took a sip. No sugar. Bitter. Dry. She took another. It was exactly what she needed. “I was actually planning on doing all of that this morning. Kinda why I woke up so early.”

Lexa swallowed, wishing Indra would talk about something else. Yet it was all true. Today she’d return to the building with her surname proudly stamped on it’s exterior. Today, she would finally stop running and face her past.

“I’m nervous too… but,” she gently swiped her fingers across the watch on her wrist, and then across the ring on her neck, “it’s time. I have to do this.” The words tasted bitter against her tongue, possibly because they were laced with palpable uncertainty.

“Lex! Lex!” Aden slid into the kitchen, feet clad in black socks and bed-hair on full display, holding a loose bowtie in one hand and a bottle of gel and a comb in the other. “I’m in dire need of help! First off, this is not a clip on!” He held the tie up to their gazes. “Secondly… the comb is a goner. It never stood a chance against my hair.”
Lexa and Indra laughed, both had momentarily forgotten that he had spent the night. “What?! I have to look sharp! This is my future we’re talking about… It’s all about first impressions. Learned that from Bill Gates.” He babbled, even as Indra approached and helped him with the tie, then his hair. “The man is a genius! Although there are a few things he could do differently to better improve his product…”

Lexa had just finished up her breakfast when the doorbell screeched to life. “I got it, Indra. Aden, finish up your breakfast and then go brush your teeth! Foul-breath is unlikely to impress Bill Gates, that’s for sure…”

“Good call! On it!” He spoke in between bites, practically inhaling the food.

A dark, murky figure stood just beyond the glass door, waiting an answer. Lexa pulled it open, her jaw grazing the floor the moment she scanned the nearly unrecognizable figure standing just beyond it.

“Holy… WHOA!” Was all she could say, because sometimes, whoa is all is needed to describe something that more legitimate words fail to. “John… whaa… you look… normal!”

John chuckled. “I take your reaction as a good sign?”

Lexa nodded furiously. “Yes! Very good! Incredible!”

John Murphy. Lexa had, in a recent conversation with him, learned his middle name to be Richard. John Richard Murphy. Lexa also learned, during the same conversation, that he was named after his biological father. John Richard Murphy, Jr. No, wait. Johnathan Richard Murphy, the Second. There. It felt right. Uttering his full, unabbreviated birth name. Because the man that stood before her was a retransformed, rebirthed individual. His hair – once matted and knotted and grown to lengths far too uncomfortable for anyone to endure – was now clean, and styled; shortened on the sides, with the longer section at the top slickened back with a precise dose of gel. His beard – once wild, unruly, and filthy – was now completely gone; giving Lexa a clear view of John’s rather shrewd, trusting face. She noted the suit he wore – sharp and pressed; the material a deep blue adorned with a long, silver tie around a collared shirt, the play of colors complementing his fair tone rather well – was free of even a speck of lint. Her eyes scanned down to his feet, clad in glossy dress shoes that were polished and pristine, much like his new appearance. John Murphy - former bum; rejected orphan; child gangbanger; unwanted nobody – had officially shed every label tethering him to his cruel past. Jonathan Richard Murphy, The Second had finally arrived.

“I got it from Target!” John piped, tone enthusiastic but with an undertone of insecurity floating there, understandably so given Lexa’s close scrutiny. “I hope it’s alright… I don’t have the dough to afford anything classier, I’m afraid.”

Lexa smiled, ushering him in. “You look amazing. Truly. To be honest, I think you’re gonna make me look bad.”

“Well, as your personal consultant, I believe it is my job to be presentable for the both of us.”

Lexa doesn’t know what possessed her to leap forward and bring John into a spine-crushing hug, mildly surprised when she felt his arms wrap around her and return the embrace. Their bizarre, uncommon relationship a mystery yet to be understood. The bizarreness became even more prominent a few days ago, when Lexa tracked John down to ask him to became her official advisor and right-hand man. There were many other people better qualified and more experienced for the job, Lexa knew, but at the current moment she didn’t need a business expert who excelled in interpreting contracts and proposals; she needed someone capable of interpreting her soul.
“Nervous?” He asked.

“Terrified.” She responded. Neither making an effort to break out of the hug.

“Understandably so.”

Lexa nodded against his shoulder. “Any last minute advice?” She asked, hopeful.

“Just one.” John replied in his usual mellow tone. “Breathe. You can do this.”

Lexa nodded again. “We can do it.”

***

Clarke tugged the edge of her new navy blue scrubs, questioning why they suddenly felt so suffocating. She had purchased a looser pair than her usual size, heeding her mother’s ancient advice about how they tend to shrink in the wash. So the extra clinginess around her chest, which made it difficult to breathe, was uncommon.

The tour had lasted roughly an hour. The head nurse excitedly walked and weaved her through the brightly lit, tiled halls that connected patient rooms, a well-sized cafeteria, conference rooms, On-Call rooms, Laboratories, and the many Operating Rooms of the hospital, providing descriptions and information about each stop. Clarke would smile and nod politely, asking relatively few questions as they walked from one end of the building to the other. The tour was completely unnecessary, of course. Clarke was no stranger to these halls; in fact, she was sure she could produce a better tour than Betty White here – sporting a mid-60’s nurses’ scrub whose color had faded to an unusual, unappealing green.

For instance, Operating Room 4 – which the nurse had shown her – was known as the “Miracle” room. Her mother had told her the story, many many years ago, about how a man practically already dead as he was wheeled into surgery after a 100-ft drop down a mountain, just miraculously opened his eyes after being pronounced dead with a flat heartbeat for two minutes. Or that Bertha, the cafeteria lady, would lie everyday about being “out” of chocolate pudding and later pass out the hidden cups to the sick children throughout the main floor. When Clarke wasn’t shadowing her mother, she’d assist Bertha with that task.

Most importantly, and most memorable of all, was taking a trip into the Attending’s Locker Room, located on the west wing of the hospital’s second floor. She was sure the head nurse was still speaking to her even as she took leave of her side and started almost automatically gravitating toward a specific, overused locker at the farthest end of the room. It was the locker her mother utilized; the one she would complain about on the daily since the lock would occasionally malfunction and not close properly. Clarke hovered to it, stopping a few inches in front of the faded blue-grey metallic door. It was still the same. Nothing had changed, except maybe… everything. Ever so carefully, she lifted the handle and pulled, not surprised to find the door unlatch and swing open.

“Oh, yes dear… we never did get around to fixing that.” The head nurse, understanding Clarke’s trip down memory lane, spoke softly. “Your mother filed countless complaints about that damn door and it’s still broken. I guess… we never really saw the point in fixing it after she left…”

Its interior was empty. Vacant. Which, logically was expected yet… it felt unusual. So many times she had opened it to see a white coat with her mother’s name stitched in cursive just over the right breast. Or a pair of purple stethoscopes, her mothers’ favorite, dangling from the metal hooks. By the looks of the dust gathered at it’s base, it had been untouched for quite some time.
“Didn’t feel right assigning it to anyone else, you know.” The head nurse explained. “That will always be Abby Griffin’s locker.”

The tour continued, yet Clarke’s mind was elsewhere. This felt wrong. A few moments spent deciphering the ‘Why’ behind it and she concluded that this had ever only felt right because of one constant… her mother. Now that that constant was no longer in play, the hospital – which she once considered a hopeful, homely place – felt more like a morgue; Lifeless and dull.

“I’m sorry… I’m not feeling well. I have to go.” She gave the head nurse a pitiful smile, and without waiting for consent, turned and left, only able to catch her breath once she had stepped outside its walls.

She sat in her car for a while, trying to figure out what this experience had meant. Had she just walked out on her future? On the career she had spent the past four years sacrificing for? Her mother’s reputation was a cushion she could always fall back on; fully aware that the hospital and its staff would welcome her in with open arms at a moment’s notice. But as she had wandered its corridors today, she felt not bustling excitement to start anew, but rather burning desire to let go. The effects, she guessed, of the tarnished pride and broken expectations her mother instilled through her desertion.

Agreeing to leave such serious decisions for a later time, Clarke turned the ignition and reversed out of her parking spot, allowing one more glimpse at the hospital that once was a second home to her through the crooked, cracked rearview mirror.

***

The 45-second elevator ride to the 32nd floor stretched into bottomless minutes for Lexa. Each ding indicating a higher level prickled her already sensitive nerves. John leaned against the elevator wall, eyes shut in a speed nap. If he was nervous, it was not perceptible.

Aden on the other hand-

“Pen? Check. Notepad? Check.” He scanned the pocket of the inner lining of his jacket for each item. “Chapstick? Check. Breath mints? Check. Mirror? Check. Buddah?…” He patted down his jacket and pants pocket. “Buddah!? Oh no… no no no no! Lexa, we have to abort mission NOW! I can’t do this without mini Siddhartha with me! I don’t know where I left him!”

Lexa snickered. “You’ll be fine, kid. Just…breathe, alright. We’re all nervous.”

John opened a single eye, watching the kid search the elevator floor from corner to corner. “No, I won’t be fine! It’s my good luck charm! I always have him with me for my games or during an exam or when I talk to pretty girls! You don’t understand… he’s lucky!”

“Hey, hey… Aden it’s ok. You’ll be ok, alright?” John interrupted, lowering himself to a knee. “Look, if you get nervous in there, just think positive thoughts. I guarantee you that will work. It’s what I do.”

The boy nodded reluctantly, retreating to a corner of the elevator as they rode out the slow ascent.

Breaths hitched and jaws clenched from anxiety as the bell indicating their arrival to the thirty-second floor finally pinged. Lexa, receiving uncertain looks from her peers, stepped off first. Her eyes scanned her surroundings warily, occasionally fixating on specific objects that her mind would faintly recognize; an extinguishing tether, she noted, to a distant past. An antique vase with unusual patterns; a rather large portrait of the city of Los Angeles, crafted by none other than Gerald Richter
himself, hanging on a wall; a small bonsai tree on the corner of the oversized reception desk; a receptionist, now aged and worn, a faraway echo of the woman Lexa had once known and still vaguely remembered. Although her features had become more creased, her strikingly youthful sapphire eyes, vibrant with energy and passion, remained untouched by the years.

Sapphire eyes locked with her own. Sapphire eyes transitioned from monotonous to disbelief. Lexa smiled. It had been far too long.

“Hello, Nia.” Lexa spoke, the words leaving her tongue as a greeting and an apology all in one. “It’s great to see you…”

“Good heavens, I can’t believe it.” Nia said as she rounded the desk to give Lexa an overdue hug. “So it is true! Thank the Gods for putting some sense into you!”

Lexa laughed, hugging back. “I don’t know what you’ve heard but… yea. It’s true.”

Nia laughed jubilantly. “Well, if I’m absolutely honest, darling… I didn’t think I’d last long enough to see this day!”

“Neither did I.” A male voice drew everyone to its direction. “Glad you could make it, Alexandria.”

Lexa stiffened. The beady, wary face she gazed upon continuously capable of drawing that reaction. “Titus… It’s good to see you.” Her tone was polite but void of warmth; a perfect reflection of the man’s character. “I’d like to introduce you to Jo—“

“Please, this way. We have much to discuss and too little time.” Titus cut her off abruptly, spinning and walking away toward a large conference room at the end of the narrow hallway.

She nodded and inhaled. She had expected this, she reminded herself. She had planned for it. “Aden, stay with Nia. She’ll give you a tour and introduce you around.” She smiled and patted Aden on the shoulder, who fiddled nervously with his tie. “And hey… you got this, little man. No need to be nervous, okay? John and I are gonna go have a talk with Titus and I’ll come find you once we’re done for some lunch, yea?”

Aden nodded, smiling up at Nia who walked a few paces to stand near him.

“Trust me, young man, you’re going to love it here!” Nia jumped in, trying to comfort him. “We have a pretty sweet cafeteria with a freestyle Coca-Cola machine! Oh, and a break room with air-hockey and Ping-Pong tables… and many, many other games! So, what would you like to see first?”

Aden scrunched his brows, slightly perplexed as he considered his answer. “The head of the non-profit department. That’s whom I’d like to see first.” He spoke firmly, his voice laced with a conviction that startled the blonde. “Then we can go check out that freestyle machine and air hockey table.”

***

“Tell me you weren’t raised to be this naïve, Alexandria.” Titus scolded, leaning back in his high, leathered chair poised at the head of the large conference table. Lexa and John sat side-by-side to his right; one sporting a frown and a bowed head while the other listened acutely, formulating designs and patterns in his cunning head. “You are a fool to think you can just meander in here, armed with only their surname and a weak claim to a title you have done nothing to deserve, and request a seat at the table! Are you remotely aware of the reputation you have built for yourself?”

Lexa sighed. “I know… I know I have been less than deserving. But I assure you Titus, that’s
changed. I mean it. I want this! I want what is rightfully mine and a chance to prove that I can do this! I will do this! Just… tell me what it is I need to do…”

Titus scoffed, giving her a slight shake of the head. “You want this? For how long this time, Alexandria? Until it becomes a bore and a hassle for you? Until you find something more entertaining to fill your time with? How long until you walk out on everything your parents have worked for once again?” The questions perforated her suddenly paper-thin skin like verbal bullets. It lodged deep in her chest, and she suddenly felt the air become denser with every truth he spat at her. The moment had finally arrived, Lexa noted. The moment she faced the uncomfortable, unavoidable reality she had long ignored. “You are a deserter! An embarrassment to this organization! Your parents entrusted me with this firm until you were of age to take over. Do you remember that day? Do you recall the little visit I paid you five years ago, a day after your eighteenth birthday?”

Lexa was silent, gaze fixed on the hands that numbly rested against the mahogany table.

“Well, let me refresh your memory.” Titus stood, walking over to the glass wall that stretched over an entire side of the room. “I remember… standing at your doorstep, a rolled up paper in one hand and a gift in the other. I remember being… excited. Thrilled, you could say even. You answered the door, hung-over and reeking of old booze and cigars. I could hear the remnants of the party from the night before still buzzing in the background. Still… I smiled. I greeted you. And you… laughed. Mistook me for a salesperson. I understood, and forgave your error. Seeing your judgment was impaired. I explained my reason for being there and handed you the paper. A copy of your mother and father’s Last Will and Testament. I even highlighted the section stating their wish… their dream for you to succeed them when you came of age.” He paused momentarily, taking a breath. “I gave you the gift, a special pen your father used to give all his employees upon starting at the firm. It was symbolic. It was a moment of great happiness and pride for me. And when you took that pen, well… I felt as if I had fulfilled my last promise to your parents.” Titus had his back to her, yet the heaviness in his voice was unmistakable. The agony and sorrow she sensed only added pain to the injury she already felt. “That lasted until you used that pen to draw an oversized ‘X’ across the papers and scribble a ‘Go fuck yourself’ in big, bold letters in the signature slot.” He chuckled, turning around to face a pale, stiff girl that met his gaze with coiled embarrassment. “You then proceeded to throw said paper and pen onto the cold pavement just before slamming the door in my face to indicate that our conversation was over. Do you remember now, Alexandria?”

Lexa swallowed the bile coating her throat. She looked to John, for aid and answers, yet John’s eyes never detached from Titus; they remained calm yet alive, unlike Lexa’s frantic ones. “Titus, I was wrong. I was wrong, and I-I realize that now. All I ask is for a second chance! Let me prove to you that I have changed! I won’t disappoint you, I swear it!”

A knock on the door interrupted Titus mid scoff. “Ti, the board is gathered and waiting for you. Should I have lunch brought in?”

Titus nodded and the secretary took her leave. “Like I said earlier… time is of the essence here. And unfortunately, you just about ran out of it.” He gave her a parting nod and motioned Lexa and John to the door. “Maybe we can convene some other time, Miss Woods. I have business to attend to now, so if you’ll excuse me…”

Lexa and John stepped out of the room. Titus remained inside a few moments, possibly waiting for the pair to leave the premises before exiting.

“Great help you were in there, John!” She couldn’t help it… now that the humiliation and shame had lessened, anger began to loop inside her. “You are supposed to give me advice! You said nothing in there! Thanks for nothing!”
John casually slid both hands into his pockets, taking no offense at the sudden outburst. “One thing I learned throughout my very strange life, is that sometimes it is better to sit back, listen, and observe. It’s astonishing just how much you can learn about a person from twenty minutes of undisturbed examination.” Lexa breathed in deeply, trying to understand where John was headed with all this. “For example… Titus is not particularly fond of eye contact when he’s emotional. That much was evident when he stood and pretended to analyze the city of Los Angeles through the window; it was a cover… albeit a very transparent one. Nor is he very interested in lowering his defenses or his pride for the likes of anyone. Particularly someone who has in the past, proven to be unreliable and disinterested in the company he has fought to keep alive after your parents’ death. Yet most importantly still, I noted, is that he was looking for something in there… while attacking you. While reprimanding you for your past deeds and mistakes. And just like he anticipated, you failed to show it to him.”

Lexa naturally laughed. “You’ve got to be kidding me. I apologized! I made an idiot out of myself! I begged him to give me a chance and in turn he laughed in my face and kicked me out of the room as though I were a child! And still I’m to blame?! Unbelievable…”

John shook his head. “You don’t understand. This meeting… it wasn’t about you showing him you’ve redeemed yourself. He isn’t looking for you to be ashamed or apologetic, Lexa. He was testing you. The entire time.”

That brought Lexa to a pause. That option she hadn’t considered. “Testing me? Testing me for what?”

John smiled. “Isn’t it obvious? To determine if you make a suitable leader. How can he entrust the fate of a global company in the hands of someone who’s ‘sorry’ and ‘regretful’ yet can’t make a stand for herself? He wanted a reaction, Lexa. He wanted to see a CEO in the making. Not a pitiful, fearful shadow of one.”

The pieces suddenly fell into place. Had she had the good sense to shut her mouth and listen like John, she would have picked up on that detail right away. It’s not too late…

Without a second thought, she stormed back into the room. Titus still sat at the end of the table, sorting a stack of papers in preparation for his meeting. Yet the look of confusion on his face spoke the non-uttered words confirming John’s theory.

“I have no-“

“I will be returning Thursday afternoon of this week, and I’d like to convene with the Board, the executives, anyone and everyone necessary to convince I am suitable for this position. I trust you’ll make the necessary arrangements and make it happen.” She spoke firmly, bravely and emboldened. “If I fail to do so, I will surrender any and all claims I have to the firm. Do we have a deal?”

Titus stood, slowly crossing over to her until they stood face-to-face. “Any and all claims include any and all future shares and financial gains, you do understand that, yes?”

Lexa nodded. She understood the stakes.

“Then we have a deal, Miss Woods.”

They shook hands and settled on a time. Lexa was prepared to take her leave, feeling strangely deflated yet elevated at the same time.

“Oh, and Alexandria?” Titus called to her just as she stepped through the door. “I must advise you
that every decision made at this firm, from expansion to acquiring a new executive employee, is determined by the board in a single, unanimous verdict. That means convincing twenty-four members that you are, without a doubt, the best suited candidate to be entrusted the highest position in the company and the future of the firm with it.”

That was news to her. *Fuck.*

“Yet I wouldn’t worry much about twenty-three of the members. With the correct words and attitude, they can be… easily persuaded.” Titus continued, a grin playing across his face.

“Who’s the one that I need to worry about then?” Lexa asked, the answer literally in front of her face.

His smile widened. “Me.”

*Double fuck.*

“Best of luck, Miss Woods. I’m looking forward to our meeting Thursday.”

***

“Holy shit!” Aden hissed loudly, stopping dead in his tracks and gawping at a figure that stood at the opposite end of the hall from him. “No way… no way, it can’t be… holy Mary, is that… oh man, that is, isn’t it?”

Nia glanced over at the man that caused the boy to freeze and suddenly revert to a shivering mess. She smiled. “Mr. Gates? Yes, Aden, that’s him. He visits quite often. He’s a member of our board.”

Aden half-laughed, half-snorted. “Oh, I-I, yes! I knew that… I mean, of course I knew! Ok, shit! He’s walking this way! Oh goodness, oh god, what do I do… what do I do…” Frantic, he searched every pocket, forgetting where what was. “Breath mints! Lord have mercy, where are my mints! Oh god, he’s nearly here…ok…ok… get it together Aden. Get. It. *Together!*”

Nia just watched. Half-amused, half-confused.

The second Bill Gates neared close enough for Aden to sniff the nerdiness radiating from the man, he forced his wobbly legs forward to close the small gap separating them.

“Mr. Gates, sir! Good mom- *Afternoon*! Sir!” He shot out his hand, gulping when Mr. Gates reached down and accepted the shake. “Sir, Mr. Gates. I’m Aden. Aden Jacob Griffin. I’m ten-years-old. Well, ten and a half really… I turn eleven in three months! Anyways, I am currently in the sixth grade. Ok, ok, technically… I haven’t started sixth grade quite yet… seeing it’s summer vacation and all. But I’m no longer in the fifth grade so it’s safe to say sixth, right? Clarke always tells me I’m very mature and bright for my age anyways, and yea… I know she’s supposed to say that, because she loves me and all, but I would have to agree with her. Oh, and Clarke is my big sister! She practically raised me though. I’m pretty sure I take after her in the family. You should meet her, she’s very smart! Well, sometimes… she’s smart with school stuff but lacks street smarts. I don’t though! I have both! Anyway, I am a young entrepreneur, looking for a business opportunity. I wanna be a businessman one day. Just like you! And Lexa! Well, she’s a girl… so not a businessman, but businesperson. She’s around here somewhere… she promised me lunch and I think she forgot about it because it’s past my lunch time and my tummy is growling. The nice lady over there gave me soda and candy, but I had my eye on a pizza I saw in the breakroom. Anyways, back to my point… I think you’re an incredible person and a very smart man and I admire your accomplishments. I have a few key propositions to run by you… ideas I think might improve the quality of your product, Mr.
Gate. I know you’re a very busy man, so I can leave you my business card…” He pulled out the pen and the notepad from his pockets, unaware that his small, elf-like hands shook from nervousness. “My business cards haven’t arrived just yet… I sorta just ordered them last night. But here…” he scribbled down his name and number on a blank page. “Please feel free to contact me anytime. It would be an incredible honor to run my ideas by you, sir.”

Before making a bigger fool of himself, Aden turned in Nia’s direction, exhaling a deep sigh and mentally chastising himself for his lack of control.

“It’s Aden… right?” Bill Gates called after him, and Aden froze, surprised the man even remembered his name at all.

“Uhh, y-yes… yes! Aden, sir.”

“Well… I was actually just on my way down to grab some of that pizza you saw down in the breakroom and I could sure use some company, Aden. If you’re free… of course. Us businessfolk always have the craziest schedule, don’t you agree?”

Aden’s jaw nearly grazed the floor. “Um, yes, pfff… totally agree. So, so busy. But, er, my schedule is surprisingly open today, so I can definitely accompany you, sir.”

Bill shone a perfectly natural, genuine smile. “That’s great! You know… I’m a little challenged when it comes to certain types of machinery… I was hoping you could show me the trick behind that freestyle soda contraption? I know you youngsters like to mix things around and I have yet to find a beverage that tastes decent when I try to do it.”

Aden grinned, wiggling his eyebrows at the grown man while they waited for the elevator. “Ah, sure! That’s because you haven’t tasted the Aden-Ade yet! My own specialty mix. I must warn you, Mr. Gates, it’s not for the faint of heart.”

Bill laughed, throaty and whole-heartedly. “I do love a challenge. And Aden?”

“Sir?”

“It’s Bill. Drop the ‘sir’. Makes me feel old.”

***

By late afternoon, Clarke brought Papa Smurf to a halt just behind Lexa’s parked Maserati, shutting off the stuttering, clattering engine to silence. Her mood reflected their current atmosphere perfectly - overcast and gloomy; a storm surely on the premise of erupting.

Once she allowed herself into the Mansion, she found it eerily quiet and void of light.

“Lexa!” She called out, only to hear her own voice echo back at her. Stepping into kitchen, she caught a dark figure slumped over the kitchen island with her head tucked in the space between her folded arms. A beer bottle rested just inches away from her. “Lexa…”

Lexa didn’t budge. She remained glued to the granite countertop, head down and unmoving, with the exception of her chest expanding in a deep sigh.

“What happened?” Clarke asked, running a light hand down the girls’ curved spine. “Hey, you ok?”

Lexa nodded, finally lifting her head. Even in the unlit kitchen Clarke could make out the deep marks from skin that had been neglected blood-flow for too long.
“Peachy.” Lexa responded. The bitterness in her tone as obvious as the scowl plastered on her face.

“Clearly not.” Clarke motioned to the beer bottle. “I thought you had quit drinking.”

Lexa picked up the bottle and practically shoved it into Clarke’s chest, her breasts cushioning the impact. The slushing sound of liquid and the weight of the bottle indicating not a single sip had been consumed.

“I did. Next time, try to not jump to assumptions, yea?” Lexa corrected her ruthlessly, walking around the island to the fridge.

To say she was confused is a massive understatement. Whatever Lexa was feeling, the brunette was clearly projecting said feelings onto her. Clarke breathed, trying to control the crackling she felt within ready to ignite into flames. “Where’s Aden? I texted you but you never replied… I told you to let me know when you got home so I could stop by.”

Lexa pulled out the gallon of milk and slammed the fridge’s door shut. “Yea, well, I was busy, Clarke. My life doesn’t revolve around you, you know.” Clarke swallowed, sensing her internal minefield begin to detonate.

“Ok… so how about you drop the attitude and talk to me like the adult you are, Lexa.” She tried keeping her voice in check, yet the irritation and budding anger still managed to seep out as she spoke. “You’re acting like a fucking toddler who just had her bottle taken away and it’s incredibly infuriating.”

Lexa scoffed, gulping down the milk straight from the carton. “Oh, I’m sorry? Is my mood currently an inconvenience for you? What, are you always expecting loving, whipped Lexa, is that it? Is sad, disappointed Lexa an issue for you, princess?”

That minefield now resembling a battleground in the wake of WWII. “No, but immature, bitchy Lexa sure is! What the hell is your problem?! You know what… no. I’m not even doing this. Where’s Aden? I came to get him and then I’m out of your hair.”

Clarke was already moving around the island and toward the kitchen’s exit.

“So typical. So fucking predictable. Always running away from your problems instead of womaning up and facing them.” Lexa mocked, taking another obnoxious gulp. “At the first signs of a struggle, of a difficulty… always ready to up and dash…”

Clarke had to close her eyes and clench her fists as the rage that had been contained in her chest began to rapidly explode throughout her body. She was tempted to just walk away and leave things alone. But there was something about those words… spoken from a place of wrath and truth all mingled into one. It stirred something in her. She spun, meeting Lexa’s frigid gaze with her own scalding one.

“You’re one to talk… I’m guessing your meeting didn’t go as planned? I’m guessing you expected to just have everything handed over to you on a golden platter like you’re accustomed to? You want some newsflash, Lex? Well here it is… life isn’t easy like that! Sometimes you have to work for something that you truly want… it’s not just going to fall on your lap because you wished it to!”

Lexa smirked; all arrogance and flaunt. “You did.”

And for a moment, Clarke tried to decipher the meaning behind those two little words. The interpretation was essential in determining how she’d proceed next. She tried to believe there was no malice; no humiliation. Yet the words were crafted as an attack, Clarke knew. A very successful one.
at that.

She started to feel her anger subside; retreat like a wounded animal after realizing it was much too weak for a prolonged fight. Lexa must have recognized it, because the sly smirk suddenly collapsed from her face as awareness set in.

“Shit, Clarke. No, I-I… I didn’t mean that, Clarke. Please, I—“

“Where’s Aden?”

Lexa crossed the gap between them, slipping her hand – clammy and cold – into her own. “Please… look at me. Clarke, I’m so so sorry… I swear to you, that just… came out! I didn’t mean it. I would never, ever mean that. Please, forgive me?”

Clarke watched her. Contemplating her options here: fight or flight. She withdrew her hand. Flight it is. “Where’s Aden, Lexa…” She hoped her steeled, chilled tone would emphasize a seriousness she didn’t feel.

“He’s out with John! They’re out having lunch with… doesn’t matter. Clarke, I’m—“

“Drop him off at mine when he’s back.” She was already reaching for her keys when a hand stopped her.

“Wait! No, babe, please don’t go. Look… today was beyond shitty, can you just give me a break and let this go?”

Change of plans. Fight. Definitely fight. “Give you a break?! For being an uber, entitled bitch? Get real, Lexa! I still can’t believe you have the audacity to act like the victim here! Is this how this is gonna be? Everyday you have one of your frequent shitty days’ I should expect to have to deal with a sour, toddler-version of you? This is NOT what I signed up for, Lexa! I’m not here to be a toilet for you to dump your shit on!”

Lexa’s shoulders sagged, caving inwards until she was hunched in a surrendering gesture. “What did you sign up for, Clarke? Enlighten me… I apologize for acting the way I did. There’s no excuse for it, but… if you’re gonna run everytime we have a minor argument, are you sure you’ve even signed up for anything at all? Are you sure you even want this?”

Maybe, just maybe, there was a third option to consider here. One that hadn’t occurred to Clarke until this very moment. Fight or flight… or fix? Surely that could be a solution to many of her predicaments. This one included.

She sighed. “I… I don’t know. I mean. I like you. I like you a lot, Lexa. And I see myself falling more and more for you every day. But… part of me is still so, so afraid of just… making the wrong choice… again!” She chuckled, swallowing hard upon taking in Lexa’s broken face. “Not that I’m saying that’s what you are, I loved Finn, Lex. Loved him with every fiber of my being. I poured my heart and soul and energy into that relationship and dedicated every fraction of myself into believing that he was the one. What he did… ruined me.” She wished her lip would stop quivering, and her throat would quit clenching. “It fucking shattered me to pieces and I haven’t felt whole… I haven’t felt safe and comfortable, in a very long time.”

Lexa stood. Frozen and chilled in place, gazing and listening. The rain that now began to splatter across the kitchen window and glass door a perfect metaphor for the tempest wreaking havoc inside her chest.

“And then you came along…and God… You know, in my head… I’ve started labeling time with
B.L. and A.L. Before Lexa and After Lexa.” Clarke paused to wipe the tears that streamed down her face; unfortunately, nothing could be done about the vibration in her voice as she spoke. “Before Lexa, I had this… notion of a semi-perfect life, you know. Where I’d graduate, then head off to obtain a promising, secure career as a nurse… in the hospital where my mother used to work. Raise and see Aden off to a good university. And continue on with my life as I have in the past five years. Always making secure, unproblematic decisions. Like avoiding relationships.” Another chuckle, followed by a shake of her head. “Yea, definitely avoiding relationships.”

“So, this brings me to the A.L., or After Lexa… where you come in and scramble all my plans around. Toss everything I had carefully designed into the waste bin, leaving me with a blank page and a head full of question marks; forcing me to start over from scratch.”

The brunette gulped, Clarke noticed, eyes still gazing at her with a plea for forgiveness and mercy. The rain outside intensified tenfold over the course of minutes; beating against glass to an eerie, yet highly fitting thump. “And for the longest time, I hated you for it. I hated your arrogance, and persistence, and inability to take a hint. Yes, I hated you. Or at least I wanted to… because hate, quickly turned into mild tolerance. And then tolerance turned into a comfort. Which soon turned into a need. A need for your presence. For your stupid, silly remarks. I knew I was in deep shit when that need turned into want.”

Lexa let out a shaky breath, still silent and still, simply speechless. Her eyes flickered to the ceiling to try and ward off the water beginning to pool around its edges.

“That’s where I find myself today. In this… want. I want you, Lexa. I wish, god… how I wish I could be as positive and sure as you of the future and where you see it headed. I wish I could promise you that we will do better, can do better. But… I can’t. I want to be with you. But I don’t know how to contribute. I don’t know how to do this… how to handle stupid little fights such as these without wanting to run. because as good as your intentions may be, as sure as you are of us today, it can all evaporate into nothingness tomorrow… and I don’t think I can survive another heartbreak, Lex. I’m barely put together as is.”

The change in her posture was subtle. Her shoulders pulled back into place, straight and poised. her brows, curved into a silent plea moments ago, realigned as they relaxed. The confidence that radiated from the brunette, completely absent a second ago, paralyzed Clarke.

Lexa took a few steps forward, moistening up her lips in preparation for her response. Now it was Clarke’s turn to listen.

“I once felt the same way you do. About Costia. For years I thought… man, this is the girl that I’ll spend the rest of my life with. I was so sure of it. I loved Costia. But now… I see that she was never supposed to be that someone. I wish I could explain everything I feel and think of you, Clarke. Truth is, I just can’t. I wish I could translate feelings into literature to better show you just how much I-how deeply I care for you. It’s fucking terrifying.”

Lexa chuckled, watching more tears flow down Clarke’s tinted cheeks. “Because I know there’s a chance that it may all vanish. Like with Costia for me, and Finn for you. But… I’m slowly starting to realize that certain things sometimes truly do happen for reasons that surpass our understanding. Costia left because she was meant to. As much as she tried, and as much as she may have loved me, she was never able to repair the damages that were already there… expanding every year since my parents died. When she walked out, I simply gave up. On life. On a future. On love. But now I get it… now, I’m sorta grateful she did what she did. Because it somehow brought me to you.”

Lexa paused a moment, swallowing her own tears and giving Clarke a mild shrug. “Clarke, you were somehow able to revive the best part of me. The part that… remembers the value of a hug. The
part that respects genuine, selfless smiles given willingly and freely by broken souls. The part that cries,” she pointed to her face, smiling shyly at the grinning blonde, “and isn’t ashamed to admit it. The part that… hopes, and dreams, and believes that for once… shit might actually work out. So it’s ok if you still have doubts. You’ll get there if and when you get there. But until then… I’ll carry on having enough faith in this relationship for the both of us.”

The effect of Lexa’s words stripped Clarke of any suitable reaction. Yet Lexa understood and when the brunette opened her arms for a hug, Clarke pounced at the opportunity, letting herself be fully enveloped by Lexa’s assuring aura.

“How about… we just take it slow. One day at a time.” Lexa spoke in a whisper. “I have no expectations, Clarke. Anything you want to contribute, anything you can contribute… is all I’m asking. If one day you wake up and decide this,” she used a finger to point back and forth between them, “isn’t working, then… we can go our separate ways. I’ll be devastated and broken, but I’ll understand. And I won’t hate you for it.” She smiled, but it was fragile; broken for merely thinking up that possibility. “Even if that’s the outcome, it will be worth it.”

Clarke nodded, brushing away her tears before reaching up and wiping the one’s Lexa shed, still wrapped up in her arms. “Okay. One day at a time.”

***

Thursday arrived with both a curse and a promise looming over her turbulent head. The pressure of her upcoming presentation kept her tossing and turning all night; the only relief she obtained was the occasional caresses from a sleepy Clarke trying to lull her back to sleep.

The better part of her morning was spent reviewing her presentation and her speech, running it by Clarke and John, who stared at her with both admiration and awe. She knew they were both just trying to be supportive.

“That was great!” John shouted, clapping once she finished.

“Absolutely perfect, Lex! You got this!” Clarke joined in.

“Ok. I need you two to be honest, ok?! If it sucks, tell me! So that I can fix it.” She explained once again, earning nods from the two. “Alright, let’s try this again.”

Once she concluded, she received more applauses and reassurance. Whether their reaction was a means to spare her additional anxiety or out of genuine sincerity, Lexa accepted it for what it was; there was no time to alter it now.

“You’ll do great. I know you will.” Clarke offered, reaching forward to adjust her tie since it had come slightly undone during her prep. “Remember, keep your head up. And smile. No one can refuse that gorgeous smile.”

Their arrival at the office was expected, and an enthusiastic Nia led them to the breakroom for a snack while the board members trickled in, arriving in slow progression.

“Lexa, hunny, just relax. Here, have some coffee.” Lexa accepted with quaky hands. Nodding a thanks.

“Hey. Hey, look at me. You’ll be ok. I know it.” Clarke tried, patting down a few curls that loosened from Lexa’s ponytail. “And guess what? Once you get through this, you and I are gonna go to that spa down the street for facials and massages. My treat.” She pecked the brunettes’ lips, coaxing a small smile out of her. Clarke smiled in return. “There you are…”
“Or we can talk about your upcoming birthday… Stop acting coy, did you really think I’d forget?” Lexa asked, finally thawing out of her haze; Clarke’s addicting kisses the only thing capable of doing that.

“There’s no chance of me talking you out of it, is there?” Clarke asked via an elongated sigh.

“Nope. Not one. Whatever you say, it’s still gonna happen… with or without your consent. Twenty-three is an important age, Miss Griffin. It deserves high recognition.” Lexa answered, pulling her in for another soft kiss.

Clarke leaned into it effortlessly. “Okay… get through this meeting and then we can discuss birthday plans all you want. We can even celebrate your win by engaging in more sinful activities later.” Her voice dropped to a whisper, and Lexa couldn’t help but appreciate how easy it was to lose herself in Clarke… even on the brink of certain disaster.

“Miss Woods, they’re ready, dear.” Nia announced, reentering the breakroom.

Lexa nodded, taking a firm hold of Clarke’s hand as she walked fatefuly towards the conference room after Nia. They paused just beyond the closed door; the only barrier now separating her and her pending future.

“John and I will be right here, okay?” Clarke pointed to the seats that lined the hall, smiling encouragement up at Lexa whose confidence now waivered. “Go get ’em, tiger.”

John stepped forward, patting her shoulder. “If you freeze up, just… take a minute. Let your heart guide you through it. Not your head.”

The manner in which John maneuvered around this stressful event in his usual calm and confident composure both awed and infuriated Lexa to no ends. *How can anyone be this unrealistically positive every fucking second of every fucking day?*

Lexa reluctantly nodded her accord and stepped away, beckoning over to Nia who patiently waited by the closed door. “Alright, let’s do this.”

***

The murmurs and whispers transpiring between the council members only grew in intensity. Lexa internally squealed at the reaction she received. Her presentation had been a success. That much was abundantly clear to her and to twenty-three of the board members who had witnessed the tactical speech delivered in a professional, sound, business-oriented format worthy of praise and recognition. She had undoubtedly surpassed their basic expectations. She was pleased. She was ardently proud of herself. But like with most of her experiences that enter into this euphoric state of glee, it was predictably short lasted.

“Yes, yes, Miss Woods’ speech was quite exhilarating, I will admit, however…” Titus rose from his seat at the head of the long, polished table, earning the silence and attention of all the second his hand rose in demand. “Let us not give purchase to it just yet… actions are what determines a good leader. Not one’s ability to spew words.”

“Ladies and Gentlemen of the board, before we proceed to the voting, I’d like to say a few words.” Titus began a slow, rhythmic pace behind his chair, eyes scanning every face in equal measure. “I understand this is… unconventional. It is difficult to be unbiased in this particular and peculiar situation. Miss Woods is, after all, the only child of the founders of our wonderful company. The company her parents sacrificed a significant part of their lives creating and developing. When they
passed, they entrusted the firms’ survival over to me, which I now share with all of you. So I ask, that you keep their wish in mind as we vote. Your duty is first and foremost, to this organization.”

Once all the members voiced their agreement, Titus lowered himself back into his chair, casually placing both hands on the table as he once again faced Lexa. “I do have one more question to ask Miss Woods before we continue.” He aimed his gaze directly ahead to where Lexa stood helplessly; the cloud of confidence and ardor that had enveloped her moments ago rapidly dissipating. “If the positions were inverted between us two, and the decision rested in your hands, what would you do? What would your vote be?”

The room fell silent as all eyes shifted to her. She took a moment, digesting the unexpected question, hoping the pause would be interpreted as her seeking an answer rather than her panicking. Her instinct of course, urged her to vouch for herself; to verify that she would obviously vote ‘Yes’. That she, Lexa Woods, was the best suited candidate and thus, deserving of this opportunity.

And even as she continued in her relentless effort to convince herself of this lie, she knew it was futile. She knew… whole-heartedly and with much clarity, that the truth was the exact opposite. It was suicide admitting it, of course. Every cell in her body compelled her to avoid the truth, or at least twist it in her favor. Twenty-four pair of eyes awaited her response in synchronized silence, and as she lifted her gaze to the wall across from her, two more pairs drew her attention. Her parents’ faces, forever immortalized in a 16”x20” wooden frame, watched her in their frozen, smiling obliviousness. She reckoned the picture was taken a year or two prior to their untimely deaths, based on the number of creases around their eyes and lips, and the silver hairs adorning their heads. Lexa watched the photos for a second, taking in two faces that she shamefully realized took her a moment to recognize. Her answer suddenly didn’t seem so difficult after all.

“No.” She responded, hands slipping into her pockets as she shot out the word with as much confidence as an incriminating verdict. “My vote would be ‘No’.”

Titus kept his expression neutral, watching her with added interest. “Please… elaborate.”

“I… made many mistakes in the past. Mistakes that have tainted my family’s name… and indirectly, the name of the company. I admit, I’m not proud of those mistakes. Truth be told, if I could be given the elusive gift of time travel, I would return to those moments and undo them. Make better choices and hope for a better outcome. I wish I had this mentality back then… to prevent them from happening in the first place. Spare the troubles and embarrassment I have caused so many due to my foolishness and selfishness… spare myself the burden of now having to carry it into whatever future is destined for me. Bottom line is… I regret it all. I have failed the people that supported me from the very beginning, you included Titus. I know an apology will not absolve me of my errors but I offer you one now. You have cared for this company since its inception. You have been there alongside my parents when it was still just an idea, and it’s no mystery that it should be you seated as CEO, not I.” Lexa exhaled a breath of relief, as if it extinguished part of the burning that sizzled in her chest. “For those reasons, I’d vote No. For those reasons… I compel you all to do the same. Thank you.”

She closed with a respectful nod, preparing to step outside of the room to give the councilmembers privacy to assert their judgment.

“Miss Woods, we invite you to stay during the voting.” Titus called to her, motioning her to remain where she stood. “Face your fate, if you will.”

Titus drummed his fist twice against the table, bringing everyone to order. “Alright, let’s begin, shall we? Remember, this must be completely unanimous for it to count.” He reminded them, sparing a moment to look each member in the eye. “So… all those in favor… raise your hand.”
Twenty-three hands shot up into the air without a breath of hesitation. Twenty-three souls readily willing to accept her even after her implicating confession. Twenty-three votes of ‘Yes!’… but that wasn’t enough. She needed twenty-four. She needed one more.

But that one-more kept his hand firmly resting on the table. Even though she had succeeded in convincing the other members, she had failed to convince Titus. Her head lowered in a bow. Fate was more painful to face than she’d originally imagined.

“You know…” Titus spoke, rising from his seat and buttoning his suit jacket, moving around the large table in her direction. “That question… was your mother’s idea. You probably don’t know this, but I was the first ever person your parents interviewed, Miss Woods. Your father… held the interview. Shooting question after boring question at me. I swore he got those questions out of a google search.”

“At the end, he stood, shook my hand and told me I had successfully answered every question. But just before I had the opportunity to dash out of that room, your mother stopped me. ‘If the positions were inverted between us two, and the decision rested in your hands, would you hire yourself?’ She asked, taking both your father and I by surprise. Naturally, I wanted to just say ‘Yes.’ No one in their right mind would be foolish enough to question their own abilities.”

He paused just in front of her, casually placing his hands in his pocket, mirroring Lexa’s stance. “But turns out, I decided to be foolish. Like you, I said ‘No.’ I had my own reasons for my answer, which I shall spare you the details of, but overall it didn’t differ much from yours. Like you, I have my share of mistakes. Like you, I have my own burdens to bear.” Slowly, as to not startle the already confused girl, he pulled out a dark, rectangular case from his pocket. He handed it to Lexa, whose brows furrowed as she accepted it. Upon opening it, her face collapsed and her jaw unhinged. “Like you, Alexandria, I was equally shocked and surprised to discover… that ownership of mistake was exactly the answer your mother was hoping for. As was I.” He smiled, sincerely and without a hidden motive. “Congratulations, Lexa. Your parents would have been proud.”

She studied the pen, still unsure if this moment was absolute. But the words, scribbled in gold against the ebony coat of the pen assured her of its realism.

‘Alexandria M. Woods’

‘C.E.O. – In Training’

“You start in two-weeks’ time.” Titus tapped her on the shoulder. “Until then… try and refrain from any further foolishness.”

***

Champagne sprayed wildly about Clarke’s living room carpet as Anya rushed to catch the falling drops with her glass. “Fuck! Shit!”

“Language!” Clarke shouted amidst the laughter and false screams.

Raven assisted, handing Anya empty glasses waiting to be filled with the bubbly liquid as she poured carefully into each one.

“Kid, no! Go get juice. There’s some in the in the kitchen.” Raven chided Aden, whose small hands quickly dashed for a glass.

“Aw, let him have a sip. Won’t kill him.” Anya handed Aden a glass with a small amount. Beaming, the boy greedily accepted, cherishing the opportunity to celebrate amongst the older crowd like an
adult for a change. “If Clarke asks-“

“It’s apple juice.” Raven and Aden answered in unison, sharing a smirk. “We know.”

A spoon rapping against the one of the glasses brought the crew to silence.

“I, uh, I’d like the chance to say something.” Octavia called out, looking around the room to all the bright, happy faces that were present to share this moment. “Lexa, is my best fucking friend and-“

“Language!” Clarke interrupted, earning a sigh from the brunette.

“Nazi! Sorry!” O cleared her throat before continuing. “Anyway… Lexa is my best friend, and I just want to express how fu- incredibly proud I am of her.” O looked over to Lexa, standing beside Clarke, their free hands wrapped around each other’s. “Lex, we’ve known each other since kindergarten. Unlike most in this room, I have had the privilege of growing up with you. I have seen you at your best and at your worst. I have seen you at your highest and at your lowest. I have seen you at your most miserable moments, and at your happiest. And today, definitely takes top spot on that list. To Lexa!” O raised her glass, everyone else quickly followed.

“Wait, waiiiitttt!” Anya interrupted. “Now I feel obligated to say some mushy shit. Way to go, O.”

After the laughter subsided, Anya continued. “Look, squirt. What you did today… I hope you don’t ever think it was owed to you. Titus is a wise, practical man. I’ve done many business deals with him, so I’d know. You being a Woods… being your parents’ kid… has nothing to do with your accomplishment. Ok… maybe it has a little to do with it but… point is… Titus would have never surrendered power if he felt you were ready for it.” Anya clarified, balancing her weight from one foot to another. “You have greatness in you, baby cuz. I’ve always known it. Indra never stopped knowing it. We all know it. Don’t you ever doubt it.” She lifted her glass, indicating she was finished.

“Oh! Wait! Can I go next?!” Aden shot his hand up, hopping up on his toes. “Lex. I love you. I think you’re gonna be the best boss ever! That’s all.”

“Aden… what’s that in your glass?!” Clarke asked, narrowing her eyes at the boy.

“Apple juice!” Raven, Anya, and Aden responded in sync.

“100% natural.” Raven added.

“Zero sugar added.” Anya followed.

“Thanks, little man.” Lexa finally spoke, throwing Aden a wink. “That means a lot. Thanks everyone, I can’t express how-“

“Can I… just say one thing?” John interrupted politely and apologetically. “Lexa… I have spent a good portion of my life being invisible to others. I have roamed California’s cold and merciless streets as though I were a ghost; a shadow of a person unworthy of recognition or salvation. And I thoroughly believed that to be true. Until you came along and showed me a sliver of something I had not been shown in a very long time. Fate is a funny thing… life is a funny thing.” He lifted his glass, and everyone joined. “May all your dreams and conquests become a reality. And may all your hearts’ desires,” he shot a quick look over to Clarke, a silent message that Lexa understood, “always be fulfilled. To Lexa!”

“To Lexa!” The rest of the crew shouted, quickly tossing back the champagne before anyone else had a chance to intrude.
The friends spent the night indulging in conversation, enjoying wine and fruity cocktails (Lexa, Anya, John, and Aden enjoying the 100% REAL Apple Juice instead), and playing a variety of games. The current game being disputed was none other than *Twister*, with Aden, Raven, and Anya the remaining competitors for the gold.

“Right foot, Red.” Lincoln shouted, spinning the shaft. “Red! I said Red, Raven! Not Green!”

Raven scowled, desperately swirling her body around as she tried to weave her leg through the tumult of bodies. “I’m trying! That’s the best I can do, Linc. Cut me a break, will ya? I’m disabled!”

“Hey, no breaks! Lincoln, you better call her out if she’s cheating!” Anya argued back, pressing her foot down on a red spot after a fair struggle. “She’s more flexible than she lets on… I witnessed it first hand a few night ago!”

Raven “accidently” swung her arm around, clipping Anya across the head. “That’s just a little synopsis of what’s coming your way if you don’t shut up and move your ass! I’ve been staring at the damn thing for the past five rounds!”

Anya smirked, tilting her head to face Raven. “You’re welcome, mami. I know how much you like it.”

“*Hey! I’m stuck* down here! Both of you more your asses!” Aden shouted, somewhere beneath Raven and Anya. “I…can’t…breathe!”

Eventually Anya and Raven failed out of the game, making Aden the sole winner. One-by-one, they all started to trickle out of the house as the night weaned to an end. Octavia and Lincoln the first to part ways. Followed by John, claiming he had some matters to deal with before his meeting early Friday morning. Raven dipped out in a rather abrupt and suspicious manner, swearing she had to run an errand (at 2 in the morning mind you). The true reason became suddenly clear when Anya waved goodbye not two minutes after, making quick work of it and racing to her car.

“They’re totally gonna meet up.” Clarke called it, pulling Lexa’s arms around her waist until they wrapped around her.

“No doubts about it. They’re worse than two teenagers sneaking around their parent’s backs.” Lexa confirmed, pulling Clarke closer. The night was chilly and the open porch offered little cover. “You sure you don’t want me to help with the cleanup? Or carrying Aden up to bed?”

Clarke shook her head against her chest. “No, it’s late. You have a big day tomorrow with John and all the paperwork you need to do for the firm. Go. Sleep. I’ll take care of it and I’ll see you for dinner tomorrow, yea?”

Lexa smiled. Secretly burning inside from how utterly inviting and completely delicious that plan sounded. “I’ll rush over as soon as everything is done and over with.” Lexa leaned down to capture Clarke’s lips into a hungry kiss that left them both fanning themselves even in the low temperature. “Now get inside before I start doing ungodly things to you out here and we wake the neighbors.”

Clarke smirked seductively, voice dropping a few octaves to a deep husk. “That kinda sounds tempting.”

Lexa growled and pounced forward for another, milder kiss, breaking away only when the need to breathe became an urgency.

“I know I didn’t give a cute little speech tonight during the toast but… I hope you know that I’m incredibly proud of you.” Clarke spoke softly, her fingertips dancing across Lexa’s cheek. “I knew
you could do it, Lex. But I think today you finally realized just how much you are capable of.”

Lexa pressed her forehead to hers, nodding. “All because of you…”

Clarke stayed out on the chilly porch until Lexa drove out of sight. Stepping back inside, she let herself wander the house in a mindless trance, collecting discarded plates and glasses as she cleaned. Aden slept soundly on the couch, the TV still playing the movie he had began to watch before succumbing to sleep five minutes into it.

She lost track of the amount of time that had passed as a soft, but audible rap on the door pulled her back to the present. It took a few knocks for her to realize it was indeed happening, and not just a TV sound effect. She made mental bets against herself that either Raven or Anya had forgotten something in their hasty departure. She pulled open the door, a haughty smirk already playing on her lips.

“Let me guess… you left your ph-“

She self-interrupted as a small gasp and a sharp inhale invaded the space in her mouth. Shock and astonishment rooted her to the spot she stood, making any movement other than blinking a near impossibility. It had been only a year and half, she thought, yet that passage of time had extended into what felt like decades since their last encounter. And ever since Lexa, a re-encounter never once crossed her mind. The name, the face, his entire existence dimmed to a flickering speck in her mind; a speck that was nearing extinction with each passing day.

“Finn…” She croaked, voice slightly trembling. Her hand automatically constricting around the edge of the door for much needed support.

“Hey, Princess…”

***

Lexa had just finished brushing her teeth, already stripped to only her boxers and wife-beater, when her ringtone began to blare.

She reached for it almost at once. The fact that it was nearly 3 A.M. didn’t alarm her when she knew Anya was still out and about with Raven. That was, until she saw Aden’s name flash across the screen.

“Hey, little man. What are you-“

“Lexa!” His tone was a dead giveaway that something was immediately wrong. The hushed, yet urgent manner in which he rasped out her name, embroidered in controlled panic, caused her to freeze in anticipation. “Lexa! Come back! Come back NOW!”

“Aden, what’s the matter?!“ She had the good sense to ask, finally springing into action and throwing on the first pair of sweats and hoodie within reach. Before he even answered, she was already dashing down the stairs toward her car. “Are you ok?! Is Clarke ok?!”

“No! It’s Finn! He showed up out of nowhere!” Lexa felt a vein in her forehead almost combust from the rising pressure. “He’s downstairs with Clarke! And he’s… shouting at her! I hear shouting! Please, HURRY! I think he might try to hurt her!”

She jumped back into the car she had parked not twenty minutes ago. “Aden! Aden, listen to me! Stay where you are! Lock the door and call the police, do you understand?! Call the cops! I’ll be there in fifteen!”
She doesn’t remember disconnecting from the call with Aden. She doesn’t even realize she’s barefooted until hours later. At the time, all she could think about was how utterly helpless she felt. How completely powerless she was. Because reality is, fifteen minutes for someone with deadly intentions, was a lifetime. In fifteen minutes, she could be arriving to a scene much different than the one she left.

She stepped on the gas until the pedal touched the floor, racing against time.

Praying it wasn’t already too late.

Chapter End Notes

Don't hate us for this... As we have said in the past, there's a reason for everything.

As usual, we would love to hear what you all have to say (be it good or bad... just no disrespect please!).

Also, hit us up on Twitter @Silver_Snake222 and @TaJat07.

Until next time... Love you ALL! :*
To Live Again

Chapter Notes

As promised, a little earlier than usual, here is Chapter 12!!! :))

We worked very hard to get this chapter out to you all as soon as we could and let me just say that this chapter is by FAR my personal FAVORITE (TaJat). It is long (as usual) and so detailed, and has soooo much emotion and heart behind every scene.

Warning: The first few scenes contain physical aggression and is emotionally charged. However the chapter does progress after the first few scenes and moves on to bigger and better things.

In other words it is very focused on Clexa and the growth of this beautiful story we have created for you all thus far.

We hope our hard work pays off, and that you all are able to feel our hearts and the emotions we wanted to bring to you all through every word.

We love you guys infinitely and we can't express enough how thankful we are of all your continuous, unconditional support!

Love,
TaJat & SilverSnake

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“… it’s been a while…” Finn spoke; his tone undiluted by the tense atmosphere between them.

The man that stood before her now was but a sad resemblance of the man she had once known. Though only a year and half had passed, Finn was nearly unrecognizable. It was his eyes, Clarke later recalled, that immediately pinged her memory. His hair - once luscious and vibrant - was now drained of life and unkempt; greased from base to tips. His face - once bare and clean - now altered by days-old stubble that seemed far too overwhelming for his soft features. He was thinner than she remembered ever seeing him, even in his teens. His clothes, always well-fitted, now hung loosely around his frame.

“Finn…? What…What are you doing here?” Clarke was having a difficult time accepting the vision in front of her. Finn… gone and forgotten Finn, standing casually at her door with his hands tucked into his front pockets. “I… don’t understand…”

“I’ve missed you…” Finn began with a partial shrug, as if that was reason enough. “And… you’ve been on my mind a lot lately… I took that as a sign. A sign to come see you. God… how I’ve missed you, Clarke…” He took a tentative step forward, crossing the threshold that separated the porch and the house’s interior. Clarke’s hand automatically tightening around the door.

“You should go, Finn…” She spoke, banishing all the emotion from her voice; it was all too much to process at once. “We have nothing to say to each other.”

Finn... *smirked*? And the very act caused a series of shivers to run down her spine. “I… have driven
half-a-day to get here, Clarke… nearly twelve hours. The least you can do is listen to what I have to say, princess…” Another step, and the impulse to slam the door shut on his intruding figure was suddenly tempting. “I’ll do all the talking.”

Clarke’s mind was on overdrive. Frankly, all her senses were on overdrive. Every one of her inner alarms were currently screeching. “It’s late. And like I’ve said… we’ve nothing more to say to one another.” She stated, inching the door closer to its frame ever so slightly. “You lost every right to that the second you chose to fuck around. So, please… leave.”

With that, she proceeded with the shutting of the door, and would have succeeded… if not for a foot barring it from fully closing.

Without waiting for an invitation to be extended, Finn pushed the door open just enough to slither inside, swinging it shut once he was in. Clarke was forced to take a few retreating steps back, putting some distance between them two, everyone of her muscles simultaneously starting to tense. Finn now stood between her and the exit.

“I said leave.” She hissed, louder and with more determination. Maybe he had misunderstood her tone the first time… maybe he would listen now that she spoke with a little more persuasion. “Whatever you have to say, I don’t care for it! So save your breath and get the- “

“Still as feisty as I remember…” Finn interrupted her, speaking through a self-assured smile that quickly turned hungry as his gaze scanned down the length of her body. “And still just as beautiful…”

Clarke could hear the TV faintly in the living room behind her… where Aden slept, defenseless and oblivious to the current situation. She diffused her nerves by mentally telling herself there was no reason to jump to conclusions; although his arrival was unwarranted, there was no cause to worry until a solid motive presented itself.

Infidelity aside, Finn had never been aggressive or quarrelsome toward her at any moment during their time together. She recalls the manner in which his eye pleaded for mercy and forgiveness the night he was caught; pained and desperate… the look of a man on the brink of losing that which was dearest to him. Yet the expression in his gaze now differed dramatically from that many, many months ago… there was neither pain nor desperation reflected in his eyes tonight. Instead, they were ablaze with a fervor and hunger that set her skin into an uncomfortable tingle. It was the look of a man with a longing… behaving out of personal entitlement and claim.

“You’ve been all I could think about lately, Clarke…” Finn said with softer eyes as he took a step in her direction. “To be honest, you’re all I’ve ever thought about… even through this time apart. I don’t think I can ever love anyone as much as I ever loved you…”

Another step, and another, and Clarke mirrored his footing backwards. Nothing about Finn’s declaration brought her any satisfaction.

“I know I made a mistake… but you have to understand I was upset that night, Clarke!” His voice became slightly louder and firmer, and soundly remorseless. “What I did… I did because I didn’t think you cared! I never even meant it! But you never gave me a chance to explain! You just bolted before I could even speak to you about it!” Finn pressed, more adamant in his statement now, the sound booming throughout the house. “It was you who destroyed our relationship when you decided to abandon it! Not me!”

Clarke forced herself to gather her senses. The audacity, she thought, of the fucker to show up announced after nearly two years of absence and throw false accusations and blame at her! The
anger she felt pushed aside the distress and it was easy to push herself forward toward him. She was
done running.

“You need to go.” Clarke spoke, tensing under his gaze. “Whatever happened between us is over!
There’s nothing more to discuss, Finn.”

She crossed past him and reopened the door, prompting him to take his leave. “Leave! Get out or I’ll-
"

But she was rudely interrupted by the door slamming back into its frame with a loud clunk. Finn, in
his determined state, pushed it shut and held his palm against it, ensuring it wouldn’t be opened
again.

“Or what?” He hissed at her, his face now so close she could smell the faint traces of bourbon that
lingered on his tongue. “*Huh?!* What are you gonna do, princess?”

He pushed between her and the door, propelling her backwards and further into the house. “Finn…
please… *leave!* I am *not* having this conversation with you!”

“Clarke…?” A voice, small and confused and heavy from interrupted sleep, sounded from behind
her. Aden, probably awoken by the loud conversation and the door slamming shut, stood in the
hallway, looking between her and Finn with a muddled expression. “Finn?! Wha- “

“*Aden*?! Wow!” Finn’s features quickly erased any signs of harshness and aggression, turning
instead into a heartfelt smile. “Just *look* at you?! You’re practically a *man* now!” He crossed,
extending an arm towards the confused boy. “It’s good to see you again, little buddy. I’ve really mi-
"

“Aden, up to your room.” Clarke was *not* having this. Her sisterly/motherly/heroic instincts suddenly
taking over, she pulled Aden from Finns’ touch and pushed him toward the stairs. Naturally, Aden
hesitated, needing more confirmation and explanation as to what was going on. “Aden, NOW! And
stay up there until I come check in on you, do you understand?!” Her tone was anything but friendly;
she needed Aden to hear the mild desperation, and to heed her advice.

Aden nodded, tossing a cautionary glance over to Finn, who still sported a smirk, before climbing up
the stairs. Clarke waited until she heard him enter his bedroom and close the door.

“How *dare* you lay a fucking finger on my brother…” She wanted to yell, yet managed to keep her
voiced tempered for Aden’s sake. “Get the *fuck* out of my house! You and I are *OVER* and there is
nothing you can say or do that will change that! So, *LEAVE*!”

Finn however, stood his ground. His gaze fixated on her, assessing the situation; calculating the
possibilities. “I drove… twelve *fucking* hours to see you, Clarke. I have *waited* outside your house
for *four* more… listening…watching…” He scoffed, his features suddenly darkening. “A *woman?*
*Seriously*?! Did I really fuck you up that badly that you’ve stopped taking *cock* now? What a
shame…”

Clarke felt ice course through her veins. He had *waited*… for everyone to leave… for her, to be left
alone…

“Get *out*! Or I’m calling the cops!” She found herself vomit the words with as much poison as she
could muster. To deny she was afraid was a bold lie. Former Finn may have never resorted to
violence when aggravated, but current Finn… *this* Finn… well, he sure might.

Finn took a step closer, inviting the challenge. Clarke hesitated, and then as quickly as possible
slipped her hand into her back pocket and fished out her phone, fingers scrambling to press 9-1-1 and diving for the call button.

But the call was never completed. In two strides, Finn closed the gap between them and yanked the phone from her grasp, sending it scattering across the wooden floor. The cracking of glass and plastic indicated the phone was beyond repair.

“No…” Finn spat, breathing down her lips through clenched teeth. “You and I are gonna have a little chat, princess. You owe me that much…”

“I owe you nothing!” Clarke reminded him, partially out of impulse and partially out of pride. How fucking dare he. “You are a cheater and a coward! The only thing I owe you is a ‘thanks’ for doing me the favor and proving it to me…”

She barely had time to relish the agony that crossed Finn’s eyes from her statement because immediately after concluding it she was hurled at the opposing wall with such force, she felt the drywall crack beneath her weight.

“YOU FUCKING CUNT!” He closed in on her, his hand lifting to pin her against the wall by her throat. She tried to push his arm away, latching onto his forearm and plunging her nails into the flesh, but Finn didn’t budge… she doubted he even felt it. “I gave you everything! Everything I did, I did for you! And you… walked away without ever even giving me a FUCKING CHANCE TO EXPLAIN! Did those five years mean nothing to you, Clarke?! Was it that easy for you to fucking forget what we had? Huh?! ANSWER ME!”

She gasped when she felt his fingers tighten, panic now on full blast. She saw the seriousness of the situation she was in when she looked into eyes, obscure and void of awareness; glazed over from fury and suppressed memories that were never laid to rest.

“You… betrayed…me…” Clarke rasped out an answer, an effort to stop his hand from constricting. “You…broke… my… heart…” The sentence must have struck some cord within the enraged man for his hand relaxed and his eyes cleared. “How could I ever forgive you for that?”

Finn shrunk before her. Resigning to the weight of a past that could no longer be salvaged. Clarke almost pitied him then… but the knot in her stomach and the burning in her throat made her think otherwise. He still hovered over her, watching her with sorrow trapped between moist eyes.

“Clarke… how- “

“GET YOUR FUCKING HANDS OFF OF MY SISTER!” And then all hell broke loose.

Aden clambered down the stairs, a baseball bat firm in his hands, and he swung with all the strength his tiny self could summon. The steeled wood landed right on the side of Finn’s left knee, the one closest to Aden, causing the leg to bend and buckle.

“FUCK!” Finn bellowed, from rage and pain, twisting on his good leg and jerking the bat from Aden’s hand. “YOU LITTLE SHIT! YOU FUCKING WORTHLESS TURD!” He was pulling his arm back, preparing to swing at a frightened Aden, preparing to strike him down.

“FINN, DON’T!” Clarke wasn’t sure the exact sequence of events that followed but she launched herself at Finn before he could deliver the blow, sending them all tumbling to the floor. Luckily, she managed to land on top of him and quickly shifted all her weight to his upper back, securing him face down to the ground. “ADEN! ADEN!”

Aden was lying on his front a few feet away from them, out of their reach; his chin had hit the floor
when he went down, momentarily stunning him. He slowly came to, stirring to all fours and shaking his head.

“ADEN! OH, THANK GOD! ADEN, RUN NEXT DOOR! GO, I’LL- “

Now it was Finn who moved. In one effortless shift, he managed to propel backwards, the back of his hand hitting Clarke’s mouth with such determination, it sent her flying off of him.

He paid no attention to Aden, who shouted and pleaded with him, begging him to stop while he straddled Clarke’s stomach. Her arms flung wildly, trying to find his face to inflict some sort of damage but he was faster, grabbing and holding both her wrists in one of his grip.

“You little bitch…” He hissed, pushing his weight down to still her squirming. She could taste blood on her tongue, seeping in from a gash caused by Finn’s blow to her lips. “If you had just LISTENED TO ME! NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED!”

“Finn… please…Aden, leave him out of this. He’s just a kid. Please!” She felt a chilled wetness stream down her face, and it took her a moment to realize she was crying. “Please!”

He pinched her cheeks then, bringing her to silence. “This… is on you, princess! You brought this on yourself!”

***

The deserted roads at such an ungodly hour allowed the fifteen allotted minutes to shrink to twelve and some change. She felt the car around her roar with every thrust her foot dared push against the accelerator, jolting the car forward to speeds she never even knew possible. The evidence of her haste imprinted upon the asphalt as she wheeled furiously at the curves; tire impressions seared unto the streets that led her closer and closer to her destination.

Her mind whirred at equal speed to that of the car she commanded; entering depths too vile and unimaginable to keep herself balanced. She pushed them aside for the time being, focusing only on the road ahead and on maintaining her foot heavy on the pedal; she needed to remain calm, a difficult thing to manage when her heart all but trembled in her chest.

Her heart further plummeted the second she swerved onto Clarke’s street and saw it void of police cars. Aden failed to call the cops as she had instructed. Lexa forced herself to take a breath as the explanation as to why began to flood her head.

She pulled up to the front of the house and was already opening her door before the car was even properly on Park. Hands clenched into fists and heart caught in her throat, she dashed up the porch’s front steps toward the front door. The moment her and Clarke shared here an hour or so ago now felt like decades old.

She opened the door, praying she wasn’t too late. It took a moment for her eyes to capture the meaning of what was happening right before them, a few feet away from where she stood. Finn, his back to her yet she could almost visualize the scowl and anger etched on his face as he sat atop Clarke, pinning her down with his weight while his free hand rose in preparation to stop her from squirming. Aden was also on the floor, scrambling to get up but struggling. Blood coated his chin yet his eyes were fixed on Finn as he pleaded him to stop.

It was as if everything was happening in slow motion. The shouts, Clarke struggling, Aden pleading, Finn’s hand rising higher and higher and suddenly, everything switched and buzzed into fast forward.
Lexa sprung. Her leap merciless as she crossed the distance in one gigantic step, landing on her left foot and before it was even properly pressed against the floor, she had her right knee already up and thrusting, aiming directly at Finn’s jaw. Lexa couldn’t be sure if the crack she heard came from bones dislocating or teeth shattering, but the howl that Finn released immediately after a certain indication something had broken.

The blow was successful to say the least. Finn was not expecting to be interrupted…by anyone, she figured. So when her knee to his jaw sent him flying off of Clarke and smashing against the wall, she was elated to see the shock and sudden fear that crossed his eyes.

“YOU SON OF A BITCH!” Giving him zero time to recover, she hauled him up by the collar of his shirt and flung him flat on his back as hard as she could, straddling and immobilizing him the same way he had Clarke moments before. “YOU FUCKING BASTARD!”

She glanced over at Clarke, who had rolled to all fours and was examining Aden with intent. Her hands brushed soothingly against the underside of his chin and over the rest of him to make sure nothing was broken.

“Clarke!” Lexa called, needing to see her eyes; needing to see they were alive and well and undamaged. “Clarke! Baby-“

“I’m okay!” Clarke spun, nodding frantically, eyes still wide and staring expressionless at Finn. “Lexa… I-I… He-“

“Take Aden outside! Call the cops and stay there until they arrive… do you hear me?!“ Lexa ordered, her own tone sounding foreign to her, brought on by the anger that pulsed through her veins at seeing the gash on Clarke’s lip and the cut under Aden’s chin. “CLARKE! GO!”

Clarke nodded, and after Lexa slid her phone over to her, the blonde pulled herself up and dragged Aden outside. Now that her heart was safe and protected, she turned her full attention to the animal that mewled beneath her.

All shred of control; all grasp on reason fled her then. Her fist moved on its own accord, landing at the bridge of his nose and cracking that too. True, she could have resorted to words of warning and threats. True, there were more… benevolent paths she could have chosen over one of force and hostility. Yet if the fear and anger gripping her heeded any advice, it was telling her to allow instinct to dictate. If Finn was capable of assaulting Clarke once, he was certainly capable of doing so again… and Lexa was willing to bend hell and earth to ensure such possibility would never repeat itself.

“If you EVER,” she lowered her mouth to his ear, hissing the words directly into them, “so much as drive through this city… if you’re ever reckless enough to seek out Clarke or Aden… I will personally make sure that you fucking disappear from this world, Finn.” She paused, the muscles in her jaw clenching from the rage she still felt, the desire to pummel his face into his skull so great she had to latch onto his shirt to keep her hands from disobeying. “Do you understand, you worthless fuck?! The only fucking reason you’re still breathing is because I know how much Clarke loves this house… and I don’t want to see it tainted with your fucking blood all over it!”

She reclined back, looking down at his face that was already too bloody to gauge expressions. His eyes bulged, wide to capacity and appalled. “I SAID, DO YOU FUCKING HEAR ME?!“

The situation with his jaw prevented him from speaking, although he tried and only a squeal slipped out. He nodded, swallowing down the blood overflowing from his nose. The sirens and colorful lights of police cars and ambulances now blared in the distance, moving closer and closer. She
stayed, holding him down until minutes later when a police officer had to physically lift her from him.

Lexa was then ushered from the house, only obediently moving after making sure Finn was properly secured and handcuffed. Outside, she saw Aden and Clarke, sitting side by side in the ambulance, their wounds already tended to. She paused, finally letting the breath she had been holding this entire time escape her lungs; a sigh of relief and gratitude.

Aden spotted her, and before the medic could restrain him, he leaped from the ambulance and ran. And Lexa waited for him with open arms as he jumped into them. She could feel how tense he was, yet throughout the entire ordeal he never shed a single tear. She realized how dangerously close his childhood and innocence came to shattering tonight. And she hugged him tighter, crying for him. Crying for Clarke. Crying for the fucked up shit that led them here. Crying… because Clarke now walked toward her. Shaken and beaten; even from the distance Lexa could taste the shockwave of the aftermath rolling off of her.

So when she came within arm’s length, Lexa reached for her hand and pulled the shivering blonde to her.

Not wanting to waste one more second of not having her in her arms.

***

The night moved slowly after the chaos dissipated. After giving testament to what had occurred to the officers, and ensuring Finn was detained and arrested and carted away to the police station in the back of a cop car, she drove home. Clarke and Aden with her.

Aden knocked out the moment the car pulled into motion; the weight of the nights’ events and the pain medication far too much for his small frame to tolerate. Clarke, on the other hand, sat in silence; eyes gazing forward but Lexa knew they traveled far beyond the darkened roads ahead. She knew it was the shock setting in, so she drove in silence, her hand never detaching from Clarke’s.

Once at the Mansion, she carried Aden up to her room, placing him on her bed and pulling the covers over him. She would not have either one of them away from her arms tonight.

Once Aden had been tended to, she pulled Clarke into the bathroom, turning the valve of the tub and letting the container fill with warm water. Clarke stood misplaced, unsure of herself, still under the spell of the attack.

Very carefully, Lexa approached her, making all her movements known by moving slow. “Clarke?”

Blue eyes shifted up to hers, and she saw awareness in them, and even though Clarke didn’t respond verbally, her gaze would suffice for now.

“Hey…” Lexa spoke softly, smiling and attentive. “I was thinking… that you and I could take a bath? I think it would help relax you. What do you say?”

After a few seconds with no response, Clarke nodded, looking to Lexa for further instruction. Lexa smiled to cover the pang she felt pierce her heart at seeing her so lost. “Okay… is it alright if I remove your clothes? We can go in fully clothed too if you want. Completely up to you!” She kept her tone light and calm, despite feeling just as shattered as Clarke looked. Once Clarke nodded her approval, Lexa removed her clothes slowly, piece by piece. She stripped herself once she finished and led Clarke by her hand to the edge of the tub.

“Here… I got you.” They settled into it, Lexa behind Clarke supporting her weight. She pulled her
Clarke twisted in Lexa’s arm then, eyes moist and heavy yet lit with a different form of passion that Lexa had never seen in her sapphire eyes before. It was alien yet so familiar… an emotion she had experienced only once before with a different someone, and that was still dim compared to what she witnessed now. Clarke’s lips moved to speak, but the words were lodged; not ready to reveal themselves just yet.

“Shh… come here…” As much as Lexa had been dying to hear them, it was not the right moment. Not when Clarke’s injured lip still tremored and her eyes swelled with tears. She pressed the blonde to her chest, cradling her head. Her world suddenly shrinking to consist of only herself, the tub, and the woman she rocked in her arms.

And she knew that was more than enough for her.

***

“You should have sent him to the fucking morgue, Lexa!” Raven shouted, pushing out of Anya’s arms that tried to bring her to reason. “Not a fucking jail! They could have been killed!”

Lexa bowed her head, hands firmly planted against the granite countertop in the kitchen. Clarke and Aden still slept, and all her efforts to keep Raven’s yelling at a minimum were unsuccessful. She sighed, “Raven…”

“NO! Don’t you ‘Raven’ me!” She spat soundly, seething rage. “Had I been there instead, I swear to GOD… he would have left that fucking house in a fucking bodybag!”

“Ray, babe… c’mon.” Anya tried again, running her hands down her lover’s arms. “Lexa did what she had to do. The fucker won’t see light of day for a long time. Plus, Clarke and Aden are safe! That’s all that matters.”

Although the truth did manage to get Raven a bit more relaxed, she was still not fully convinced. “You should have NEVER left her alone! You should have STAYED there with her! You should have been there to protect them! God… she coulda… she- “

Raven’s rant gave way to a sob when the unimaginable crossed her mind. Lexa understood, and pulled her into a hug. She wasn’t the only one who could have lost nearly everything last night. “I know… I know I should have… and I’ll never leave her side again. Unless she orders me from it.” Raven sniffled, giving Lexa a light chuckle.

Pulling back, she nodded at Lexa. “You broke his jaw?” She asked.

Lexa smirked. “Kneed the shit out of it.”

“And his nose?”

Lexa nodded, sensing Raven’s humorous side preparing to pierce through.

Raven sighed. “Thank you…”
Lexa could only smile, not expecting gratitude and sincerity from Raven after her verbal onslaught.

“I’m gonna go check on them…” Raven gave Lexa one final hug before leaving.

Her phone vibrated in consecutive spurts in her pocket, and upon retrieving it, she saw it was Titus ringing her. It would seem news had already reached his ear.

“Can’t avoid him forever, squirt.” Anya warned, shrugging. “Gotta face the man sometime. And trust me, better sooner than later…”

But Lexa was in no mind for another beatdown. Pressing the decline button, she prepared two glasses of water, it was time for Clarke and Aden to take their pain pills. “I choose later… Clarke needs me right now. And nothing is more important.”

***

They stood, all three, hand in hand on the front porch. Clarke lost track of how many minutes had passed while she gazed at her front door, not fully sure she should even be here. Her eyes scanned the front wall of the house, pausing to examine the cameras that were perched on both upper corners.

“I had them install cameras facing the front and back doors. Also, every window has one… to up security. You can monitor everything through your iPhone too.” Lexa explained, giving Clarke’s hand a soft squeeze. “There are cameras inside as well. In the kitchen, living room, and garage. I also made sure they installed one facing both ends of the hallway upstairs. All the locks have been changed and there’s a new alarm system in place. If anyone ever tries to get in, I’ll know right away.”

Clarke shifted her gaze, looking at Lexa now. “You’ll know?”

Lexa blushed, but maintained Clarke’s stare. “I have access to the system as well. So aside from you and the police, I’m the only other person with access. I’m not taking any chances with this, Clarke…”

Clarke smiled, beyond relieved to hear that. “I know…”

“So… are you like, gonna be spying on us now?!” Aden asked, looking up at Lexa with a smirk. Lexa smiled down, her heart swelling to see his boyish grin back in place. “You sure you didn’t secretly put one in Clarke’s bedroom?!”

It was meant to be an innocent joke, but she felt her cheeks ignite just the same. “What! No! Of course not! Bedrooms are free of cameras. Bathrooms too. Just, you know, public areas of the house.” She explained quickly, getting a quirk of the brow from Clarke. “So, um, shall we?”

The Griffins nodded, and Lexa let go of Aden’s hand to reach for the knob. She entered first, scanning the interior, patiently waiting for Clarke and Aden to follow. Aden hesitated for only a moment before darting in and running to his room in search of his stuffed turtle… it was all he could talk about all weekend.

Clarke on the other hand, entered more cautiously. “Feels… different.”

Lexa nodded. “Clarke, my offer will always stand.”

Clarke smiled, walking toward the woman that stood equally unsure about all this as she did. She wrapped her arms around her neck. “I know… but, this is my home. A and I… we grew up here. I can’t just abandon it.” Lexa understood, giving her a pained smile. “Plus, moving in together… that’s
a huge commitment, Ms. Woods. I’m not quite sure we’re ready for that just yet.”

Lexa laughed, pulling Clarke close enough for their noses to graze. “Well… if and when you are ready to take that step, you know where to find me…”

They kissed, gentle and soothing, relishing the others’ lips as if for the first time. “Thank you… for all this. I feel safer already.”

Lexa sighed, but nodded. “Aden has a point… I’ll be monitoring the shit out of you. Hope you know that…” Lexa spoke half-joking, half-serious. Mostly serious though… Ah, who are we kidding, totally serious. “At least until I’m confident you and Aden are okay…”

Clarke pulled back, giving Lexa a stare that made her knees weak. “We just need time… but other than that, I assure you we’re okay…”

Lexa’s gaze fell down to Clarke’s lip, the gash now somewhat faded but still there, an infuriating reminder of the ordeal she’d gone through three nights ago. “I know… I’m just covering all the bases, Ms. Griffin. As any decent girlfriend would…”

Clarke beamed. “Well, I need a change of clothes. As much as I love your loose jerseys and oversized hoodies, I do miss my closet. I’ll just be a sec… then we can go for dinner.”

Once Clarke had disappeared upstairs, Lexa walked around the house, opening doors and checking windows. She wasn’t exactly content with Clarke’s decision to return home, especially after spending the weekend with her. True, Finn was under custody and thus, no longer a threat to Clarke or Aden, but still… her skin crawled at the very thought of not having the blonde near her. No amount of cameras, no amount of security could abate the uneasiness it brought.

“Lexa?” Aden’s small voice sounded behind her. In turning, she found him staring at a baseball bat he held in his hands. She crossed over to him, watching as he twirled it in his grip. Once she had his attention, she kneeled, leveling their gazes.

“What you did, little man… saved you both.” Lexa admitted, ruffling his wild hair. She had been meaning to have this conversation with Aden, but never found the proper time to do so. Now however, the moment had finally presented itself. “You… were very brave, Aden. You know that, right? I’m very proud of you, kiddo. So is Clarke.”

Aden watched her, but he refrained from showing any sort of emotion. “I did what I had to do to protect my family. The little bit of it that I have left…”

Her throat clenched so impossibly tight that she feared she’d suffocate from it. “I know you did. But,” she reached forward, and pulled the bat from his hands, using her free hand to stroke the underside of his chin where the wound healed, “that is no longer your job, okay? Your job… is to be a ten-year-old kid.” He smiled, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. “From now on, taking care of you and Clarke… that’s my job. So… how about you stop worrying, and let me handle it. Do we have a deal?”

Aden’s little shoulders sank at hearing Lexa speak the words, liberating him from the heavy burden he’d been carrying for the past five years. Lexa had to bite her tongue for a distraction when she saw the tears that immediately began to burst free; Aden’s dam had finally been breached.

“Yes… deal.” He sobbed out the words, clumsily wiping his cheeks. “I just want… Clarke… happy… She deserves it.”

Lexa tossed the bat aside, making a mental note to get rid of the damn thing before they left for
dinner. She drew him closer, wiping away the remnants of the tears on his cheek. “So do you, A. You both deserve the world.”

***

The *L.A. Times* was flung at her from Titus’ merciless hand and in a reflex, her own shot up to catch it midair, already dreading the reason why Titus had called them in for an “urgent meeting.”

“Care to explain?!” Was all he said once the paper was in her grasp. She flipped it so the front page was facing her, expecting to have to flip through all it’s forty or so pages to figure out the meaning of his question. Turns out the answer came sooner than anticipated.

The second page revealed a title that immediately captured her attention.

‘New CEO Saves Woman and 10-year-old Boy From Late Night Attacker’

Lexa swiftly scanned the snippet of information following the title. ‘Alexandria Woods - recently hired to replace current Woods Enterprise Holdings, Inc. CEO, Titus Flamer - rescued a woman and her young brother from home invader early Friday morning, says anonymous source. The man, 24-year-old Finn Collins, is currently under police custody for the assault. Witnesses say the man and the woman he viciously attacked were past lovers and that Collins became aggressive after the relationship terminated. The identities of the victims will remain undisclosed. Witnesses say they are well and recovering from the unfortunate incident. The heroic actions of the young CEO halted the assailant’s chance to cause further harm…’

Lexa had little idea how the media had been made aware of the incident at all. It had been handled professionally, and aside from Clarke’s nosey neighbors that had stepped out to observe once the sirens of the police cars arrived, no one had known intimate details.

Yet the smile that spread across her lips could not be contained, hard as she tried. *I’m a goddamn hero! Look at me now… mothafucking hero! Anya gon be so jealous! I’m fucking Batman! Feared by ALL! Protector of the citizens! The nightmare of my-*

“I know you are not finding this amusing!” Titus pulled the paper from her hands, leering daggers in her direction. “Not twenty-four hours after I grant you the position and already you’re on the paper?! Did I not tell you to tread with caution, Alexandria?”

Lexa was slightly confused. She didn’t exactly understand what was so concerning. She had been dubbed a hero for goodness sake! “But… I’m a hero! That’s a good thing, Titus!”

Titus let his head hang from overwhelming frustration. “Good thing?? You pulverized a man’s face! Not to mention, it somehow leaked and the media got hold of it!”

Lexa sighed, shooting John a glance that screeched a silent ‘Help me, fucker.’ But as usual, John remained entirely absent in the conversation; offering no help as she once again faced the wrath of Titus.

“Ti, it was never my intention. But what was I supposed to do?! It was self-defense! I had to- “

“How about you let the cops handle it, Lexa! Must you always involve yourself?!” He continued to scold, waving his arms about the air frantically.

“I had no choice! They hadn’t arrived, and he was- “

“For once in your life, must you answer blood with blood?” Titus, once again, interrupted her.
“No! I know it was wrong! But if I hadn’t showed up and- “

“As future CEO you have a responsibility to this company! And that means refraining from throwing shit at its name simply because you felt like it! You were out of line and that is unacceptable! You were- “

“I… WAS DEFENDING THE WOMAN I LOVE!” Lexa finally burst, standing up so suddenly her chair toppled backwards. She locked eyes with a shocked Titus, who quieted the second her tone escalated and her hands came smacking down on the table. “WHAT… would you have me do?! Hm? Stand to the sidelines and allow that fucking monster to hurt the person that matters more to me in this world than life itself?! NO! I refuse to sit back and allow someone else I love slip from my fucking fingers just because I was too fucking helpless to do anything about it! NO… I will NOT apologize that it is an inconvenience for you and the firm! DEAL WITH IT! Because you have best believe I would rather see a million stories like this in every goddam paper in the country over a single one stating tragic end to woman and child at the hands of a fucking psychopath!” She was panting by the time she finished her speech/rant/oral assault. The need for air was such that it burned her lungs when she finally received it.

Titus stood like a statue, void of words and reaction. Eventfully his resolve corroded and his discipline waived. “You are undeniably your father’s daughter, Alexandria.” He reached forward and returned the newspaper to her, still sporting a scowl although a less threatening one. “Foolish and lacking good sense all around in the name of love!”

Lexa sucked in her lips. The will to smile at the rather true comment was overwhelming. Titus gave her a disappointed shake of the head for good measure before excusing himself from the room in haste, and Lexa thought she caught the smallest hint of a smile on his lips as he turned. She might have imagined it, yet the fact that he had let her off the hook with only a slap on the wrist indicated that not even the Mighty Titus was foolish enough to penalize the actions of someone in love.

“The woman you love, huh?” Lexa turned toward John, who stood and made his way over to her with a knowing smirk. “I believe that’s the first time I’ve heard you speak of Clarke in such regard…”

Lexa shrugged. “That’s… because it is. I have never said it out loud before…”

John stood near her, for the time being simply enjoying her presence. “I’m assuming you haven’t told her yet?”

Lexa dipped her head in confirmation. “I have always loved her. Sometimes it feels like I’ve loved her since before we even met.” Lexa scanned the room for a distraction as she compartmentalized her feelings, this was the first time she shared this with anyone other than herself. “But… it’s because I love her, that I can’t tell her. Clarke needs time to figure out what she wants, that includes me. She’s lost in so much, John… her career, her relationships, and family. And no matter how much I may want to help, and take some of that burden from her… they’re matters she needs to face herself, you know. I see that now.”

John nodded, gazing out the window at Los Angeles sprawled before them. “So…what does that mean…for you.”

Lexa sighed. “It means… I’ll be right beside her, every step of the way, until she tells me to leave. It means… I’ll walk down any path she wants to take, and when she’s tired and can no longer walk, I’ll carry her the rest of the way… if it means getting her to where she needs to be. It means… letting her decide if I’ll be part of her future, without any additional pressure… like telling her I love her.”
John glanced at her then, brows scrounging. “You’ll suffer… what you’re saying, it’s a recipe for pain, you must know that…”

Lexa chuckled, returning his glance. “Love and pain… is there really a difference between the two?”

They continued to stand, side by side, watching the sun’s trajectory as it descended across the horizon. “You’ve been quiet… any advice to offer?” Lexa asked a while later, returning to the present from her thoughts.

Now it was John who chuckled. “None… you said it all much better than I ever could…”

***

Clarke: Babe, where are you? Dinner’s ready.

Clarke had to reheat the lasagna for the second time in the span of an hour. Lexa had promised to arrive home in time for dinner and had yet to make an appearance. Her Monday, unlike Lexa’s, had been relatively dull. For starter’s she barely had any sleep, spending most of the night tossing and turning and checking her bedside clock in hopes morning was near.

After breakfast, Raven had come to collect Aden for a soccer match across the city, where Raven would be coaching Octavia’s team. He was hesitant to leave her, Clarke had noted. Making lame excuses about not feeling well in order to stay home. Clarke saw through the farce and after much convincing from both, Raven and herself, he finally acquiesced and went with Raven.

The rest of the day consisted of mindless activities. After spending the morning and better half of the afternoon on house duties, she turned her attention towards dinner, picking a time-consuming meal to prepare. Clarke knew precisely what she was doing. She was running. No, not in the physical sense, but more in the emotional and mental aspect. She drowned out her thoughts by blasting loud music as she went about preparing dinner, and whenever she found herself occasionally slipping, she’d fill her mind with thoughts of Lexa instead.

Lexa…who was currently late for dinner.

She huffed in frustration, her mind out of distractions to keep the unwanted thoughts at bay. She knew she’d have to face them eventually… the situation with Finn, the situation with her career, the situation with her mother… even more pressing, the situation with Lexa herself. But whereas the first three were darker, more uncomfortable to deal with, Lexa was the exact opposite, but just as equally terrifying nonetheless.

Clarke: The food is getting cold. Will you be long?

After fifteen minutes with no response, she opted to call her. It rang until she got her voicemail. “Hey baby… just calling to see what’s up. Dinner is ready and you’re not responding my texts. Just… hurry home. I miss you… bye.”

Upon hanging up the call, the doorbell rang, and her heart immediately fluttered. Being overly cautious, she peeked through the peephole and beamed when she saw a pair of bright green eyes patiently staring back at her.

She pulled open the door, forcing her features into a sterner expression. “You’re late.”

Lexa smirked… her sassy, sexy, devilish, crooked smirk as she stepped toward the blonde, pecking her lips in a ‘hello.’ She had both arms behind her back as she entered. “Sorry, beautiful… got caught up at the office and then a few… unexpected things that came up.”
She pulled her arms from behind her back, presenting Clarke with two loving gifts. “I hope these can make up for my tardiness… and for keeping my lady waiting.” Lexa handed her the bouquet of roses, by scent and texture, she deduced it had quite recently been freshly picked. The bottle of wine in Lexa’s other hand remained with her, but she twisted it so Clarke could read the label. The blonde smiled.

“Wow… fancy much? Didn’t know we were celebrating tonight…” Clarke teased, happily accepting Lexa’s welcoming kiss.

“Yes, well…it’s long overdue.” Lexa rasped against her lips, pulling her close so their bodies pressed flush against one another. Clarke could see exactly where this would lead, so…

“Alright… calm down, hot stuff…” She pulled away, earning a pout and puppy eyes from her girlfriend. She towed Lexa to the kitchen, placing the bouquet in a jug of water and uncovering the lasagna. “Dinner first. Then I’ll let you have desert…”

The bottle of wine stood zero chance when coupled with Clarke’s orgasmic lasagna. Lexa all but devoured half of it in minutes, while Clarke paced herself out with a single, but generous sized slice. They chatted about their day, Lexa sharing the story in the papers with Clarke (who was equally surprised to hear of its existence as she had been).

After the meal had concluded and the dishes had been cleaned and put away, Lexa opened another bottle of wine (from Clarke’s personal storage) and returned to her seat at the table, pulling the blonde down on her lap and filling her glass. “Miss Woods… you, are trying to get me drunk! And it’s fucking working…”

Lexa winked at her, her intent revealed. “Indeed I am, Miss Griffin. Something tells me you’ll appreciate it soon enough. I… have one more gift for you…” She whispered, lifting off the chair slightly and pulling a folded stack of colored paper from her back pocket. Upon closer observation, Clarke realized it was a map.

Carefully, as to not tear it, Lexa unfolded the map, spreading it over the kitchen table. Clarke observed, tracing over the countries and oceans on display. The entire world - condensed and flattened - at her fingertips.

“A… map?” She asked, not following.


“You bought me… a map?” Clarke asked, still confused. “Babe, I already have a map.”

Lexa leaned in, kissing her shoulder. “This is one is different. It’s special.” She pulled out a black sharpie from her pocket, and started writing in large, bold letter across the top of the map. “This one… is ours.”

Clarke watched, trying to decipher what Lexa was trying to communicate. “‘Clarke and Lexa’s Adventure Map’.” She recited once Lexa finished writing. “O…kay…”

“The purpose… is to fill this map with the evidence of our travels together.” Lexa continued, pouring a bit more wine into Clarke’s emptying glass. “Everytime we go somewhere, we will mark it. What do you think?”

Clarke narrowed her eyes, swaying slightly on Lexa’s lap. Lexa was giddy; her plan was working deviously well. “Oh! Ok… so, can we mark off L.A.? That counts… right?!?”
Lexa chuckled. “You’re the birthday girl… of course it counts…” With the sharpie, she circled L.A. “You know what else we can circle off?!”

Clarke narrowed her eyes once more, deep in thought, analyzing the map for an answer. It was a trick question of course, and after witnessing her girlfriend’s drunk self struggle for longer than necessary, she dragged her hand from one end of the map to the other.

“This right here…” Lexa finally stated, drawing an oval around the place she wanted Clarke’s eyes to zone into.

“Um, babe… that’s the middle of the fucking ocean…” Clarke gave her a roll of the eyes. “I’m pretty sure the only ocean I’ve set foot in is the Pacific.”

Lexa smiled, leaning up to kiss her girlfriend’s adorable pout. “Look closer…”

Clarke bent forward, bringing her face so close to the spot Lexa had circled on the map, her nose touched the paper. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust, and when they finally focused, she read the word slowly. “Maldives…”

…and then she gasped. “Lex… wha-wait…”

“Happy early birthday, beautiful.” Lexa pushed a gold lock behind Clarke’s ear. “Now, go pack. We leave in the morning.”

***

“Oh-mah-god, Lexa, you should have given me a heads up! What about Aden?! I can’t just leave him!” Clarke shouted over her shoulder, digging through the bottom drawer of her bedroom dresser. “And work! Shit, where is that fucking – Ah! Found it!”

“Babe, I told you… everything is already taken care of.” Lexa said, for the hundredth time now, folding the pieces of clothing Clarke was tossing at her and stuff them into a suitcase. “Aden will stay with Raven, Anya, and Indra. The kid is ecstatic about it! He’ll be eating junk food, playing video games and binging on inappropriate TV shows for the next two weeks! Plus, you need time off right now… clear your head. You said it yourself that you’re not sure about the hospital… maybe this will help.”

Just then Clarke flung yet another sweater over to her. “Clarke! I told you to pack lightly! You don’t need sweaters; it’s fucking hot over there!”

And another sweater came hurtling over at her just as she finished speaking. “Just… pack them! You never know!” Clarke pulled out the fanciest outfits she owned, along with all the beachwear and beach items in her possession. “But… shouldn’t I be using this time to… I dun know, at least give it a try?! I can’t make the hospital wait much longer… I need to give them an answer soon.”

Abandoning the mountain of clothes awaiting her, Lexa walked over to Clarke, wrapping the blonde’s waist from behind. “Hey… look. Two weeks is nothing. If they were willing to wait four years for you to finish college, they will wait fourteen more days.” Clarke let herself be pulled by Lexa’s intoxicating haze, her head sinking back against her shoulder. “Now… stop worrying, and let’s get you packed up and into bed. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow.”

The simple fact that they both made it to the airport in time for their flight was nothing short of a miracle. Lexa had to practically drag the grumpy, sleepy, slightly hung-over blonde from her bed in the morning, while also making sure she was properly packed, her passport and documents were in hand, that she spoke a good-bye to Aden who had spent the night at Raven’s, and that she had lots,
and lots, and lots of caffeine. She was beginning to regret getting Clarke tipsy the night before.

Their flight, although long and exhausting, was equipped with the latest comforts and luxuries money can afford, the very same reason as to why Lexa chose a private carrier over a public one. There was plenty of room to stretch and move about in the cabin; designed to offer relaxation and pleasures to its travelers such as an oversized television with access to an intense array of films and shows, game tables and a butler to serve and please their every whim, and most importantly, not have to engage with other noisy passengers. A private compartment located at the end of the plane, furnished with a generous sized bed and a shower, allowed them to rest for the majority of the trip in seclusion. The mid-sized aircraft was also stocked with an endless supply of spirits and champagne, all catered to the exquisite tastes of the renter, along with upscale meals and snacks.

Their arrival to the Male International Airport roughly twenty-four hours later (the aircraft had to make a connection in Istanbul, Turkey for a few hours before continuing) was welcomed by a Mr. Miller, a kind man that upon spotting them, greeted Lexa with a bow and a firm handshake before pulling Clarke in for a crushing hug and a sloppy kiss on each cheek. Lexa watched him like a hawk after that. The man gathered their suitcases and led them down the open walkway to the edge of the small airport (which was perched on an island), where a row of speedboats and other varieties of water vehicles awaited.

Thirty minutes (and many attempts to flirt and flatter Clarke by Mr. Miller) later, they finally arrived at their destination. Rangali Island, isolated and extremely private, was also known for its prestige in accommodating the world’s most prominent and powerful individuals. It was a spectacle to behold from a distance, as they approached by boat, yet Lexa’s focus was entirely not on the beautiful sight ahead but rather on the beautiful sight that sat beside her. Clarke, lost in the moment, the evidence of the marvel surrounding them manifesting on her face. Lexa secretly thanked the universe for finally siding with her for a change and promised to sacrifice a goat or two in its name later.

Once they were checked in, they were escorted to their overwater villa at the farthest, most secluded end of the island. Although it was a good fifteen-minute walk, it afforded them more concealment from the island’s other guests. The villa itself was beyond breathtaking to say the least, adorned with only the highest quality furniture and décor, with glass floors that allowed them to peek at the shallow, transparent ocean beneath. The doors to the balcony were open and the curtains had been pulled aside, revealing nothing but blue, shimmering ocean that expanded before them for all eternity. The kitchen was stocked with fresh fruits and an assortment of cheeses and other snacks, and the bar had been prepared to Lexa’s orders (lots and lots of wine, the ones preferred by Clarke, and lots and lots of water and juices, for herself). There was no need to concern themselves with meals, seeing the island was endowed with six upscale restaurants, all inclusive and all providing delivery upon request.

The butler departed, setting the luggage’s in their bedroom for them, and Lexa followed Clarke out to the balcony. Clarke was at a loss for words. Her eyes however, sparkled just about as vividly as the water of the ocean before them. A massive infinity pool took up majority of the balcony. To its right, bordering the edge of the balcony and overlapping out over the ocean, was a full-sized hot-tub, already on and bubbling. There was also a stone firepit, tables and chairs for lounging, and an outside bar. A rope hammock, covered with waterproof pillows, was stretched at the edge of the opposing side of the balcony, completely suspended over the water. After absorbing everything in, Clarke finally exhaled.

“Gosh… I-I… this is surreal, Lex…” To shake off her disbelief, she dipped her toe into the cool waters of the pool, letting out a giggle from the unexpected coldness that made Lexa’s heart skip a beat. Clarke looked at her, finally making eye contact after far too long it seemed, and Lexa saw the tenderness in them. “We’re in paradise…”
Lexa approached her, wrapping her arms around her waist and drawing her in for a kiss. “No… you’re paradise… I’m just lucky enough to be living in it.” Clarke chuckled once again against her lips, causing another outburst of flutters in her stomach again. “There’s one more thing I want to show you…”

She led Clarke to the exterior closet out in the balcony, opening the door and stepping aside to let the blonde review the contents. Clarke’s lips parted in admiration and her eyes moistened; there truly was no limit to Lexa’s affection and determination to see her happy.

“For when inspiration hits…” Lexa explained, pulling out the wooden tripod and one of the dozens of blank canvases, all ranging in different sizes. She set it up, giving Clarke a preview. “Plenty of paint in there too, and brushes of all sorts. If there’s anything you might need or want, just let me know and I’ll have Miller get it for you.”

She had been here for a matter of twenty minutes and everything still felt surreal… Lexa, felt surreal. “Right now, the only thing I want is for you to take me to bed and make love to me until tomorrow.” Clarke finally responded, lovingly caressing Lexa’s cheek and sighing when the brunette leaned into her touch. “I want to wake up to paradise in your arms…”

***

“To the left, Clarke!” Lexa reminded the blonde for what seemed to be the hundredth time. “I’m paddling right! Stop switching up!”

Clarke huffed in frustration, angrily dipping her paddle into the water. “We’re not moving! We’ve been in this same spot for half-an-hour!”

“Yea… because you aren’t listening to me! Paddle left, I paddle right. And go a little faster! We have to match our movements!”

“Hard to do when you forced me to wear these idiotic floaties!” Clarke twisted her body to look at the brunette, standing a few paces behind her at the end of the paddle board. Not only had Lexa implored she use the floaties around each arm, the island did not sell ‘adult’ versions, so she had to settle for a couple of flowery, ridiculous looking ones. “I am not a five-year-old!”

“Well, you swim like a five-year-old…” Lexa scoffed from behind her, smiling to herself when she heard the blonde growl from disagreement. “I’m gonna make sure you take some swimming lessons when we get back…”

“I swim just fine! Argh! This isn’t working!” Clarke furiously dipped her paddle into the water, causing the board to wobble. “Shit!”

“You’re gonna toss both our asses off this board! No sudden movements… you know how fucking difficult it is to get back on this thing once we fall off…”

“You just had to choose this activity, didn’t you?!” Clarke swung her head back, glaring at the smirking girl behind her. “Out of everything we could have done…”

“This… is a great sport for teamwork and trust building. Besides… we’ve done everything you’ve wanted to do so far! You think I enjoyed yoga?! Hell no! The downward dog pose has got to be the most humiliating thing I’ve ever done…”

Clarke chuckled. “You were in downward dog for me last night… didn’t hear you complaining then…”
The blush that crept across Lexa’s cheeks was entirely worth the struggle right now. “That’s… different!” Lexa said in a rush, tone a little softer at her own personal embarrassment. She shifted her weight to her left leg when she saw Clarke lean to the right, her eyes involuntarily browsing the muscles that rippled across Clarke’s thighs as she exerted herself. Choosing a tropical location to vacation had definitely paid off, Lexa noted. The minimal need for clothing, the scenery and romantic atmosphere, and the privacy was having a rather pleasant effect on Clarke; one Lexa continuously benefited from. “Sunbathing, pottery, Zumba… and I never complained. Not once!”

“Shut up, you loved pottery class… I saw the little souvenir you made for Indra.” Lexa blushed furiously again. How had Clarke seen that?! Clarke turned, smirking at her. “She’s gonna love it, babe… that was very sweet of you.” As she turned to face forward, Clarke misplaced her footing, causing her to lose balance. “Shi-“

The board flipped, launching both of them into the water. Lexa was already swimming over to check on the blonde before her head even popped out of the water.

“Clarke… you okay?!”

Clarke nodded, spitting a mouthful of water at her. “I’m fine… the floaties don’t let me drown, remember?”

The ocean floor was about a foot or so beneath their toes, not overwhelmingly deep but Lexa wanted to make sure precautions were in place. She pulled Clarke to her, admiring the way her cheeks were tinted from the scalding sun. “You… suck at paddle board.”

It was sweetly spoken, and Clarke smiled back. “You know… we can always just go back and do a couple’s massage instead? Maybe lounge on the beach?”

“Hm, good try… but no. I have the afternoon already planned out and you will not convince me to change my mind. Sorry, but your cuteness and charms will not work today.”

Clarke smirked, her eyes turning dangerously seductive; cuteness and charms might not work… but something else might. “Or… we can go back to our villa, and I’ll let you fuck me in the pool like you’ve been wanting to do since we got here…”

The blonde knew she had won the second she saw Lexa’s pupils expanded to oblivion. Lexa growled, unable to resist. “No… fair…”

Clarke bit her lower lip, loving the way Lexa’s eyes chased them in her hunger. “So… what will it be, Miss Woods?”

Lexa swallowed her desire; an action deserving of the highest awards and recognition. “The pool can wait… we got some serious snorkeling to do next!”

***

On the day of Clarke’s actual birthday, Lexa awoke to a vision that made her believe she had died and gone to heaven. Stepping out onto the balcony, two mugs with coffee in hand, she stopped just past the open doors to admire the scene the gods blessed her with.

Clarke sat with outmost poise on a stool, legs exposed and crossed to the side as she faced a massive, horizontal canvas that was partially coated in different shades of blue. Her right hand moved expertly as she stroked the brush from end to end; it seemed so effortless and second nature for Clarke, Lexa would have believed the brush itself was guiding her hand, not the other way around. The best part however, was Clarke herself, bare except for a thin, colorful shawl wrapped around her waist. She
had no way of knowing how long Clarke had been here, could have been hours or minutes, but just as she was now lost in Clarke, Clarke was lost in her work.

She approached carefully, not wanting to spook her and cause her hand to slip. “I see inspiration finally caught up to you…” Lexa spoke softly, placing Clarke’s mug next to her on the nearby table.

Clarke smiled, leaning into Lexa’s kiss atop her head. “Yes… and at four in the morning, too.”

“It’s beautiful, babe… perfect.” Lexa analyzed the painting, not quite finished but still just as captivating. The deep blue of the ocean blended seamlessly with the lighter blue of the sky. A sailboat could be seen surfing the crafted waves; it’s white sails stretched from the invisible wind. Lexa shifted her attention back to the blonde, leaning forward to let her gaze scan down Clarke’s naked front. “I def dig this look on you… this is how you should walk around from now on. Just sayin’.”

Clarke laughed, slapping Lexa’s hand away when it dipped down to a breast. “Nah-uh, you’re gonna distract me.”

“But… this is torture! C’mon… a little birthday treat…” Lexa snuggled her neck, placing soft kisses tracking down to her shoulder. “The least I can do for my birthday girl…”

“Once I finish this.” She said with a stern conviction, dipping her brush back in the paint and swirling it around the palette. “I’ll just be a few more hours… then I’m all yours to ravage and do with as you please…”

Lexa felt her mouth water at the mere thought of that promise. “Deal… but the ravaging will have to wait until tonight… I have lunch and dinner plans for us.” She gave Clarke another kiss before leaving her to her work. “When you’ve finished, get dressed and meet me down by the beach. I have a few things to prepare still.”

Once Clarke finished her painting, she did as told and met Lexa back at the resort for a two-hour massage by the beach, complete with wine and strawberries and incense. Lunch was also no simple endeavor when it came to Lexa and her desire for extravagance. One of Clarke’s request had been to swim with dolphins, something she had always wanted to do as a child but sadly never been giving the opportunity to.

So, Lexa hired an expert for the afternoon to take them to a secluded spot a few islands west of the one they resided in. There was a peculiar place where the water lured the creatures due to the abundance in fish there, a preferred hunting ground for dolphins and other water mammals.

“Madam, here…” He handed Clarke a vest, which she begrudgingly put on. Clarke entered the water first, unsure what to do. Looking down, she could see the school of fish swimming near the bed of the ocean floor; the water so clear she could make out their intricate details and colored beauty. “We scared the dolphins away with the boat. Give a few minutes and they’ll return to feast…”

As promised, the dolphins slowly began to appear. One by one, thy scouted the area, concerned first with the fish. Once they had their fill, their attention switched over to Clarke, who was given sardines to lure them to her.

“Babe, stop throwing the fish! They’ll never come near enough for you to touch them!” Lexa spoke from the boat, keeping her tone soft to not spook their visitors. “Wait and feed it to them when they’re closer.”
Clarke heeded her advice, holding on to the sardines until one brave soul approached her. Once he became comfortable, he drove the tip of his nose to her hand, smelling the fish she held, and Clarke fed it to him as he opened his mouth.

“Oh my god!” She squealed, unable to contain her excitement. She reached for another sardine to give to her new friend. “Lex! Babe, did you see that?! Ah! He’s sooo cute!”

Clarke stretched her empty hand, running it gently over the slick, slippery skin of the dolphin, beaming when she saw him chirp in response.

“Lex! I think he likes me! Are you recording?! Aden will die when he sees! Poor thing… he would have loved this!”

Lexa had been recording since Clarke first dipped into the water. “Getting it! Pet him again! Look! He has friends coming!”

Clarke suddenly found herself surrounded by half-a-dozen or so dolphins, all eager to meet her…and her free fish. “Lex! Ohmahgod, ohmahgod… there’re so many!” Clarke looked at her, smiling as radiantly as the sun. “Get in!”

Lexa hesitated. Swimming with the dolphins was definitely not at the top of her personal list. “Er, I think I’m gonna sit this one out.” She responded, but when Clarke pleaded and used the ‘but… it’s my birthday’ line on her, she had no choice but to strip down to her swim shorts and bikini top. She put the vest on and very carefully, she entered the water. Clarke slowly swam over to her, the dolphins following like a bunch of devout worshippers.

“Here… this one is very friendly. Give it to him.”

Lexa did as instructed, sliding the fish into its eager mouth. “Gross… how can they eat this stuff…yuck! You’d think they-OW!”

“What? What’s wrong!” Clarke asked, confused.

“That little fucker bit me! He bit my toe, Clarke!” Lexa huffed, appalled by such treatment. The accused dolphin approached, eager for more fish, pretending he had done no such thing. “No! don’t you dare give him more fish! The nerves!”

“Lex… he’s probably just playing with you. See…” Clarke demonstrated he meant no harm by petting him, and the little fucker practically purred under her touch, “he’s a good boy!”

They fed and pet the dolphins until they ran out of fish, and once that happened, the dolphin’s interest in them also disappeared. It was late afternoon when they returned to their villa. Lexa had dinner plans for the pair and so they showered and got ready. Lexa asked Clarke to wear the white dress she had brought with her, so they could take matching photos during dinner. The dress was simple, yet it was the perfect combination of sensual and elegance. She wore wedges and her hair down in thick curls. Lexa herself wore a white polo dress shirt, tucked into khaki shorts that reached down to her knees and flat shoes.

“Which cologne?” Lexa asked, lifting up two bottles for Clarke to inspect. “I’m trying out a new one and-“

“You know which one, Lexa…” Clarke responded, gazing at her through the mirror as she applied her make up. “The only one I ever want on you.” Lexa knew that would be her answer. Still… it was always fun to hear it.
They walked hand-in-hand down to the beach where a man waited for them. “Miss Woods, Miss Griffin. Please, follow me.” He bowed and walked toward a massive yacht/sailboat hybrid that was anchored offshore. “Welcome aboard. I’ll be your captain tonight. Serving under specific instructions from Miss Woods.”

Clarke flashed the grinning brunette a devious smirk, Lexa would have all this up her sleeve. The captain led them aboard and put the sailboat into gear. A few crewmen were present to aid with the sails and to serve the women drinks. Clarke stood by the rail of the ship, watching as the island shrunk from sight. Lexa stood behind her, her chin resting on her shoulder, hands protective around her waist.

“Are you happy, babe? Liking your birthday so far?” Lexa questioned in a whisper, eyes still gazing far ahead.

“Yes! Are you kidding me?!” Clarke responded, feigning shock at even being asked such a pointless question. “Lexa… this is incredible…”

And it was. All of it. The attention to detail on Lexa’s part; the urge to please and serve and of course, impress Clarke out of her senses kept the blonde in a constant state of awe. And… the best part was, that Clarke would never even have to voice her desires or needs. She never had to, not once, communicate what she wanted or felt or needed, because Lexa was always a step ahead of her, already knowing those necessities before she even knew them herself. She even oftentimes felt guilty; ashamed she couldn’t reciprocate in the same manner… not only in the monetary sense but in all aspects of their relationship. Lexa gave her the world (almost literally), on a silver platter and cocooned in the finest luxuries and comforts, all the while also serving as her lover and protector and savior, selflessly and willingly given… never expecting nor requesting anything in return aside from the opportunity to be close to her.

“Miss Woods. Miss Griffin. Dinner is served.” One of the crewmembers approached them and politely interrupted. Lexa led her to the the table, positioned at that front of the boat. Their view here was open to the ocean below and the colorful sky above, uninterrupted by the sails, posts and cords. The only light washing over them was that of a dying sun and the swaying flames of the table candles, complemented with the relaxing sound of violin as they sailed into the sunset.

Their meal was brought out to them: gourmet seafood with an assortment of side dishes for their choosing. Wine was plentiful and under Clarke’s plea, Lexa shared a single glass with her to properly toast her birthday. Lexa had ordered a cake for her birthday and the crew brought it out once they finished dinner, twenty-three candles flickered on its surface as they all sang her Happy Birthday. The sun was setting right in front of them, sinking slowly beyond the edge of the ocean, casting spectacular colors and shadows across the sky that was beautifully reflected by the stilled ocean.

There was a sudden shift in temperature, and Lexa grabbed a white shawl from a nearby box for Clarke, draping it over her shoulders with tenderness and a kiss. “Thank you…”

“One thing for you, princess…” Lexa responded, watching Clarke’s eyes widen in discomfort. “What? Everything ok?”

Clarke nodded, but her features showed resistance. “It’s just… that nickname… it’s what Finn would call me… when we were dating…”

Lexa felt her own features darken at the very sound of the name. Reaching forward, she pulled Clarke’s hand into her own, squeezing it lightly. “I’m sorry… I didn’t know. Consider it dropped.” Lexa watched for her reaction, for any further signs of uneasiness. “Clarke… he will never hurt you
again… I swear it on my life. No one ever will.”

She saw the anxiety lift from Clarke, and her smile return. Lexa felt elevated right then; Clarke… *believed* her. Clarke *trusted* her. And it was certainly the second most incredible feeling in the world to know that.

***

Clarke was swaying her hips to the sensual tune Lexa had put on back in the villa, which they returned to find void of light save for the candles and moon light that filtered in.

“So fucking romantic…” Clarke rasped, waltzing over to Lexa and flinging her arms around her neck. “I wonder what happens next…”

Lexa chuckled, licking her lips slowly and watching as Clarke’s gaze followed. “Whatever you want to happen, beautiful…” She spoke in a soft growl, knowing exactly what it would do to the blonde. “Any requests, birthday girl?”

Clarke pressed herself flush against the brunette’s front, determined to make her intent clear. “I think… you know *exactly* what it is I want… something you promised this morning and I’m ready to collect.”

Lexa had to reel in her urges, she needed to remain in control for a bit longer. “I have one last gift for you… one I think you’d appreciate.” She pulled out of Clarke’s death grip and told the blonde to stay put and behave while she went to fetch it.

When Lexa returned, she no longer had her dinner outfit on but rather an oversized jersey and basketball shorts, with her hair pulled in a tight ponytail. Her hands were empty, and Clarke looked from one to the other utterly confused.

“Where is it?” She asked, cocking her head to the side. “Why did you change?”

“I thought… we could try something new tonight?” Lexa made sure to keep her tone low and dominant, loving the way it made Clarke’s breathing stagger. She stopped in front of Clarke, running a finger across her cheek. “You up for it?”

Clarke’s eyes gave her response before her lips could. She smirked mischievously. “Do tell… what do you have in mind, Miss Woods?”

Lexa smirked back. She was hoping for that exact answer. “How about I give you a little demonstration instead…”

She spun Clarke in a wisp of a second, her hands dropping to the blonde’s waist to keep her in place. She moved forward, pressing her hips against Clarke’s backside, and giving it a tentative thrust. She grinned the second she heard the surprised gasp and strangled moan leave the girl’s lips; exactly the reaction she had been hoping for. “I bought it for you, beautiful…”

She gave another thrust against Clarke’s ass, feeling the silicone shaft dip and glide. She leaned forward, placing a kiss against Clarke’s ear. “I want to fuck you with it…”

Clarke answered with another lengthy, guttural moan, reaching a hand behind her to grasp the toy lodged between Lexa’s legs. “*Oh fuck*…” She hissed, already grinding her ass back against it, yearning for pressure. “Do it.”

Lexa was just as excited as the blonde sounded for this new adventure. For weeks she’s been
wanting to pound ruthlessly into the blonde with a strap on, and it seemed her wish was about to come true. Wasting no time, she spun Clarke back to face her, peeling the dress off her body and tossing her onto the couch. There was no time to make it to the bedroom; their need far too urgent to warrant them those unnecessary steps.

“Take the rest off.” Lexa ordered, as she tore off her jersey, watching Clarke remove the bra and thong in record speed. Her own hands moved to the waistband of her shorts, but just as she was about to tug them down, Clarke stopped her.

“She?” She pleaded, her need so strong Lexa could smell it off of her. “I want to see it…”

Lexa nodded consent, and stood off the couch to give the girl space. Clarke stood, and then decided standing wasn’t the best position, so she moved to kneel in front of Lexa instead. Lexa watched as her fingers made their way to the waistband, slipped underneath it, and pulled the shorts down her legs.

She wasn’t sure what color or texture Clarke would have preferred it. Yet seeing how she wanted the toy to be a surprise, she took an educated guess regarding the matter. The way Clarke’s eyes widened the second the shaft sprung free convinced her she had made the right choice.

“What do you think?” She asked, intrigued at how closely Clarke analyzed the fake dick; comparing it to the real thing.

“Wow… umm, i-it’s… legit.” Clarke finally managed to get out, eyes still scanning it from base to tip. “How… big?”

“Eight inches. I wasn’t sure… I mean, my fingers are pretty long, so I took an educated guess.” Lexa was suddenly feeling… nervous? *Fuck, I should have asked!* “Is that… okay? I mean, most girls can take it… but, I definitely don’t want to overwhelm you. We can ex- “

“I can take it.” Clarke rasped, finally pulling her gaze away from the shaft and looking up to meet Lexa’s. The look… so confident, so ready… a challenge buried in them. Clarke’s eyes dropped back down to the member, standing erect a few centimeters from her face. “Is it… alright if I touch it?”

Before Lexa could respond, curious fingers began to dance down it’s length; exploring the realistic smoothness, tracing the veins, rubbing the head with the pad of her thumb, giving a tentative tug to see if the leather harness would hold and smiling wickedly when it did. “Gosh… it’s so fucking real…"

Lexa understood Clarke’s fascination. It was new for her; different and exciting. But her libido was growing impatient, and she wanted nothing more than to see the shaft buried to the hilt inside the blonde. “Clarke…”

And then Clarke’s mouth wrapped around the head and her traitorous knees dipped under the crippling pleasure that assaulted her senses. “Holy *fuck*…"

Now it was Lexa who was fascinated, watching Clarke’s mouth work her length deeper and deeper down her throat. Watching her tongue coat the silicone appendage in saliva as she pulled back and licked the sides. Watching her hand bind around it and begin to pump her cock with practiced ease, as though she acted from muscle memory. Lexa’s hand flew to her hair for support when she saw Clarke lift the phallus and suck down to the balls.

“Clarke…*goddammit*… That’s hot…” Lexa spoke, more breath than sound in her voice, swallowing dry when the blonde pulled her lips away with a grin, a string of saliva still tethering her
to the tip of the fake cock. She felt the scaling temperature begin to urge her to action. “Get up.”

The second Clarke obeyed, she found herself thrown back onto the couch on her back, legs falling open in an invitation that Lexa eagerly accepted. Moving between them, she slammed her lips down against Clarke’s, already involving far too much teeth and tongue for it to be considered passionate and gentle.

She rocked her hips forward in shallow thrusts, dragging the phallus against Clarke’s drenched folds, using her wetness to lubricate the toy. The blonde was practically mewling beneath her, purring and ready. Clarke hissed when she felt Lexa’s weight shift off her body, confused as to why-

Fuck… that’s why. Lexa’s mouth was on her. Tongue now on a separate mission as it flicked and pressed against Clarke’s already sensitive clit; building her up to climax…

“Lex… inside… now!” Clarke pleaded between breaths, grinding her cunt against the brunette’s mouth, dragging her wetness shamelessly over her face.

To keep the girl still, Lexa used a hand to pin her down by her waist, her mouth never disconnecting from that throbbing nerve bundle that was driving Clarke wild. She lowered her tongue, circling Clarke’s dripping entrance, lapping her up, ghosting it over the clenching hole but never entering. Not yet…

“LEXA! Goddammit… stop teasing!” Clarke was frantic, her hands moved down to Lexa’s hair, yanking it roughly. Her moans began to crescendo higher and higher, filling the villa and the ocean beyond it. Her hips were bucking uncontrollably under her hold, and in looking up, she watched her back arch in a perfect bow, head thrown back and mouth open wide, her breasts spilling to the sides. She was so, so close…

As fast as she could, Lexa crawled back up her body, lining the tip of the cock to her entrance. “Clarke… you- “

“Yes! Please!” Clarke answered her unspoken question, granting Lexa the consent she needed to hear before continuing. And she did. Sucking down on the blonde’s pulse point, she sank fully into her; pushing all eight inches in one stroke. There was some resistance, Lexa could feel through the strap on, which caused a hiss to leave Clarke’s lips the deeper she went. It had been a while since Clarke had anything more than a few fingers inside of her, so she had expected for there to be some level of pain. She studied Clarke’s face, trusting the blonde to let her know if it was too much, relieved when she saw her features shift from discomfort to a more predatory one.

“Oh, God!” Clarke was panting, eyes rolling into her head, digging her nails into her back and Lexa knew it would leave marks, yet she didn’t care. She gave Clarke a few moments, letting her adjust to the size and the new depths Lexa reached within her. She remained still, waiting for Clarke to give her a signal to continue, her subtle way of letting her girlfriend know that she was in control, not Lexa. “You can move babe… I’m okay…”

Clarke’s voice… spoken as if it was Lexa who needed looking out after. She spent another moment just observing Clarke, appreciating her beauty, engraving the moment into memory. She started to scatter loving kisses and caresses across the blonde’s mouth and cheeks and neck. It took one giggle… one undeniably cute, adorable giggle… to shatter Lexa to pieces.

Slowly, as if afraid she’d break the beautiful woman beneath her, she started to move her hips. It was the exact opposite of what Clarke had originally wanted and the savagery that she had promised. Yet she couldn’t help it… her soul yearned for more than mindless fucking right now.
Lexa’s new purpose was to feel her. To truly worship every part of Clarke. It was strange… how connected she felt to Clarke at that moment. And looking into her sapphire eyes – at how vibrantly they shimmered from adoration and welling tears; how they appeared satiated and whole after having longed for this moment for ages - it was clear the blonde felt the same.

Her pace gradually accelerated, following the rhythm of Clarke’s body, listening to the tune her lips sang. Eventually they found themselves back to the point where they started; Lexa driving the phallus into her at a savage pace. Clarke pushing forward to meet every thrust Lexa delivered. It didn’t take long for both of them to find their shared release, with a depleted Lexa collapsing atop Clarke when they finished.

It was then, at that moment, with her ear pressed against Clarke’s heaving chest, that she herself felt a tear fall from her eyes. The sound of Clarke’s heart pumping wildly but steady. Pulsing blood and life and joy through to every part of her.

A sound that could have been extinguished a week earlier.

A sound that she knew, without a single shred of doubt, that she could not survive without.

***

“So… you’re telling me… that I can get anything I want?!” Aden asked, again, still not entirely sure he understood. “As in anything, anything?”

Anya ruffled his hair, nodding. “Yea, kiddo! Anything anything. Even multiple anythings! No limits. Lexa said ‘whatever he wants, he gets.’”

Aden processed this a moment, still firmly planted at the entrance of the toy store. “Well… what’s my budget?”

Raven sighed. “A, there’s no limit. Anything means anything. If you want something from somewhere else, we can go there too. We just thought to start here because, well… most normal brats your age like toys.”

The message finally seemed to get through to him. “Okay… well, I’ll just be a moment then.” Raven and Anya watched as he made his way from shelf to shelf, following close behind but giving the kid enough space to make decisions without feeling pressured or rushed. Finally, minutes later, he decided on something he wanted, pulling the package from the shelf and running back towards them.

“Okay! I’m all set!” Aden spoke when he was near enough, handing the package over to Anya, who shot Raven quirked brow. Upon close observation, they realized the package contained a Barbie doll inside.

“Uh, hey, A… not judging or anything… you know I totally support you and love you and I don’t care if this is what you’re into but, er, is there something you’d like to tell us?” Anya asked, hoping to come across as supportive and not judgmental of his choice.

“Huh? Oh! No, that’s not for me! It’s for Harper!” He explained, giving both girls a full smile. “Those bullies ripped her Barbie’s head off a while ago… I’ve always meant to get her a new one, but never had enough money to until now! Think she’ll like it?!”

Raven was suddenly speechless, she grabbed the package from Anya’s hand, looking from the doll to Aden. “Yea… I think she’ll love it, kid. Is there anything you’d like to get for yourself? Anything at all, Aden…”
Aden thought about the proposition, but eventually shook his head. “No… I have everything I need already. Harper… her mommy doesn’t have a lot of money. She needs toys and things more than I do.”

Anya and Raven both started to pinch each other to hold the tears back. When they finally came to, they smiled at him and walked him over to the checkout. “Do you think we can pick her up?! Maybe go for some ice cream and cupcakes? I really miss her…”

Anya nodded. “Anything you want, little man. I’ll give her mom a call to set it up. What else do you wanna do today?”

Aden thought about their offer. How he could get anything, and everything his little heart desired. One thing did cross his mind. Something he had been neglecting himself throughout the year but with recent events, the need had escalated to unmanageable heights.

He knew it might upset Clarke. He knew there was a great chance the deed would upset himself. Still… the nagging voice in his head, the pang in his chest, the yearning to, for once, take matters into his own hands instead of wondering ‘what if.’

“Ray… there’s one thing I’d like to do… later tonight.” He spoke, his gaze shifted to his feet, and he wasn’t quite sure how to push the words out.

“Sure, kid… what is it?” Raven asked, frowning when she caught the conflicted look on his face. “Whatever it is, A… you can tell me.”

After a while, he decided to just come out and say it. His mind had been made up. There was no turning back now. He sighed.

“I want to talk to my mom.”

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“Hmm, I wonder which star is mine…” Clarke shared her thoughts, scanning the display of stars above them. The sky was transparently clear on this particular night; their second to last night before they would have to depart this heavenly place. “Maybe… that one?” She said, pointing directly ahead to a cluster of stars. Lexa obviously had no idea which she had chosen of course, but she nodded and smiled and pulled the blonde closer to her for her warmth. The night wasn’t particularly chilly, but there was something about Clarke’s proximity that kept more than just a few wayward winds away.

“Could be… but I think… it’s that one.” Lexa decided to play along, pointing directly at the full, crystalline moon that appeared suspended directly over them by invisible strings. It cast a brilliant shadow across the vast ocean, making it seem like the night stars that decorated the sky were descending to decorate the sea. “Suits you better… it’s big, and beautiful, and- “

“All you calling me fat?!” Clarke twisted her neck to face her, scowling.

“What! No! You kidding me?! God, you have like, the sexiest bod ever, babe…” Lexa replied in earnest, worried that Clarke might push her off the edge of their overwater hammock. “I just meant it’s beautiful… a-and bright and so, so lovely to look at!”

Clarke laughed at Lexa’s flounder, curling into her even more. “I know… I’m just giving you a hard time…”

They lounged in silence for a moment, listening to the soft waves break against the wooden beams of
the bungalows’ structure and the crackle of the fire that blazed in the firepit behind them. They were wrapped up in a thin blanket and each other, enjoying their last few days in paradise before having to return to harsher realities.

“I’m gonna miss this place…” Clarke was the first to breach the silence, releasing a long sigh in the process. “I haven’t had a vacation like this in a long time… thank you for doing this, Lex.”

Lexa replied her thanks with a kiss to the forehead. “I needed this just as much as you… and I wanted this with you. We can always come back, you know…”

Clarke chuckled. “We have an entire map to fill. Which means new places. But… this one will definitely hold a special place in my heart…”

Lexa nodded in agreement. “For me too, Clarke…”

“Lex?”

“Yea, babe?”

“I’m gonna take Mr. Richter up on his offer to teach me when we get back to the States…” Clarke blurted out, propping her chin up on Lexa’s shoulder to better see the brunette’s reaction. “I’ve been thinking a lot lately… about my career, and about my future… and I think, that sadly the healthcare path has been ruined for me. Partially because of my mom leaving, and… partially because it was always her dream for me, or my goal to please her rather. But, with everything that’s happened lately, I think I want to start living for myself now…”

Clarke paused a moment, searching Lexa’s eyes for any objections, and even though the brunette remained completely still and refrained from offering advice, she saw only support reflected back at her.

“And… I want you there with me… because I don’t know if I’m strong enough to do it on my own, to be honest. If it… hadn’t been for you, if you hadn’t come to rescue us, Aden and I – we…”

“Shh… you and Aden would have been just fine, Clarke… You two are just fine. And will continue to be fine. Okay?” Lexa grabbed her face with both hands, making sure the blonde truly heard her. “And… in regards to you pursuing your dreams… you know I’m already your number one fan.”

Clarke laughed, but it was pained and choked, absolutely overwhelmed by the torrent of emotions coursing through her.

“You… are the most talented, intelligent, overall amazing person I have ever met. You… will go far. You… will be successful. You… will see everything you want become a reality and I… will be there with you. Anything you need, Clarke. Anything you could ever want, if it’s within my power, I’ll make sure you have it. That includes financial support… during this time that you won’t be working. For you and Aden.”

Clarke shook her head, tears now involuntarily dripping down her face. “Lex… no. I can’t accept that. You’ve already given me so much. Offered me so much! it’s not fair… because I have nothing to offer you. Nothing to give you in ret-“

“There’s… only one thing I could ever want from you.” Lexa choked the words out, a much more difficult thing to do than she originally imagined. “And even… if I never get it, Clarke, just having this opportunity to help you accomplish everything you have been denied is rewarding enough. No matter what, you and Aden will always mean the world to me, and I want nothing more than to see you both happy… okay? No strings attached.”
The blonde nodded, incapable of answering, drowning in her own emotions and tears.

“So… drop your stubbornness, and let me do just that. When we get back, you’ll talk to the hospital, and get started with Richter. God knows that man has been badgering me enough about you since you two met.” Lexa chuckled when she saw a smile crack past Clarke’s pained features. “I’m still salty he didn’t realize the greatness of my painting… I mean, c’mon! Sure, yours was good and all but… mine was just beyond words!”

Clarke laughed, remembering back to their first date. “That’s because it sucked so bad, we couldn’t find words to tell you just how much!” She leaned forward to peck away the pout on Lexa’s lips. “Aw…but I do miss your ‘little dude’…”

Lexa rolled over her, wiping her tears clean. “You okay?”

Clarke inhaled; catching the faint scent of the cologne that she loved so much mingled with the smell of the sea water. “Yea… I am now…”

***

Their last day on the island was filled with relaxing activities to prepare them for their lengthy trip back home. The morning began with massages and a yoga session (which Lexa grouchily attended). Lunch was held at the beach, followed by a brief lounge by the ocean and then a boat ride to a nearby island for pictures and desserts. Upon returning to their villa, they packed and readied themselves for their last meal in the Maldives, which they prepared together (well, mostly Clarke; Lexa fetched her ingredients and spices and made sure her wine glass was always replenished). Once dinner was over, they changed (Lexa into ripped jeans, brown Timberland boots and a plaid shirt over a white T, while Clarke also wore plaid over a grey V-neck with dark blue skinny jeans and brown booties), for one last stroll by the beach under moonlight.

They walked hand-in-hand, making small conversations and sharing memories of their time together until arriving at their destination. The night, like the one before, was warm and clear. Upon reaching the shore, they noticed many of the resort’s guests gathered around, which they had not expected to come across on such an unusual time.

“I guess everyone had the same idea we did, babe…” Lexa mentioned casually, strolling lazily across the sand, glancing over at the multitude that crowded the beach. “It’s such a nice night… perfect to be out here.”

“Yea… that must be why.” Clarke responded, tugging Lexa toward the center where the crowd circled a canopy. “Hey… look, Lex!”

On closer look, they realized that many carried unlit lanterns; heading towards the edge of the ocean once they had theirs in hand.

“Clarke, they’re sky lanterns! I guess we stumbled upon some sort of event… come on!” And Clarke had no time to respond, in her excitement Lexa dashed for the tent, pulling the blonde with her. “Hurry! Before they run out!”

They ended up getting two, and the joy on Lexa’s face was such that it reminded her of Aden on Christmas morning. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this excited before, babe… it’s super cute.”

Lexa smiled shyly. “They’re sky lanterns! Floating decorations! With candles in them! Candles, Clarke! How can someone not get excited about it!”

Clarke laughed, pulling Lexa to the edge of the ocean where everyone now waited. “Yes, yes and I
The lanterns were heart-shaped and crimson-tinted. It appeared everyone on the island had come out to either witness or participate in the event; couples, employees, people from nearby islands, all gathered in unison upon the brink of the Indian Ocean, waiting for the signal.

“You ready, babe? Got your lighter?” Clarke asked.

“All set! I have a feeling mine will go the highest… looks sturdy enough.” Lexa spoke, analyzing her lantern, checking for flaws. “Yup. This baby is gonna soar to the stratosphere… I just know it.”

A loud, booming voice enhanced by speakers and a megaphone pierced the night. Clarke pulled out her phone, wanting to record the commotion currently unfolding, focusing on Lexa’s childlike grin as she bounced on her heels, ready to part ways with her candle.

“Ladies and Gentlemen! Thank you *ALL* who came out tonight to help us make this a memorable, special moment! Upon my count of three, light your candles! And then on the count of *four*, release them! Is everyone ready?!”

The crowd cheered and clapped in response, anticipating the count and preparing for the moment.

“Alright then! Here… we… go! 1… 2… 3!”

Everyone moved to light their lanterns. Lexa, anxious to get things going, decided to light it on ‘2.’

“Now…1…2…3…4! Release them!”

Clarke continued filming, not bothering lighting hers just yet, watching Lexa bring her arms up and release it, offering the lamp up to the heavens.

“Babe, *look* at it! Ooooooh, it’s kicking *ASS*!” She exclaimed, her eyes never detaching from it. “Go, little lantern… go, little lantern…”

Hundreds of lights filled the air, casting warm glows down at the people who watched from below and over the ocean as they began to scatter and travel on its own accord. Lexa watched, mesmerized, her eyes twinkling along to the lanterns above.

“Wow… it’s so beautiful…” She whispered, admiring the view. “How many do you think there are?”

Clarke lifted her gaze upwards, wiggling her hand into Lexa’s and immersing herself into the moment just as Lexa had done. “Nine hundred and ninety-nine… to be precise.”

Lexa tore her eyes away, amazed and surprised the blonde had known the detail. “How’d you know? Did you see it on a flyer somewhere…?”

Clarke shook her head, still watching the candles float, claiming the air and sea. “I *know*… because that’s how many I requested…” She looked at Lexa then, the expression on the brunette’s face attesting she wasn’t following. Lifting her arm, she showed the brunette the lantern she had yet to release. “Well… I requested *one thousand* lanterns… this one being the thousandth.”

Lexa blinked a few times, trying to push past her own puzzlement. “I… I don’t understand…”

Clarke smiled, facing her, bringing Lexa’s hand to her lips and placing a kiss across her knuckles. “*If that day ever happens, I’ll surprise you with a thousand candles…*” Clarke quoted herself, mind
reversing to the night of their first date. “Do you remember, Lex? Our first date… when we were at dinner? You shared your candle obsession with me then…” Clarke smiled, catching a mild recognition begin to unfold in Lexa’s eyes. “You said I’d fall for you eventually… you guaranteed the day would come. And that… was my response to you…”

“…I don’t know if today is exactly that day… I think I’ve known for a while now, but could never bring myself to face it.” Clarke continued, forcing herself not to fall victim to the tears that threatened to spill with every word she spoke. “You’ve done… so much for me and Aden… you’ve constantly placed me before everything and everyone else, even at the expense of your own feelings… even knowing this could all blow up in your face at any moment…”

Lexa was tearing up now, and Clarke found it that much more difficult to keep hers under control. “Last night… I lied to you when I said I had nothing to offer…” Lexa shut her eyes, in complete disbelief at what was happening. “Because I do, Lexa…” Clarke admitted, cocking her head to the side, sighing… finally… “My heart, Alexandria Mae Woods, belongs to you.” Almost there, Clarke… let it out… it’s time… “I love you.” She spoke in a shaky breath; her words trembling along with the rest of her. “I love you… so, so much!”

And Lexa, upon hearing the three little words she had been yearning to hear since ages ago, moved forward, connecting her lips to Clarke and tasting the words that still lingered on her tongue. Nothing… felt this good… this powerful.

“I love you too, Clarke… Always have.”

Together, they lit the last remaining lantern and released it, watching it climb steadily to join its brothers and sisters that still floated in the air. They watched it until it began its decent into the ocean. They watched it until all had departed and only they remained. They watched it until the last lantern of the night sky, the last surviving candle, slowly landed upon the sea bed and the fire extinguished.

“Promise… that no matter what happens… we’ll always have each other.” Clarke spoke, shifting closer to Lexa in the sand, enjoying the stillness and darkness of the night.

“I promise.” Lexa responded firmly. “Always and forever, Clarke.”

Chapter End Notes

:D

As always we would love to hear and read all of your comments!!!
We hope you all enjoyed this little slice of our Clexa heaven <3

Don't forget to comment and leave your kudos for us,
& as always come chat with us on Twitter!

@TaJat07 @ Silver_Snake222

P.s. We can't draw AND we'd love nothing more than a drawing of this last scene. Anyone out there talented enough?? We will give you credit and lots of invisible hugs!!! (& it will serve us as a souvenir to remind us of this story for many years to come even after its completed.)
IT FEELS SOOOO GOOD TO BE BACK GUYS!!!
I know it's been a long, long, long time but Chapter 13 is finally here!!

SilverSnake and I just want to start off by saying a huge THANK YOU to all of you from the bottom of our hearts. The amount of messages, tweets, comments, and support that we have received since the last update has been absolutely incredible and we are both so so so grateful for each and every single one of you.

Thank you for being so patient with us, while we took our time writing and developing this incredible chapter. Unfortunately life came rushing in at us and both of our schedules got insanely busy after posting Chapter 12 preventing us from sitting down and writing this sooner. It literally took us the entire time we've been gone for us to get it done, but we finally finished it and let me just say you guys are in for a treat! This chapter blew both of us away and we cannot wait to see what you all think of it.

The story is coming to an end, with only 2 final chapters left... unfortunately our schedules are still pretty much the same, and I don't think they will get any better. However, we do promise to slowly but surely get them out to you guys as soon as we can! We will write any chance that we get, and see that this story reaches the end we've been planning for it for a very long time.

Thank you again for following along, for all your patience, motivation, and for loving this story just as much as we do.

We love you all and here is The Silver Lining!

xxTaJat & SilverSnake

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Six Months Later…

“Jesus, kid, you need to start laying off them cupcakes,” Lexa panted out in a staggered breath, swaying slightly off balance as she stepped closer to the eight-foot pine tree. For such a scrawny boy, Aden was surprisingly heavy. “Hurry up before Clarke catches us.”

Aden huffed, shifting uncomfortably on her shoulders as he stretched out his arms, straining to reach his target. “A little more to the left, Lex…” he groaned, leaning forward until his stomach pressed against the back of her head. “That’s it. Now… a little to the right.”

“Aden! Just plop that thing up there!” Lexa was now nose-to-nose with a rather prickly branch, one careless step away from piercing an eyeball.

“No, it has to be perfect!” Aden explained, twisting to get a better angle. “This is the most crucial Christmas decoration. It requires patience and precision… and you moving a little more to the right.”

“Well, you’re precisely five seconds away from getting your ass tossed to the floor. Hurry!”
It took a few more unsuccessful attempts, and a rather intimate moment with a frisky branch rubbing against her crotch, for Aden to finally position the star ornament atop the tree.

“Got it!” he said eventually. In her relief, she took a step backwards far too quickly, a rash movement Aden was not prepared for. “Whoa, Lex! Shi~”

And then he was gone. A blur of blonde hair streaked past her line of vision before it was consumed by the tree in front of them. The clash was obscenely loud. Consisting of clattering ornaments – a mixture of plastic, wooden, and glass – as they smashed against hardwood floor mingled with the pained cries of a boy being jabbed and poked by branches and Christmas lights.

“Uh, Aden?”

Aden thrashed relentlessly, attempting to free himself from the tree’s unyielding grasp. “Help me! Ah! It’s poking me in the butt! Get me out!”

Perhaps Lexa should have felt guilty.

Perhaps she should have felt worried.

Yet the only rational reaction that occurred to her at that precise moment was to very slowly slip her phone out of her back pocket.

And while withholding a serious giggle, she began to not-so-secretly Snapchat the entire damn thing.

“What’s going on in there!” Clarke shouted from the kitchen. Lexa immediately heard the unmistakable sound of rushed footsteps nearing the living room, where they had been decorating the tree.

“Fuck. Aden, be quiet.” She reached forward and after grasping a handful of Aden’s shirt, she tugged the kid free and set him down beside her just as Clarke appeared in the entryway.

The blonde scanned the disarray that spanned out across the living room floor in disbelief. Leave it to Lexa and her brother to uncover a way to transform a task as simple as ornamenting a Christmas tree into a death-defying ordeal.

“What happened here?” Clarke’s eyes roamed over Aden’s ruffled appearance – hair disheveled slightly more than usual, with pine tree needles protruding from every square inch of his clothes. Lexa was grinning forcefully, throwing Clarke that ‘huh? whatchu mean?’ look that entirely gave her away.

“Nothin’.” The guilt-ridden pair responded instantaneously, shrugging the question off in a casual dismissal.

“Uh-huh…” Clarke narrowed her eyes suspiciously, but decided to let them off the hook this time. She had dedicated the better part of her morning working on an obscenely sophisticated, highly anticipated portrait for a loyal client and she was too enveloped in her work to be distracted by Lexa’s and Aden’s shenanigans. “A, you need to start getting ready for practice. Lexa’s taking you since I have to finish this painting. But clean this mess up first, both of you.”

Once the mess had been dealt with, Aden dashed up the stairs to ready himself for soccer and Lexa sought out Clarke, swerving carefully around the countless easels and canvases that littered the hallway to the kitchen. She swore their numbers multiplied with each passing day.
“You know,” she spoke softly as she approached a concentrated Clarke who chewed mechanically at the end of a paintbrush, “you have a serious problem going on with your painting equipment. I fear one day I will enter this house and find you and the blondie upstairs buried under a pile of canvases and paint.”

Clarke chuckled lightly, reconnecting the fuzzy end of the brush to the painting. “It’s only a temporary arrangement until I can either: A) Showcase my finished paintings at Richter’s gallery or, B) Open one myself. Richter is already holding thirty of my paintings and I feel guilty asking him for more display space. He’s already helped so much…”

Lexa hugged her then, pressing her front to Clarke’s back and watching her work over her shoulder. “He’s a smart man. Your work brings him business, which in turn brings in money. People love your art, babe. Which is why I think you are ready to sever ties and start your own gallery. I mean, you already have everything going for ya. Loyal clients, enough paintings completed to fill an entire warehouse. Not to mention the experience you’ve gained from working with Richter these past six months. I think you’re beyond ready for that next step, beautiful.”

Clarke pondered her words for a moment. The idea wasn’t a new one. Lexa, and many of her friends, had made the same suggestion many times previously, and not unreasonably so. Everything her peers and lover had been saying was true. She was ready. Yet the part of her that hesitated and prevented her from acting on that principle spoke of one underlying reality that no one could really understand except her.

She was afraid.

Richter had coached her and to a certain extent, carried her up until now. Her paintings were selling at a higher pace than she had ever dreamed they would, reeling in a nice sum of income that entirely allowed her to fully focus on her art and not worry about much else. Her name was slowly being exposed to important characters in the industry and to art moguls that had even contacted her directly with enticing offers and new partnership deals.

Clarke Griffin was developing into the artist she had always fantasized of being. Her goal so unbelievably near, it was palpable. Any alterations to her path, any changes made at this crucial yet still unstable point, could ruin everything she had been working for.

“Maybe so,” she responded breathily, putting down the brush and twisting in her stool to face Lexa. “But I still have a lot to learn. For now, it’s wiser to stay with Richter. At least for a little while longer.”

Lexa didn’t have to question her motives for an answer she already knew and understood. Instead, she leaned and captured her girlfriend’s lips with her own. It was a simple privilege Lexa never took for granted, and one she took frequent advantage of.

“And you? How you holding up, my love?” Clarke asked her once they parted. “Big day coming up soon. How’s the speech coming along?”

Lexa coiled at the very mention of said event. The Wood’s Inc. Annual Holiday Party was approaching at a velocity much faster than she felt prepared for, especially when she had been made aware by Titus that he would be officially stepping down as CEO at the party and passing the baton over to her. Sure, sounds lovely and simple in theory, which is exactly what she thought at first. At least until there was mention of her accepting said baton in front of a thousand spectators, and consummating the legality of her position as official CEO by gracing everyone with a ten-minute speech.
She gulped. “Uh, well. I-it’s, you know, going…” she tried brushing off the question with a shrug, moving around Clarke to fetch a glass of water. “Oh! I was thinking we could do dinner with An and Raven tonight? Go out somewhere? Want me to set it up?”

“Stop trying to change the subject,” Clarke caught the dodge. “Look… tonight, after dinner, you and I will sit down and work on that speech together, ok? No more procrastinating. The party is next weekend and you are running out of time.”

Lexa nodded her agreement. “Ok, yea. Argh, you know I’m not good in front of crowds, Clarke!” Lexa conceded, a single nudge from Clarke enough to cause her to unburden herself. “I’ve been panicking about it ever since Titus told me. I mean, why can’t John do it? Everyone loves John! He’s a better speech giver than I am! And tell me why this even needs to be a public thing? Why can’t Titus just do this in private? It’s absurd! I swear he still gets a kick out of embarrassing me. Just to think… the other day I was trying to be nice and recommend a few places that cater to hair regrowth on men like him. Trying to get him to look good, maybe then he can land a date and quit bugging me on a—”

“He shaves his head, babe,” Clarke sighed, shaking her head. “You probably insulted him even more without knowing it.”

Lexa blinked for a few seconds, considering that possibility. “That would explain the sudden shift in his attitude and the piles and piles of paperwork he left on my desk when I got back from lunch.”

“Maybe now is not the best time to tell you that the event will be televised and there will be reporters there…?” Clarke swore she wasn’t going to mention anything to Lexa, yet keeping it a secret as she had been for the past few days since she learned the detail herself just seemed cruel.

“NO! Definitely NOT the best time to—what!”

“John told me,” Clarke explained, gazing up at the appalled brunette with an apologetic look. “Apparently it was Titus who invited them. But, hey, this changes nothing, babe. You will be fine. I’ll help you.”

Internally, Lexa was ready to explode. If there was a monumental level of pressure on her before, it was unbearable now. But she said nothing. The truth of the matter was undeniably simple… she was fucked regardless.

“Set it up with Ray and An. Maybe somewhere chill for dinner?” Clarke unsuccessfully tried to redirect Lexa’s train of thought. “You guys need to leave now or else Aden will be late. See you tonight, babe.”

After a parting kiss, Lexa maneuvered once again around the scattered finished and incomplete paintings, reaching the stairs just as Aden skipped down to the landing.

“Lex! I almost forgot the letter!” he called to her, not stopping to explain but heading straight for the Christmas tree. She followed behind, watching as he carefully, and with almost surgical precision, stuck a folded paper in between two branches.

“What letter, kid?” she asked, not following.

“Santa’s letter! You know, the one you told me to write a few days ago? Of all the things I want so Santa doesn’t miss anything,” he said, throwing her a radiant smile. “Took me a few days but… I finally know what I want!”

Lena nodded, ruffling his hair and pushing him toward the front door. “That’s great, A. I’m sure
Santa will give you everything on it. Now, go put on your cleats. We’re already running late.”

With one more hopeful smile plastered on his face, he ran out of sight in pursuit of his shoes.

Lexa used the moment alone to gauge the letter. Curious, she carefully lifted it from the branches and opened the folds. Aden’s handwriting now freely displayed – sloppy and slanted, and crafted in a rush.

Dear Santa,

I hope you are well.

I have had the most incredible year. It’s been loads of fun!

I don’t want any toys. So, can you please give my share over to Harper? Her full name is Harper McIntyre. Thanks!

I do have one wish. I have been wishing for it for many years now, but it hasn’t come true yet.

Can you please bring my mommy back? I wish I could tell you where she is, but I haven’t spoken to her in a while.

Sorry if this is a lot of work, but if anyone can find her and bring her to us, it’s you.

Thank you in advance, Mr. Claus! Love you!

Sincerely,

Aden Griffin

P.S. You know what, maybe a puppy would be nice.

Just as carefully as before, Lexa refolded the letter and returned it to its spot before making her way to the front door where Aden was waiting.

Her expression betraying nothing of the plans her mind secretly plotted.

***

Lexa gulped down the chilled liquid in an unnerving need to quench her inner turmoil. The Los Angeles Conference Center was buzzing with live music and conversation, and she had been demanded by Titus to play hostess and entertain the constant influx of guests that poured in. It would have been a simple enough matter to attend to if not for the inescapable knowledge of the approaching speech that was eating away at her bit by torturous bit.

She flagged down a wide eyed waitress carrying a tray of champagne flutes and distributing it to the guests, grabbing two from it and tossing them back before anyone (*cough couch* Titus… and maybe, possibly Clarke) could see or say anything.

She was, as usual, almost successful.

“Something tells me that isn’t apple cider you got there.”

She mentally cursed herself for not being more discreet and turned to catch her girlfriend lifting a questioning eyebrow at her. Clarke, to Lexa’s unpleasant realization over the course of the past few months, had the unnerving talent of catching her amid something slightly questionable, usually
ending in Lexa pleading for mercy. So, already guessing how this infraction would play out, she lowered her eyes and sighed in surrender.

“I’m nervous. Thought the alcohol could help take some of the edge off a bit,” Lexa said. Clarke was holding a flute of her own, which she surprisingly passed over to Lexa without hesitation.

“I know,” Clarke said, smiling to prove to Lexa her gesture was no trick. “You’ll do fine, babe. We practiced all week and you killed it. Just remember what we talked about and you will do great. It will be over before you know it, I promise.”

Lexa nodded but didn’t respond. Ten minutes may not seem like an overwhelming figure yet to her, in her current rattled state, it might as well have been hours. She leaned for a kiss and excused herself to the restrooms, her go-to place when she felt the need to gather herself in private, away from prying eyes.

She took a minute to watch her reflection through the bathroom’s mirror; paying close attention to the dark rim that had formed around her overcast eyes. There was nothing in herself, she thought, that portrayed or even mimicked the physique and character of a CEO. She appeared to be already too defeated and weakened to be anything other than what she saw now, an illusion. A shadow of something, or rather someone, she longed to be yet never could. She was startled when she saw a tear run down her reflection’s pale cheek. Lexa didn’t recall feeling the need to cry.

“I know what you’re doing.” Her eyes flicked over to the bathroom’s door, where John stood with both hands stuffed into his suit’s pockets. “And as your trustworthy advisor I come bearing some trustworthy advice.”

Lexa chuckled. “Murphy, this is the Ladies’ room. And unless you’re here to tell me you’ll do my speech for me, there’s really no advice that will make me feel better right now.”

John strolled in a little further, completely unfazed by the fact that he indeed was in the Women’s bathroom. “I beg to differ, Woods. See… as much as I’d love to stand up on that podium and accept the honor that Titus is about to bestow upon you on your behalf, it is not my place. It’s gotta be you.”

John spoke with a certain finalization that made Lexa lock eyes with his frosty blues via the mirror. “It’s always been you. It’s fate, Lexa.”

Lexa wasn’t sure how to process. That kind of providential advice not only confounded her, it also silenced her. So, she merely nodded.

“I know it sounds farfetched,” John continued once he sensed her hesitation, “but I think you’ll soon realize that fate sometimes plays a huge part in our lives. Tonight is bigger than just a ten-minute speech. Tonight… is about you coming face-to-face with your present, past, and future. It’s about fulfilling your parent’s legacy while also creating your own. So don’t hide away from it, Lexa. Don’t let fear or pressure subdue you from this accomplishment. You have earned this. You deserve this. So go up there tonight and take what is rightfully yours.”

That simple truth wasn’t difficult for Lexa to understand, yet still… “And if I fail? If I make a fool out of myself and drive the company to shit? What if I, instead of honoring them, tarnish their good name and everything they worked for? What then!”

John didn’t move to comfort her, he simply smiled his calm, confident smile that had a rather comforting effect all on its own. “You won’t.”

“How can you be so sure? You may be a genius when it comes to business and strategy, John, but not even you can predict the future.”
John shrugged, his way of agreeing with the accuracy of her statement. “I just know, Lexa. Call it... a gift.”

He didn’t wait around for her to continue her interrogation, and with a graceful nod, he exited much the same way he had entered, in poise and silence.

Lexa stayed behind a moment longer. It didn’t take her long to realize that John had never once been wrong or mistaken about any of his advised suggestions. In fact, he had been the exact opposite about all of it, as if he truly could tap into some unforeseen and unreachable part of destiny and withdraw all he needed from it. Obviously that was not the case, yet Lexa couldn’t help but trust him. Couldn’t help but believe that Murphy, for better or worse, was always conveniently correct.

She straightened herself and after a few enlightening minutes, she strolled out to confront the calling that awaited her.

Whatever that was to be.

***

“Ten bucks she chokes within the first ten seconds,” Raven leaned into Anya, stretching out a hand. “Deal?”

“What kind of pointless bet is that?” Anya responded. “Look at her! She looks about as good as you did when you passed that kidney stone two months ago.”

Aden, standing with a bowl of chocolate ice cream next to Anya, snickered at the rather accurate comment. Sure enough, Lexa appeared to be beyond consolation where she stood at the far end of the stage. Clarke was there, attempting to soothe her stage fright, but it seemed a futile effort. Even from a distance, Aden could practically hear her teeth grinding from harbored anxiety.

Two raps against the microphone brought the room to total muteness as every pair of eyes shifted to the stage. Titus stood with relative ease just behind the podium, gauging his spectators with a curiosity that conveyed both awe and admiration. After waiting a few more milliseconds, he breeched the heavy silence with a speech he had ardently waited nearly two decades to deliver.

“It is with great honor, and great happiness, that I stand before you all today officially retired.” There was a round of cheers and applause from the audience, to which Titus kindly accepted with a smile and a nod. “Yet tonight is not about me or my past endeavors. Tonight... is about continuing a legacy that at one point, was thought to be lost. Tonight, is about honoring the memory of our company’s founders by looking enthusiastically to the future. Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, is not about concluding an era, but about the beginning of a new one. Or rather... the continuation of an epoch that was almost extinguished one ill-fated, abysmal night fifteen years ago. Except, it wasn’t. Alexandria Woods -- yes, I’m sure most of you have heard the name.”

Laughter exploded across the hall, mixed with scattered claps and cheers. “For those of you unacquainted with the individual, let me try and paint you a better picture of the many titles bestowed upon her throughout her life.” Titus began to pace up and down the stage, scanning the multitude. “‘Orphan’, ‘Alcoholic’, ‘Womanizer’, ‘Delinquent’, and ‘High School Dropout’ are a few of her more infamous titles that plagued her from early life until just very recently. Yes, it is no secret that the offspring of our beloved founders had rather questionable tastes. But, as I have mentioned earlier, tonight is not about focusing on the past but rather the present and the future. So, how about we become better acquainted with some of her newer titles? Some of which consist of ‘Recovered-Alcoholic’, ‘GED Holder’, ‘In a Relationship (and yes, it is a monogamous one)’, ‘College Graduate’, ‘Heroine’, and to many, including a young boy of ten, an ‘Idol’.” Titus pulled an
envelope that had been hidden within the podium, and flaunted it to the crowd. "And because I am a man that believes in second-chances and the human spirit, effective tonight she will also be known as ‘Chief Executive Officer’ of Woods, Inc. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with irrefutable pleasure that I present you our newest CEO, Alexandria Woods."

At the corner of the stage, at the farthest possible end, Clarke was seen nudging a stunned Lexa to action, and she staggered forward, stalled for a moment, before regaining her courage and hardening her steps. She offered Titus a hand to express her gratitude and acceptance, but the man stunned her further when he skipped the hand and pulled her into a long overdue embrace. The envelope was then handed to her, along with a tap across her back. It took her a moment to regain her ability to hear, and she wondered how long the crowd had been clapping and cheering, because they still continued to do so. All she could hear, echoing in her mind, resounding in her ear canals, was the speech Titus had just given replaying in endless cycles. She felt the weight of the package in her hands, the stack of documents she would need to sign in order to make the title official.

It wasn’t an illusion.

It wasn’t a dream.

It… was real.

And it was suddenly very, very silent.

She tried conjuring her speech to the forefront of her mind. Her practiced, memorized, decorated speech that she had been working on for eight consecutive days. Yet she couldn’t recall it. She had so much to say, so much to justify and explain, so much to promise…

“This thank you…”

Was all she could say when she finally did speak. And with those two words, she allowed herself to expel all the sincerity and honesty she felt erupting within her.

“This thank you.”

***

The metal plate adorning the door’s surface - freshly polished and newly engraved - now showcased a different name, followed by an antique title that pertained only to this particular office.

‘Lexa Woods, CEO’.

John Murphy stood before it with an unimaginable grin, overflowing with continued pride and happiness for the woman that stood somewhere beyond the door. He took another silent moment to admire the sign before ensuing with a gentle knock.

Lexa pulled the door open half-a-second later, grinning wickedly and gasping for air. “Finally! What took you so long?” she asked, not waiting for a response and tugging him into her office by the sleeve of his suit. “What do you think? And be honest… I’m gonna be entertaining clients here.”

John looked around the office, unable to keep his jaw from disconnecting from the upper half of his head. “I see you’ve been decorating…” he said bemused, a somewhat massive understatement. “Exactly how many of Clarke’s paintings have you purchased under that fake pseudonym, Lex?”

He felt Lexa cringe mildly beside him, confirming that the answer would be nothing short of appalling. “Er- well, you know… nothing too crazy. I mean, she is my girlfriend, Murphy! I gotta
support her! A-and it’s not like I’m buying them just for the hell of it, I legit love them all! I don’t want anyone else having them. Here, I will show them each love, and appreciation, and care, an-

“How. Many.” He pressed.

“Eleven,” she responded, eyes averting his gaze in shame.

He paused, counting how many were currently up on the walls of her office. “Wow. Well, as long as you realize that Clarke will eventually find out who Heda2016 really is, I’m all for it. They’re all absolutely stunning.”

A light-bulb seemed to go off in Lexa’s brain. John deduced she was calculating possibilities by the frightened look that she suddenly sported.

“Shit.”

“Didn’t think about that, did ya?” he asked, only too aware.

She shook her head. “And I just ordered five more,” Lexa whispered it out, in astonishment and disbelief. “Well, Heda2016 did.Oops.”

“Just, you know, tell her that her paintings bring you energy and peace, which is why you felt the need to have as many of them around you while you work. And also because it’s as if a piece of her is here with you. Tell her that and you won’t be sleeping on the couch for the next few weeks, I guarantee it.”

Lexa smacked him excitedly on his shoulder, “and that right there,” she gestured to his brain, “is why you’re my right hand man, John.” Lexa moved around her desk, so colossal it extended the entire width of the room. “And it’s also partly the reason why I called you here today.”

She opened a drawer and pulled out a folder, which she proceeded to open and lay out against the desk for him to view. He approached her in his usual serene manner. “Ah! And here I thought you had called me in for styling advice.”

Lexa chuckled, “well, any advice from you is always useful and highly appreciated, but no,” she flipped the neatly stacked pages for him to see what she was trying to communicate. “I called you in, because I need you to sign this.” Lexa dragged her index finger to the bottom of a page, where an oversized ‘X’ stood to the left of a blank line. “It’s all that stands between you and this…”

She held up a door sign that was identical to the one John had been analyzing a few minutes earlier, only it was his name carved eloquently into the polished metal this time. The letters ‘CSO’ stood proudly next to the ‘John Murphy’, and before he could process his thoughts, Lexa interrupted.

“CSO is for Chief Strategy Officer,” Lexa explained. “The stack of papers is your Welcome Packet. You will receive a full benefit package, complemented with monthly and yearly bonuses that are split amongst shareholders and top executives. There are perks to being an executive officer might I add, the main one being a vehicle of your choice, which the company pays for. Oh, and don’t worry, you can still keep the Tesla.” Lexa winked at him, before diving back into her rant. “Also, I’m starting you off with a six-figure salary with a three percent annual raise. May not sound like a lot but trust me, those bonuses and dividends add up! Plus,” she continued, handing him the silver sign with his name on it, “you get to pick out your office. Any floor you want. You’ll get whatever equipment you need as well. Nia is aware of all of this and she’s planning on meeting with you tomorrow morning to help you get settled.”

John stood, much like he had throughout her one-sided conversation, motionless and pensive. He
accepted the plaque in an obligatory fashion; reaching for it to show courtesy and gratefulness. Yet the second his fingers enveloped around its cold, slim frame, there was such a finalization to it, that the weightless object might as well have weighted tons.

With a crumbling smile, he gently placed it back on the table.

“John… it’s yours. It is done. All you have to do is sign.” Lexa, not understanding his reaction, continued. “You’ve earned it, Murphy. You deserve it!”

“No.” The word was more breath than tangible sound, and he knew Lexa was struggling to pick up on it by the tilt of her head and the squint of her eyes. He cleared his throat and this time, made sure to speak more firmly. “No, I don’t deserve it, Lexa.”

“John, that’s not tru—“

“I have a story to tell you,” he interrupted. His gaze drifted elsewhere; everywhere. It was the first time, Lexa noted, that she saw the calm, cool façade John sported falter and crumble. “Once I do, we will return to this topic of ‘my deservingness and worthiness’. Something tells me that by the end of it, you will think dramatically differently of me.”

He saw her open her mouth to object, but the protest immediately dissolved when he politely lifted a hand in request of silence. The journey he was about to hurtle himself into demanded everyone’s undivided attention.

“The fondest memory I have is nearly fifteen years old, and it is still as fresh on my mind as it was all those years ago. I can still, to this very day, recall every minute of that day. It was a day like all others. A trip like all others. Yet I should have known, from the moment my father handed me that radio that it wasn’t. I, being a kid eager to help and assist, ignored all such signs,” he said, in a dream-like tone. “See, my father was a truck driver. He was constantly on the run, driving from one end of the country to the other for a job, only to repeat it again the second it was completed. My mother wasn’t around much. A drug addict I hear, before, during, and I suppose, after I was born.”

“My dad wasn’t too keen on being a father when he first heard the news. He told me my mother was set on having an abortion. But for reasons he himself could not understand, he urged her to keep me, promising her that he’d take full custody if she were to go through with the birth. It took some convincing but she eventually agreed. So, little John was born!” His tone became lighter as he spoke, the same could not be said for the dark expression masked over his face. “From pretty much birth to the age of eight, I was my dad’s right hand man, accompanying him on every journey. We didn’t have a home. When he traveled that much, a house wasn’t a necessity. The truck was our home really. I was small enough to fit up on the bed with him, squeezed between his beer belly and the back of the passenger seat.” Lexa noted the smile that cracked his pale face in two at the uncomfortable, but doting memory. John, however, seemed oblivious to it. “It was nice. It was simple and humble, our little lifestyle. Complemented with greasy dinners off the side of a highway diner, and flat tires after a particularly rough road, and lots and lots of radio chatter and reading maps. I was fluent in truck driver lingo by the age of five, my dad told me. After that, every trip became an adventure.”

He began walking toward a painting at the farthest corner of the room, proceeding to analyze it. It was a distraction, obviously. He needed a moment to gather the courage for this next part.

“That day that seemed much like all others, I was given a walkie-talkie. My dad had never once given me a present. Money was always scarce, and any little amount he was able to collect would go directly to food and other needs. I never complained. I was living a lawless life, free of the normal societal restrictions and duties like school. Best yet, I was living wild with my pops, and to an eight-
year-old kid, that’s absolutely everything. And so was that gift. It was everything. And it wasn’t even new!

He laughed now, moving down the wall to the next painting, his back still to Lexa who studied him curiously from her desk. “He had gotten it from a thrift store. Paid two bucks for it. The cheap-ass. Still… it might as well have been dipped in gold to me. I spent all day and part of the evening playing with it. I have always had an obsession with Extraterrestrial life and I was trying to tap into their secret line and make contact. My pops laughed and cursed at me, but he didn’t mind it. Looking back, he seemed as happy as I was that day. As the dusk weaned into deep night, we were hunting down a safe place to stop for some shut eye. We were rounding a particularly curvy, narrow road when my walkie slipped from my hand and under the seat,” he now moved to the next painting over.

“I remember struggling to reach it. I was very small, and the seatbelt made it impossible for me to grab it. So, I guess mostly from frustration at watching me flail around, my dad decided to just go ahead and dive for it.”

Lexa leaned back against the edge of her desk, her eyes fixated on John’s back, following him with her gaze as though her very being depended on it. For some reason, the story captivated her. Something about it called to her.

“That’s when our normal day transformed into the most tragic day of my life.” John turned, his gaze squaring up with Lexa’s, and there was a message in them that was still far too early to interpret. “In the two god-forsaken seconds that it took my dad to undo his seatbelt and dive under my seat for the walkie, a car appeared. A small car. A car that I immediately saw but my dad didn’t. A car that seconds later collided against my father’s truck.”

Lexa’s eyes widened. Her jaw slackened.

No…

“A car… that carried a family of three. A mom, a dad, and in the backseat, their eight-year-old daughter.”

Lexa’s breathing quickened. Her heart slammed against her ribs.

I-it can’t be…

“The impact caused my dad’s untethered body to fling forward, slamming into the emergency breaks which brought the truck to a sudden stop, but not before it also flung his body out through the windshield and some twenty feet out onto the road, claiming his life, along with the three souls in the other vehicle.”

John paused, scanning the pale face before him. “Or so I thought.”

“I was told no one survived the accident. I was told, even hours later when two police officers found me wandering down that same road in the opposite direction, barefooted and shivering, that I was lucky. That I was fortunate to be alive. Because the same could not be said for the other family. The Woods family, I later discovered. The family that I had a personal hand in annihilating due to a careless mistake.” He couldn’t cry, as much as he wished he could in that instance. “And I went on believing that for a very long time. Nearly fifteen years. That day… was the happiest, and the worst, birthday of my life.”

He became aware of Lexa’s stiff posture and colorless lips, and the way her eyes searched his in a hopeful expectation that everything he had just confessed to be nothing more than a cruel, humorless
“How long?” Lexa asked, in a small, uncertain, raspy voice that barely managed its way to his ears. “How long have you known, John?”

Now, this question made him draw a breath. The context was a little vague, yet somehow he knew exactly what the question was aiming for.

“How long?” he answered. “You told me your name, and it’s as if everything clicked. I didn’t— I wasn’t sure how to tell you. How… do you explain to someone that you are the reason they’re slumping down on a deserted bench, drunk and hopeless? How do you tell a stranger, who just happened to wander into your life without any warning, that the two of you are connected by a devastating event that happened years ago? I couldn’t, Lexa… and I’m deeply sorry. For everything.”

Lexa remained still. Watching. Listening. Forcing herself to breathe even though every gasp of air caused her insides to sizzle. Her hands, conformed into grips that shook violently by her sides, itched for action.

For vengeance.

If not for him, she would still have parents. If not for him, she wouldn’t have suffered the way she did. If not for him… if not for… him.

_Bitter Mini Me_: What are you waiting for! Make him hurt like he hurt you! He’s the cause of everything!

She brought her unsteady hands to her face, pushing the palms into her eyes. It was suddenly unbearable to breathe.

_Bitter Mini Me_: HIT HIM! KICK HIM! KILL HIM! HE DESERVES IT!

Where the hell is good mini me when I need her? She thought.

She was tempted. She felt her pulse quicken and her teeth grit in preparation.

“I… understand your grief. I have carried it with me ever since. Not a day goes by that I don’t think back to that day, to that moment. And what I could have done differently to change it.” John felt the need to speak; to further explain.

_Bitter Mini Me_: He could have died… his mother should have aborted him! He has no right to life when your parents lie in a cold grave because of him!

She gulped. Forcing her palms deeper into her eye sockets. Desperately begging the good and kind inner versions of herself to make an appearance.

They never did.

“I don’t expect you to forgive me. That’s not why I stuck around. I honestly wanted to help, in any way I could, because it was the least I could do. It was the only thing I could do. I wanted nothing more than to see you successful and happy. To give back a little of what I took.”

_Bitter Mini Me_: Just kick him out. You don’t need him. He’s a nobody! He’s useless!

She lowered her hands and lifted her gaze to meet John’s. What she saw in them, was all the answer
she needed. She squared her shoulders, and watched as he slumped his.

“You’re not deserving of forgiveness,” she spoke, leveling her tone to match her stoic expression, “because you have nothing to be forgiven for.”

The protests that erupted from her mini me spread through her like wildfire, but she didn’t submit to it. She pushed through her own barriers; jumped through her inner hurdles, and quelled her own inner doubts. The enemy, she realized, had never been an external entity.

“I used to harbor a lot of hate and anger toward the man that killed my parents. The only thing that would make the situation better, was knowing that he too died for his carelessness,” she said. “Never did I acknowledge that said man also had a family of his own. A child of his own. If I could only have seen that earlier, maybe my life could have gone differently.”

“I don’t blame you, John. My life turned out the way it did because of my choices, and my choices alone. Not you. You… are as much a victim to all this as I am. What happened… was an accident. A horrible, unfortunate accident that yes, I wish could have been avoided. We both lost. We both lived. Our lives have been intertwined since we were both children, whether by fate or misfortune, we will never know. But if there’s one thing I am absolutely certain of, is that you are to remain in my life as I am to remain in yours. We need one another, John. We can accomplish so much more together. I think… in some bizarre way, this was always meant to be. We were meant to find one another.”

Lexa lowered her gaze the second she saw a tear course down his face. She figured it was the guilt departing his soul, or the burden of a fifteen year old curse finally lifting. She understood that sensation well. The feeling of being accepted and loved by someone when you deemed yourself unworthy. Clarke had shown her that. Clarke had given her that. And in some strange way, if not for John, Clarke might never have existed to her.

The silver lining, she thought. She had finally found it.

She used the moment to pull a pen out of her pocket. “So, do us both a favor, and come sign your offer,” she smiled, and it was as liberating as it was authentic, “I can’t do this alone, John.”

***

“Raven, I know you have it! C’mon, I’m begging here!” Lexa pleaded for the hundredth time. “Switch with me! I need it in order for my plan to work!”

“Ok, Lex. Here’s the thing, it’s called Secret Santa for a reason, ‘kay?” Raven twirled on her heels, facing a desperate Lexa who was comically close to crawling on her knees. “Us exchanging our picks sorta defeats that purpose. And I don’t know about you but I take this Christmas Tradition rather seriously. We picked who we picked, and I for one will not betray my beliefs because you just happen to have a hunch that I have the person you want. So save it, slick. I will not reveal my person. No amount of begging or bribery will work on me. I’m an impenetrable fortress, I tell ya, and will not be pressured into- “

“Whoa, whoaaa, babe… let’s think this through a minute, shall we?” Anya interrupted, an idea formulating in her head. “Lex, give us a second. My girl and I need to consult one another regarding your case.”

“You have got to be kidding me…” Lexa sighed in frustration, but stood aside while the pair communicated in loud, obnoxious whispers across the kitchen from her. After a few seconds, it appeared they had finally reached an agreement.
Raven crossed her arms and lifted a brow. “An and I are willing to exchange my person for yours once you agree to a list of demands.”

“Name them,” Lexa spoke through clenched teeth.


“Also, Anya does not want to dress as Santa this year, so you will take her place wearing the costume—“

“Hell no! I hate that fuckin-“

Raven shut her down by wagging a small, wrinkled piece of paper in the air; the piece of paper that held the name she so desired to have. “Nah-uh. You, sir, are in no position to disagree. Understand?”

Reluctantly, Lexa nodded. “Fine! What else?”

“Lastly - and this is Anya’s request - you will have to participate in a family photo for the Christmas card that will be sent out to friends and neighbors. You will do so without complaining and follow her directions without inquiries, capisce?”

Lexa relaxed after hearing the last demand. *Ha! Easy enough! “Deal!”* she blurted out before either one of them could change their mind. “That’s it then? We’re good? Can we switch now?”

Raven and Anya exchanged a brief, but satisfied look that should have been enough of a warning to Lexa. Upon hearing the confirmation, Anya dashed out of the kitchen toward the basement that Raven and herself had been cohabiting for the past few months. “Alright Woods,” Raven walked over to her, passing her the crumpled paper and taking the one Lexa handed her. “You got yourself a deal, kid.”

Lexa unfolded the paper; a smile splitting her face in two the second her eyes scanned over the name written messily on it.

‘Clarke’.

She had only a fragment of a second to enjoy the sensation, because right at that moment, Anya strutted back into the kitchen, carrying a makeup bag in one hand and a bright magenta, sweet-sixteen gown decked in sparkly beads in the other. Her jaw instantly dropped.

“Time to get ya all dolled up, Princess Lexa,” Anya said mockingly. “Indra will be home any minute now and we gotta get you ready for that family photo op.”

It finally dawned on Lexa that she had walked right into one of Raven’s and Anya’s carefully crafted traps. She sighed. “I hate you. I hate both of you.”

***

“Babe, where are you? You said you were going to be an hour and it’s been two!” Clarke hissed into her iPhone, monumentally pissed that Lexa was *Missing-In-Action* the night of Christmas Eve, right as they prepared to reveal their Secret Santa’s. “We’re all *waiting* on you! Aden is about ready to have a premature heart attack from anticipation.”

The line crackled, and Lexa’s voice seeped into her ear apologetically. Clarke noted there was a
slight heaviness to it as well, more so than usual, but she decided it wasn’t enough to bring her concern. “Sorry, beautiful. The task took longer than expected,” Lexa said. “I’ll be there in twenty.”

Clarke nodded, momentarily forgetting that Lexa couldn’t see her. “Is everything alright? You sound different.”

There was a heavy silence that lingered after her question; drawn out to the point of discomfort and… she thought, suspicion? “Lex?”

“Everything’s fine, babe.”

Clarke picked up on the smile in Lexa’s tone, which soothed her prior worries. “I’m on my way. Don’t start without me, okay?”

Again, Clarke nodded. “Duh. Hurry home, love.”

Lexa disconnected seconds later. Staring at the fading screen of her phone until Clarke’s name became shrouded by blackness.

“Thank you… for doing this…” The voice, docile and humble, lured her back. Lexa nodded her response to the woman that sat in the passenger seat of her Audi. “I don’t – I’ll never be able to repay you. For everything.”

Lexa once again wondered if she was making the right decision; if the ends justified the means. The judge to that question none other than the same individual that held her heart in her bare hands, with the power to caress it or crush it in equal measures.

She knew this could all easily explode in her face.

She knew she might be making an irreversible, unrepairable error.

Still, she knew that for better or worse, the potential reward was worth the risk.

“No, thank me just yet,” Lexa said. “This isn’t over. Not yet.”

She drove off in silence once the woman stepped out, forcing herself to swallow the bitterness that coated her tongue.

***

“Ok, ok… so, my Secret Santa is an obnoxious, loud-mouth, irritating little turd that—“

“It’s ME! It’s ME!” Aden bounced up from his seat, too excited to wait for the rest of Raven’s overly-obvious description. “I’m the annoying little turd!”

Everyone that gathered exploded in laughter, including Clarke (after giving Raven a threatening glance, of course).

“Um, rules of the game states that you’re supposed to make the revelation slightly more challenging than that, Reyes,” Octavia reminded her. “That was a dead give-away.”

“Well, the fact that you were staring directly at Bellamy while you spoke was also a dead giveaway,” Raven reciprocated with a tilt to the head. Octavia had been shocked that everyone had guessed so quickly. “That, and the ginormous tag you glued to the gift that read ‘TO BELLAMY’, dumbass…”

“RAVEN, focus! My gift… where is it?!” Aden tugged on her dress to regain her attention. “Getting
a little impatient here!”

“Jeez, don’t soil your undies, kid…” Raven walked over to the fifteen-foot Christmas tree poised elegantly by the raging living-room fire. She fussed around the countless gifts until finally coming across the one she sought. “Here.”

Aden was… vastly disappointed. He had expected it to be the big, rectangular box tucked away behind the tree. But what Raven handed him now was a pathetic comparison.

“A… card?” he asked, confused. “Is that it?” he took it, unsure what to do with it.

“Oh! No, of course that’s not it…” Raven said, a grin re-growing across Aden’s face upon watching her dig into the pile of gifts once again, “Ah-ha! Here it is.”

His smile once again plunged. “A… pen?”

“Yup. Good quality stuff too, kid. You’re welcome.”

Aden, holding back tears, opened the card with a pout potentially visible from space. He hoped there would be money, at the very least, within its folds.

Alas, to add onto his disappointment, there was none. There were letters. Lots and lots of letters. Letters he didn’t feel like reading. He sniffed.

“But… I thought you loved me…” he threw Raven his best puppy-dog look.

Raven huffed. “Brat, read the damn card! I need your signature.”

Aden perked up. “Oh.”

Flipping it over once again, he proceeded to read it. Out-loud.

“‘Disclaimer’,” he started, shooting Raven a glance, “the item I am about to receive was provided by Raven Reyes however, I will not hold her accountable for any future incidents or problems that may arise from said item. Raven Reyes is not to be a liable party and therefore, not to be blamed for any unfortunate, annoying, unpredictable situations. I, Aden Griffin, understand and accept the terms of the agreement…” he glanced over at Raven once again, fully perplexed. “Um. So I need to sign this?”

Raven nodded, observing as he signed his sloppy trademark at the bottom of the card. “Good. Now… go and have Clarke sign it as well.”

“Er, why?”

“Because, as his legal guardian, you are to be held equally accountable.”

“No way in hell I’m signing that thing without knowing what you-”

“SIGN THE DAMN CARD, CLARKE! OR DO YOU WANT YOUR BABY BROTHER TO DIE OF DESPAIR?” Aden thrust the card at her, pleading with his eyes.

“Jeez… fine!”

Once Raven was satisfied, she nodded over to Anya, who briskly walked out of the room. When she returned, she wasn’t alone. She held a small, furry, wiggly, caramel-colored creature in her arms that quickly became the center of attention.
Aden’s eye lit up brighter than all the lighting on the Christmas tree.

“A puppy!” he squealed. Anya gently placed the small furball down on the floor, and as if by a predestined connection, the puppy hurtled clumsily toward the blonde-haired boy. “Oh my gosh, you got me a puppy!”

Clarke was ready to protest with some very grotesque words but the second she saw Aden crouch and lift the friendly puppy into his arms, smiling and laughing as his face was thoroughly licked, she swallowed it. She supposed a puppy would be an ideal addition to their little family. Aden had earned that. Aden deserved that.

“Here,” Raven handed him a plastic bag and paper towels, “he poo’ed in Lexa’s room. Go clean it.”

“What! You hid him in my room?”

“Yea… he loved your bed. Made himself very cozy there,” Anya said nonchalantly, shrugging her shoulders. “He barfed on it too.”

“He did what!”

“Lexa… you’re ruining the kid’s moment here…”

“Aden, now… a puppy is a big responsibility, child,” Indra walked over, petting the puppy. “First and foremost, you need to give him a name. Have you any ideas?”

Aden scrounged his face up in deep thought, looking profoundly into the round, chestnut eyes of the puppy as though he searched its soul for an indication. Suddenly, he smiled broadly.

“Yea… I do actually,” he said.

“Nemo. His name will be Nemo.”

The night continued with more laughter, reveals, and nonstop flow of wine, food, and holiday music. Nemo and Aden all but ditched the rest of the crew in pursuit of an intense game of fetch around the mansion, one Indra closely monitored.

Lexa wasn’t one bit surprised at discovering that she was Anya’s Secret Santa. Nor was she surprised to have received deodorant and a pair of socks as a gift.

“Wow, so thoughtful,” she said, tossing the socks at Anya who grinned mischievously. “Jackass.”

“Love you too, baby cuz,” Anya responded proudly.

Lexa strolled to the tree pulling a small, square box that fit perfectly on her palm.

“My Secret Santa…” she started, making sure to keep her expression blank and her eyes in motion, never settling on anyone in particular, “is someone that…”

However, there was no way to be discreet, she figured. Not when the pool of possible candidates that had yet to be acknowledged consisted of John, Bellamy, and lo and behold, Clarke herself. So, she decided a direct route would be best here.

“Alright, my Secret Santa is Clarke,” she fessed, immediately blushing when everyone began to ‘aw’ and make kissy faces; Clarke bit down on her lip to contain her smile. “I’m sure most of you had
already figured that out by now. Babe,” she now spoke to Clarke, “you know I love you more than anything and, well, I want to give you the world, one piece of it at a time. This box here is only one small part of it.” Clarke stood and made her way to Lexa, wrapping her arms around her neck and pulling her down for a kiss. “I hope you like it.”

Clarke took the box and shook it. “Hm, it’s a little light, babe.” She joked, undoing the wrapping. Inside, was a leather blindfold. “Um, definitely wasn’t expecting that.”

Raven snickered next to Anya. “Oh, snap! It’s about to get Fifty Shades of Kinky up in here.”

Lexa threw her a scalding glare, taking the blindfold from Clarke’s hand. “No, that’s not what it’s for! Here,” she spun Clarke, slipping the blindfold over her eyes. “Trust me, babe?”

The blonde nodded before Lexa finished the question.

“Take my hand.”

She carefully led Clarke toward the front door and down the front steps of the mansion. Excited whispers and rushed footsteps followed along, and Lexa expected there to be a crowd for this. Even Indra, Aden and Nemo materialized next to her.

And as if on cue, an array of whistles and gasps of awe exploded behind her the second the reason for Lexa’s secrecy became apparent.

“What! What is it?” Clarke, upon hearing the reaction, began to fidget. “Lex, tell me!”

Slowly, Lexa undid her blindfold. Clarke’s unfocused eyes adjusted a few seconds later, zoning right at the object of everyone’s attention. “Oh, Lexa…”

Parked in front of her, was a brand new, Royal Blue Audi Q7 SUV. A big, red bow decorated its elegant hood. “The key’s in the ignition,” Lexa commented, squeezing Clarke’s hand. “Merry Christmas, babe.”

Clarke remained speechless for a few moments, shaking her head in disbelief. “Lexa, Papa Smurf—“

“Papa Smurf served you well,” Lexa took over, guiding her to the vehicle. “You need something reliable. A decent car that won’t break down every other day.”

“Lex, I don’t need—“

“Babe, please just accept my gift? Don’t argue with me on this. It’s a safe car, with a ton of airbags and great tire traction. Its got a camera, automatic breaking system, side-mirror indicators, and most importantly, functioning seatbelts.” She earned a light chuckle from Clarke, and knew she had won her over with that comment alone. “I worry sick every time you and Aden get into Papa Smurf. I know you love that car, but please start using this one? Please? Pretty please?”

“Okay,” Clarke sighed her agreement, following with a kiss. Aden dashed ahead of them and pulled open the passenger door, exploring the interior and the plush seats. Nemo followed suit, jumping in after Aden and claiming the backseat for a nap. “Hey!”

“Oh, this is totally unfair,” Octavia mumbled in the background, crossing her arms and pouting. “I thought we agreed to keep gifts under a twenty-dollar limit!”
The following day, after a lavish Christmas lunch and more exchange of presents, Clarke gathered Aden and Nemo and the countless other gifts Lexa had showered them with and placed them in her new car. Aden, exhausted from opening and playing with all his new toys, collapsed on the backseat, Nemo cuddling up against him.

“I’ve never seen him this happy,” Clarke mentioned, snuggling into Lexa. “Although you definitely went overboard with the presents.”

“Nonsense,” Lexa said, leaning forward to buckle Aden and Nemo in. “There is no such thing as too many gifts, Clarke. He’s a kid! He needs to be spoiled senseless every now and then. My kids will most definitely not want for anything, I tell ya.”

The comment made Clarke pause. “You… want kids?” she asked, cognizant of how serious Lexa’s expressions suddenly became.

“Oh, er- well, yea, I guess…” Lexa responded awkwardly. “I mean, I love kids. And I guess I’ve always wanted a little one of my own. Well, ya know, as in my partner and I. Together. I-if she wants! If not, dogs are great too! O-or cats… you know what, we don’t even have to have anything that moves, trees and plants are also fun! And when I say we, I don’t mean we – as in you and I! Because I don’t want to make you think I’m putting any sort of pressure on you, or anything, ‘cuz I’m not! I’m happy as long as you’re happy, you know,” Lexa rubbed her nape, her discomfort so obvious, it made Clarke smile. “But, just out of curiosity, do you… want kids?”

Clarke thought about her question a moment, and then nodded. “Very much so. Hopefully one day, with the right person.”

The hope that flooded Lexa’s eyes was so intoxicating, so transparent and inviting, that Clarke had to distract herself to keep her soul from crumbling with the gush of emotions. “You know what, I almost forgot…” she said, rummaging in her purse and pulling out a wrapped, square-shaped item. “Anya wasn’t wrong when she said it’s impossible to buy someone that already has everything a gift.”

She handed the package to Lexa. “It’s from Aden and I. it’s not much, but we hope you like it.”

“Babe, I told you… you didn’t have to get me anything.”

“I know, I know. We just wanted to give you something too.”

Lexa undid the wrapping, exhaling soundly once the object came into display. It was a picture frame. Produced from white gold with intricate details marked into the corners. At it’s center was a picture. A selfie of her, Clarke and Aden, taken two months earlier during a spontaneous camping trip to the northern mountains. Lexa had Aden hoisted up on her shoulders, feigning a disgusted expression as the girls shared a kiss. Even through the picture, she noticed how they each had a smile formulating across their lips the second their mouths touched, a detail she hadn’t witnessed at the time since her eyes were closed. They stood yards away in front of a scenic background; a waterfall splashing behind them into a sparkling lake. It was one of her most cherished moments.

At the base of the frame, there was a message engraved into the metal.

‘There’s no greater treasure than to love and be loved’

“I know how much you detest the wilderness and primitive living but, you made Aden very happy during that trip,” Clarke said, recalling the excursion and the unpleasant look on Lexa’s face when she begrudgingly agreed to it. “And you only complained a few hundred times, which was
Lexa frowned, “primitive is an understatement, babe. We were bathing in a river for crying out loud,” she said unhappily, but smirked when she saw Clarke’s eyes twinkle with laughter. “I absolutely love this. I mean it, it’s amazing. Is it alright if I put it up on my desk at the office? I want to look at it everyday while at work.”

“Of course it is,” Clarke said. “Alright, see you later tonight? Let me get him home before he wakes up.”

Lexa pulled the driver door open for Clarke, but stopped her before the blonde could slip in. “Babe, you know that I love you, right? And that I would never, ever do anything to hurt you, not intentionally at least?”

“Of course I know that,” Clarke said, “why do you ask?”

Lexa looked over to the backseat, where Aden slept blissfully as usual. “Just… wanted you to know that. You and Aden mean the world to me. I just want to see you both happy, in every way.”

Clarke pressed her hands to Lexa’s cheeks, and pulled her face down to hers. “I know that, Lex. And you do!” Clarke pecked her puckered lips and slid into the driver’s side. “Go and get some sleep, we barely got any last night,” she winked, grinning. “I’ll see you tonight for dinner.”

“Okay…” Lexa rasped. The realization of the inevitable creeping up on her, and she wondered if she should offer a word of warning, yet decided against it. She had already intervened enough. “Just call me. In case you change your mind about tonight.”

Clarke rolled her eyes, turning on the ignition. “And why on earth would I do that?”

Lexa had a hunch she would have a reason soon enough.

***

“A, c’mon, bud,” Clarke roused him from his nap once they were home. “Head upstairs, brush your teeth and then straight to bed,” she glanced over to the sleepy puppy beside him. “Nemo, you too.”

Clarke ushered Aden up the porch and through the front door. It took her a tenth of a second, upon entering the foyer, to realize something was wrong.

A familiar smell permeated throughout the house; a smell she hadn’t been exposed to in a very long time. It was the smell of Christmas morning, sweet with a calculated touch of cinnamon and gingerbread. A cabinet door could be heard creaking shut in the kitchen.

She froze, pulling Aden to her. Nemo in his excitement, dashed in the direction of the sound, barking wildly until he vanished from sight.

“Nemo!” Aden called after him, but was pulled back by the sleeve of his hoodie by Clarke, blocking Aden’s path with her body.

A figure, slender and tall, appeared in the kitchen entryway. The figure held the puppy in her arms, caressing him lovingly. The figure looked up, locking eyes first with Aden, then with Clarke.

The woman smiled. “Hi, kids,” she spoke with a tremble.

Clarke watched Aden approach the woman with uncertain steps. He was struggling to understand,
Clarke noted, by the way he shook his head, unwilling to accept the image before him in fear it too would fade; in fear it was a cruel mirage.

But it wasn’t.

Because Clarke saw her too.

Aden decided to test out the truth. “Mom? Is it… really you?”

The woman took a few steps closer, reaching forward to touch his cheek. She nodded, “yes, sweetie, it really is me.”

***

Aden pounced, and cried, and planted kiss after kiss on their estranged mother, blabbing at the speed of light, trying to catch her up with everything that she’d missed over the past five years. Abby shed a few tears of her own. Fawning over Aden and pointing out how much he’d grown. How much he’d changed. How much he resembled their deceased father. A factor, Clarke realized, she had never truly noticed.

Clarke, in contrast, had no reaction. Even breathing was challenging.

“I made gingerbread cookies,” Abby spoke, switching glances from Aden to Clarke, “your Christmas favorite. Also, there are presents for both of you under the tree. I hope you like them…”

“More presents!” Aden shouted, already sprinting for them. “Best Christmas EVER!”

Clarke, on the other hand, swallowed the stream of profanities dying to pour out of her mouth.

“I, um, understand my sudden arrival might be a shock,” Abby said softly. “There’s no forgiving what I did and –“

“Excuse me,” Clarke muttered coldly, swerving around her and aiming straight for the kitchen. She wasn’t ready for this. Not mentally or emotionally ready to confront five years of neglect. Five years of responsibilities and struggles her mother had so easily left her with. This wasn’t some minor incident. No… it was much bigger than that. What her mother had done was Grade A betrayal at its finest.

She fumbled around the cupboards, mindlessly gathering the coffee powder and adding water to the coffee pot in need of something to do. It didn’t take long for her mother to grace her with her presence.

“Clarke,” Abby pleaded, shuffling from foot to foot awkwardly. “Sweetie… please, just… give me a chance to explain.”

Clarke’s most immediate response was to scoff, loudly. “Please,” she hissed, slamming the cabinet door shut. “Explain? What, you disappear for five fucking years without so much as a proper goodbye and now you want to explain? Save it, I’ve received enough pointless explanations to last a lifetime.”

Abby had expected a healthy level of hostility to play out. Clarke, she reasoned, wasn’t at all wrong. She decided the best solution was to remain silent. To let Clarke ride out this wave of anger and suppressed emotions toward her that surely needed to be released.

It didn’t take long for it to detonate.
“And, just so I’m clear, I’m assuming you’ve met Lexa? I’m assuming she was the one to bring you back? What, did she pay you? Threaten you?” Clarke steeled her gaze but softened her voice; Aden did not need to be involved in this. “Why are you here, Abby?”

Abby cringed, for a multitude of reasons. “I’m here… because Lexa put some much needed sense in me,” she responded, just as softly. “She sought me out, a few weeks ago. I had… relocated to a deserted tribe in central Africa. I thought my letter had been mailed out to you, explaining the relocation, but turns out that it was intercepted by their militia. I had no knowledge of this. This whole time… I thought you and Aden simply wanted nothing to do with me. I had no idea you tried reaching out. Had I known, sweetie, I would have answered. I would have replied and –”

“And what?” Clarke interrupted, unable to refrain any longer. “Came back? Because you yourself just admitted that Lexa was the one to get you here. And let me make one thing abundantly clear,” Clarke continued without any desire to spare her feelings, “Aden reached out to you. For what it’s worth, I would have been satisfied never hearing from you again.”

Abby released a shaky breath. The bullet, she thought, had hit its mark. “Clarke…”

“Why… are you here?” Clarke pressed.

The woman sighed, and took up a stool by the kitchen island. “Lexa,” she rasped out. “Lexa hired a man skilled in tracking down missing missionaries and war refugees in certain parts of the continent. When he reached the village I was assisting, he passed on her message to me.”

“Once I arrived at a nearby city, I was able to contact her via phone. She explained who she was, and what she was to you. She told me… she was in love with my daughter. That my daughter meant the world to her, but that she couldn’t give my daughter the world because the girl that she was so deeply, madly, wonderfully in love with wasn’t whole. She wasn’t complete.”

Clarke swallowed the knot pushing against her throat. “That wasn’t her place. Nor her business. And I’m fine. Aden’s fine. We’re all fine so you can go back to whatever other life you’ve made for yourself guilt-free.”

“I’m not going back.” Abby said, moving toward Clarke. “I’m here to stay, Clarke. No more running.”

“You mean it?” A small, cautious voice intruded. Aden stood, eyes glistening and dangerously hopeful, staring at Abby. “You… have to mean it. Otherwise, go now. Leave. And never come back, mom. Clarke and I, we’ve been doing okay. We can continue to do okay. With or without you.”

Abby kneeled before him, brushing his unruly hair back. “I mean it. I’m not going anywhere, sweetie. You and your sister, what I have put you two through is extremely unfair. It was selfish and unforgiveable. I want you to understand that, after your father died,” she paused, the evidence of Jake’s passing still a sore subject, “I felt… so suffocated. Being in this house, feeling his presence in every corner, it was unbearable. I am so, so sorry, Aden. I’m sorry for not being a better mother to you, and to Clarke. But I mean it. I’m here for good. If you’ll have me… if you can find it in your heart to forgive me. Both of you.”

Aden didn’t respond right away. Instead, he looked to Clarke. Clarke watched him in return. She knew he was looking for confirmation. She knew he was looking for her support and final decision. Always loyal and true to his nature, even in the precipice of receiving that which he wished for most. Clarke understood. He would accept whatever decision she deemed fit. After all, he trusted her unconditionally.
Which made her next move all the much harder to execute.

***

It was late evening when Lexa finally received the much anticipated call she had been impatiently waiting for all day.

She answered on impulse, barely registering that she might be dealing with a less-than-tempered Clarke on the other line.

“Er- hey, babe,” she rasped into the receiver, preparing herself for the onslaught of profanities she was likely to receive. She continued before Clarke had a chance to utter a greeting. “Look, I can explain.”

Aside from rushed, sporadic breathing, there was no other sound coming from Clarke’s end.

“Baby… I was just trying to do what’s best for you and Aden,” Lexa advanced, pacing around her living room as she racked her brain in search of a suitable explanation. “I wanted to tell you, trust me on that, but Abby begged me not to. She was afraid that you wouldn’t be willing to meet, or hear her out, and prevent Aden from it as well. Anyway, I felt like shit for it. I’m truly sorry, babe. I understand if you need space. O-or if you don’t want to see me for a few days. Just, you know, know that I did it with you and Aden in mind. I would give just about anything to have the chance to see my mom again. Abby fucked up, but at least she’s alive, ya know. Not all hope is lost for you two just yet.”

A sigh. Lexa heard a prolonged, heavy, obnoxious sigh.

“Clarke? Please say something?” Lexa pleaded, and waited.

Finally, an answer.

“Bring wine,” Clarke said, unenthusiastically. “And puppy food. We will have this discussion later. Right now, I have a very hungry, very grumpy ten-year-old and puppy to feed. And my mother is insisting I have my infuriating girlfriend over for dinner. Apparently she already loves you. So… tonight, we’re gonna enjoy a nice, quiet, slightly-awkward Christmas dinner… as a family.”

Lexa was beaming through the phone (secretly glad Clarke couldn’t see the smirk plastered on her face in fear of being scolded).

“Wipe the grin off your face, Woods,” Clarke growled, and Lexa did a 360 degree turn to decipher how in the heavens the blonde had known. “You’re not off the hook just yet.”

***

“Clarke, you have to be quiet!” Lexa hissed through clenched teeth, driving the phallus protruding from the apex of her thighs a little slower. “Your mom is in the room next door to us! You’re gonna wake her up!”

Clarke scoffed, driving her hips down forcefully and moaning soundly when the shaft slid back fully into her. “And whose… Ah… fault… is that?”

“I know, I know… I already apologized,” Lexa mumbled breathlessly, losing herself into her movements, thrusting gradually harder and harder into her girlfriend. “I did it… because… I love you and I want to see you happy…”
Clarke pulled her down to her lips, biting roughly onto Lexa’s lower half. “I know…” she rasped seductively, “we can discuss my mother later. Right now, I just want you to keep on fucking me like that, baby.”

Lexa’s thrusts became slightly more sporadic just from hearing the command. “You got it, beautiful…”

It took a couple more brutal poundings into Clarke, an angry demand from Lexa ordering her to shut up, and a playful spank against an asscheek to get the blonde unraveling into a quivering, loud mess. Lexa followed shortly after, glaring at her girlfriend for possibly petrifying her mother back to Africa. Surely Abby had heard their passionate throes.

“I’m pretty sure your mother hates me now…” Lexa crackled, snuggling into the nook of Clarke’s neck as she tried to catch her breath. “I mean, that last scream sounded violent, babe. I’m surprised she didn’t call the cops on me.”

“Relax… she’s beyond jetlagged and it’s been a hell of a day,” Clarke said soothingly, caressing Lexa’s scratched back. “She’s like Aden, can sleep through a heavy metal concert.”

Lexa chuckled faintly, on the threshold of bliss and oblivion; the pull of sleep too heavy to resist. “I meant what I said,” she whispered, “I did it only to see you and Aden happy. I hope you can believe that.”

Clarke felt Lexa’s body go limp, and sent her lover to sleep with a farewell kiss to the forehead. But not before reminding her of a crucial detail Lexa constantly failed to acknowledge.

“I am happy, Lex.” Clarke spoke directly into her ear, in hopes her girlfriend was not so far gone to hear her. “You will always be more than enough.”

She thought she saw a cocky smirk appear on Lexa’s lips seconds later.

***

The bell dinged a hollowed greeting the moment she pushed open the door of the Polis Ice Cream shop. She immediately scanned for a familiar booth, which to her excitement, she encountered available at a near corner.

She went ahead and placed an order for three ice cream sundaes, one with extra chocolate syrup and chocolate flakes (the way Aden liked it), and one with extra everything (the way Raven liked hers).

It didn’t take long for her to hear the bell echo its protests and for bickering to fill the small space as Raven and Aden sauntered in.

“You mother is back, you annoy her now,” Raven scolded, ignoring Aden’s pleas for… clearly something a ten-year-old didn’t want to badger his mother about. “Nope. Sorry, kid. Not getting Nemo a girlfriend. And don’t you dare try this,” Raven motioned to his pleading face, “on Anya. She’s dumb enough to buy it.”

“But he’s lonely!” Aden responded, slipping into the seat across from Lexa. “He needs love in his life!”

Lexa waited until they finally turned their gaze toward her before saying anything. “‘Why, Hello to you too, Lexa. Lovely to see you, Lexa.’” She said playfully. “’Jeez, Lex, I know we haven’t seen each other since New Year’s but damn, we love you and miss you—’”
“Cut to the point, Woods,” Raven interrupted her rant, rolling her eyes and shifting her attention toward the massive bowls of ice cream being placed in front of them. “I see enough of you as is. Plus, New Year’s was two days ago, so quit the whining.”

Lexa chuckled, watching the pair dig into their bowls without any reservations.

“So,” Aden spoke through a mouthful, ice cream smeared all over his mouth and cheeks already. “What did you call us here for? You interrupted a very fun session with my puppy and my girlfriend. And yes, Harper and I are official. It’s getting pretty serious.”

Raven scoffed loudly. “Kid, are you sure Harper is aware? She seemed blatantly oblivious to the heart-eyes you were throwing her earlier. But seriously, what’s so damn urgent that it couldn’t wait?”

Lexa leaned forward, elbows resting on the table. She looked from one, and then to the other, gazing their expressions. “It’s, um… do you two remember the last time we were in here? A few months ago, when I first met you, A?”

Aden nodded, shoving another spoonful into his mouth. “Yup, sure do. We talked about Orange Is the New Black and how I instantly liked you the second you said Alex and Piper were soulmates. Which, I don’t even know if it’s gonna happen to be honest. The way they’re taking the show… it’s absolutely unacceptable.”

Lexa smiled, satisfied that the young business-kid still remembered.

“We talked about how you wanted to get with my sister, which originally worried me but you seemed sincere so, I let it go. Oh, and Raven got to ride your motorcycle, which she dented but, hey, that was you being stupid and letting her on it in the first place,” Raven shot Aden a glare, to which Aden shrugged off before resuming with his “dinner”. “And, hmm, oh yea! I gave you permission to date my sister. Which, to be honest, was insane on my part. Should have had a background check done on you first.”

Lexa laughed, reminiscing back to the moment. It was intimate and deep, holding his dwarfish hand while he poured his heart out to her so absolutely unhindered by anything. The thought was as refreshing and emotional as the moment itself.

“Why do you ask?” Aden questioned, his brows shooting up.

Lexa eased into the answer. “Well, why did you, A? Why did you give a total stranger permission to pursue the one person that matters to you most in this world?”

Raven paused her ice cream slurping abruptly; she too wanted an answer to that.

“Well, I guess I can’t say for sure,” Aden said, searching himself for an answer that clearly eluded him. “I think, had it been anyone else, I probably wouldn’t have. But you, I saw how much you cared for her. I may be young, but I’m not stupid, you know. I can sense when people are being dishonest. I know when people are lying to spare my feelings,” he looked cautiously over to Raven, an offense she had continuously committed in the past. “You had sad eyes, just like she does. Or did. I saw it the second we met. I saw how you masked it with smiles and words. Just like she did. I guess you can say I saw through that mask. Saw through to you. Just like I’ve done with Clarke. I knew she wasn’t okay. I knew she had been in pain for a long time. So when you cam along, it was a no brainer to me. You two were meant to be together. Like Alex and Piper.” He said with a small smile. “Like soulmates.”
Lexa and Raven both tried to conceal the awe on their faces. Aden, as Lexa had often noted, never ceased to impress them.

She cleared her throat before speaking. “You and Raven… you two are the most important people to Clarke,” Lexa said. “And to me. Aden, I absolutely love you, as if you were my own little brother, you know that right?”

Aden nodded cheerfully, gulping down the leftover ice cream.

“And even you, Ray,” she turned to Raven, who looked taken aback. “Yea, half the time I want to strangle you but, I love you too. If it weren’t for you, I would not be where I am now, with Clarke. So, I owe you more than you can ever imagine.”

Raven’s shocked expression suddenly turned devious. “Does that mean—“

“No, I’m not giving you the Harley. Sorry, it’s a one-of-a-kind and far too special to see in your hands.”

Raven sighed, but agreed.

“Anyway, what I mean to say is, the reason I called you both here, was to ask you both something. Something… important.” Lexa inhaled, then exhaled slowly.

She could see she had their undivided attention.

“I want, to ask you both, for your blessings.” She said, nervously twirling her thumbs. “Your blessings… to ask the woman I love for her hand in marriage.”

Lexa wished she had a camera to capture the comic look on their faces the second the statement processed.

“You’re… y-you’re gonna propose? You’re… gonna marry my sister?” Aden stumbled through the sentence, slowly recovering from the shock.

Lexa bowed her head, nodding. “If she’ll have me. If she’ll accept me, then yes, kid. I want to make her my wife.” She once again gauzed their reaction, still lingering on shocked and speechless. “That is… if both of you approve?”

That was the jolt they both needed to come to.

Raven, for lack of a suitable response, shed tears that Lexa had never before witnessed. Her lips trembled, and her head nodded without any chances of it ever stopping.

Aden was beaming. His smile infectious and pure, which in turn made Lexa reciprocate just as vibrantly. In the end, it was Raven who offered her a few words of congratulations.

“It’s about damn time, Woods!”

Chapter End Notes

:D
So what did you all think?
Please leave us your comments with your reactions! We cannot wait to read them all :)
Don't forget to press for Kudos if you guys liked it and thank you all for reading!

Come talk to us on Twitter @TaJat07 and @Silver_Snake222
Also look us up on Tumblr!

PS: If you guys want another good read, check out TaJat's new Clexa story: Awaken Me.

See you all next time! <3
If Not For You

Chapter by TaJat07

Thank you guys for all your love and your patience and for hanging in there with us until now. These last few months have been a crazy rollercoaster for myself and SilverSnake but not once did we ever forget about you all or this story. It took us a long time to write this chapter, after deleting almost entire drafts multiple times in search of the perfect one (and accidentally deleting whole scenes, to our dismay). But we are finally here.

We hope that you all enjoy it and that it is able to touch all your hearts the same profound way it touched ours when creating it.

We love you all and are so immensely grateful for the never-ending love and unconditional support you guys have showered us with.

Here is Chapter 14!

Love,
xxTaJat & SilverSnake

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Clarke, I… well, you see, you know that I-er. I love you, yea?” Lexa began, already prepping herself for that familiar quiver that would soon begin to rewire her motor and speech functions. She paused for a second, swallowing the nervousness down a constricted pipe. “A-and you and I, we’ve been together a while now… well, I know it’s only been a few months, seven to be exact… or eight… wow – um,” she was losing it, she could feel the control slowly slipping away from her, “anyway, my point is that, it may not seem like a whole lot of time but for some reason, it feels like we’ve known each other a lot longer than that. Sometimes it feels like I’ve known you my whole life. As though you were always meant to happen.”

She cleared her throat before diving for the big finale. “You see, Clarke… before you happened, nothing really mattered. Y-you changed that. You’re just so incredibly beautiful, and smart, and talented, and strong, and- god you’re just so fucking amazing —oops, sorry, didn’t mean to curse, ah!” Slap to the forehead, nice. “Sorry, um, I-I really suck at this…” audible sigh, cringe, continue, “Clarke, what I’m trying to say is,” Lexa gave up the pretense of surprise and dropped to a knee, opening a small, suede box in the process, “Clarke Abigail Griffin, I love you more than anything in the fucking Universe. Will you please fucking marry me?”

One-Mississippi

Two-Mississippi

Please say ‘Yes’, please say ‘Yes’!

Five-Mississippi
She remained in that position for a few seconds longer, counting each one in her head. Lexa had read “somewhere” (How to Propose for Dummies, to be exact) that the proposer should give the proposee roughly ten seconds to process the question.

Eight-Missi-

“YES! Oh, yes, Lexa, darling, I’ll fucking marry the snot out of you!” Anya screamed out loud, bursting through her bedroom door and sending an unsuspecting Lexa scrambling to her feet, internally cursing herself for not locking it beforehand. “Uh, actually on second thought,” Anya continued, snatching the suede box out of Lexa’s trembling hands, “I take that back. I ain’t a gold-digger but I’m gonna need something better than this outdated ring, honey-buns. Hope you got your girl a rock that’s a little more current than that.”

Lexa, in her embarrassment at being caught mid-practice, slapped the box out of Anya’s hand. “You ruined my moment, dipshit!” She snarled, pushing past Anya and plopping down onto her bed. “I almost had it!”

“Yea, sure you did,” Anya snickered, sitting down next to her cousin, “let’s just say you were La La Land close to having it. Sorry, kid, but that was pitiful to listen to.”

Lexa scowled, but remained silent. She knew Anya wasn’t entirely wrong.

“It’s been two fucking weeks and I still can’t get this speech right,” Lexa admitted, avoiding Anya’s amused gaze. “What am I supposed to do if I screw it up tonight, An? Just thinking about it, about ruining it for Clarke, makes me wanna hurl. She deserves perfection. Not some mumbling, stumbling idiot.”

Anya sighed. It seemed the moment to torment her cousin was regrettably short-lived. “Look, squid, that girl is crazy about you, okay? I’ve no doubts that she’d say ‘Yes’ even if you actually did hurl all over her while spouting that crap I heard you say earlier. I don’t think it would make an ounce of a difference.” Anya shoulder-bumped Lexa in an effort to cheer her up. “Throw yourself into the moment tonight. Let it take its course and I promise you the right words will find you before you find them.” Anya immediately regretted the heart-felt advice the second she caught the sideways glance Lexa threw her. “O-or so I hear. But what do I know! Just saying that when I propose to Raven, that’s what I’d probably do. Maybe. I guess it depen-“

“When you propose to Raven, huh?” Lexa found her window, and by the lack of color on Anya’s face, the shot hit home.

“I meant-” Anya started, but relaxed as an undeniable realization dawned, “exactly that. When is right. Raven… she’s it for me. Just like Clarke’s it for you. I guess when you know, you know… ya know?”

Lexa nodded in understanding. She and Anya were, as much as Lexa oftentimes refused to acknowledge, more alike than they were different.

“Just make sure you get Princess a legit ring. That ought to make this entire ordeal much easier for you.” Anya suggested, pushing off the bed and heading for the exit, pausing just before reaching the door.

“You know, for the longest time I thought you had made a mistake when it came to Costia. Letting her go like that,” Anya spoke timidly, clearly a piece of information she’d held onto for years. “And I honestly believed that you’d never recover from it. That you’d always just be the selfish, broken brat I knew all those years ago. Every decision, every mistake, every event that has ever happened to you
has brought you to this very moment, Lex. I was wrong. And I’m glad for it. Because you deserve the world too, kid.”

Once Anya left, Lexa scooped the small suede box from the floor where it had landed. She closed the lid, the ring still encased within its cushioned interior, and walked over to the nearest trash bin where she carefully discarded the package.

The ring, contrary to Anya’s assumption, was never meant for Clarke.

It was once meant for the only other person she had ever loved.

Lexa smiled. Thankful she never received the chance to use it.

***

Like most other Saturdays, today was not discernably different. The sun kindly made its predictable appearance at its usual time. As previously forecasted, the temperature was warm and inviting, which complemented the suave blue of the sky, unhindered by wayward clouds.

Her favorite flower shop unlocked its doors at exactly 8 AM, as scheduled, and when asked by the humble, sympathetic elderly man if she’d want the ‘usual’, she simply nodded and graced him with a gentle smile.

By mid-morning, she found herself leisurely treading the unpaved trails that cut through patches of trimmed grass and white marble monuments, as she had planned to do so the night before. She moved, partially on cruise-control toward the spot she had neglected to visit for a number of years now.

Just another Saturday. As ordinary as all others. For everyone else, perhaps.

But not for Clarke.

Not for Abby.

And not for Jake’s tombstone, which currently supported the weight of a slumped, sobbing adult woman.

Clarke had half a mind to turn around and leave as silently as she came, without anyone the wiser that she was ever even there. But today was no ordinary day.

“Abby,” Clarke breathed.

Abby’s head shot up, eyes wide and frantic as she searched for the owner of the sound. Clarke saw fleeting disappointment the second Abby recognized it had come from her, which rapidly evolved into a look of pity and sorrow. She knew that look only too well. It was the bitter blend of crushed hope and broken dreams at the realization that no, it wasn’t him. That yes, he was still gone. And no… he wasn’t ever coming back.

Abby straightened herself, wiping her face free of the obvious evidence she had just displayed. “Hi sweetie,” she said, her voice laden with grief, disguised by a pained smile. “Well, I guess we both had the same idea.” Abby let out a weak chuckle, crossing her arms across a chest that still heaved from pain. “Uh, w-where’s your brother?”

Clarke saw the dodge, but decided to go along. “Raven has him for now. He’s going to be with Lexa for most of the afternoon,” Clarke clarified, scrutinizing her mother’s elusive expression, “Aden is
fine. You don’t need to worry.”

Abby nodded vacantly, wiping quivering hands down her jeans. “Well, I should go. I’m sure you want some privacy…”

“Wait, mom,” Clarke said, hesitating at first, but relenting, “don’t leave. He’d want you here.”

She closed the distance between her and her parents, suddenly remembering the flower bouquet she carried. Desperate for an ice-breaker to thaw the awkwardness between them, she recounted a secret she had never once shared before. With anyone. “The last time I was here, I fell asleep,” Clarke said with a hint of humor to her tone. “Well, cried myself to sleep actually. And… I dreamt about him. We were fishing, him and I. Only instead of an ocean, our boat rocked soothingly on a bed of clouds. Instead of fish, we were catching birds. Birds of all shapes and sizes, and colors.”

Abby smiled along to the story, immersing herself into the visual as though she were an honorary guest into Clarke’s private memory.

“When I finally caught one, it was a Dove. And dad- wow, dad… he was beyond excited. He hobbled over to me, reaching out for it. It was afraid, I felt it. I felt everything the bird was feeling somehow. The fear, the pain of the hook. Yet the second dad held it… it relaxed. I felt the trust it had for him. Dad explained how to remove the hook without inflicting further damage. Showed me how to soothe her, how to tell her without words that she was safe. We just sat there, holding the bird for a moment in silence.”

Clarke felt the usual, expected clench to her vocal cords that seemed to be a common reaction to the images. It didn’t take long for the burning sensation to invade her lungs and for her vision to blur at the edges.

“Time didn’t seem to exist, in this place. The sun shone from beneath the clouds, making them golden instead of white.”

She remembered the peculiar dream with such vivid details, it could have easily been mistook for a memory rather than a fragment of her frail imagination. She could still taste the salt in the air, and feel the lulling sway of their paddleless boat. The only sounds were the hypnotic creak of wood and the flapping of wings, which echoed rhythmically through the empty skies. And a quiet hum. A hum to a lullaby she knew well as an infant, when her father would cradle her in his arms and hum it until she dosed off into deep slumber.

“And then he stood,” she continued, her own voice foreign to her from the heaviness it supported. “And said, ‘Clarke, it’s time.’”

Clarke cleared her throat and forced her lower lip to still. “I didn’t want it to be. So I held onto the bird a while longer, spurtng excuse after excuse as to why she wasn’t ready yet. He of course, listened to every word I had to say. Always patient and calm, and understanding. And then I ran out of justifications. I ran out of reasons, and tears, and time. I guess he was waiting for that moment to arrive, because right then he offered a hand to me. I stood, noticing how the small boat rocked beneath our feet. ‘Dad… and what she falls?’ I asked him, looking to him and receiving a reassuring smile in turn.

‘Oh, my darling Clarke… and what if she flies?’”

Clarke lowered the flowers gently atop Jake’s grave, rogue tears staining the once light lilac petals, turning them into a deep violet. “When I finally forced myself to awaken, it was dusk. I had slept here for over nine hours.” She told Abby, who appeared to be much closer than before. “I was
disoriented at first, totally confused and lost. And then I saw it… the bird. A dove. Perched gracefully on a distant gravestone. I thought I was still in the dream, but the hunger I felt told me otherwise,” Clarke looked to the same direction she had all those years ago, where the bird once stood. “And then it flew away. As effortlessly and unhindered as the wind itself, disappearing into the horizon in a blink of an eye. I knew it was a sign. That wasn’t just coincidence, mom… it was a message. I knew then, that at that moment, I was exactly where I was meant to be. Had I woken up two seconds later, the bird would have been gone.”

Abby nodded, rendered speechless by her daughters’ heart wrenching story. She burst into tears the second she felt Clarke’s hand envelope hers; felt her fingertips caress the rugged, silver wedding band she still wore around her finger.

“And we are, in a way, exactly where we are supposed to be,” Clarke continued, her eyes looking to Jake instead of her. “You left. And I don’t know if that is something I can ever truly get over. We needed you, mom. Aden and I… we were just as broken, just as devastated. Still… you came back,” Clarke spoke earnestly, turning to her with such elegance and maturity that it left her more speechless still, “for now, that’s enough.”

***

“Ah, Miss Woods,” a low, roughened voice croaked from behind a glass display in a greeting, “or shall I say, Mrs. Woods from here on out?”

The elderly man laughed heartily, wheezing out a few coughs from the strenuous effort. Aden gave the man a wary look, one of concern and awe that someone in such a fragile condition could produce such a powerful sound.

Lexa strolled across the small boutique to where he stood, grinning broadly at the title. Even spoken from coarse lips, the word still enveloped her like evaporated velvet.

“Not quite yet, Mr. Wallace,” she said with a gentle shake to his frail hand, “I still need to get the girl to say ‘Yes’ first. And for that, I’m going to need that ring you promised me.”

The man laughed once again, leaning against the display for support. “No worries there, my dear. No one can turn down a Woods!” He said confidently, slowly making his way around the display. “And who might this young gentleman be?”

“Why, none other than my potential future wife’s kid brother,” Lexa responded, shoving her hand into Aden’s hair and tussling it around. “This is Aden Griffin, Mr. Wallace. Thought he should accompany me here today.”

The glint that suddenly invaded the old man’s eyes, restoring a sliver of his past youth to the hardened layers of old age, was not lost on Lexa. Unlike his deteriorating body, his mind remained intact.

A young lady with dark, coiled hair appeared in a back doorway. “Miss Woods, you’re right on time,” the woman spoke excitedly, waving Lexa over, “we’re just about to put the finishing touches to the ring. We left the best part for you.”

“Thanks, Maia,” Lexa said, turning back to the old store owner. “Mind looking after the squirt for me while I’m back there, Mr. Wallace? I’ll only be gone a moment.”

He nodded his agreement, making his way to the golden-haired boy that currently pressed half his face to one of his glass displays.
“See something you like, Mr. Griffin?” He asked with mild humor. The question tasted of familiarity against his tongue.

Aden pulled back slightly, replacing his nose with a finger. “That’s the one!” He exclaimed, jabbing the glass a series of times. “That’s the ring I’m gonna get my girlfriend when I propose to her!”

“One, is that so,” Mr. Wallace leaned in close, analyzing the ring. “My-oh-my, you have impeccable taste, son. She’s a very fortunate young lady.”

Aden nodded in agreement. “She deserves only the best. I’d buy it today, but…” he dug out his faux-leather SpongeBob wallet, pulling out a crumpled ten dollar bill and some change, “I’m a little short. Can I put a down payment on it? Or can you place it on hold for me for, say, fifteen years? Gotta wait until we both graduate college.”

The proposition, although blatantly ludicrous, was so selflessly delivered that Mr. Wallace almost considered it.

“You know, when I first opened up this shop, some twenty something years ago, my customers weren’t the wealthy type like Miss Woods,” Mr. Wallace shared, inviting Aden over to a wall across the room. “They were ordinary, hard working men and women, with hearts abundant with love and joy but lacking in financial means. Since I was beginning to build my brand, with very limited means of my own, I would give these poor souls an alternate option: pay or trade.”

Aden scrunched his brows, not sure he understood. “So… you’d give them a ring in return for something else that wasn’t money?”

“Exactly right,” Mr. Wallace eagerly nodded. “But there was a catch… the ring was only as valuable as the item they were willing to part with. I also had a business to run. Couldn’t just be handing out free engagement rings to every love-stricken chum that strutted in.” Mr. Wallace gave a frail laugh, scrutinizing the many faces plastered against his Wall of Fame. “That was many years ago… that all changed once some hot shot celebrity walked in, desperate for a ring, and I just happened to have a one-of-a-kind sitting in my drawer. I blew up like the Fourth of July after that.”

The old man shifted his attention over to the first face to ever join his wall; a visual, chronological memoir of every customer to ever purchase from him. “Still… it was those first few customers… the broken yet hopeful, that I owe my business to. I assume you might recognize that name, son?”

Mr. Wallace pointed to the first picture, the one he had been analyzing previously. Aden squinted to get a better look, trying to make out the smallish letters into a legible word-

Gasp.


Mr. Wallace smiled, the wheels of time turning backwards in his mind. “A gold-coated pen, he handed me. Valued at $75 dollars, brand new.” He said, tilting his head and staring beyond the wall. “It was comical almost. I think I even laughed in his face. Mr. Woods told me the pen had been a gift from his father, for graduating University. His most prized possession, he said. The most expensive thing he owned.”

“I couldn’t blow him off, the poor lad. His eyes said it all… he had a sweetheart he was intent on marrying. And he was determined to make it happen. And so I crafted him a $75 dollar ring. I’ll never forget the look of gratitude in his eyes… the ring may as well have been worth millions to him.”
Aden finally pushed through the shock that had immobilized him, turning the weight of his gaze away from Mr. Woods and back to Mr. Wallace. “The pen… do you still-"

“Oh no, my boy, the pen is long gone.” Mr. Wallace interrupted, saving Aden the trouble. “Mr. Woods returned, years later, after he had created his empire. It was a short visit, very brief and to the point. But he left here with his pen, which I never did have the heart to sell, and my most expensive ring, valued at $115 thousand dollars. I’ve had thousands of customers since then, met hundreds of A-list celebrities throughout the years, yet his is a face I shall never forget. His and one others’…”

It wasn’t difficult to follow Mr. Wallace’s gaze as it hopped from Mr. Woods’ picture down one, two, three, f-

“I believe this gentleman is also no stranger to you.”

It was a picture of a face Aden knew well. A face he dreamt about nearly every night. A face that with each passing day, increasingly resembled his own.

“Dad.”

“Yes, dear boy,” Mr. Wallace finally confirmed after a short pause, “your father sauntered into my store a short two weeks after Mr. Woods, just as broke and helpless and drunk on love as your late soon-to-be father-in-law.”

Aden hung on every word that dripped out of the man’s mouth, unsure how to react to the numbing news.

“A copper watch,” Wallace announced, “is what he offered me. Valued at a measly $30 dollars at the time. It wasn’t anything special, if I’m being honest. An old, unbranded, simple watch, not worth the trouble it would take to restore. Still, I couldn’t turn him away. I saw how much he needed this. Saw the difficulty he was having parting with the worthless thing.”

“Turns out, he had made it himself. He told me he did it during his freshman year of high school, after deciding he wanted to become an engineer. Said it took him nearly 200 hours of hard labor and a sore back but he finally got it working eventually. He was proud of that thing, I could tell. I figured that maybe it was worth something after all. His was the cheapest ring I ever produced, yet somehow it became my favorite ring. Still is, to this day. Anyway,” Mr. Wallace lowered his gaze, finally returning to the present, “I didn’t know him well, but your father seemed to be one hell of a man, son. You look…. very much like him.”

There was one question that still remained unanswered. Yet Aden couldn’t bring himself to ask. He couldn’t bring himself to hope.

Mr. Wallace sighed. “I sold it, a few years ago. I held onto it for a while, in the off chance your father would one day return to reclaim it. When he didn’t, I researched why. I’m sorry, son.”

Aden nodded his understanding, but offered no words in return. He was relieved to see Lexa walking toward them a few seconds later, a look of shared empathy projecting from her eyes.

“You knew?” He asked, more of a statement than a question.

Lexa nodded, squatting to bring herself to his level. “I found out six months ago, kiddo. Before that, I had no idea. Didn’t even know this place existed. I came here looking to get my watch adjusted.”

Lexa flexed her wrist, the Rolex was now snug against her arm. “Mr. Wallace recognized my name. He showed me the wall. He showed me the pictures. And then, he showed me ring designs.” Lexa smiled, pushing away the traces of sorrow. “Because that just further confirmed what I already knew
from the moment I laid eyes on your sister. That I was going to make Clarke Griffin my wife sooner or later. So, I chose sooner.”

A small smile pierced through his gloomy expression. “Sooner… as in three stinkin’ months after you met her? Raven is gonna have a field day when she finds out!”

Lexa’s face plummeted. “If you promise to stay quiet about that, I’ll show you the ring!” Lexa blurted, regretting it the second she saw his wide-eyed enthusiasm. “Fine… but you better act surprised tomorrow when Clarke shows it to you, deal?”

She pulled out a crimson velvet box from her trouser pocket, the letter ‘C’ delicately fashioned on its surface, made entirely of small but luminous diamonds. The second she cracked open the lid, she saw the rings’ reflection dance across Aden’s eyes.

“It’s beautiful…” he said, mesmerized. “It’s perfect, Lex. It’s perfect…”

Once back in the car, a heavy silence once again descended between them. She remembered the sentiment, the same ones Aden currently wrestled with, when she found out six months ago.

“A, I got something for you too…” she said, pointing to the glove compartment. “Go ahead and open that.”

He did as instructed, reaching blindly inside and pulling out a long, rectangular box nearly identical to the ring case Lexa had gotten Clarke. Except instead of a ‘C’, there was an ‘A’. With as much care as he could muster, he pulled the halves apart. Inside, was a slender copper watch.

“Mr. Wallace has one hell of a memory, not sure if you picked up on that. Took him five minutes to figure out the customer he sold it to. Once I had a name, I had a PI do some research as to his whereabouts. Turns out that he was still living in the same address he had been when he bought the watch. When I went to see him, he was wearing it.” Lexa filled in the blanks, giving Aden a moment to put the pieces together himself. “I told him the story, prepared to load him with cash if need be, except I never even got the chance to make an offer. He simply took the watch off his wrist and handed it to me.”

Aden dragged the tip of his finger across the length of the watch, certain it was fake. Instead it felt exactly as he had imagined it. Looked even better than he had pictured it.

“Why?” He asked, gently lifting the watch off its cozy bed. “I would have been just fine without it. You didn’t need to go through the trouble, Lex.”

Lexa shrugged, smirking slyly.

“How else was I supposed to bribe you into being my Best Man?”

***

With a towel wrapped securely around her still dampened frame, Clarke waltzed out of her steamy bathroom and into a horror show unfolding atop her bed. Nemo, convinced that he played an innocent game of tug-o-war with his owner, must have interpreted Aden’s shouts and orders as further incentive to keep on gnawing and yanking at the hem of a dress, his sharp fangs slashing through the fabric like a blade through water.

“Nemo! Bad boy!” Aden persisted, the upper end of the dress trapped between his hands, pulling in the opposite direction. “Let go, Nemo! Let go right now or we’re both gonna die!”
Both blindly unaware that Clarke stood horrified, watching the entire ordeal mere feet away.

“NEMO! This is the last time I tell you!” Aden shouted again, only spurring Nemo on to pull with even more vigor. “That’s it! I’m calling animal control! This is your last- oh… hey, Clarke.” Aden dropped the dress the second he saw his sister’s pale face and bulging eyes. Nemo, now that Aden was no longer challenging him, spat out the remnants of the dress and lowered his ears in shame.

“That- that was my DRESS, Aden!” Clarke screeched, waving a hand around furiously while the other still held the towel to her body. “The DRESS I was supposed to wear for my date tonight! Look at it! It’s ruined!”

Aden picked up the tattered cloth, giving it a good look over. “If it’s of any consolation,” he spoke, shrugging, “it was pretty hideous. Nemo did you a favor.”

A furious screech sent both Nemo and Aden scampering out of the room, colliding clumsily into one another as they struggled to squeeze past Clarke unscathed.

“I swear to god, I’m gonna- ah!- FUCK!” She bellowed, fanning through her closet in search of an ideal replacement. She gave up two minutes later, once it dawned on her that the dress she had selected was her best and nothing her closet could produce at the moment could substitute it. Well… not her closet at least.

Diving for her phone, Clarke tapped the second name under her ‘Recent’ tab, waiting impatiently as the phone began to dial the number. To her growing dismay, she was immediately transferred over to voicemail.

“Ray! I’m having a major crisis right now! Aden and Nemo ruined the dress I was supposed to wear tonight, and, well… I have nothing to wear. Now I know this is unprecedented and that in the past, when you’d randomly show up with a dress I’d always tell you to fuck off… but if you just happened to do that right now, I’ll… I’ll convince Lexa to let you have the Harley for a week! Just, please hurry!”

“Two weeks,” a keen voice spoke from her bedroom entrance before Clarke could even disconnect the call. “Two weeks, and you got yourself a deal, kid.” Raven countered with a quipped brow, leaning nonchalantly against the doorframe. Tossed over her shoulder was a black garment bag.

Clarke scoffed, torn between relief and irritation at seeing Raven’s chin tilt arrogantly upwards in an unspoken ‘checkmate’. “You were already on your way over with it, weren’t you?” Clarke deduced, reckoning it to be the only valid reason for Raven’s perfect timing. Still, she was unwilling to surrender just yet. She pulled her friend in and closed the door.

“Yep,” the brunette nodded triumphantly, narrowing her gaze. “I think Nemo deserves to keep his balls after that little stunt. I’m canceling his procedure next week.”

Clarke glared, yanking the bag out of Raven’s hand. “So you already planned on giving me this,” she said, unzipping the bag and pulling out a beautiful, satin black dress that made her mentally whisper remorseful apologies to Nemo, “before I even made the offer?”

Raven nodded once again, “Yep again. But hey, I still want that deal! Been wanting to get my hands on that Harley since I saw it.”

Clarke dropped the towel unashamedly, slipping the dress over her bare skin for a test drive. “I can’t make any promises…”

“Nah-uh! You already have, and besides,” Raven’s smirk widened as her gaze traveled the length of
Clarke’s figure, admiring the bared shoulders and pronounced collarbone on display, “I’m sure you can think up creative ways to get PG to say yes. Something tells me she’ll be more than compliant by the end of the night.”

Once she was dressed, Raven beckoned Abby over for hair assistance while she busied herself with perfecting Clarke’s features by dabbing layers upon layers of makeup.

“Alright, what are we thinking?” Abby asked, brushing Clarke’s mane from one side to the other, trying to determine a good starting point.

“Uh, just the usual, mom.”

“Loose side bun, with a few strands draped just above her eye,” Raven intercepted, putting on the finishing touches to Clarke’s lips. She made a move to comment but abstained when Raven pressed the tip of a lipstick to her mouth.

The calm that surrounded them as the women worked was unceremoniously massacred by Aden and Nemo, when the pair barged through the half-opened door, earning a spooked squeal from all three.

“My bad… We’re back… I got it,” Aden huffed trying to catch his breath, both his arms hidden behind his back. “Clarke, this is the second most important decision you’ll have to make tonight, so pick wisely.”

“W-well, what I mean is,” Aden cleared his throat, “you know, besides what you’re gonna have for dinner. Chicken or fish? Wine or cocktail? That kinda decision! Anyway,” he withdrew his arms, two pairs of brand new, Christian Louboutin Lady Peeps heels dangled from each hand. “Nude or black?”

“Where the hell did you get those, A?” She asked, jaw slack from surprise.

“Chill Barbie, they’re mine, alright. I told the squirt to run over and get them.” Raven jumped in, refocusing her attention back to the heels. “Nude or black? Your girl is gonna be here any second now so chop-chop.”

“Nude.” Clarke said immediately after, already admiring the shimmer that bounced off of its polished coat from afar. “All of this just for a date?”

Raven smiled, gliding the lipstick over her already crimson lips one last time. “Not just any date, babe. It’s the ninth month-a-versary.” She leaned forward, placing a loving kiss to Clarke’s temple, an indication she was done. “That deserves something a little extra.”

***

Déjà vu was, for a lack of better term, exactly what she experienced as she found the courage to bring her foot up high enough to graze the surface of the porch’s bottom step. A porch that she had climbed dozens of times before, never even batting an eyelid. She took the steps one by one, reminiscing the moment she felt the similar rush of emotions jolt her heart into a frenzy, as though she had just finished running a marathon. She felt the tale-tell creek of wood beneath her feet, as she swayed her weight from one foot to the other, hoping to throw the nervousness she felt off balance. It wasn’t until her knuckles made contact with the door, and she heard commotion from within the Griffin household, that Lexa felt her mind whir back to their first date.

She recalled the insecurity they both shared; an aspect that had plagued their earlier days together. Two hearts equally damaged and sheltered behind a mile-high wall, which occasionally waivered but
never collapsed. Two souls cowering behind a steel armor, convinced that it was the sensible approach, the correct approach to prevent further agony. Just two people, with a spectrum of difference between them, and a lifetime of experiences pulling them together.

The sound of an unclicking knob called her back to the moment, and she watched, breath caught somewhere between her throat and lips, as the door swung ever so fluidly open. She had expected Aden, or Raven, or even Nemo to be the one to greet her. She was not prepared to come face-to-face with her blue-eyed vixen that still had the ability to rob the breath out of her. She didn’t mind it, of course. When it came to Clarke, there wasn’t a single part of her that she wasn’t overly willing to give.

“Hello, Lexa.” Clarke said lowly, with mild seduction to her tone, which brought Lexa’s already frantic heart to a dangerous halt.

Still, she didn’t miss a beat. “Hi, baby,” she dipped her head in a bow, bringing one of Clarke’s hands to her lips, her gaze never leaving Clarke’s. “You look absolutely beautiful.”

Clarke disregarded the compliment, her focus completely enraptured by the visual in front of her. Lexa in a tailored suit, a slim tie, and hair drawn back in a perfect ponytail deserved her upmost appreciation. Her knees buckled slightly when she noticed the subtle traces of eyeliner, which Lexa never wore, augmenting the vibrant green of her eyes into a new shade Clarke had never seen before. It was her usual forest green, only swirled with a splash of gold and seared into permanence by fire, so molten that if not for the charcoal rim, it would spill across the outer white vastness.

“You look very handsome yourself,” Clarke husked with a wink, a signal the blonde also traveled back in time to that first date, and they both lingered simultaneously between past and present. For the sake of consistency, Lexa handed her the luxurious bouquet of red roses, to which Clarke accepted gratefully. Lexa made sure to refrain from shoving them at her chest this time around.

“Thank you darling, they’re beautiful.”

Right on cue, Lexa thought, smirking. “Well… you’re beautiful-er.”

Once they had said their goodbyes to the three ogling heads peeping from the kitchen entrance, Lexa escorted Clarke to the limousine, where Gustus patiently waited.

“Looking as lovely as ever, Miss Griffin,” Gustus complimented with a nod, opening the door for her.

“Why, thank you, Gus. Mind telling me where we’re going today?”

“Nice try, Miss Griffin, but I wouldn’t do that to Miss Woods,” he replied back with a soft smile, closing the door once Lexa had slipped in after her.

“You know I don’t like surprises, babe,” Clarke tried, accepting the flute glass Lexa handed her, “where you taking me tonight?”

Lexa smirked, carefully pouring the champagne first into Clarke’s glass, and then hers. “To the moon and back, baby.” She said, clicking their glasses together and proceeding with a sip. “Patience, gorgeous.”

Dinner, which was obviously on the schedule for tonight, was the first stop on the itinerary. The Chateau Marmont Hotel in West Hollywood sprung to life in the near horizon as Gustus curved into Sunset Boulevard, the street becoming gradually more congested the closer they approached.

“Well, well, well … I’ve been begging you to take me here for weeks and it appears you finally
listened, Woods,” Clarke taunted, trying to keep her budding excitement anchored, “guess you no longer find the place appalling and infested with snobby, rich parasites?”

“Oh, believe me, I still think that,” she said, pulling her blonde in for a kiss, “but tonight’s about you, so what I think doesn’t matter. As long as I get to see that smile, a trip through hell is alright by me.”

They settled into the patio, under a canopy of palm trees and a golden sky that progressively dimmed in tune with the setting sun. The dusk brought a mild breeze that washed over them like a calming perfume, perfect for their outdoor setting. Wine and champagne were both presented the instant their behinds made contact with the soft cushion of their chairs, both waiters looking expectantly to Clarke for her preference.

“Um, the wine, please.”

“Club soda for me. Thanks.”

It didn’t take long for a group of men, all carrying violins, to surround them and begin a tune so harmonized, the sound appeared to have fused into the air and entered every soul in that patio via breath.

Everyone was silent. Listening fiercely as the tune switched from joyful and weightless to a heavier melody, crafted with the purpose to cause every pair of eyes to become saturated with tears. She didn’t realize she was crying until Lexa placed her hand protectively over her own and handed her a paper napkin.

“Fuck, my makeup,” she sniffed, shying away from embarrassment.

“No, don’t,” Lexa reached over, pausing a hand that was halfway to her face to wipe the evidence of her breakdown, “you look even more beautiful this way.”

Dinner was marvelous. And the wine, although abundant, stopped after a while per Lexa’s request.

“You’re a lightweight, Griffin,” she explained while sipping her club soda, “and I want you coherent. No passing out in the car tonight.”

“And why is that? Where we going after this?” Clarke, of course, had to try.

Lexa leaned back against her chair, biting her lower lip mid smirk and throwing Clarke her specialty glare that had the unfailing ability to make the blonde’s inner thighs quiver. “I don’t know if you’re aware, but that dress of yours has a rather short life span. Something tells me it won’t make it past tonight.”

The famished look that quickly seized Clarke’s expressions, twisting curiosity and excitement into a half-lidded look and agape jaw, proved the change of subject had been entirely successful. Lexa took advantage of the moment to torment her further by reaching over and gently cupping her girlfriend’s chin. “You look more edible than any of the desserts they have presented us tonight, babe. And if I can control the desire to pull you onto this table and devour you in front of all these fine snobs, I’m sure you can manage your curiosity for a few minutes longer, don’t you think?”

The low growl that escaped Clarke’s throat was more than enough answer for Lexa, who pulled back with a satisfactory ‘good girl’ whispered under her breath.

“Ah, perfect timing,” Lexa announced a second later, upon seeing the dessert platter lowered onto the center of the table. “Speaking of dessert…”
She kept her gaze firmly on Clarke, wanting to memorize every adjustment that transpired across her face. She saw blue eyes, now shaded over by the faint lighting, shift to the plate for a quick assessment of approval, then lovingly jump back up to smile at her girlfriend, and then dart back down to the dessert and remain there.

Because unlike the previous time, the second examination held something she had missed during the first inspection.

A message.

‘You.

Me.

New Adventure?’

Clarke read it multiple times, finally giving up trying to decipher its meaning and lifting her glance away from the plate and towards Lexa.

“New adventure, huh?” She asked, playfully swiping her index fingers across the caramel words and bringing them up to her mouth. “So, where we going?”

It was all the confirmation Lexa needed. The brunette nodded the waiter over to indicate they were ready for the tab. “Back to the past,” she responded, paying the bill and waiting on Clarke to finish before summoning Gustus. “There’s something I want to show you.”

***

The limo slowly maneuvered its way towards the visitor’s entrance of the massive building, coming to a stop at a nearly vacant lot. Clarke stared confounded at the edifice’s glass exterior, eyes hovering over the name imprinted against its facade that was not unfamiliar to her.

“I don’t understand…” she said barely above a whisper, “why did you bring me here?”

Lexa took her hand and gave a gentle tug. “Because there is something here that I need you to see. C’mon, beautiful. Trust me.”

She followed Lexa hesitantly out of the vehicle, an uncertain feeling washing over her as she absorbed the details of her surroundings, still wondering silently what could have possessed her girlfriend to bring her back to here. They paused just beyond its impressive doors, staring inwards to where its current occupants moved about entirely oblivious that they were being monitored.

“Lexa, why-“

“Did I ever tell you that I was born here?” Lexa finally spoke, eyes still fixated somewhere inside.

Clarke exhaled, struggling to keep her discomfort from being noticed. “No... but that’s hardly a surprise. I was born here too. Heck, I think majority of all Los Angelinos are born here, Lex. It’s the preferred hospital in the area for childbirth.”

Lexa smiled, nodding her agreement. “Yes, well... this is where I took my very first breath, babe. Somewhere inside this building, almost 24 years ago.”

Clarke ran the pad of her thumb across the expanse of skin it could reach where it was encased by Lexa’s own hand. “Babe, I’m not following...”
Lexa pulled her forward, past the sliding doors and into the lobby of the hospital. “My mother… she was rushed here by ambulance the night I was born. She had been home alone that night, since Indra was elsewhere at the time and my father was out of town on work-related business.”

It was monumentally strange to be casually strolling the halls that she once roamed enthusiastically in the past. Clarke struggled to block away the distractions, seeing her attention was being pulled in multiple directions at once; the familiar portraits that hung on plain white walls; the flash of white coats and sneaker squeaks against tiled floor as doctors and nurses zoomed past them; the out-of-sync beeping from machines coming from the rooms they crossed. It felt like visiting an estranged friend.

“I was supposed to come three weeks later. I wasn’t meant to be born that night, Clarke. So when my mom started to feel pain, when she saw that her clothes were suddenly stained with blood, she called for help.” Lexa continued, pulling Clarke through the maze of hallways and small corridors. “She was a mess, that night. The nurses that tended to her said there was a complication, and that they would have to deliver me immediately or I ran the risk of dying.”

Clarke felt her heart malfunction at the sound of the word ‘dying’ pass Lexa’s lips. She tightened her grip around Lexa’s hand, and received a reassuring smile from the woman she loved.

“It’s okay, babe. It was a long time ago…” Lexa calmed her, feeling the blonde’s pulse quicken under her fingers. “Anyway, my mom became frantic at that point. Begging the nurses to save me. To do whatever it took to make sure I survived.”

“She shouted for my father, and even though one of the staff placed a call to him, he wasn’t gonna make it back in time. See, I was dying, Clarke. I was suffocating inside my mother’s womb. The ultra sounds showed I had shifted into the wrong position and wrapped the umbilical cord around my neck. The only thing to do was to have an emergency C-section and get me out. Before it was too late.”

“Lex, please stop.” Clarke begged, holding back the tears. “I don’t want to hear this, okay?”

The brunette chuckled, engulfing Clarke in a tight embrace, placing her ear just above her chest so the blonde could hear her heartbeat and her lungs filling with air. “There’s no need to be upset, my love. I’m here, aren’t I? That means that story had a good ending.”

Clarke nodded against her, still refusing to let go. She waited a moment before she continued.

“While my mother waited for the operating room to be prepared, all alone and terrified, a doctor that just happened to be walking by, noticed her.” She once again took Clarke’s hand, and pulled her forward, heading toward a nurse’s station at the end of the hall. “The doctor was on her way home for the night, but decided to walk in and keep my mother company, so that she wouldn’t have to be alone during the ordeal.”

“When the nurses came in to wheel her into surgery, they found the doctor hunched over my mother, singing softly to her in an effort to keep her calm. She had… her hand over my mom’s, fingers laced together, and resting over her belly. Over me. Apparently, according to the nurses at least, that was possibly what saved me in the end. This doctor, who was never even supposed to have been in that part of the hospital, kept my mothers’ breathing steady, which was essential to keeping me alive.”

They finally came to a pause in front of the deserted nurse station, and Lexa, without ever untangling their fingers, reached over the counter and lifted a long, heavy binder off the desk.

“Lexa! What are you- are you insane?”
“Shhh… it’s okay. They gave me permission.” Lexa winked, opening the binder and flipping through the laminated pages.

“My mom never did catch the doctor’s name. In the state she was in, it’s only natural that she might have forgotten it,” Lexa spoke, browsing each page she flipped more carefully now, searching for something. “Indra told me all of this, by the way. And I remember my mother telling it to me when I was still a child, but it wasn’t until a few weeks ago that I decided I wanted to see if I could locate the woman… the doctor potentially responsible for saving my life.”

The flipping finally stopped, and Lexa’s index slid down the page, pausing a quarter of the way down. Clarke looked from the book, to Lexa, still as mystified as ever.

“When I came in here to ask if anyone could help me, I somehow managed to ask one of the nurses that had been there that night. And to my luck, she remembered. We chatted for a long time. The nurse recounted the details of that night, of how my mother was in so much distress, she was beyond help. That was, until a doctor on her way home to begin her maternity leave walked by her room and stopped to help her.”

Clarke’s eyes shot up, scanning Lexa’s face for more answers. “Maternity leave?”

Lexa nodded, pulling Clarke closer, pointing to a line within the page of the log book where her index still rested. “The doctor, in some crazy weird coincidence, also happened to be pregnant. The nurse mentioned she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl not even two months later.”

Clarke’s eyes immediately blurred upon reading the names scribbled, in old black ink, across the page.

‘Patient: Victoria Shepherd. Surgeon: Dr. Green. Doctor in Attendance: Dr. Griffin.’

“I asked Abby if she remembered that night, and she mentioned she did in vague details. Although she had no idea the woman she helped had been my mother,” Lexa explained, seeing Clarke was rendered speechless at the moment. “Probably because my mom still had her maiden name back then.”

Clarke finally let out a trembling sob, unable to comprehend the magnitude of the information.

“This… is where our story begins, Clarke. Right here, within these walls where we both took our first breaths. Where your mother helped my mother when she was alone and afraid. They never saw one another after that, but I’ve no doubt in my mind that you, Clarke, somehow saved me that night, even before we were born.”

“And maybe, just maybe, that is the reason why I lose the ability to breathe properly when you’re not around me. And maybe, this is the reason why I need you, Clarke. Because I can’t imagine a life without you in it anymore. I think… I would literally die if I had to continue without you, because you are air, babe.”

Lexa professed, feeling the weight of the truth she spoke liberate every cell in her body.

“You are air, Clarke.”

***

“Now where are you taking me?” Clarke questioned once they were back inside the car, noticing how Gustus drove in the opposite direction of home. “I swear to all that is holy and mighty, I will mutilate you if you make me ugly cry one more time today, Lexa. I love you, but my makeup is
ruined.”

Lexa grinned, pulling Clarke closer. “I think you look absolutely gorgeous, even with all the snot you got going on right now.”

“Ah, humor. That won’t get you very far tonight,” Clarke stated, reclaiming the control. “I asked you a question. Where are you taking me now? Are there any more stories about my and/or your past that I should know about?”

“Just one. But I left it for Aden to tell it.”

Clarke narrowed her eyes but didn’t push. She figured if Lexa wasn’t spilling the beans about whatever else she knew, it was because Aden had asked her not to. And she would rather face Clarke’s wrath than betray the little man any day.

Gustus finally pulled to a stop in front of single-story, medium sized studio with a traditional white-paint brick façade as exterior décor, with wide windows traversing from one end of the front wall to the other. The outline of a former name remained imprinted just above the door, Clarke noted, squinting to make out its previous identity but unable to do so.

“Where are we, Lex?” She asked, following Lexa out of the car. She put forth a valiant effort to peer into the structure, but the lack of light emanating from inside made the task impossible. Its interior seemed to be consumed by an abysmal, unperforated darkness.

“I showed you the past,” Lexa explained, grabbing a firm hold of her hand and tugging her towards the modern, all glass double doors. “Now I’d like to show you the future.”

The doors swung outwardly with unexpected ease once jerked into action by Lexa, and almost immediately, Clarke felt the dynamic of the building, both in appearance and attitude, shift.

She entered first, so there would be nothing or no one to obstruct her view as she inhaled it all in, standing mere inches past the threshold for the best vantage point. The first thing she noted was that the darkness, or the blackness she had previously expected, had been manufactured. The windows and doors were covered in black tarp from the inside, making the filtering of light whether from the inside or outside, impossible. Now, that obscurity had been absolutely obliterated by the glow of thousands of miniscule lightbulbs that lined the length of the ceiling.

Walking a few feet into the spacious room, she studied the walls on either side of her, and counted a total of ten blank canvases, five per wall, all hung in equal distance from one another. Each frame was accented with its own lamp poised just above the canvas, which appeared to yearn for underserved attention.

“What happened here?” She asked, moving down the wall toward the small wooded stage at the far end of the room. Her eyes roamed far ahead of her, already inspecting the easel poised at its center from a distance, disappointment creeping when she realized the canvas that leaned against it was also void of color. “This used to be an art gallery, right? By the looks of things…”

Lexa followed a few feet behind, maintaining a safe distance between her and the blonde. “The previous owner unfortunately passed away a week ago. No, not here!” she added quickly following the pointed look she got thrown her way, “at home. From old age. The new owner is, from what I gathered, a love-stricken idiot who bought the place as a gift for the fiancé.”

She maintained calm when Clarke turned her head slightly, shooting her a quizzical look but not a questioning one. She was still safe, for the moment.
“So… will it continue being an art gallery?” Clarke asked, turning back to face the stage.

“I guess that depends on the fiancé. And what she decides to do with the place. Anyways, I asked to borrow it for the night. I wanted to show you all the… magical possibilities the future holds.”

Clarke’s quizzical expression returned, and she once again scanned the room. “All I see are eleven empty canvases, babe. In a very nice, but very lifeless, all-white studio. I’m not sure what possibilities you’re referring to.”

“Oh, is that so? Because from where I’m standing, I see something entirely different,” Lexa stated, looking around as though seeing the canvases for the first time. “I see… endless opportunities, illustrated in each one. I see a future, Clarke. I see sleepless nights spent engaging in nonsensical chatter in bed, discussing everything and nothing at all. I hear countless moments shared in laughter, the kind that makes tears roll down your cheeks. I feel the warmth of summer, the bitterness of winter, and the transition of seasons into years as we age and yet, each day that passes I somehow feel younger. I see birthdays and holidays split between two households. I see Aden transitioning from a kid, to an annoying teenager, to a successful adult. I see countless trips around the world. I see countless more adventures in our path. I see… Indra and Abby fussing over a blue-eyed, blonde-haired beautiful baby girl. I see struggles, and fights, and hardships. But I also see hope, prosperity and love. And after all of this has come to pass, I see us with grey hair and aching, transitioning into the next life together,” Lexa paused, panting for air, “And I can see these possibilities Clarke, because in every scenario I have ever conjured of the future since you took over my heart, you are there. I don’t see emptiness when you’re around beautiful. I see endless promises…”

In every one. In every way. As though you are the pillar holding it all together.”

Clarke of course, was already tearing up at this point. And Lexa saw the rawness in her eyes, the knowledge that what the blonde was currently feeling coincided with her words.

“And this,” Lexa pointed behind her, to the canvas hoisted on the easel. “This is just another part of that bigger picture.” She grabbed two used tubes of paint that had been left by the foot of the easel, selecting two different colors. “Give me your hand?”

Clarke complied swiftly, rolling up her dress sleeve in preparation for what was about to come. Lexa squeezed the paint out of one of the tubes onto Clarke’s palm, apologizing when she felt the blonde wince from the coldness of the paint. She repeated the same action on herself using the second tube. Carefully, she pressed Clarke’s hand against the tightly woven fabric of the canvas, pulling back seconds later to analyze the perfect off-purple imprint left behind. The quality of the copy was better than expected, with every digit intact with all the correct lines. Lexa then pressed her own hand to it, making sure to place her thumb just over Clarke’s so that it overlapped the smaller digit. The grey imprint she left behind was equally impressive, and with her clean hand she reached for a towel that had also been discarded in the near vicinity.

“What do you see, Clarke?” Lexa asked wiping her hand free of the sticky paint, and then proceeding to do the same for Clarke.

The blonde stared intensely at Lexa’s masterpiece, trying to find the right words that could properly describe the sentiment she felt. There were no ideal words, of course, so she settled for the best ones she could utter at that moment.

“Us,” she finally said, tracing the outlines of their fingers with her eyes and letting her gaze linger where their hands connected to one other in a permanent, eternal seal. “I see us. I see… you protecting me for as long as we’re together, that’s the symbolism of your thumb over mine, right?”
Lexa nodded, smiling back at her teary-eyed goddess. “Always.”

“And, I see happiness, in the color you chose for me. Purple is my favorite, but you knew that. You knew it’s my happy color. And yours… grey can mean many things. Uncertainty, turbulence, confusion. But while I do see those things being present in our relationship, I also see equilibrium. I see timelessness. I see forever too, Lexa.”

“You see beyond the emptiness now?” Lexa asked, retrieving a small controller out of her pocket.

“I do,” Clarke admitted, turning to look back at the other colorless frames that hung on colorless walls. Looking at them with new eyes and a new appreciation.

“Good, because when it comes to you Clarke, even the dullest moments seem beautiful to me.” And suddenly the lights gave way to complete darkness. So profound Clarke immediately sought the one thing that could comfort her in any situation.

“I’m right here,” Lexa whispered by her left ear, a hand protectively on the small of her back. “What do you see, babe?”

Clarke squinted, shaking her head. “I don’t see-“

And then the room lit up.

The walls, from end to end, vibrantly showcasing colors that glowed dazzlingly, slicing through the darkness as they appeared to dance across the room. The colors had no pattern, no visible beginning and end, yet they existed in perfect harmony, blending into one beautiful, orchestrated mess.

Her eyes moved to the canvases she had inspected earlier, hopping from one to the next, discerning the words that slowly appeared in each.

“Oh my god…”

She read them all, and when she finished, she read them again, submerging herself into this sliver of a world Lexa had created for her.

“Clarke Abigail Griffin, I, Alexandra Mae Woods, promise to love you fiercely,” Lexa began reiterating the promises printed on each piece. “I promise to protect your body, soul, and mind.”

“I promise…

‘to provide for you.’

‘to defend and support your dreams.’

‘to fight away your demons with you.’

‘to make you smile and laugh.’

‘to earn your forgiveness for the moments I make you cry.’

‘to make you my every priority.’

‘to be someone you are proud of.’

‘to worship your beauty and spirit.’
Lexa spun her then, so that instead of the entrance, Clarke now faced the back wall. Almost instantaneously she felt Clarke’s weight shift backwards in surprise, followed by a hollowed squeal.

In perfect calligraphy, one that never broke but continued bled from one word into the next, the back wall of the studio revealed the biggest promise of all.

‘Clarke Griffin, will you Marry Me?’

It took Clarke few elongated seconds after committing the sentence to memory to realize that the lights were back on. She stared at a now blank wall, void of the beauty she had just witnessed.

She turned, looking for the only beauty that really mattered, and found her kneeling a few feet away. A small box tucked between both her hands and inside, the most breathtaking ring she had ever seen.

“What do you say, beautiful?” Lexa prompted, unsurprised that her blonde stood trembling, a stream of tears wiping the remnants of the makeup she had left. “Will you do me the honor of-“

“Yes.”

Lexa wasn’t sure she digested the answer correctly. “Yes, as in, yes you will-“

“Marry you, Lexa, yes!” Clarke blurted impatiently. “Yes, yes, yes, a thousand times over, yes!”

Lexa slowly rose to her feet, trying to maintain her composure but unable to when she felt her own legs wobble. She plucked the ring out of the box and slid it over an already waiting finger. Once the ring found its new home, she waited no time to kiss the hell out of her new fiancé.

“I’ll be honest, for a second there I thought you were gonna say ‘No’,” Lexa admitted shyly, cracking Clarke a large smile.

Clarke tossed her arms around Lexa’s shoulders, pulling her back in. “You mumble in your sleep babe, did you know that?” She asked, placing a kiss to her lips and chin. “I found that out one night, one of the first times we spent the night together. Woke up to you mumbling incoherently whilst tossing around the bed. However one thing you said that night was surprisingly clear. ‘Gon’ marry Clarke one day. Wife her up.’”

Lexa’s face paled, toning to the same whiteness of the walls.

“No way! I-I… really?”

“Oh, yes… you sounded super sure of it, too.”

“Oh… and, um, w-what did you think?”

Clarke kissed her again. “Why, I said yes back then too. See, I thought you couldn’t hear me, but the second I said it, you smiled, relaxed, and stilled. It was always a ‘Yes’ when it came to you, Woods. I just needed you to actually ask.”

They stood enjoying each other’s arms for a while, just cherishing the moment.

“I must say, I don’t think the owner will be very happy to know you vandalized her studio, fyi,” Clarke breached the silence, her head cocooned in the crook of Lexa’s neck.

“Nah, she seems pretty happy to me. I think she’ll be alright.”
Clarke’s head snapped upright the second she understood the hidden connotation.

“You didn’t…”

“Did what? Buy you this studio? As of a week ago, you are its new owner and I that humble idiot I mentioned before.” Lexa confirmed, caressing the lines of disbelief that had appeared on Clarke’s face. “I promised to defend and support your dreams, remember?”

“I figured this was a good way to honor that promise, don’t you, soon-to-be Mrs. Woods?” She knew it was a dangerous gamble, but one she had been waiting to enter into for a long time.

“I believe it will be Mrs. Griffin-Woods,” Clarke corrected her gently, “now I know you have one last promise to uphold from earlier, having to do with a certain dress and an expiration time? Well, Mrs. Woods, I think that time is up.”

Chapter End Notes

We are almost at the end of this beautiful crossroads...
Thank you guys for your endless, unconditional love and support. It has been a beautiful year writing this piece of work, a piece from our hearts to you all and we cannot believe how far it has come. It has all been worth it thanks to you all, our readers. So thank you sincerely from the bottom of our hearts. It has meant the world to us being able to write this for you guys.

We would love to read your comments with your reactions to this beautiful chapter! We want to hear what you guys thought and felt when reading it... as well, we are very curious to see how you guys think we will be ending this story on its next, final chapter?

We cannot wait to read it all :)

Thank you guys a million times...

Much love to you all,
Always,

xxTajat & SilverSnake

PS: Come talk to us on Twitter @Tajat07 and @Silver_Snake222
Also look us up on Tumblr!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!