Sisters

by commandmetobewell

Summary

Lexa Woods, mother of two and beloved wife, goes on her final tour with her older sister and second-in-command, Anya, in Tagab before she's to be relieved of active duty. Everything goes as planned until a fateful roadside bombing leaves the two sisters separated. After Lexa and half of their crew are presumed as K.I.A., Anya is honourably discharged and sent back home to New York where Clarke receives the shocking news of her lover's untimely death. Anya comforts her younger sister's wife and children in attempts to honour her promise to Lexa. Only, as the years pass, her 'comfort' unforeseeably becomes something more to the both of them.

Then -- by some miraculous twist of fate -- Lexa shows up five years later, changing everything.
No one can ever forget that there are two sides to every family.

Notes

This story is going to be a little different from my other fics. It's going to be still Clexa-centric, not Clanya-centric as I originally planned for the most part. The beginning is heavy on Clexa, and then transitions into Clanya slowly, and then returns back to a slow-burn Clexa when Lexa returns, and then endgame is Clarke/Lexa and Anya/Raven. I literally dreamed about this yesterday during a power nap thing and it's loosely based on the movie "Brothers", starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Toby McGuire, and Natalie Portman. If you've not seen it, watch it. It's a fantastic movie.

Anyways, the tags are pretty self-explanatory. This is a side-fic that I don't know when will update. Not as sporadic as WTTIMG or "if anger and revenge…” or my Clextaven fics, however. It'll be like the Terminator AU.

I honestly have ZERO clue as to what this is.

Please leave a comment if you can! I haven't written something like this before so it's very new, haha! :P

EDIT: CLEXA IS ACTUALLY ENDGAME AND RANYA IS ENDGAME.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Prologue [Part One: Lifeline]

Chapter Summary

Victory stands on the back of sacrifice.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Graphic Depictions of Violence, Blood, Gore, and Mild Childbirth.

HELLO FRIENDS IT'S ME YOUR LOVELY 5AM UPDATER LMAO. I just finished exams and I felt like writing so I thought I'd warm up with whatever the heck this is. I don't even know if I'll continue it, and if I do, it'll be a side fic. I had a lot of fun writing it but it's angsty as hell so I apologize in advance ahaha. Well, actually, no it's not too angsty it's just not a happy beginning. I swear WTTIMG is my only happy story on this site… ahaha.

I've honestly never thought about writing Clanya until I had a dream and I was like cool beans let's write it and so now I did enjoy 12k of this crap and maybe I'll update idk it seems unrealistic but who knows. If this does well I'll consider it, until then it's on the backburners for the time being! I'd love to hear thoughts, though!

Thank you for the lovely support during my finals. It was insanely stressful but I'm glad to be done now.

The song in the quote is "Bad" by U2.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

if you should ask then maybe they'd

tell you what i would say

true colours fly in blue and black

blue silken sky and burning flag

colours crash

collide in blood shot eyes

if i could, you know i would

if i could, i would
"Aden!" Clarke hollers up the stairs as she finishes packing her son's sandwich into the brown paper bag, "now! You're gonna be late for school!"

"Are we dealing with the living dead this morning?" Lexa chuckles as she bounds into the kitchen, showered and clean from her routine morning workout. Clarke rolls her eyes at her wife as Lexa steps forward and pulls her in for a dramatic kiss, causing the blonde to erupt into a fit of giggles against her lips.

"Good morning," Clarke whispers as they separate their lips just barely. Lexa chuckles and nods, pecking her again.

"Definitely good morning," the brunette sighs as she nuzzles her lover's neck. "I missed you when we were sleeping."

"You sap."

"You love me," Lexa jokes as she pulls back to grab an apple from the fruit bowl, "isn't that right, my queen?"

"Ew," Aden's grumbly voice snorts as he stumbles down the steps, half-awake and barely ready for the day. Lexa steps over to him and eyes him suspiciously, her eyes mockingly taking on a unimpressed expression. Aden glares up, sleepy-eyed and irritated at the mere thought of school, as he brushes past her.

"Hey kid," Lexa says as she nods her head to her son with a grin. Aden blinks up at her from where he slumps over at the counter. "Your shirt's on backwards."

Aden's eyes widen comically and Lexa bursts into a deep-bellied laugh as she walks over to tug her son into her arms, wrestling him playfully as he tries to fight back. Clarke watches on, bemused as Aden manages to tackle the trained soldier to the floor, effectively pinning her taller body under his own. Aden squeaks as Lexa pulls him down to her chest, her smile nearly splitting her face as she tousles his hair and kisses him, causing the boy to groan in exasperation.

"Mom!" He whines as Lexa leaves a particularly sloppy kiss to his cheek. "Mom, come on that's gross! I'm almost ten, I don't need kisses."

"Excuse me?" Lexa pulls away with a playful frown. "I don't care if you're sixty, you'll always need your Mom's kisses!"

"Ew," Aden giggles as Lexa growls and wraps her arms around him and hugs him tightly again, "Mama can take my kisses."
"Is that so?" Lexa beams as she looks over her son's shoulder to where her wife looks on endearingly, a warm smile on her face. Immediately, Lexa's green eyes soften and she smiles dreamily at her wife, still unsure of how she managed to land her high school crush as her forever-after. She'd been a bumbling nerd all through high school, whereas Clarke always was in the more popular crowd. It wasn't until they'd been matched to be lab partners did the two click.

"You're doing it again," Aden grumbles from her chest. Lexa blinks down at him, confused. Aden only rolls his eyes and sighs.

"You're staring at Mama the way Old Man Harold stares at his cats," Aden giggles. Lexa frowns.

"Aden," she says sternly, "how many times have I told you--"

"That his name is Mr Greenway, yeah I know. He still has a lot of cats," Aden wrinkles his nose as he sighs against Lexa's chest. "He also smells kinda funny."

"Aden," Clarke scolds him this time, hiding her laugh as she looks upon the similarities between her son and her wife as they lie there on the wooden floors. "Now, come on. Both of you two need to get up and get ready to eat. I have an appointment at ten o'clock and you know how I feel about tardiness." It takes everything for both Lexa and Aden to not roll their eyes at each other as they both heave upwards to their feet. Aden straightens out his shirt before grabbing at the lukewarm bowl of oatmeal pushed towards him by his other mother. Lexa winds around the island to hold her wife, placing her hands over her stomach.

"She's nearly here," Lexa hums as she cups her palms over the protruding bulge from Clarke's stomach, "I can't wait to meet her."

"I wish you were going to be here," Clarke murmurs sadly, placing her own hands over Lexa's pair and squeezing softly. "I wish…"

"I know," Lexa mumbles sadly as Aden finishes up his breakfast and gives them a guarded, but mournful look as he quietly tells them he's going to brush his teeth and then be back down within a couple more minutes. Lexa gives him a genuine, warm smile and the worry on his face lifts slightly.

"I don't want to go either," Lexa replies as she pulls Clarke closer towards her, "but this is my last tour. Then I'm done. Jaha said so."

"I want it in writing."

"When I come back you'll get it," Lexa chuckles at the impatient tone in Clarke's voice, but her own laughter is a bit strangled. "I swear, I'm done."

"She'll be two months old when you get back," Clarke hums as she looks down at her stomach, "I wonder what she'll look like."

"I pray she looks like you, too. Aden got lucky. The kid's gonna be a lady-killer when he's older."

"Hush," Clarke scolds playfully as her cheeks take on a light pink hue. Lexa chuckles and kisses her hair, turning them slowly so that she can tilt her head downwards and allow their lips to meet after so long being apart. "He could be interested in men for all we know. Or both."

"Or neither," Lexa affirms as she kisses her wife slowly again, "but we can put a hold on that, he's still a kid."

"He grew up so quickly," Clarke whimpers against her mouth, feeling her hormones kicking in as
she slumps against Lexa. "I don't want her to, either."

"Oh sweetheart," Lexa mumbles as she tugs her shuddering wife closer, "they'll always be kids in our eyes."

Clarke only glances down between them, where their hands are clasped over the new life soon to arrive, and she sighs achingly.

"I hope so."

=====

Clarke waits with Lexa in the sterile white room, glancing up at the posters that decorate the bland walls. Lexa's sitting rigidly beside her, hands loosely clasped in her lap as she flickers her gaze from the wall to the doors, and then to the windows. Her nose crinkles and the blonde sighs, reaching down to take her lover's slightly trembling fingers in her palm. She draws lines over the back of her wrists, catching a few of the scars that linger there. Lexa's gaze immediately darts down to her hands as she offers a measly smile in her wife's direction. The brunette leans over the bed and presses a soft kiss to her wife's lips.

"Sorry," Lexa mumbles guiltily as she squeezes Clarke's hand comfortingly, "old habits die hard."

"Did you talk to Anya about Dr Jarod?" Clarke cuts straight through to the chase, softening her voice when Lexa flinches.

"I don't need a shrink, Clarke."

"Maybe you don't," Clarke mumbles as she pecks Lexa's forehead, "but what about your sister?"

"Anya's tougher than I am."

"And you guard your feelings with a ten-foot titanium wall, Lexa."

"Fine," Lexa sighs in admission, hanging her head. "I… I'll look into it after I get back."

"You know I just want to help, right?" Clarke asks her softly, unsure if she'd crossed a line. They've talked about therapy many times before, but Lexa's never been able to open up the way that Clarke wants. She knows that professional help is something of routine for post-war veterans. She's seen the scars that line Lexa's body, but she's never been able to see the multitude of invisible markings that the older woman braces inside her weathered heart and scarred mind.

"I know," Lexa whispers as she kisses Clarke's brow, "I… I mean it, Clarke. After I get back, I'll buckle down. Anya, too. We need it."

Just as Clarke goes to answer, the door opens and in walks their gynaecologist, Dr Liu. The older woman wears a smile on her face as she greets them with a gentle welcome before pulling up the charts on her clipboard and sending a smile in Clarke's direction. Lexa erases the fear from her face and stoically sits up to listen to the doctor as she reads out the reports of Clarke's latest tests to make sure that when she does have to leave, Clarke is in good hands.

"The fetus is as at twenty weeks now as you know," Dr Liu grins as she rolls up Clarke's shirt to apply the jelly to her stomach. She rolls the ultrasound's sensor around until a greying blob appears on the screen. A small thumping sound can be heard from the machine as the doctor grins back at the happy couple.
"Strong and kicking," Dr Liu beams proudly as she zooms in on the heartbeat, "looks to be a very healthy baby."

"Our daughter," Lexa sighs in complete awe and Clarke blushing, squeezing her wife's hand tighter as she lifts it to kiss the back of her knuckles. "That's our baby in there, Clarke. Our little girl. Our Tris." Clarke grins at the excitement in Lexa's voice. It would seem weird to anyone else considering they've been down this road before with Aden, but to Lexa, new life is always what it is -- new. She cannot contain her emotions as she tears up at the ultrasound's image.

"She's gonna be a spirited one," Dr Liu muses as she feels a steady throb from the surface of Clarke's stomach, "maybe a soccer player."

"Oh God," Clarke moans as another kick hammers against her skin, "please not another one."

"I guess this one's taking after me too," Lexa chuckles as she kisses her grumpy wife's temple. "What can you do?"

"Let you deal with your clone children," Clarke retorts as she pouts in the stirrups, "next baby you're carrying, no questions."

"How about we deal with two first, love?"

"How convenient."

"Clarke," Lexa chuckles as she kisses the corner of her wife's mouth, "you know I kid, right? Get it… kid?"

"Why did I agree to marry you again?" Clarke mutters as she shakes her head and pushes Lexa's face away when the older woman waggles her brows and bursts into laughter. Dr Liu looks on with a bemused expression as she wipes off the jelly residue from Clarke's stomach and pulls her shirt back down.

"Because you love me," Lexa responds softly as Dr Liu leaves the room to get the picture of the ultrasound. Clarke's gaze softens as she nods.

"Because I love you," Clarke murmurs as she reaches up and pulls at Lexa's chin to draw her in for a kiss, "I really, really love you, Lexa."

===== After they pick Aden up from school, reality sets back in.

It sinks into all of them that tomorrow is the day that reality hits.

Tomorrow, Clarke painstakingly realizes as she watches Lexa and Aden curled up and napping on the couch together, is the day Lexa flies out.

As if to agree with her agony, a thump against her stomach's skin pulls her back to the real world. She walks over to the couch and positions herself between her wife and child, wrapping her arms around the both of them so that their heads rest upon her shoulders. Lexa hums upon the contact, her arm automatically coming around to wrap her front and cradle her close in a protective manner. Clarke's eyes well with tears as she turns her head and kisses Lexa's scalp.

"Please come back," Clarke whispers as her voice croaks painfully, "I can't do this alone."
"Always," comes the faint murmur from Lexa's lips as she snuggles closer into Clarke's embrace. "I promise I'll come back for you… for them… for me."

"I love you," Clarke breathes into her hair shakily as Lexa blinks open her eyes and glances up to give Clarke a nod and then a kiss.

"I love you more," Lexa hums as she deepens their kiss. "More than the moon and the sun and the sky and all the stars. I love you, Clarke."

They gaze upon each other for a few moments before there's a knock at their door. Sighing, Lexa lightly ruffles Aden's hair, pulling him from the throes of sleep as she meanders off the couch with a final kiss to Clarke's lips. She walks over to the door, her socked feet gliding across the mahogany until she unlocks it and pulls it open to see a familiar face staring back at her with a grim smile on her face. Behind them stands a younger man and another shorter brunette.

"Anya," Lexa greets her sister as she beckons them into the house before nodding to the couple behind them, "Lincoln. Octavia."

"Good to see you too, Woods." Lexa smiles at Octavia's chipper mood, glad that for once someone was lightening it. Lincoln's hand remains at the small of his wife's back as they're lead into the house. Lexa shuts the door behind them as they make their way into the kitchen where Aden is helping set up the table.

"There's my favourite nephew," Anya beams as she pulls Aden into her arms and jostles him around a bit, causing the boy to laugh.

"I'm your only nephew!" Aden whines as Lexa kisses the top of his head before squeezing him in a tight hug. "Aunt Anya, please--"

"Just think, kid," Octavia chimes in as she pries him away from his aunt to pull him into her own embrace, "you can do it to your little sister, too."

"Wait," Aden says as he makes the connection when Anya stands next to Lexa, "did you used to do that to Mom?"

"Used to?" Anya barks out a laugh as she side-eyes a frowning Lexa. "Kid, I still do. Watch."

Before Lexa has the chance to react, Anya sweeps her into a mock choke-hold and rubs her knuckles into her scalp in a noogie, laughing as Lexa growls and struggles in her grip. Aden giggles alongside his other mother as Lexa releases herself from the hold and traps her older sister in her own lock and wrestles her amicably. The two tousle for a bit before pulling apart and settling themselves down on the chairs where Lincoln has helped Clarke bring the food in.

They talk about their lives for awhile, of things outside this room and this state, of futures that are to come and bright things. Lincoln discusses his plans to retire and start school again so he can become a physical therapist working with veterans. Anya decides that she wants to travel the world and go on a spiritual adventure (which didn't pass without a snort from Lexa -- followed swiftly by a kick under the table to her shin by her wife). Lexa beams about Tris and Aden, about how she can't wait to come home and settle into the life of being a parent. Perhaps, she muses, she can take up literature and teach a few classes.

"So…,” Octavia says solemnly after a bit of silence as she twirls her finger around the rim of the empty wine glass, "nine o'clock, huh."

Just like that, the mood falls back into reality. Aden drops his head a little as he looks over to Lexa
with glazed eyes.

"It's only six months this time," Lexa offers as she gives her son a reassuring smile, "we'll be back soon. It'll be over before we know it."

"Yeah," Anya agrees as she rises with Clarke to grab the dishes and take them to the kitchen, "no time at all."

Lexa gives Clarke a worried glance but her wife just nods and silently assures her she's okay with her sitting and conversing with her cousin and his wife. Aden doesn't move, but looks more at ease when Lincoln pulls out a quarter and tells him about this new magic trick that he's learned. Anya carries in the heavier dishes and sets them in the sink, turning the tap on and reaching for the soap and sponge as Clarke grabs the towel. The blonde's eyes are distant, mournful.

"Clarke," Anya whispers her name as she watches Clarke grip the towel tighter in her grip, "it's gonna be okay. It's just like any other time."

"Then why… why do I have this churning in my gut?" Clarke chokes out as she looks to her sister-in-law in anger, "this… pit of despair?"

"You're pregnant and Lexa's not gonna be here when you deliver the baby. You're scared, Clarke, rightfully so, but I'm her sister. I know how much this whole family business means to her, even if I fully don't appreciate it," Anya cracks a smile as she explains to the younger blonde, placing a gentle hand on the trembling shoulder. "We're family. I won't let anything happen to her, I promise. Lexa comes back with me just like before. I'll bring her home safely."

Clarke shakes her head once, biting her lip as tears threaten to pool over in her eyes. Finally, she sighs and nods. "Please."

"I swear on my life," Anya whispers as she brings her in for a hug, gently placing Clarke's head upon her chest as she lets the younger woman sniffle out the beginning of her tears. "It'll be okay, Clarke. Just six months and then she's yours forever. Nothing can come between you two, you know it. I promise."

But, Clarke never realizes that in that moment, her promise was set to be broken.

"Do you ever think about alternate realities?"

Lexa blinks away from setting the lock on her duffle bag before she glances to where Clarke is staring up at the ceiling in silence, glassy-eyed.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Clarke whispers as Lexa slips into bed beside her and flicks off the light, "do you think about a reality in which you aren't…"

"… me?" Lexa finishes as Clarke fumbles on the words. There's no resentment in her tone, but Clarke nods sheepishly anyways. Lexa sighs.

"Sometimes," Lexa shrugs as she places her hands behind her head and tilts her chin upwards to stare at the plaster above them. "Sometimes I wish I was a librarian for some huge historical archive. Or maybe a museum curator. When I was a kid, I wanted to be a dolphin trainer though." Clarke chuckles at the last bit as Lexa throws her a goofy grin. The blonde shifts closer as she tucks her face
into the nape of Lexa's neck, nosing the soft skin under her jaw.

"But," Lexa reminisces as she gazes lovingly at her spouse, "if I did, I wouldn't have met you. I wouldn't have fallen in love and gotten married. I wouldn't have a son and a daughter on the way. I would be someone different, and I don't think I could ever love that as much as who I am with you, Clarke." Lexa's eyes mist as she shifts so that she can gently roll her body atop Clarke's own, pinning the younger woman to the mattress with a soft grip. Clarke lets out an inaudible breath as Lexa leans down and captures their lips in a slow moving, warm and gentle kiss. At some point, their hands find each other in the fray.

"You're going to come back," Clarke breathes shakily as she feels those tears sting at her eyes again, "you have to come back."

"In this lifetime and the next," Lexa replies with another slow kiss, her free hand reaching for the hem of Clarke's nightshirt. "I'm yours, Clarke."

The whimper that leaves the blonde's lips is near excruciating to hear, one that is mangled with adoration and heartbreak in the same. Lexa firms up her grip upon the quivering fingers that are interlocked with her own as she pries off Clarke's shirt and then her pants, only breaking their grasp so she can quickly rid herself of her own clothing before they are nude against each other, simply lost in the sensation of skin upon skin. Clarke's free hand maps out the scars, tracing them and ingraining them into her mind so she may make peace with Lexa's duty to her people, to her family, to her country. Lexa's mouth marks up and over her left breast, just above her heart to reassure Clarke that the reason it beats will never stray, no matter how far from home she may be.

They make love slowly, like their first time. Hands wander and lips tingle in places that are too sensitive to be touched, but ache with a passionate fire to be taken anyways. Eyes search eyes, lips meet lips, fingers lock with fingers as they move together in the rhythm of a dance set to the beats of their hearts. Their hips thrust and pull back in tandem, full synchrony like this is their routine and the bedroom is their ballroom. A few tears slide down both their cheeks as the heat spreads like an inferno of pleasure and nostalgia, of the warmth of skin but the cold, bitter ache of what awaits them the next morning.

And with a quiet, soft cry, they come together in hushed pants and whimpers. Lexa's head rests against Clarke's slick forehead as they catch their breathes, too afraid to open their eyes in the case that the moment is gone too soon, snatched from under their vulnerable bodies like a magic carpet and the genie they've been talking to has run out of wishes. But Clarke only has wish, as she feels up and down the rough expanse of Lexa's toned biceps and then over the splintered skin from a shrapnel wound from six years ago, and that is for Lexa to be safe. It does not matter to her if Clarke is in the picture -- maybe a little -- but her desire is drawn up from Lexa being alive and well, living and present.

Here, she realizes as Lexa kisses that spot over her heart again, she wants Lexa to be here.

"Soon," Lexa murmurs as she nuzzles Clarke's neck gently, tenderly, "we will, Clarke, soon."

Not soon enough.
Lexa sits in the car with Anya and Clarke as they pull into the parking lot dedicated to military family. Aden is quiet in the backseat, staring out of the window while Anya sits rigid and tall in the back. They wait a few moments, watching as other family members walk alongside other members of different squadrons, all dressed in their uniforms and ready to go. Lexa takes a deep breath before glancing over at Clarke. She silently reaches between them for her wife's hand. Anya can see Clarke tensing from the backseat and gazes over to where Aden's eyes are misting with tears, too. He tries to be brave like his mother, stoic and unwavering, but even the strongest of men can break under a glass anvil. Swallowing thickly, Anya offers her best smile to her nephew, nudging him slightly.

"There's an ice cream truck by the pay-meter," she says as she points to the van by the blue boxes, "I bet they have that rocket-ship one you like."

Aden perks a little, which is to be expected because he's a kid. He doesn't understand some of the concepts of war, not yet at least. He just thinks that his mother is a hero that stops bad guys with her side-kick older sister, and for that Anya and Lexa are both grateful. Not all the decisions on the battlefield have been made heroically. Not all nightmares or scars or reflexes fade, but to Aden, his aunt and his sister are his idols. The thought causes an ache in Anya's chest, but she denies it, thinking that she can muster up the strength to be a good distraction to the boy while Lexa gives her final goodbye to her wife.

"I'll race you," Anya proposes again, unbuckling her seatbelt. "If you get there first, you can have two."

Any lingering trace of sadness on Aden's face is gone as he looks up to Clarke and Lexa for approval. The blonde nods and Lexa reaches back to ruffle his hair, taking the moment of distraction to mouth the words, 'thank you' to her older sister, who simply gives her back an understanding shrug. They've been here.

It's just another run, Anya convinces herself as she opens the car door, just one final tour and it's all over.

Lexa and Clarke watch as their son giggles, chasing after Anya until he beats her to the truck. Lexa gazes proudly, squeezing Clarke's hand again as she looks over to her wife. They both unbuckle their seat-belts but make no effort to move until finally a PA message comes over the speakers in the lot, indicating that the soldiers flights are due to leave in twenty minutes and it's time for the final goodbyes. Clarke sucks in a worried breath as Lexa gives her a flimsy smile before kissing the back of her knuckles again, whispering soothing nothings until the blonde's heart rate has significantly calmed.

"Come on," Lexa whispers as they both settle themselves at the sight of Anya returning with Aden. "It's time, sweetheart."

Putting on the bravest face that she can muster, Clarke nods and they both step out of the car. In the distance, she spots Octavia giving Lincoln a tearful goodbye. The blonde's mouth dries instantly upon seeing the interaction, knowing that in a matter of minutes, she'll be in the same position.
Luckily, Lexa's on her knees before Aden and her son is too enraptured by his mother to notice the slow tears that have accumulated in her glassy vision.

Before she can say anything, Anya reaches forward and pulls her into a hug, and Clarke latches on tightly. There's no one else that Clarke trusts more than the older blonde. Lexa and Anya grew up with next to nothing, and if it hadn't been for Anya, she isn't sure that there'd even be a Lexa for her to love. She burrows herself in the safety and warmth, the security and assurance of the older Woods' embrace, rubbing over the ridges in her spine as she lets out a soft whimper.

"We're gonna be okay," Anya murmurs as she holds Clarke closer to her body, "I swear, Clarke. We get through everything. This is no different."

"Bring her home," Clarke mutters back as she squeezes Anya tighter, "and come back with her. We both need you. Aden, too."

"Family," Anya choked out a dry laugh, though her voice gets a bit strangled. "It's still a new concept, you know."

"Get with the times then," Clarke chuckles sadly as she lets her sister-in-law go and brushes away a few tears, "you know you're our family, An."

The two of them glance down at where Lexa is embracing a sobbing Aden, holding her son close to her chest as she presses his lips to his sandy hair. Those vibrant green eyes are brimming with sadness and longing as she mumbles sweet words into her son's ear. She rubs his back soothingly to ease the ache of his sobs and calm him. Behind them, there's another call for the soldiers to report to their assigned sectors, and Aden lets out a yelp when Lexa begins to pull away. Humming a song from her own childhood, she manages to soothe her son enough to allow them some space before she leans in and pecks his forehead.

"Be brave, my boy. Your Mama's gonna need you when I'm gone, can you help her?" Lexa asks softly, willing her voice to not crack. Aden sniffles but he nods, setting his jaw in the same facet he's always seen his mother do. Lexa smiles proudly, blinking back tears as she kisses his nose and then his cheek again.

"You take care of your little sister too, okay? She's gonna need her brother to protect her. No one can protect her better than you, my hero." Aden beams at the words as he throws himself forwards, whispering a promise with his goodbyes. They both exchange 'I love you's before parting ways so that Clarke can tug Lexa into her arms and Anya can say goodbye to her nephew. Lexa's head immediately finds Clarke's nape, taking shelter in the warmth and comfort there.

"I'll be back before you know it." Lexa assures her as she rubs her wife's back, "and the greatest homecoming gift will be waiting for me." Her palm skirts down between them before Lexa looks down and smiles, misty-eyed, at her stomach and takes a daring gulp of air to steady herself and set her emotions.

"If there's anything, you call Octavia. Don't be stubborn, love. Promise me," Lexa states the question rather than poses it as she glances back up. Clarke chokes down a whimper as she nods and draws Lexa in for a kiss, not caring of who sees. Lexa responds with such passion that they both nearly asphyxiate from the pressure and rushing of blood to their hearts. Their lungs ache and burn for air, but they keep their mouths sealed together, knowing this is their only true form of healing and reassurance. Lexa takes strength from her wife and gives back stability, the mindset that Clarke will be okay and so will she, no matter the distance. And Clarke greedily accepts as Lexa deepens the kiss and dips her free hand lower on the small of her back until the final call comes in over the PA.
"Don't be a hero," Clarke whispers against her lover's lips, "I want you back safe and sound, Woods."

"I will," Lexa smiles as she pecks Clarke's lips and gives her one last hug, "I love you."

Clarke only nods and watches with teary eyes as Anya and Lexa grab their bags and sling them over their shoulders. Lexa turns her head once more, just in time to hear Clarke whisper the words, "I love you" right back at her. The brunette smiles and nods before passing the same sentiment down to her son. They watch until Lexa and Anya disappear behind the security bars and make their way onto the plane. Aden insists on watching the take-off and Clarke complies, no matter how much it causes more strain inside her own tortured heartstrings as the 747 roars down the runway and lifts off into the air, Afghanistan-bound.

Their drive home is silent.

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June 20th 2009, 14:45
Tagab, Afghanistan

"It's a hot one out there," Gustus remarks as he looks to his captain with a dry laugh, wiping a bead of sweat from his face, "supposed to get hotter."

"Don't remind me," Lexa grumbles as she adjusts her scarf around her neck while they scope out the area of an abandoned village, searching for any potential terrorists hiding amidst the wreckage. Propping her HK416 up on the rocky ledge, she peers through the sights and tries to pick out some motion through the inverted crosshairs. She swivels the gun around and finds no activity, removing her sights from the weapon. She nods at her second lieutenant and they pack up the equipment surrounding them, preparing to head back to base. Lexa picks up her radio and selects the third frequency before pushing down on the button.

"First Lieutenant Woods," she speaks authoritatively into the microphone, "what's your status?"

There's a bit of a garbled static before Anya's scratchy voice picks up on the comms. "We had a few blows with some IDF but we're good."

"Injuries?" Lexa barks out, worried. There's some more interference before Anya's voice comes back, a bit stronger.

"Negative, Captain. They were just rebels, I think, nothing too heavy on weaponry. We're all set to head back to base on your command."

"Affirmative. Gus and I will meet you there. Safe travels, Lieutenant."

"Roger that, Captain. Reconvening at waypoint alpha."
Lexa pockets her radio and loads up her gun before slinging it over her back. She adjusts her pack and tightens her goggles as she feels a sandstorm settling in the distance. She motions to Gustus and he gets the message, leading them down the rift of the valleyed gorge until they're on lower ground. They trek an alternate route to the way they came to make sure that the sand covers their tracks before they make their way towards their temporary headquarters. It takes a few hours, longer than usual but it's not unexpected considering the heat and the weather conditions, but they reach the camp by dusk.

When they arrive, Anya is already there, waiting for them by the main tent. Gustus takes Lexa's pack and nods to Anya once in greeting before heading towards the armoury to restock the weapons. Lexa sees the apprehensive look on her sister's face and sighs, nodding at her to lead the way into the command tent. They enter and immediately, Lexa is shocked to see Colonel Jaha and Lieutenant Colonel Kane standing in uniform. Straightening her posture, Lexa gulps and salutes respectfully. Jaha gives her a smile that lets her know she can ease up on the formalities. Lexa relaxes her posture and drops her hand, but stays wary.

"Sir," she states politely, "with all due respect, what are you doing at Lash Vegas? Isn't this out of your district?"

"Everyone's district is my district," Jaha sighs tiredly as he rubs his brow, "besides, this is a matter of great importance. I need my best team."

Lexa waits a moment, unsure if he's meaning her or not. Kane offers a kind smile from behind the older man, nodding to relieve her of her suspicions.

"What can I do for you, sir?" Lexa asks as she rounds the table where maps are spread out and tablets are displaying a multitude of different images. Jaha hands her one copy of the maps before grabbing another so that he can point at a few circled red areas marked with exclamation points. Lexa frowns at the image.

"IEDs?" She asks, puzzled as she looks to the two men. "We're smack dab in the middle of nowhere. Why IEDs?"

"That's what we were wondering," Kane mutters as he steps forward to inspect the reports. "There's no sign of actual detonation, but we've received recon that they're priming the trucks now, not just the civvies. We've got three main conveys heading south towards Wazir. They're passing through Tagab, or are set to pass through the valley, in a few weeks. We think they're planning a hit on the city considering NATO and a few of the eighth regiment and some infantry stationed." Lexa frowns at the news and quickly does the calculations in her head, including the population of Wazir as well as Tagab, just in case.

"That's roughly eight thousand civvies and three thousand soldiers," Lexa says, seeking affirmation. She grimaces when Kane nods.

"Permission to speak freely, Captain?" Anya's voice pipes up from behind. Lexa's head does a quarter turn and she nods. Anya takes a step inwards and gestures to another spot on the map as she says, "we've scoped out this ridge over here a few weeks ago. It's only five clicks from the only road into the village. If they're going to come via Tagab then they're going to have to pass through this gorge here." Jaha narrows his gaze at the map before looking at the lieutenant.

"Are you suggesting a plan? You want to ambush the convoy?" Jaha asks, but Anya shakes her head.

"We don't have to blow the rigs sky-high," she says as she points to the opposite side of the ridge.
"We just set up the spikes in the sand. With the refraction in the sunlight they won't be able to spot it. If the trucks can't move, they don't have their explosives. Even if they arm a civvie, it's not enough to take out eleven thousand people." Jaha, Lexa, and Kane mull over the alternative option and processes it. At last, Jaha and Kane turn to Lexa, backs ramrod straight.

"Your opinion, Captain? You're the leader of this regiment," Kane says as he looks at her with interest. Pulling her bottom lip into her mouth, Lexa bites down the worry of the risk and instead turns to Anya. The older woman is standing with a measure of respect, but fire lights her hazel eyes, one she knows too well.

"You're confident this is the spot?" Lexa asks with a stern voice. "It's a big risk, Lieutenant."

"I am, ma'am. One-hundred percent. There's no other entry into the village unless they skirt around, but then they'd be passing through us, regardless." Anya's gaze stays firm as she relays the information to her younger sister. Lexa takes a minute to calculate the odds in meeting the force with subtly and stealth vs. meeting them head on. Realizing that the latter would more than likely result in a bigger risk, she nods slowly and points to the spot on the map.

"We'll set out a perimeter and watch it. I'll send the recon team up north to get locations on that convoy. I'll get my marksmen and heavies to lay the spikes on the road. We'll intercept them before they can detonate in the village," Lexa states with authority. Jaha and Kane, seemingly pleased with the plan, nod and excuse themselves from the tent, letting the two sisters know that they'll be in touch via the radios and to expect further updates as the weeks progress.

As soon as they're gone, Lexa turns to Anya with a worried glance. "You're sure about this?"

"Positive," Anya says with a nod, "there's no other route unless they come through our HQ."

"And if they do...," Lexa trails off, her face paling slightly as she thinks about the lives of her men and women in this camp.

"So help us God," Anya mutters, finishing Lexa's thought as she exits the tent, leaving her sister alone to process her thoughts.

Lexa spends a few more moments in the tent reviewing her notes and schematics before she hears the tent flap being pulled back. Cocking her head, she sees Lincoln's warm smile staring back at her. He nods to the exit of the tent, eyes excited with happiness. A flame ignites in Lexa's heart at his jovial expression.

"We patched the cables to get some connection to the laptop," Lincoln says and Lexa smiles at the words, "Clarke's waiting on Skype. Princess is pissed."

"Why?" Lexa asks, eyes widening as she straightens and grips the band of her holster. "Is she--"

"She had a false contraction," Lincoln chuckles, easing Lexa's fears. "Thought it was an early labour, but it was really gas."

At this, Lexa's face scrunches up slightly. Lincoln shakes his head and beckons Lexa to join her in the barracks where her wife awaits. Her cousin has always been the go-to for Clarke since she'd first been deployed. Anya had been a bit more closed off but Lincoln was the empathetic one, the neutral voice when Clarke couldn't understand why Lexa wouldn't talk about certain things. He was the lawful good in the political and physical war between the desert and home. Anya always was more stubborn and hard-headed, claiming that Clarke couldn't possibly understand the gist of it, but then again, Lexa muses, she's Anya.
Nothing is more hard-headed than Anya, not even a bullet-proof helmet.

"All yours, Cap." Lincoln says kindly as he pulls back the tent flaps and points to the laptop in the corner of the room. "Good luck."

=====

"This kid is a nightmare, Lex," Clarke moans as soon as Lexa sits in front of her, dusty-haired and tan from the Afghanistan sun. "I want her out."

"Hello to you, too, my love," Lexa chuckles back as she peers through the fuzzy camera at her beautiful wife. "You look gorgeous."

"I am a whale," Clarke whines as she cups her stomach and groans as she feels another wave of gas overcome her. "A gassy, bloated, giant, whale."

"Only a few more weeks, baby, you've got this. She'll be before we know it, our little Tris." Lexa's voice softens over the signal and Clarke can't help but feel some of her irritation fade after a few seconds of simply staring at Lexa. Clarke keeps rubbing over her stomach, easing the fluttering kicks by her daughter.

"I miss you," Clarke whispers as she looks to the curve of her belly, "I wish you were here."

Lexa's eyes glaze over the pixelated screen and Clarke can see the struggle in her throat as she swallows thickly.

"I know," her wife replies in a choked up voice, "I miss you so much, baby. I want to come home to you and Aden as soon as I can."

"Only three more months," Clarke hums as she hugs her stomach closer, "I can't wait, baby. Neither can our baby, so it seems."

"She's kicking your ass still?" Lexa chuckles through the screen. Clarke scowls at her through the camera and shakes her head.

"What have I told you about language, Lexa?"

"Oh come on," Lexa wiggles her eyebrows as she jokes, "I'm a soldier. What else do you expect?"

"Our kids are going to have filthy mouths just like you."

"Just like me?" Lexa scoffs in mock-disbelief. "You definitely swear way more than I do, Griff."

"Maybe it's because I'm a Woods now."

"Funny," Lexa jokes as she smiles endearingly at her wife. Clarke can't help but feel her heart speed up at the way Lexa's facial features relax, shedding some of the weight of her role leading her people from miles away. Before she can speak, she hears the front door open and footsteps racing up the steps. Clarke turns and smiles as Aden bounds into the room, still dressed in his soccer jersey and cleats. Mud tracks lead down the steps and Clarke frowns.

"Aden," she says as she groans at the mud on the newly-cleaned floors, "what have I told you about shoes in the house?"

"Oh," Aden realize with a sheepish blush as he looks to his feet, "sorry, Mama. I got excited when I heard you talking."
At the reasoning, Clarke can't find a bone in her body that lets her be mad at her son. Instead she just pats his arm and makes room on the bed so that he can squeeze up beside her. Learning his lesson quickly, Aden peels off his cleats before hopping onto the bed and grinning at the sight of his other mother. Lexa's face lights up when Aden's face comes onto the screen. Aden squeezes into Clarke's side and nearly squeaks at Lexa's mere presence.

"My handsome boy," Lexa beams as she leans in closer as if attempting to break through and join them on this side of the world, "how are you?"

"I'm good, Mom. I scored twice today in practice!" Aden beams as he grins at her. "Coach said I should try out for gold-level!"

"That's my son!" Lexa exclaims proudly. "You take after me, though you got your good-looks from your mother."

"Mom," Aden whines as he blushes again, causing Clarke to grin and kiss his head, "that's gross. Did you make heart-eyes at Mama while I was gone?"

"Heart-eyes?" Lexa asks in confusion, her own cheeks tainting slightly through the screen. "Buddy, who told you about heart-eyes?"

"Angelica from math class says that people make heart-eyes when they're in love," Aden recites the information like it's ordinal, "she said that it looks like how you look at Mama, or how Old Man -- I mean Mr Greenway looks at his cats. It means you really love that person… or I guess cats, in Mr Greenway's case. Can you be in love with a cat?" Aden ponders the question innocently and Lexa just smiles at his excitement. Clarke holds him tighter to her, grinning as he places his hand on Clarke's stomach and feels for the odd fluttering of his little sister from within the confines of Clarke's womb. Lexa just stares on, taking it all in.

"Why don't you go wash up?" Clarke hums as she notices some people starting to enter the tent. "We'll get pizza tonight."

"I want Hawaiian," Aden says as he bounds off the bed. Clarke and Lexa both frown at the statement.

"Last I checked you hated Hawaiian, kiddo." Lexa's voice is nearly garbled through the speakers. The signal must be getting weaker. Aden just shrugs.

"Mom likes Hawaiian," Aden offers as a response before walking out the door, leaving the 'I miss you' unheard but still conveyed.

"I swear," Clarke muses as she hears the shower turning on as she faces Lexa again, "he's a carbon copy of you, babe."

"I'd say he's a fifty-fifty mix. The perfect blend," Lexa chuckles as she turns her head to see more soldiers walking in. Clarke sighs in despondency.

"How are things out there?" Clarke asks, not liking the way Lexa's eyes darken at the question. "Are you holding up?"

"As best we can," Lexa mumbles quietly, "there's not much else we can do. Doesn't help that it's bloody hot out here."

"Make sure you keep hydrated," Clarke rattles off, going into doctor-mode as she stares intently at her wife, now blurring and pixelating with the worsening signal, "eat lots of food high in fluids, like
fruits if you can get them. You need electrolytes and protein. Cut back on the carbs and cover yourself up, babe. The last thing you need is skin cancer from all the godawful radiation you've been subjected to in the past few months. I want you home in one piece, alright?" Lexa raises her eyebrow at the strict words, and Clarke can hear a few chuckles from behind Lexa, causing the brunette to bark out a few sharp words.

A shiver tingles down Clarke's pine at the commanding tone and yeah… she really misses Lexa now.

"Clarke," Lexa's garbled voice comes back on the line, "the signal's cutting out... gotta... go... love..."

"I love you," Clarke blurts out as she sees the weakening connection signal on her application. "Promise me you'll please stay safe, Lex."

Even with the distorted image, Lexa manages to smile and confidently tell her, "I will."

Unbeknownst to Clarke, as the audio and visual cuts out, that is the first time Lexa Woods has ever lied.

July 14th 2009, 13:05

Somewhere in the Nangahar Province, Afghanistan

"Visuals?"

"Negative."

"Comm channels?"

"Dead, Cap."

"Give me the rundown of their payload again."

"Proxies and unknowns. Given that they're hooked to the trucks, it's gotta be big."

Lexa puts her binoculars down from where she'd been looking out into the deserted valley. The spikes have been laid out and her recon team has given her the signal that the convoy, four trucks and two cars strong, would be heading their way in an hour. The earth around the valley is relatively flat, so it confuses her that even with the mirage effect as a result of light refracting off the sand, that she cannot see the vehicles en-route. Pocketing the binoculars, she hops down from her ridge to look back at Gustus, who's still trying to pick up a signal on their dead radio to get in touch with the secondary team back at camp.

"Captain!" A young-sounding voice interrupts her thoughts, causing Lexa to turn. The man is about twenty-two, freshly shaven as he snaps a salute.
"At ease," she says as he runs up to her, sweaty and out of breath, "what is it, Specialist?"

"Permission to--"

"Please," Lexa says, waving him off to get him to speak his point. The man gulps fearfully as he wipes a bead of sweat from his brow.

"The convoy diverted the path back to HQ." he breathes out between huffs, "they're using target jammers to cut the radio frequencies."

"What?!" Lexa demands, eyes going wide as she steps up to the man, "you better not be lying, Specialist."

"I'm not," the man coughs as he wheezes more air into his lungs, "recon needed their fastest runner to send the signal. It's a trap. They bugged the meeting yesterday with the Colonel and the Lieutenant-Colonel. They diverted back and have civvies alongside their suicidal asses. They're gonna blow base-camp."

"Gustus," Lexa commands as she looks to the second-lieutenant with a worried, but still calm expression. Gustus doesn't even need to hear the words as nods and motions for the team to converge on their base-camp. Lexa slings her rifle from her back onto her shoulders, worriedly remembering that Anya's leading the secondary team back at HQ. Setting her motives straight, Lexa pushes down her emotions and focuses her energy in leading her people. Letting out a furious cry to the rest of her regiment, she leads the path with Gustus back down towards the primary camp where Lincoln and Anya are waiting.

"Can you believe there's only two more months until they're back home?" Octavia says as she props her feet up on Clarke's coffee table. The blonde groans from beside her as she tenderly curls her hand over her stomach's curve, now more prominent than ever. She's nearing the due date in a few weeks, with little Tris soon on her way to becoming the new member of the Griffin-Woods household. The brunette beams from beside her as Clarke rubs her stomach.

"Excited to get the monster out?" Octavia chirps as she stuffs a handful of popcorn in her mouth while they continue their Netflix marathon. Clarke glares at her, but Octavia can see that it's more playful irritation than anything. Clarke rolls her eyes at her best friend's nonchalance, not bothering to fight her on it further.

"Ow," Clarke mutters as she feels a pain ripple through her side. Octavia arches a brow in concern, unsure if Clarke's pulling her leg or not.

"Clarke?" Octavia asks as she watches Clarke grimace again, tenderly rubbing the sharp pain in her stomach. "Yo, if you're kidding you better--"

"Ah God," Clarke practically hisses the silent prayer as suddenly, she feels the cushion beneath her soak in her own liquids. Octavia visibly blanches at the sight but snaps out of her daze when the blonde lets out another painfully low moan of agony. Octavia acts quickly, reaching for the phone as she dials her brother. Bellamy picks up right away, having just got off his shift at the station when Octavia growls at him that Clarke's baby is coming, that she's peed all over the couch, and that he needs to pick Aden up and bring him to the nearest hospital. She hangs up without him responding before rushing over to the couch.

"Do I need to get an ambulance or should I drive?" Octavia asks, unsure of how to help the woman
in labour before her. Clarke chuckles in a low wheeze.

"You drive?" Clarke rasps out between ragged gasps. "I want to keep my daughter alive, not dead."

Octavia lets out a nervous laugh at the crack joke at her driving skill as she nods and picks up the phone to dial an ambulance. She waits beside her best friend, clutching her hand for dear life and giving her all the support in the world while the both of them know that there's only one other person that needs to be there more. Clarke's eyes are glazed over in both sadness and pain, but Octavia stays strong and clutches her hand closer to her lips and peppers kisses on the knuckles like she's seen Lexa do many times before when the blonde is in moments of doubt or weakness. Clarke knows that in any other situation it would be considered odd behaviour, but right now, with the baby they both worked so hard to get on its way, the flickering touches are the only reminder of her spouse.

"She's right here with you," Octavia hums into her knuckles, "she knows, Clarke. Lexa always knows."

Clarke just nods, focusing on her breathing as more pain rips through her like a tsunami.

*Lexa always knows.*

======

Luckily for them, the terrain by car is uneven and rocky in comparison to being on foot.

The sounds of gunfire rattle over the edge of the final rift between the two groups, tearing up clouds of dust and sand. Screams and shouts of war commands can be heard in the distance, and Lexa finds herself nearly sighing in relief when she hears Anya and Lincoln giving directions from further up front. She tears her way through the tents and finds her sister and cousin propped up against the back of a jeep, reloading their weapons. She looks back at Gustus, who nods and pops his head up from the cover of the rocks to provide covering fire as she keeps low and slides in beside her relatives.

"What the fuck happened?" Anya demands as she sees Lexa prop up against the side of the truck. "The convoy--"

"It doesn't matter anymore," Lexa cuts her off as she tries to get a visual of their battlefield, "it's a trap. Conversation was bugged."

"Fuck," Anya swears as she loads another magazine before popping up and taking out a few of the enemy militia. "They brought a squad."

"What's the fire power on those bombs?" Lexa screams over the gunfire as she makes out the first of the four trucks paving their way through the ravine in their general direction. Anya shakes her head, letting her know that she's unsure. She goes to duck her head up again but Lincoln reaches out and swiftly pulls her down. As she goes to protest, the three of them are jostled against the jeep by the fizzing of a bazuka-head flying over their heads, barely missing them as they explode in one of the tents behind the soldiers. Lexa clears the ringing from her ears, a bit more aware of the fire-power the enemy possesses.

"They came prepared," Lincoln mutters as he reloads his M4 Carbine and ducks his head out to get a read of the enemies. "Two left-flank, four right."

"I got right," Lexa says without taking no for an answer. Anya goes to protest but Lincoln pulls her back and pops up to provide his captain with covering fire until she reaches a safe point on the other side of the camp. Lexa power-slides behind a set of rocks, hissing when a bullet nicks her right ear and splatters blood on the dusty sand. She scrambles for cover and cups her bleeding ear, clenching...
Taking a minute to collect herself, Lexa ducks out of cover and levels her sights, shooting down two of the four targets with precise aim before hopping back down when the barrage of fire continues. Reloading a magazine into her rifle, Lexa waits until the signature 'click' of the enemy's weapon being emptied before she comes back up to mow down the rest of them. Noticing that more trucks are inbound, Lexa quickly reaches for her radio and pulls herself into cover.

"Reading all units under Regiment Five-C, I've got more vehicles inbound," she yells into the receiver as gunfire ensues once more, "VBIED unconfirmed. Hostiles are inbound, I repeat, hostiles inbound." Lexa peeks around the corner, trying to ignore how the dead body next to her has been slowly bleeding out and staining her boots crimson, as she gets a read on how many targets are approaching. The cars barely screech into view before she ducks behind the rocks.

"Unconfirmed total, counted fourteen on right flank, forty-five degrees northeast of base-camp. Eight confirmed targets heading southwest towards the armoury," she lists as she closes her eyes to make sure she'd counted right before ordering, "I want all available units converging on waypoint alpha."

A signal of 'copy that's' erupt from the speaker as Lexa pockets the radio and looks across the blood-soaked sand to where Anya and Lincoln are still propped up against the jeep. She barely makes eye-contact with her sister before the gunfire stills. Frowning, Lexa knows that there hadn't been enough shots to target the enemy soldiers. Turning her head around the rock, she looks at the scene before her, only for her heart to sink to her stomach at the sight.

All of the soldiers are standing with their guns drawn, but aren't moving. They're all muttering things under their breaths, holding their guns close as they eyes remained flickered shit with their heads bowed. Frowning, Lexa peeks her head up a bit more until the connection finally clicks in her brain. Her eyes widen in horror as she stands just as the soldiers open their eyes and place their hands inside their jacket sleeves, reaching for a mechanism. Eerie, almost calm smiles paint their faces as they stare at Lexa's stiffened form. Anya catches the fearful expression before her sister has the time to get the words out, but it's too late.

All that comes next are screams.

===== 

The howls leaving her throat threaten to tear her larynx out from her esophagus.

"Push!" Dr Liu yells at her from beneath the white sheet between her legs. "I can see the head, Clarke, you're so close, just push."

"I can't," Clarke wheezes as she pitifully cries into Octavia's hands, "I want Lexa, oh God it hurts."

"You've got this, Clarke, come on just listen to the doc. Push," Octavia urges with a trembling voice, "come on, do it for Lexa."

For Lexa, Clarke reminds herself, for the woman that's coming home in two months, who's fighting for all of them.

For Lexa, the woman who stole her heart and gave up her own.

For Lexa, her everything.

With terrifying yowl of sheer agony, Clarke leans forwards and gives one last push, feeling the movement tearing the insides of her walls apart like knives as she hears the encouraging shouts from
both Dr Liu and Octavia. As soon as the last sensation of hardness leaving her lower lips ceases, Clarke collapses against the damp sheets of the hospital bed, exhausted. Tears slip down her cheeks as she hears Dr Liu handing the baby off to a midwife as the umbilical cord is cut. At first, she's so dull from the searing pain that she doesn't recognize the silence that has befallen the room. Her eyes blur with tears as she looks to Dr Liu.

"S-She didn't cry," Clarke gasps as she inches forward with a horrified expression, "Tris, she didn't cry--"

"I need you to relax, Clarke. Everything is under control," Dr Liu tells her gently, her voice the epitome of calm. "Tris' lungs got filled with fluid. She's not breathing but we're working on her. I need you to relax. We need to stitch you up or else you're going to haemorrhage out. Please stay calm, okay?"

"Tris," Clarke wheezes, unable to focus on anything else but her daughter, "no, I need my baby. I need Tris. Lexa!"

"Clarke," Octavia's voice centres her as she starts to panic on the bed. "Clarke, look at me, you need to calm down. Lexa's not here."

"Lexa," Clarke moans fitfully, ignoring Octavia's soothing hums and gentle brushes of her fingertips in her sweaty scalp. "I want Lexa!"

"Sedate her," Dr Liu orders sternly as she pulls her bloodied gloves from under the blonde's sheet. "I need her knocked out, now."

Clarke manages only one last, feeble 'Lexa' before all she sees is black.

======

Lexa's entire head spins as she feels her body start to come back into itself but the ringing doesn't cease.

Something sharp is jabbing into her leg, but she can't feel the wound as much as she knows she should. Blinking twice to get rid of the white spots dancing in her vision as a result of her rods being bleached by the blinding light, she finally manages to focus back on the chaos of the battlefield. Her entire uniform is covered in the gory guts and blood of enemy soldiers that had taken the suicidal routes to remove many of her good working men and women. Lexa heaves herself up from the ground, shocked to see that the four trucks and two cars are still in place, despite the many men now obliterated by the force of their explosions. As she stands, she can't help but cough at the wet clod of blood that gets stuck in her throat. She spits it out before looking around.

"Lexa!" Anya's voice hollers out from the rocky covering a few paces behind the jeep. Lexa turns slowly, still disorientated heavily by the sights and sound of the massive explosion, relieved to find both her and Lincoln relatively unharmed considering the situation. Lincoln's crouching beside her sister, who's leaned against the rock face with a grimace on her face. Lexa barely stumbles over to them and nearly trips when she sees who her cousin is tending to.

Tears mist in her eyes when she sees the bloodied patch of mangled organs practically seeping out from Gustus as he lies upon the crimson sand. His eyes, fleeting and grey, flit over to her own and she gulps down the fear as he purses his lips, causing more blood to ooze from his cracked lips and to the floor.

"Be strong," he whispers to her as his head falls back to the earth. Lexa bites back a growl as tears
stain her eyes. She reaches for her radio.

"Regiment Five-C," she hoarsely gasps into the radio, "status report on all sectors, now."

"Multiple casualties across the delta sector, unable to withstand heat."

"Fourteen fatalities reported at waypoint alpha, Captain."

"We're taking heavy fire at the valley, too. Requesting medical-evacuation and ground assistance immediately."

Lexa clutches the radio in her hands and looks over to the field of massacred body parts and strung apart organs to see more men arriving in trucks, armed and ready. Turning back around, Lexa takes stock of the remainder of her squadron, of the men and women that had pledged to serve her, the men and women who have died as a result of the poor call she'd made. Steeling herself, Lexa weighs her options and knows that there's only one. She swallows and looks back to the image over the sandy dunes where the enemies are closer to approaching the battlefield. Taking a deep breath, she turns to face Anya and Lincoln.

"All units fall back to give assistance at the valley," she orders them into the radio, ignoring the way Anya's eyes furiously widen in horror. "Base-camp is a casualty, I repeat, do not return to HQ. Convene at the valley and hold the rest of them off. Do not let the foot soldiers or the VBIED into Wazir." Lexa pockets the radio, not bothering to wait for the responses as she limps over to Anya and Lincoln. The rest of the squad is already forming up around them, awaiting their next orders. Lexa nods to Lincoln, but her cousin shakes his head as well, adamant on not letting her go so easily.

"Those trucks get through and tens of thousands of people will die," Lexa hisses before they can say anything. "We are the only thing in the way of preventing that from happening. You know how rank works. You question me on anything you want but you will not question me on this, understood?!" Anya bounds forward but Lexa shakes her head, barely noticing the blood dripping down her skull and slipping in between her cracked lips. The iron is bitter against her tongue as she turns her head over her shoulder to see the men fast approaching, yelling things in Pashto that she knows don't mean well for her people.

"What are your orders?" Anya asks as she looks around, still displeased. Lexa nods at the other soldiers, bare for the medic tending to a luckily still-breathing Gustus, and they get the message, falling back to go join the others at the valley fire-fight. Anya shakes her head as she reaches out and grabs at Lexa's arm.

"I'm not leaving you here," Anya tells her determinedly, "you have a fucking wife and kids, if someone has to take the shot, it's gotta be me."

"Don't," Lexa hisses as she points down to the shrapnel that had somehow lodged into her thigh from the first explosion, "I need a commanding officer at the valley. I can't get there in time. You can. You and Lincoln take Gustus out and get him medical attention. I need you to do this, Anya. You are second-in-command." Anya shakes her head, watching with fear as more soldiers make their way over the footfalls towards their camp.

"I'm your sister first, goddammit!" Anya screams when Lexa tries to tear herself away. "I made Clarke a promise, Lexa. I said I'd bring you back safe."

Lexa pauses, head bowed into her chest before she turns to face her older sister, glassy-eyed. "I know. So did I."
"Then we're keeping it," Anya growls as she pulls Lexa back into her grasp, "let me take the shot. I won't lose you."

"No," Lexa whispers as she readjusts Anya's rifle in her hands as the soldiers start pouring into the clearing. "You and Lincoln need to cover my ass until I can get close enough to those trucks." Anya's gaze waters as she shakes her head furiously, but Lexa's grip upon her shoulders is strong, unwavering.

"I love you," Lexa tells her with a mournful croak, "but this is the only way and you know it."

"I can't let you die," Anya gasps as she looks to an equally saddened, but somehow more understanding, Lincoln. "I won't… I can't…"

"You get our people out of here as soon as these trucks go off," Lexa growls, shoving the radio into her hands as she fights back hot tears. "Okay, Anya? You're the only one that can get them out after this is over. Get Gustus out of here and get our people to safety. That's our objective. We're leaders first, An."

"Clarke told you not to be a hero, Lexa," Anya chokes out as Lexa pulls her into a bone-crushing hug, tears steadily streaming down both their faces now as they are given the last few minutes to feel each other, to take in each other's scent, however blood-addled and gruesome, because they know that this is the end. "I fucking promised her that I'd bring you back alive and I fucking will. I… I won't leave you here. We go back together. We're sisters." Anya buries her nose into Lexa's neck and sobs as the younger woman squeezes her tighter. Anya's eyes trace over the men approaching with their guns raised and she growls.

"Take care of Clarke for me, okay?" Lexa whispers softly, her voice growing slower as she closes her eyes and thinks of Aden and Clarke, of their little girl, Tris, whom she would never have a chance to meet. "Aden and Tris, too. I need you to be there for them, please. An, you took care of me, please take care of them. They're your family now. Tell Clarke that I love her, that I'm sorry for breaking my promise. I… I wish there was another way, but we have to protect our own." Anya grips her younger sister tighter in her arms, ignoring the shard of agony pressing into her heart with each choked sob leaving her lips when Lexa pulls away. The younger woman's eyes soften, and for a moment Anya doesn't believe that they're in a war-zone. All she sees is the girl she protected her entire life.

All she sees is Lexa, strong, resilient, heroic, brave Lexa.

"Please," Lexa begs as she fights the urge to cry, "please, Anya, don't leave my wife and kids."

"I won't," Anya mournfully submits as she leans her forehead against Lexa's clammy and bloodied own, "fuck, I promise I won't."

"Thank you," Lexa whispers with a smile, "thank you for everything, Anya. I love you."

"God… I…," Anya whimpers as she pulls Lexa in for one last hug, "I love you too, baby sis. Never forget that." Lexa allows herself the brief moment of comfort in Anya's strong fingers threading soothingly through the baby curls at the back of her neck, coupled with the soft kisses to her cheek and undamaged ear.

But the moment is over just as quickly as it begins and Lexa forces herself to pull away before she gives similar teary-eyed goodbyes to Lincoln, who looks as stricken as her older sister at her decision, but Lexa knows that he can see that there are no other alternatives. Their farewell is short and sweet as Lexa picks up her rifle and makes her way over to the first piece of covering. Anya and
Lincoln square their jaws and take their own positions, loading up their rifles just as the first few armed soldiers make their way down the ravine and into the battlefield. Lexa keeps her stare on her siblings, watching as they both start firing.

As soon as the first wave of soldiers are knocked down, Lexa limps out from cover and hobble-runs her way over to the next bit, biting back a howl of pain as she slips on a river of blood and lands on the piece of dug-in shrapnel on her thigh. She scrambles behind the rocky face as the gunfire starts up again. More soldiers are dropping like flies as she moves from cover to cover, drawing closer towards her primary target. She can see that there are more soldiers incoming, and quickly formulates a plan. She turns her head around to see Anya and Lincoln still furiously laying down the covering fire. Her heart aches in her chest as she sees the tears sliding down Anya's cheeks and the agonizing screams leaving her lips with each fingering of the trigger on the carbine.

Just as Anya and Lincoln run out of ammo, the soldiers make their way into the prime zone of the battlefield. Lexa takes a deep breath.

This is it.

As if in slow-motion, Lexa rises from her spot, ignoring the agonizing howl of her name being screamed in the background by her older sister as Lincoln tears her away. Upon noticing her, the gunshots ring out. The first bullet hits her in the shoulder, causing her to stumble backwards. The next catches her stomach, barely being caught by the kevlar underneath her uniform. The third carves just above the shrapnel wound on her thigh, bringing her to a stumbling, wheezing mess. The last one pierces through the upper lining of her uniform, digging deep in between her collarbone and upper right breast.

And with that, Lexa, the almighty captain of twelve units under Regiment Five-C, is brought to her knees in a bleeding heap.

The soldiers converge on her, just as she'd expected, but this time, instead of raising her gun towards them, she aims it at the fuel tank of the first truck. They seem to get the hint and storm closer to her, but Lexa's faster, despite her sluggishly bleeding injuries and rapidly dwindling consciousness.

"May we meet again," Lexa whispers into the humid air as she closes her eyes and thinks of Clarke, Aden, Tris, Anya, Lincoln, and Octavia.

With a deep breath, she pulls the trigger.

There's a shrill screeching noise followed by an incomprehensibly loud bang. Unfathomable, rocketing pain and a scorching heat envelops her body, causing Lexa's entire being to be thrown backwards at a blinding speed. She hurtles through the air like a rag-doll, too winded to even let out a scream. The fire races up and down her limbs, consuming her and eating away at each layer of the dermis with parasite-like qualities. Her lungs concave inwards and jar against her ribs until she feels them fill with hot, warm blood, leaving her breathless.

And when her back finally collides with something hard, Lexa loses all sensation and collapses into nothing.

Chapter End Notes

Yay? Nay? I don't even know ahaha.
Thanks for reading!! <3 Leave a comment or a kudo if you want to, but no pressure as always.

Much love, xx.

PS. shout out if you caught the T&S reference :P
Prologue [Part Two: Homecoming]

Chapter Summary

The dead are gone, the living are hungry.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: Mentions of Gore and Violence.

I am really agonizingly sore and am having poor health issues but I was sad/high off pain killers so I decided to write some more of this story. I re-watched Brothers last night while crying in pain because I hadn't seen it in four or so years and I didn't remember that at the end, it didn't play out the way I thought it did. It has me contemplating this story and wondering if I want to keep it Clanya endgame or revert back to Clexa endgame with side Ranya instead. I think I still want to explore Clanya a bit more considering all my other 100 fics are Clexa-based but I am unsure if it'll end up being them as endgame yet. It all depends on how I feel, aha.

Also this story is just a side fic -- I was too sad and sore to write happy WTTIMG so this is my outlet instead. I hope you guys are keeping well and this'll probably be the last of my updates until I get better, sorry. I doubt this story will be getting updated any time soon after this chapter because I wanna update my main fics first.

The lyrics at the beginning are from Greg Laswells' song, "Comes and Goes".

EDIT: CLEXA IS NOW ENGAME AS WELL AS RANYA.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

this one's for the faithless

the ones that are surprised

they are only where they are now

regardless of their fight

this one's for believing

if only for its sake

come on friends get up now
Anya wakes up to the pressing of something sharp under her ribs. An arm is draped over her side and there's a voice yelling through the haze of smoke and dust that starts to make itself more known. Turning her head, Anya finds Lincoln's wide eyes staring back at her, lips moving at a lightening pace.

And then, as she looks over his shoulder to the smouldering flames and scent of charred flesh, her memories come crashing back in.

"L..." she chokes as she shoves Lincoln off her body and scrambles to her feet, "Lexa? Lexa!"

"Anya, we have to go," Lincoln growls hoarsely, his voice scratchy and soft as he loops an arm around her middle and tugs her back. "Anya--"

"No!" Anya screams as she stumbles forward a few steps before collapsing to her knees at the sight of the flames before her. "No, Lexa…"

Lincoln wavers on his feet as tears stream down his face, the last images of Lexa kneeling with her pistol aimed at the convoy burning an inferno through his mind. He wipes away the tears and wills himself to be strong as he makes his way over to where Anya is kneeling, her hands woven tightly in her hair as she screams out her younger sister's name in vain. He pulls her tight against his chest and cradles her head as she sobbs, wailing in his arms as her entire body shakes with the force of her sobs. Lincoln's glassy eyes remain locked on the fire in front of them as Anya shakes her head against his chest.

"We have to go," Lincoln hushes her as he holds her closer, "we need to get back to the valley, Anya. It's what Lexa wanted. Please."

"No, we have to get to Lexa, we have to… she could still be… she's…," Anya stammers over her words as she tries to break free from Lincoln's words, but she sees the fire in front of her. Despite how badly she wishes to deny it, she can hear the screaming in the back of her head, the rationality
"Anya," Lincoln mournfully calls her name, "we need to leave, now."

"I can't leave her!" Anya snarls as she fights him, tears welling in her eyes as her shoves get weaker, "she's my sister, I can't leave her."

"Lesa's gone, Anya," Lincoln tells her in low, scratchy voice, "we have to leave."

"No," Anya shakes her head and traumatically screams against his chest again, "no she's not gone, I have to find her. She could still be--"

"Anya!" Lincoln snaps as he grips her tighter. "We can't, okay?! Lexa's gone. You saw it."

She saw it, that's true. Anya knows because she'd stood there with a look of shock on her face as Lexa had approached the vehicle convoys. She knows because she'd seen the last smile on her baby sister's face as she'd whipped out her pistol and took the shot while on her knees, bleeding out before the enemy. Anya knows, because she's the one who let the only family she had left slip through her weathered palms. She knows because she let Lexa go.

Anya watched Lexa die.

"She's gone," Lincoln repeats in a sad whisper, his own tears streaking down his face, "there's nothing left, Anya. You know it."

Anya shakes her head again, refusing to believe his words even though she knows he speaks the truth. She fights against his powerful grip, her fingers scrabbling against his uniform as she hears Lexa's last words replaying over and over again in her mind. She feels that grip and those eyes staring at her as she'd run for the trucks. Anya cries harder as she remembers the faint smell of sweat and blood on her sibling's skin before she was torn away.

"We need to get everyone else to safety," Lincoln tells her again, warding off his own memories of the explosion, "we have to help the others, Anya."

Anya takes a moment before she grounds herself to the strength and bravery of her younger sister. After taking a breath, she shoves Lincoln away roughly, wiping her tears and reaching for her rifle before she stands on wobbly knees, swallowing down her grief to be the leader Lexa always saw her to be. She feels those ghostly fingers graze over her wrist and aim her hand towards the radio. Anya chokes as she reaches for the device and holds down the button.

"Regiment Five-C," she growls through the tremor in her voice, "give me a status update."

"Multiple hostiles inbound. Airstrike has been called. Wazir hasn't been breached. Reinforcements from delta sector and waypoint alpha are here."

"Casualties?" Anya nearly sobs at the word as she looks back to the flames. There's some static on the radio before an answer replies back.

"We're holding on now that help is here. Awaiting our next command from Captain Woods."

Anya chokes as she pulls the radio away, unable to deliver the news that Captain Woods is dead, blown to smithereens after taking out an armada of enemy soldiers with her. She keeps the radio in her shaking palms, staring at it like it's a foreign object. In the back of her mind, she hears Lexa's voice urging her to carry on, to be strong, but she can't listen to her, not now. She looks back up to Lincoln's glassy eyes and shakes her head, feeling her stomach churn as she stumbles backwards. He
takes the radio and relays the next set of orders while she looks back to the flames roaring upon the
dusty earth. Her hands squeeze around nothing, when only moments ago, they'd been holding onto
her younger sister for dear life, fingers tangled in her knotted brown hair.

Her younger sister that had been taken in a matter of *seconds*.

The thought makes her sick.

*Literally.*

Anya heaves over and retches, vomiting and sobbing at the same time as she hears those bullets
firing, taking down a woman who was built from titanium and tearing her apart like she was stitched
together by thin bands instead. She remembers Lexa on her knees, refusing to scream for the enemy,
before she single-handedly killed all of them, herself included. She continues to heave until nothing
comes up, and even then, she chokes on her sobs as she teeters forward. She barely misses the pool
of her own vomit as she stares into the abyss of flames, tears flooding down her cheeks as she shakes
her head.

"Lexa," she chokes out as she kneels down and fists sand between her fingers and rests her head
upon the dusty ground, "God, no…"

"Anya!" Lincoln is calling her again, but she ignores his pleas. All she can think about is Lexa. Her
Lexa, now gone. *Dead.*

And it's all her fault.

Anya cries into the sand as she trembles with remorse and grief. She's trying so hard to be so strong,
but for so long the world has robbed her of things. First it was her mother when Lexa had been born,
then four years later it'd been their father upon returning from war. How many more people does she
have to watch die before it's enough? Who will it be next? Lincoln? Maybe Octavia or Clarke. She
feels a churning in her gut that leaves her breathless and all she can do is cry.

For once, she's not brave enough to get up and move on.

"Come on," Lincoln says gruffly as his arm wraps around her waist tenderly, "they need our help.
They need their captain."

"Their captain is dead," Anya spits as she shoves him off with disdain. "Their captain--"

"Anya," Lincoln shouts, gripping her firmly to steady her so they can look at each other. "You're
their captain now."

Before another retort can leave the blonde's lips, there's a hiss and a wheeze from a few feet away.
Lincoln pales as he recognizes Gustus and runs over. In horror, he quickly recognizes the severity
the explosion had did on him. The man's upper torso is coated in his own blood, and both his
kneecaps are decimated by shrapnel. Lincoln swallows down the spell of nausea that swarms in his
stomach as he looks back to Anya, who stares on with a look of hopelessness.

"She… she did it…," Gustus garbles as he tries to form words, "she…"

"Ssh," Lincoln soothes him as he tries to apply pressure to wounds that he knows will bleed him try,
"don't talk, we're gonna help you."

"Tell my son…," Gustus whispers instead, his voice barely audible from the flames roaring behind
them, "tell him… tell him I love…"
"He knows," Lincoln hums as Gustus' eyes slide shut, his chest barely rising and falling. "Tristan knows, Gus. Rest easy. Your fight is over, my friend."

Anya looks to the piece of rebar stuck between her own ribs and then back down to Gustus before she steps over to Lincoln's side with a new look of determination. She can hear Lexa, however haunting and small, in the back of her head, screaming at her to keep fighting -- that the battle isn't over yet. Taking a breath, she reaches back for the radio next to Lincoln and tells the regiment that they'll be there as soon as possible. Lincoln murmurs his final farewells to his fallen comrade before he grabs his gun and nods at Anya, wiping the tears that are steadily falling down his cheeks. He scrambles over towards the ravine, intent on reaching the others before another life is lost to the war. Anya waits a moment, simply staring into the flames before grabbing her weapon.

"I'm sorry," she whispers as she blinks back the last of her tears, "I'm so sorry, Lexa."

Then, without another word, she turns her back on the destruction and leaves Gustus and Lexa behind.

They reach the valley in less than ten minutes, their entire journey spent in silence. Anya's face is hardened and stoic as she reaches the chief warrant officer, James Dickens, hiding out from a hot zone. She scrambles in beside him and he nearly sighs out of relief. But then, his eyes narrow as he recognizes the lack of his superior officer, but as he makes out the darkened glance flickering in the blonde's eyes, he understands. He understands, but he doesn't believe it.

"Where's Captain Woods?" He asks as he reloads a clip into his rifle. Anya flinches at the name, but swallows it down.

"I'm the Captain now," she replies tersely, steeling herself as she peeks her head around the edge of the rock to avoid his gaze, "Woods… didn't make it."

"Shit," James hisses as he shakes his head, "what happened?"

"Took out the convoy," Lincoln replies before Anya has the time to whip her head around and scream at the man, "saved our asses."

James sees the tension growing in Anya's shoulders and he nods, accepting the answer without fighting. "Staff Sergeant Brooks called in the airstrike."

"ETA?" Anya barely bites out. James shakes his head as he looks at the valley, now turned into a bloody pit of massacred bodies.

"We can't give them a target. We've sent two people out there with smoke but they've been mowed down," he explains the situation through rough wheezes as he pops back up and unloads the clip into advancing enemy soldiers, "they're multiplying by the millions but haven't managed to get a signal. Each minute that passes they get closer towards Wazir's border. We need to clear out the valley before they can come in with heavies. They've got the advantage, though."

"But if the pilot gets the smoke, we're in the clear?" Anya asks through gritted teeth. James nods.

"Crystal, Ma'am."

"Give me the flare," Anya says as she throws her rifle off and hands it to Lincoln, "give me covering fire. I'll get it to the target."

"Captain," James says with wide eyes, "it's a hundred yard clearing and you'll have no protection. It's a suicide mission."
"Lincoln," Anya cuts in, ignoring the other man and pointing to the heavy artillery beside him. "Take the bazooka. Give me all the cover you can get."

"Anya," Lincoln growls in disagreement, "think about this for a second. Lexa--"

"Lexa's not here," Anya snarls back at him, causing the younger man to flinch. "Now take the fucking rocket launcher and get into position."

"You're making a mistake," Lincoln says as he shakes his head, but Anya grabs at his uniform, pulling him close to her face.

"Get in position, Lieutenant. I won't tell you again," she orders in the coldest voice she can produce, "don't you dare disobey me."

Lincoln only grunts and shoves himself off her as he scrambles down to the guns and picks up the bazooka, loading it up with rockets before returning to her side with a glare. He looks about ready to challenge her again, but James beats him to the chase with wide, disbelieving eyes as he stares at her in shock.

"Captain, please. You'll get shot down," he urges her as he glances to a hardened Lincoln, "you'll die if you go out there."

"So be it," Anya hisses through gritted teeth, sharing a piercing glare with Lincoln that screams out for him to challenge her, "no one else dies today."

"Captain--"

"I'm the fastest one here," she snarls as she reels on the younger soldier, "you know that none of your soldiers could outrun it but I can."

"You're not thinking with your head," James spits back with a shake of his head, "you've been captain for all of five minutes--"

"I made a promise to get everyone out of here safely," Anya snaps back, trying to forget that she's already broken two of her promises thus far. Her word isn't worth much but neither James nor Lincoln know it. She continues her bluff as she throws her pistol down and sheds her heavy vest. James' eyes widen and so do Lincoln's, but she shakes her head and takes a breath, scoping out the hundred yard clearing she has to make. It's nearly a football field in length, but she knows that she can make it. Both James and Lincoln knows she's right. Out of all of their squad, Anya and Lexa were the fastest when it came to running.

"Anya," Lincoln nearly whimpers as he reaches out and whips her around so they can face each other, "I can't lose you, too. Please."

Anya sees the raw fear in his big brown eyes but she can't acknowledge them. She just places her hand over his and nods stoically.

"Cover me," she orders strictly, "and don't you fucking miss."

Lincoln's eyes widen as she tears his hand off and reaching between them. He tries to reach for her again but she ducks out of the way.

"Anya, no--"

The older woman doesn't even give her cousin the time to finish before she's grabbing the flare and
running out from the cover. Her eyes glaze with tears as she sprints towards the target in the centre of the valley, ignoring the shouts of her soldiers from behind her. Her arms pump at breakneck speed as the hot evening sun glints down against her back. The sound of gunfire roars through the valley. She doesn't stop running as a metal bullet catches in her shoulder. She stumbles a bit, but doesn't stop moving. She sees the target a few yards ahead and bolsters up the rest of her stamina to reach it and complete her mission.

All Anya can think of, as she holds the flare in her hands like a baton, is her days with Lexa in university when they'd run on the track team. She erases the battlefield from her vision and replaces it with the maroon rubble of the track. She breathes in the fresh Oregon air and listens to the chirping of the birds. Her blood pounds through her veins, her adrenalin at an all time high as she hears the thumping footsteps of the other runners beside her. Ahead, she can see Lexa in front of her, waiting with her hand back, palm open and ready for the baton to be passed on. Those green eyes are like liquid steel staring back at her, waiting for her to approach. There's resilience and determination flickering in her younger sister's gaze, one that causes Anya to run faster. Gritting her teeth, Anya pushes through the searing pain in her side as she focuses in on the soft features of Lexa's face before lighting the flare and continuing to run.

And with a shout of agony as her side bleeds profusely, she tosses the flare into the middle of the valley, erupting the space in vibrant green smoke.

*Follow through,* she can hear Lexa urge her in the back of her mind as she sprints past the target, *don't stop running until you reach the end.*

And she doesn't, not until she makes it to the other side and collapses against the rocks. There are hands upon on her, rolling her onto her side. Someone pushes down on her shoulder to stop the bleeding and another person is at her side. Blood pools down her side and clumps against her uniform as she heaves for breath. Above her, the roar of F-16s scream across the airspace before there's a spark of light and another explosion. All around her soldiers are rejoicing, screaming out their victory of keeping the village safe from the enemy, but Anya isn't with them as she rolls to her back and stares up at the darkening skies. She isn't with the two medics at her side screaming at her to focus on her, to stay steady, to breathe, no, she's not *here* at all.

Instead, Anya finds herself on the grassy fields just after their senior year relay. Lexa's laying beside her, hair splayed out in a mess of brown curls upon her shoulder as they watch the clouds forming shapes like they are kids again. Their hands are clasped loosely together as they lose themselves in their victory, beaming grins threatening to split both of their faces as they stare up at the sky. Lexa's head is soft upon her shoulder, her smile pure and free as they bask in the cool summer breeze. Somewhere in the distance, Lincoln is teasing them and cheering them on beside Clarke and Octavia, proud of their victory.

*We're a team,* Lexa tells her as she squeezes her hand tightly, *you and me until the end, right?*

Anya looks over at her, tears glazing her vision as Lexa offers her a soft smile before squeezing her hand again.

*Don't be afraid,* Lexa whispers as the sounds of war bleed into the picture, the grass beneath them switching for bloodied dust. Anya's mouth opens and she tries to scream as she watches Lexa's face burn away, the skin peeling to reveal the gory, stringy mass of flesh underneath. Lexa keeps repeating the words until Anya can't hear her voice anymore, and the field is long gone, replaced by the Afghanistan heat and sun-scorched valley of death and blood.

*Don't be afraid,* Lexa's voice lingers one last time in her ears as she closes her eyes, *death is not the end, Anya.*
Clarke blinks her eyes open to the fuzzy beeping coming from the sterile room.

She looks around the room, a bit unaware of her surroundings as she comes to consciousness. A weight rests on her shoulder and she frowns, glancing down. It's then that she makes out the familiar sandy mop of hair that belongs to her son. Wearily, Clarke raises her hand and combs her fingers through the tangled knots of her son's hair, sighing in content as he rises slowly from the throes of sleep. Aden blinks a few times before bursting into a grin at the sight of her.

"Mama," he beams as he clambers onto the bed and embraces her, "you woke up. Finally."

"How long have I been asleep?" Clarke murmurs into his hair as she feels him nuzzle her neck.

"One whole day," Aden says as he yawns, "the doctors had to put you to sleep after Tris was taken out of your stomach."

Clarke's eyes widen as she looks to her son when he drops her daughter's name. Before she can ask about her, a voice hums from the doorway.

"She's fine," Abby muses as she walks in the door in full scrubs as she nods towards the small incubator in the corner, "the kid's a fighter."

"Just like Mom," Aden grins toothily and Clarke smiles and nods. Abby goes over to the small box and reaches inside, pulling out a tiny bundle wrapped in a pink blanket. Clarke's mouth hinges slightly when Abby walks over, tears misting in both their eyes as she holds out the precious baby for her to see. Clarke takes her from her mother's arms, gasping when she sees a tuft of dark hair adorning her daughter's scalp, a direct match of Lexa's chestnut curls.

"She looks just like her mother," Clarke sighs as she gently taps Tris' cheek, "God, she's beautiful."

"She really is," Abby beams proudly from her side as she squeezes Clarke's shoulder, "got a powerful set of lungs on her, though."

"Yeah," Aden agrees as he scrunches up his nose, "she screams a lot."

Clarke chuckles and shakes her head as she stares down at her baby, wriggling in her arms and making incorrigible noises as she snuggles deeper into Clarke's embrace. Leaning down, Clarke closes her eyes and lets her trembling lips rest upon the baby's forehead, kissing her lightly. The baby coos and Clarke smiles against the soft skin before pulling back. Tris whines and fits a bit more before blinking open her eyes, revealing beautiful sea green irises staring back at her.

"Identical to Lexa, huh?" Abby muses as Clarke looks at her daughter in awe. "I was just as
"I look like you and Tris looks like Mom," Aden giggles as he stares down at his baby sister with awe, "but she's so tiny?"

"You were once this tiny too," Clarke chuckles as she kisses her son's hair, "actually, you were a bit smaller because you were born a bit early."

"So she's gonna get taller than me?" Aden asks, eyeing Tris skeptically. Abby smiles and leans over to ruffle his hair as Clarke beams at him.

"We never know," she says as she returns her smile back to her daughter, "but all we can do is wait and find out."

Aden nods and settles himself back at his mother's side, sleep threatening to take him again as he cuddles into her side. Eventually, as he falls asleep, Tris fits and suckles on nothing, causing Clarke to chuckle at her eagerness. Abby helps her move her gown so that she can nurse her daughter, gasping slightly from the seemingly unfamiliar sensation upon her left nipple. Tris' eyelids close shut as she feeds, drinking in the milk without coming up for air.

"Ssh," Clarke coos in amusement as she removes her daughter from her breast for moment, "breathe, sweetie. It's not going anywhere."

As if in response, Tris whines and cries out, her cheek turning in search of the source of food. Abby laughs as Clarke shakes her head and reattaches the little baby to her chest, letting her continue feeding. Abby's hand soothingly strokes through Clarke's knotted blonde tangles, lovingly smoothing them out until Tris is done feeding and ready to be burped. Abby reaches for a towel and lays it on her own shoulders, taking the baby from Clarke and allowing her daughter to adjust her gown and settle back against the bed. Clarke tries to protest and claim that she can burp her child, but Abby can see the exhaustion in her eyes.

"Did you call Colonel Jaha?" Clarke asks as she watches Abby gently sway her granddaughter on her shoulder, easing out a few more burps. There's a cloud of uncertainty that passes over her gaze as the older woman shakes her head. Clarke sighs and looks at her now-slumbering daughter as Abby sets her back into the small incubator before turning back to face Clarke, taking a seat at one of the chairs beside the bed. Clarke reaches for Aden and lets his head roll into her neck, her arm rubbing soothing lines up and down his arms as he falls into a deeper slumber at her side. Abby looks torn as she glances at her daughter.

"We tried to get through but the signal was down," Abby says softly, reaching out for Clarke's hand as the blonde's eyes widen in fear.

"Why couldn't you get through?" Clarke asks in worry. "The command centre always has signal."

Abby takes a breath and lowers her head a bit before she reaches for the remote and turns on the TV mounted to the wall. Clarke watches on in niggling anxiety as Abby flips to CNN, where there's live aerial footage of a war zone. Clarke's stomach sinks as she reads the headline running in the scroll underneath.

67 US SOLDIERS CONFIRMED DEAD AFTER ROADSIDE BOMBING IN TAGAB, AFGHANISTAN. FATALITIES STILL BEING REPORTED AND COUNTED.

"Lexa?" Clarke nearly whimpers her wife's name as she glances between her mother and the TV screen. Abby shakes her head sadly.
"We don't know," Abby tells her in a soft voice, "the news just came on today. So far they've not released names."

"She's gotta be okay," Clarke replies in a shaky voice, unable to tear her vision away from the destruction on the screen. "Lexa's the captain -- she has to be okay, right Mom?" Abby doesn't say anything, not when the image on screen flashes to the headquarters of Lexa's camp, now scorched in flames. A knot forms in Clarke's heart as she feels tears burn in her eyes at the scene. She vaguely hears the words 'IED', 'explosion', and 'suicide-bombing' being dropped by the reporter. All she can focus on is the image of destruction and death on the screen in front of her. All she can think about is Lexa.

Clarke isn't religious, but in that moment, she prays to whoever's listening for them to bring her wife home safely.

July 24th 2009, 14:23
Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan

Anya stands at the side of her bed, donning her dress blues as she stares at the linoleum floors with a distant expression. Her thumbs graze over the lapels on her uniform, tenderly stroking the ache underneath from the piece of metal that had been removed from her body only nine days ago. The pain in her stomach doesn't even yield a comparison to the raw burning in the pit of her heart. There's an emptiness in her, a harrowing grief that clings to her every breath. Her arm sits in a sling, the pain barely there as she looks around the empty room. The sheets are made and everything seems so normal, like she didn't nearly die.

Anya closes her eyes, but all she sees is Lexa's face before the explosion.

Maybe she is dead, in another sense of the word.

"Captain Woods?"

A heavily-accented female voice calls out from the doorway, snapping Anya from her despair. The older blonde blinks away the tears she didn't know had welled up in her eyes as she nods and looks up to see the Afghan woman staring back at her. Anya swallows down her pain and grabs her cap off the bed and nods, limping in the nurse's direction as she's lead down the hall and towards the hanger bay where she knows Colonel Jaha will be waiting. She passes a few of the men and women that she served beside lingering in beds within the cramped space of the narrow halls. They look at her with a mixed level of awe and remorse and she hates it. A few of them nod in silent condolences as she walks past them with her head bowed into her chest despondently.

Anya almost wants to bitterly scoff at their gawking.

The nurse leads her to the hanger bay and bids her farewell before returning back to the hospital wing of the air base. Sucking in a deep breath, Anya nods her head up. Her heart wrenches inside
her chest as she sees multiple caskets -- seventy-four in total -- being loaded onto the massive C-5 Galaxy. Each of them are wrapped in American Flags, and Anya's eyes water when she sees them being loaded up like any other form of cargo. Steeling herself, she marches forward until she manages to get closer, her gaze unable to tear away from the sight of so many of her fellow men and women, of Gustus and Lexa, being stowed away.

"Captain," a low voice jolts her from her thoughts as she turns her head to see Lieutenant-Colonel Kane staring back at her with a mournful expression. She swallows thickly and stands up straight, snapping a salute with her good arm and ignoring the sting of pain in her side from the exertion on her still-mending injuries. Kane eyes her cautiously, being mindful of keeping his space as he approaches her with silent footsteps. Anya bites her lip and holds back a cry.

"With all due respect, sir," she says with a tremor to her voice, "Captain Woods is my sister. Just… it's just Anya, please."

"At ease Anya," Kane murmurs, "you're not on active duty."

Nodding slowly, Anya drops her arm and lets her body relax and Kane doesn't comment on her remark or use of the present tense. He gets it, painfully so. He'd watched the Woods sisters grow up together, train together, fight together, heal together. At some point, he'd come to see them both as his surrogate daughters, having known their father when he'd served in active duty on the front lines. Lexa's death had been like losing his friend all over again, and while he'd taken the time to grieve in solitary, he compartmentalizes for the older Woods. He knew their closeness and can't even imagine how Anya must be feeling as she stares at the multitude of flag-wrapped caskets being loaded into the plane. From the hollowness in her otherwise usually stoic and calming hazel eyes, he knows that she's lost a part of herself when her sister died in the explosion. Not that he'd expect any less. Lexa and Anya were a package deal, always.

You don't get one Woods without the other, Lexa had once told him upon their first meeting, all toothy-grinned and playful jest. Anya had just been stoically standing beside her with a smirk on her face, daring him to separate them. He never had the heart to do it, not when they stuck by each other like glue.

Even now, he wishes that there could be a way to bring them back together.

"I'm sorry for your loss," he says after awhile Anya turns her head back to follow his gaze upon the caskets, "she was a great soldier." It doesn't cut it, they both know it. No amount of apology could change this situation. The man chastises himself for being generic; he knows Lexa deserved better than that.

So does Anya.

"She was more than that, sir. She was...," Anya chokes up, unable to finish her sentence. "She was better than I could ever hope to be."

"You both saved eleven thousand lives," Kane assures her calmly, unable to find proper words. "You're heroes to your country."

Anya grits her teeth and shakes her head in disagreement, her gaze burning through Kane as she stares at him with misty eyes.

"No," she mutters as she glances despondently back at the caskets, "there are no heroes in war, sir."

"I spoke with Colonel Jaha," Kane says, letting her statement sink in. He clears his throat. "You and
First-Lieutenant Forrester are to be honourably discharged. He was also just as insistent on the new promotion in rank being private." Anya refrains from snorting as she grits her teeth again. Kane's smile falters slightly. He wrings his hands together as he, too, feels the absence of Lexa's presence. It hurts him, a slow aching throb in his gut, that his best soldier and most loyal comrade, won't ever get to see the lives she helped save through her valiant sacrifice. If anyone deserved a chance to see the good behind the bad, it was Lexa.

"I highly doubt killing five thousand people warrants a promotion, sir." Kane's head snaps up at Anya's cold voice.

"It was us or them," Kane replies with a stiff tone, but Anya just subtly shakes her head, still not looking in his direction.

"It's always us or them," Anya mutters as her eyes drift over the coffins, "it never ends."

The man swallows thickly, letting his words mull over him. There's logic and reason behind it, but it's not one that is easily solved. War is a tricky thing, he's come to realize, that peace seems like a golden egg or a beanstalk -- it's child's play but they can't reach it. They won't ever reach it, not without litres and pools of blood spilled between either side. Kane wonders what the point is in all of this, if perhaps war was a meaningless fight if it means constant death.

"I suppose so," he offers instead, nodding silently. Choosing not to respond, Anya's eyes flicker back and pierce his own. Kane nods silently and sighs as he begins walking towards the end of the C-5 where the last of the caskets have been loaded up. Anya's knees nearly buckle as she's lead inside the aircraft, overwhelmed by the sheer amount of caskets that are being buckled down to the floors of the massive cargo plane. Her eyes scan over each one, struggling to figure out where Lexa's own coffin rests amongst the crowd of nameless soldiers. Her back stiffens as she feels Kane's hand rest gently in the crook of her arm.

"Did they find…?" Anya asks, unable to finish the question. "Is she…?"

Anya can't ask the question as looks to him with watery eyes, nearly breaking into a cry when he understands and shakes his head sadly.

"There wasn't anything left of the base-camp," Kane admits mournfully, "from the scouting reports, we saw nothing. We recovered Gustus' body but there was nothing… substantial left to identify Major Woods' body. There's a high chance that she was too close to remain in one piece. I'm sorry, Anya."

*One piece*. The words make Anya's stomach flip again in anger as she looks away from the older man. This time, she can't help the tears that slide down her cheeks at the thought of how she couldn't even bring her sister home alive, let alone in a casket in one damned piece. No, she's instead flying home with a medal on her chest and an empty coffin to represent the spoils of a battle they'd won only through sacrifice. It makes her sick to her gut. She thinks about Clarke and Aden in that moment, and her heart grows heavier than she thought it could be. She looks up to Kane with a sorrowed expression, lips pursing.

"Have they… has someone…," she can't find the words, not as the memories replay on a loop in her mind. Kane seems to get it and sighs.

"Not yet," the lieutenant-colonel replies with soft voice, "we're going to send the CNOs out on this flight."

"Don't," Anya chokes up as she swallows down tears, "not to Clarke, anyways. I'll do it."
Kane eyes her warily, unsure. "Are you certain that's a good idea? You've been through a lot, Captain--"

"Anya," the woman bitterly interrupts, "I told you, it's just Anya now. I'm not my sister. I'm not…"
Anya can't even finish the statement before she bursts into a soft cry. Her fingers wrap into a tight fist as she shakes her head and furiously swipes at the rest of the falling tears before building up those walls.

"I'll tell Clarke," Anya tells him with a cold voice, "she… Lexa… is my sister. My responsibility."

"Very well," Kane acquiesces, "we'll have the CNO give you the package with her uniform and medallions."

Anya doesn't say anything as he bids a kind farewell and leaves her alone in the wide cargo bay of the aircraft. Many of the workers are now on their lunch break, leaving her alone in the metal bird and surrounded by the fallen. She sits down at one of the seats at the end of the aircraft, her shoulders slumping as she begins to cry, a hand cupped over her mouth as she feels those ghostly touches of her sister upon her arms and shoulder. She can hear Lexa in her ears, trying to coax her out of that dark place, the lonely cesspit that she's managed to acquire in the previous week. Her grief is bottomless and she is sinking fast.

We're a team, Lexa whispers soothingly into her troubled mind, a pale, ghostly hand gripping her own, everything we do, we do it together.

"Not this time," Anya angrily spits out as she glares at the apparition of her sister's corpse beside her. "Not when you left me behind."

Lexa doesn't reply, not that she expects her to.

Maybe she really is going crazy after all.

The CNO finds her a few moments later, jaw locked and eyes bloodshot. Anya doesn't offer a single word as she's given the last of her sister's belongings. She runs her finger over the material of the flag, tracing the pattern of blue, white, and red until she feels like the ink has penetrated her skin. She pulls the cloth covered package to her mouth, almost thinking that she can still smell Lexa in the uniform underneath. She closes her eyes and gasps in the air, her fingers trembling as she grips the package closer to her, unable to shake off the vision of that explosion from her mind this time. Lexa's face stays engrained in her head like a permanent fixture. She realizes it then, that she's never going to see her again.

Never will she hold her, tell her that she loves her, tease her -- never again.

Hours later, with the triangular package wrapped in an American flag gripped loosely in her hands and Lincoln beside her, Anya flies home.

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July 25th 2009, 19:30

Brooklyn, New York
"You sure you're ready to do this?"

Anya glances over at Lincoln from where they sit in the back of the cab, still dressed in their formal uniforms. Through the windows of the Woods-Griffin residency, she can see Octavia walking around with Aden. A pit settles in her heart and she shakes her head, looking down at the package in her hands.

"I won't ever be," she whispers as tears glaze her eyes, "but I have to. For Lexa."

"I'm right beside you," Lincoln tells her assuringly as he places his hand on her smaller one, squeezing lightly. Anya swallows down her grief and nods, reaching for the door as she swings it open. Lincoln sighs and follows after her when he's done paying the driver. They both walk up the steps, listening to the faint shouting of Aden and Octavia from within the house. Anya freezes at the door, her shoulders growing rigid and chest quickly rising and falling.

"An," Lincoln whispers as he places his hand on her shoulder, "please, let me do this."

"No," Anya chokes as she shakes her head, gripping the package in her hand tightly, "no, I have to do this."

Lincoln nods mournfully and watches as Anya's trembling hand reaches up and presses the doorbell twice. There's a silence on the other end before there's the sound of approaching footsteps. The man steels himself for his older cousin, knowing that she needs all the strength she can take from him. He stands, unwavering and brave, as the door unlocks and slowly swings open to reveal a grinning Aden holding a twenty dollar bill. Immediately upon seeing them both, he screeches in excitement and barrels forward against Lincoln's knees. Not looking at Anya, Lincoln lowers himself to his knees and brings him in for a hug.

"Uncle Lincoln!" Aden nearly screams the words as he excitedly looks up to his aunt, not registering the sadness on her face as he wraps his arms around his aunt's waist in a hug. Anya stiffens at the contact and Aden pulls back with a frown, but not before glancing between them, obviously searching for Lexa.

"Where's Mom?" He asks curiously. "Is she stuck with a talkative cab driver again?"

Lincoln swallows. This is going to be harder than he thought.

"What's taking so long, kiddo?" Octavia's familiar voice sounds from behind the door and Lincoln nearly collapses at the sight of her as she walks up to the entrance. His wife's eyes widen in near-comic disbelief as she breathes out his name and reaches out for him, drawing him into a hug. He feels guilty in that moment, as his arms automatically wrap around the small of her back, because she is the only one that will be reunited with her spouse tonight.

"Lincoln," she whispers, her hand coming up to stroke the nape of his neck, "thank God… you're alive."

"Yeah," Lincoln replies with a harsh swallow, "yeah… I'm okay, O."

"We saw the news," Octavia says breathlessly before reaching for Anya, the absence of Lexa not having sunk in yet, "they sent you back early?"

Anya lets out a choked sound at that, unable to reach up and hug Octavia back. Her entire body is
stiff from the contact, and she remembers that the last time -- the last person she'd hugged had been her sister. Anya closes her eyes and wills the panic down. Octavia rubs up and down upon her arms, easing out the tension with mild confusion. Finally, the younger brunette notices the stillness between them both. She looks over their shoulders to see if Lexa is around the corner, but then her eyes cast down at the flag-wrapped uniform in Anya's shaking hands. The older woman's stare is glued to something over her shoulder. A low gasp of air leaves her lips as she looks up in horror, her heart jumping up in her chest when she sees the usually stoic woman nearly break under her stare.

"Oh God…," Octavia breathes out with a croak, "God… no…"

"Auntie O?" Aden asks, confused. "What's wrong?"

"Aden," Octavia whispers as she looks down at the apprehensive-looking boy, "go to your room, honey. And um, call your mother over please."

"Why?" Aden asks with a frown as he peeks around Lincoln and Anya. "Where's Mom?"

"Aden," Lincoln hums as he gets back to his knees to draw the curious boy into his arms, "listen to your Auntie O. Please, kiddo."

Before he can respond, another husky voice sounds from the kitchen and Anya's heart seizes in her throat.

"Pizza can't take that long," Clarke's amused voice filters in as she steps into the doorway. "Do you need some change for the tip?"

Anya's eyes immediately drift down to the small baby in her arms, held snuggly against her chest. Her bottom lip quivers and the tears are back, but she can't be bothered to wipe them away. The child is gorgeous, a small bundle of joy wrapped up in her mother's arms, blissfully unaware of the cruelty in the world. Anya's jaw works a few times as she holds back a cry at the sight. Clarke is looking down at the child with such adoration, such hope, that she can't will her tears away this time. They silently drip down her high cheekbones and taper off her chin. The grip on the package increases tenfold when Clarke finally looks up from her child to see the two of them at the door.

"Aden," Octavia says again when she sees the look on Clarke's face, a bit more urgency to her voice, "go to your room, sweetie."

Complying, Aden nods warily before bounding past his shocked-looking mother and makes his way up the steps. Clarke's eyes are glued to Lincoln and Anya, and it's without a doubt that she's now noticed the absence of her wife. Clarke's arms tremble, and for a moment, Lincoln and Anya both look terrified that she's about to drop her child. Octavia is the first to move and unfreeze from the moment, swallowing thickly as she pads over to Clarke with careful steps. She eyes the slumbering baby in her arms and reaches her arms out, holding back her own grief at the loss of her friend so she can hold Clarke together.

"Clarke," Octavia whispers as she reaches for Tris, "I need you to give her to me."

But Clarke is frozen, voice caught in her throat as her eyes stay glued to Anya's hazel pair. Octavia nearly whispers at the raw sadness in her eyes.

"Clarke," she repeats in a shaky voice, "give Tris to me, please."

When Clarke doesn't respond a second time, Octavia gently reaches out and draws the child into her arms. At the contact, Tris begins to fit, soft cries filling the room. Anya blinks over at the sound, watching as the child wriggles in Octavia's gentle hold. The brunette shushes her quietly, rocking the
child back and forth as she moves away from Clarke to give the blonde some space to take the sight of Lincoln and Anya in. Clarke's arms are still stuck in the position of holding her child, her blue eyes filled with disbelief and shock as she stumbles forward. Lincoln squeezes Anya's hand once before taking the first step towards Clarke, steadying her in his arms as she looks over their shoulders to the empty street behind them. The midsummer rain starts to pound against the gravel, each sound louder than a bullet being fired. Anya chokes down a sob and steps into the room behind her cousin, staying strong for the frazzled blonde.

But Clarke doesn't cry. She won't cry, not yet.

"Where is she?" Clarke asks in a trembling voice. "Where's my wife, Anya? Where's Lexa?"

Anya can't speak. She thought she was ready.

For the second time this month, she's wrong.

Why is she always wrong?

"Clarke," Lincoln whispers into her hair as he holds her strongly against his chest. Clarke shakes her head, tears welling in her eyes. "Clarke, I--"

"You made me a promise," she hoarsely breathes out the words to Anya, "she made me a promise. She's not… she can't… no, I refuse to believe it."

"Clarke," Lincoln says her name a bit stronger, though his voice cracks, "Clarke, please I'm--"

"No," Clarke shouts against his chest as she tears herself away from his grasp, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Don't you dare say you're sorry."

Lincoln's expression is harrowing to say the least, but he gives the blonde space to let the news sink in. He inches over to where Octavia is still rocking a fussy Tris. His wife looks as torn as he does, stuck between wanting to comfort the woman or letting her have space. Clarke's fingers weave into her hair as she continues to silently cry, shaking her head and muttering out incomprehensible words of disbelief. She paces a few steps before looking at the package in Anya's hands. Her eyes narrow into a sharp, watery glare as she nods her head up and stares into the older woman's broken face with a hiss.

"Why haven't you said anything?" Clarke demands as hot tears break from her eyes. "Where is she, Anya?"

Anya swallows, her eyes growing glassy as more tears streak down her cheekbones. There's something else there, something hiding behind the ever-so stoic mask that the older blonde has always managed to place upon her face, but Clarke refuses to recognize it. Anya's living in a nightmare as Clarke approaches her with slow, cold steps. She steps into Anya's personal pace and defiantly nods her chin up against the taller woman. Ire sparks through those sapphire eyes and Anya can't turn away from the raw hatred burning in them. Anya's lip is quivering and trembling with each breath she takes, but she doesn't lose control.

Not yet.

Clarke growls and shoves her, ignoring the wince in the older woman's expression. "Dammit!" She snarls at her, "where is my wife, Anya?"

Only a hoarse choking noise leaves Anya's lips.
Ready, ready, ready, she thought she was so damned ready. Her shoulder hurts from where the sling is slightly dislodged but fuck, she isn't ready.

"Anya!" Clarke screams her name now, clutching her uniform and tugging her close. "Where is Lexa?!

"Clarke," Lincoln croaks from the side, "Clarke, please."

"Where. Is. My. Fucking. Wife?!" Clarke spits at the older woman, hot tears streaking down her cheeks. "Where is Lexa, Anya?!"

"Dead."

Anya finally lets the word slip past her lips, shattering the silence she'd kept. It's whispered, barely there, barely present. A ghost that grazes her mouth and she can see Lexa standing at the steps with a harrowed glance. She wants to look away, to cry, to scream, but Lexa shakes her head, eyes glued to Clarke's back. Anya swallows and looks to Clarke mournfully. Her voice falters as she looks Clarke in the eye and tells her, "Lexa is dead." Clarke's eyes widen and she gasps in a painful amount of air when Anya breaks down into a cry, shaking her head in agony when she repeats the words louder. "Lexa's dead, Clarke."

"No," Clarke swallows as she grips Anya tighter, "no, it's not true. Tell it isn't what I think it is, that the bombings -- tell me it wasn't her."

Anya lets out a strangled cry at the words, her eyes blinking shut as Clarke collapses against her front. Anya only offers the subtlest shaking of her head before they both collapse to the floor in a weeping mess. Clarke digs her hands into Anya's uniform, her chest rattling as a bloodcurdling wail leaves her lips. Anya's hands drop the package and come up to hold her in a tight hug. One of her hands cradles the back of her head and the other curls around the small of her back. The older woman hangs onto Clarke like she's a lifeline, ignoring the fiery pain in her side as Clarke leans more of her weight against her, still sobbing.

"I'm sorry," Anya chokes out as she holds Clarke closer, "I... I tried... t-to stop her... I tried, Clarke..."

"But you didn't," Clarke sneers as she wipes away her tears and swallows down her anger, "and you came back without her. You promised me."

Anya hangs her head, ashamed as Clarke digs her boney finger into her chest in fury. "I trusted you to protect her, to bring her home. You swore, Anya!"

"I know!" Anya cries out in a croak, unable to take the hatred brewing in those once kind and loving blue eyes. She whispers, "I know. I failed you... her."

"Damn right you did," Clarke snarls as she shoves Anya away from her, "why did you let her go?! I told her not to be a hero!"

"Clarke," Lincoln warns from where he stands with Octavia, "don't."

"Don't?!" Clarke asks incredulously, shaking her head in disbelief. "Don't?! You don't get to tell me 'don't', not when you get to come home to Octavia."

Lincoln swallows down the jab and holds himself together as Clarke cries harder against Anya's bruised chest. "You... you don't get to tell me anything when she's not here. I love her. I love her so much. I won't believe that she's dead. I refuse to believe it. After all she's done for you? For us? And
this is how you bring her home on her final tour? In a fucking wrapped flag and a stupid medal?! She deserves better than that, Anya, she deserves to be alive because she's got a family. She's… she… oh God…” Anya can hear Lexa in her ears again and she clenches onto Clarke tightly, ignoring how the younger blonde beats down on her chest, knocking out the band in her sling, screaming and crying into her uniform. She wills herself to be strong and push down her burning grief… for Lexa.

This time, Clarke doesn't have the strength to fight off the embrace any longer. She slouches against Anya and lets out a heartbreaking, pitiful howl of grief as she lets it set in that Lexa's not coming home. She won't kiss her, make love to her, have a family with her or hold her in her arms. She won't trace the scars that map her back and remind Lexa that she's beautiful. She sobs into Anya's neck, her hands fisting the material of her uniform into her sweaty palms while she cries. Anya takes it all, holding her close without a single word, while her hands tend to soothing patterns and lines down her trembling back. Both of them are crying but only Clarke screams against her chest. Anya's eyes slide shut and she sees Lexa there again in that grassy field with a goofy grin and frazzled hair.

"I'm sorry," Anya whispers as she cries softly into Clarke's hair, "I'm so sorry, Clarke."

But they both know that even an infinite amount of apologies won't fix their loss.

Nothing can bring Lexa Woods back, not this time.

=====

"Aden?" Lincoln knocks lightly on the boy's door, noticing that he can hear sniffling from inside. He waits a moment before opening the door.

Aden sits upon his bed, knees up to his chest as he sobs mercilessly with his head bowed. Lincoln's heart aches as he steps into the room, trying to ignore the shrieks still coming from Clarke downstairs. The big man makes his way to the bed and lowers himself down so that he's sitting next to Aden. They sit in silence for awhile, tuning out the swearing and cries of grief from the blonde a floor down. Aden sniffles and inches closer to Lincoln, his body trembling in fear.

"She's not coming home," Aden chokes out finally, glancing up at Lincoln with bloodshot eyes, "is she?"

The man swallows once and sighs, pulling the boy into his arms and stroking his back.

"Where is she?" Aden cries into his shirt. "Where's my mom?"

"Aden," Lincoln whispers into his sandy hair before pulling him from his chest so they can look at each other. "I need you to listen carefully, okay?"

Aden wipes his nose on his sleeve and nods, steeling himself in the same way he's known Lexa to do. His chest shudders at the similarities.

"Sometimes, when we go to war, we don't come home. Your mom… she…” Lincoln stumbles over his words as he replays the explosion in his mind. Aden waits, processing the words that he's trying to say but are unable to leave his mouth. Lincoln takes a breath before he glances up at him and offers a faltering smile.

"Your mom, she… she did something really brave and saved a lot of people," Lincoln tells him softly, stroking his hair. "But… she couldn't save herself."

"What do you mean?" Aden asks shakily, starting to pick up on what he's trying to tell him. "Where is she, Uncle Lincoln?"
"I don't know," Lincoln whispers in a raspy voice as tears well in his eyes, "but wherever she is, she's watching out for you."

"She promised to come to my first soccer game," Aden murmurs as he bows his head, "but she's not gonna be there, is she?"

Lincoln shakes his head as Aden asks, "she's not gonna come for any of them, is she?"

"I'm sorry, Aden," he whispers as he kisses his sandy hair, letting his lips linger in the tangled knots, "I wish she could. I'm sorry, kid."

The words strike Aden in the gut like a knife in the dark. He's read enough books and seen enough movies to know what has happened to his mother. He collapses against his uncle's chest, a boneless heap of sorrow as he weeps. Lincoln holds him closer and pecks the top of his head as he sobs in his arms. He continues to cry relentlessly, trembling in the bigger man's arms. Lincoln's gaze is distant as he watches the door open and a weary looking Clarke walk into the room followed by Anya and Octavia. Lincoln's lip trembles as Clarke clambers slowly onto the bed, pulling gently at Aden's arm until the boy blinks up at her.

"Mama," he croaks before throwing himself into her arms. Clarke holds him close to her chest and buries her nose in his hair, breathing in his scent as she kisses his head. Lincoln wraps his arms around both of them and lets them cry against his broad chest. Over their shoulders, Anya watches on in desolation, heart laying in the pit of her stomach as she just tries to breathe. Octavia's arm has wound around the small of her back, her lips on Anya's rigid shoulder.

"I did this," Anya whispers as she looks to Clarke and Aden sobbing in her cousin's arms, "I… did this." Octavia frowns and looks to her in confusion. Anya just continues to stare at the scene in front of her with empty, wet eyes as her mouth opens and closes -- once, twice, and then finally she looks over at Octavia.

"I did this," she repeats as her voice cracks, "I killed her."

"No," Octavia shakes her head as she drags Anya from the room. "This isn't your fault, Anya."

"You weren't there," Anya hisses through the tears, "you didn't… you… you didn't see it."

At this, Octavia's jaw drops slightly.

"You…," she stumbles as she blinks up at her friend, "you… watched her die." Anya bites her lip and hangs her head, nodding ever so slightly.

"I should have fought harder," Anya whispers as she blinks back tears, "I didn't try hard enough to stop her. It should have been me, not her."

"An," Octavia murmurs as she draws the woman into her arms, "it wasn't your fault, okay? God, it wasn't your fault."

"It was," Anya admits in a harrowed tone, "it always will be. I let her go, O, I… I let her go and now she's not coming back again."

"Anya," Octavia coos in her ear as the older woman begins to sob in her arms, "hey, ssh, it's not your fault."

"I let her go," Anya cries as she clutches onto Octavia's back, "she's my baby sister and I let her go. She's dead because of me, Octavia."
Octavia shuts her eyes and holds herself together as the woman she's always seen as the epitome of strength and courage breaks in her arms. She barely has the time to react as Anya crumbles to her knees, head burrowed in Octavia's neck as she weeps harder. The younger woman winds her arms tighter around Anya's trembling back, one of her hands reaching up to cradle her head as she cries. When she blinks open her eyes, she sees Clarke and Aden standing at the doorway, watching with wide eyes as Anya sobs into her chest. Octavia passes a mournful glance in Clarke's direction and the blonde swallows thickly. Octavia swallows down the guilt and deprecation as she shakes her head slightly at the older woman's direction. Anya's still a trembling wreck in her arms, shaking and unstable.

"Aunt Anya?" Aden speaks with a tremor in his voice, knees wobbling from the sight of his aunt crying. Sucking in a deep breath, Anya blinks away the remainder of her tears and wills herself to be strong before she releases Octavia and turns to see Aden staring back at her, wide-eyed and confused.

"Kiddo," she breathes as she looks at him. He doesn't hesitate to throw himself at her, winding his arms around her neck and nearly sending her tumbling to the ground. Anya closes her eyes as tears slide down her cheeks when he sniffs against her neck. "Hey," she whispers into his skin, "hey, I've got you, okay?"

Aden continues to cry as he feels Anya's hands trailing a line up and down his back. "You're okay, kiddo, just breathe, okay?"

"Is Mom really dead like your parents?" Aden asks between hiccuped cries. "Is she really not coming back?"

Anya clenches her jaw and grips him tighter, her hand absently smoothing down his blonde locks. The only thing she can offer is a soft nod.

"I want Mom," Aden sniffs as he trembles in her arms, "I want her back, Aunt Anya. I miss her so… so much."

"I know, kid. I know," she whispers as she opens her eyes and looks up to a mournful Clarke, "I miss her, too.

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July 27th 2009, 13:45

New Calvary Cemetery, New York

Today is the day.

It's raining. An ironic slap in the face as Anya stands at the gate of the cemetery, alone. Dressed in her ceremonial dress blues, she keeps her posture straight and steady as the thunderclaps roar overhead. She doesn't open up an umbrella, and instead decides to let the frozen droplets pool run down her nose and drip from her chin. Her stare is glued to the entrance's crest, mournful and dark as
the sounds of vehicles pull up behind her. Her eyes sting with unshed tears, but she holds them back. She will not cry, not yet. Anya glances over her shoulder to where Lincoln and Octavia have arrived with Clarke, Aden, and Tris.

Anya's throat bobs at the sight of her sister's wife, dressed in a subtle black dress and wearing one of those black veils over an elegant hat. Her gloved hands are enveloped in the crook of Aden's elbow as holds him close. Tris is in the stroller beside her, being pushed by Octavia while Lincoln joins Clarke's other side. A pang of loneliness strikes Anya's heart, but she represses it when Clarke's eyes meet her own for a brief second. The blonde doesn't look pleased at seeing her, but Anya doesn't blame her. She struggles looking at herself in the mirror, too. But then, Clarke shifts her gaze and stares blankly ahead, emotionless as they reach Anya at the front gates. Lincoln offers a sad smile, but Anya doesn't respond. She can hardly look at them after the guilt that festers within her.

If it hadn't been for her, none of this would be happening.

Lincoln opens up the umbrella and holds it over Clarke and Aden's heads as they join Anya at the front. There's a bonnet covering Tris' stroller, and Anya's gaze softens when she sees the sleeping baby inside the cart. Octavia's hand grazes her arm and Anya nods, swallowing down her grief as she nods towards the top of the cemetery where a crowd of soldiers and friends have already gathered, ready and waiting for the processional. Octavia keeps looking at her sympathetically, her hand reaching between their bodies to give her scarred knuckles a firm, assuring squeeze. Clarke offers her nothing but a blank stare.

"How are you holding up?" Octavia asks, though the question is rhetorical. Anya swallows and shakes her head.

"I'm fine," she whispers, releasing their hands to straighten her back and walk through the gates. "We should go."

They make their way to the top of the hill, where a tent is already set up and people are taking their seats. While the procession had intended to be for all the victims of the bombings, Anya had requested a separate and private ceremony for Lexa. A few friends from their university are sitting at the back rows, dressed in black and quietly whispering amongst themselves as Anya walks past them and to the front of the tent. Her eyes land on the photo of her sister with a gulp.

Lexa looks so young, so free from the burdens of war even in her uniform and cap. Anya takes a deep breath and clenches her gloved hands as she sees Colonel Jaha and Lieutenant-Colonel Kane approach her. Lincoln manages to find himself at her side as the two men come to greet them mournfully.

"Are you ready?" Kane asks her quietly. Anya swallows and nods, blinking back tears.

Kane sighs and nods, turning around so that he can lead them to where the hearse is waiting a few blocks down. The full guard is there, including the marching band and the military chaplain. Anya sucks in a breath and takes her place at the lineup of guards, noticing the familiar face of James Dickens. He offers a sad smile in her direction, but doesn't say a word as he gets ready for the rites to take place. Anya looks to Lincoln across from her and holds back a sob. His eyes are downcast and grey as they watch the two colonels take their place at the front of the horse buggy, hands crossed behind them and backs ramrod straight.

As the music starts to play, Anya moves from her spot and walks over to the hearse, reaching out to fold the flag atop the casket. Her hand trembles but she wills herself to be strong as the soldiers behind her march towards the casket. She reaches out and grips the end of it in her hands, letting them help her carry the box out from the car. The rain pelts down harder, masking the steadily falling
tears that drip down her cheeks as they make their way towards the buggy and horse. Behind them, the soldiers at giving the twenty-one gun salute snap to attention, loading their rifles. Anya takes a deep breath and slowly throws her own hand up as she watches the casket be loaded onto the buggy. Kane and Jaha watch her from ahead, mournful glances painting their faces.

The band stops playing and there's a moment of silence before the man with bagpipes in front of the horses picks up his instrument.

The soft, melodic tune of "Going Home" starts filtering through the pipes as the soldiers step back from the casket and form the line. The horse begins to shuffle forward as the rest of the men and women fall in line behind Anya, following the casket as its lead up the hill and towards the tent where the grave has been dug. The walk is slow and steady, the air still and frigid despite it being summer. It's like Earth herself is mourning her sister's loss, too.

The bagpiper transitions into "Hector the Hero" and the band behind her starts to play in tune with his piping. Anya remembers the tune from her father's funeral years ago, when both Anya and Lexa had just been kids. Anya had been a little younger than Aden at the time, but all she remembered was standing in her aunt Indra's shadow, clutching her dark dress as her father had been piped in and laid to rest. Now, she painfully realizes, she's about to do the same with the last member of her immediate family. She stares at the casket with empty eyes, the loss and loneliness threatening to tear a hole in her heart.

They wind their way up the hill just as the bagpiper drones off into silence. The horse and carriage comes to a slow stop and there's another silence filled in by the torrential rain. Anya waits a few minutes before she lowers her hand and marches forward, her hand clasping around the ring of the casket's edge before Lincoln and James join her side. The honour guard work together to pull the casket from the carriage before quietly marching towards the lowering device. They set the casket down on the four tethers and step back, lining themselves around the pall-draped coffin in an orderly fashion as the champlain takes the podium.

The man steps up to the podium, dressed in a casual black uniform. Neither Anya nor Lexa had been particularly religious, but Indra and Abby had been adamant on hiring a pastor to talk, even if just for the introduction. Anya can almost hear Lexa in her ear, chuckling in a light rasp at the load of crap coming out of the man's mouth as he speaks about how God'd taken her soul to a better place. Anya remembers as her father had chided with her sister, telling her that anyone is free to take whatever path they'd wanted and that they shouldn't pressured into not having a faith. She'd stuck by Clarke's mother's beliefs, mostly because she was a lovesick fool that couldn't ever tell Clarke no. Even the blonde wasn't particularly religious, but she loved her mother dearly.

"We are gathered here to mourn the loss of Major Lexa Woods," the champlain says after the pastor's introductory prayer, "beloved wife, sister, soldier, and friend." Anya keeps her stare glued to the casket, her hands still trembling at her sides. Her stare is glossy and distant as the man continues to speak.

"The world loses a great woman today," the man says as he grips the edge of the podium, "one that loved purely and deeply, that protected her country until her tragic demise. Her sacrifice to this nation will be remembered for years to come. Her heroic sacrifice saved the lives of most of her regiment, as well as eleven thousand lives stationed at Wazir, Afghanistan. She died a hero, serving her country." Anya sighs and blinks up to see Clarke sitting with her hands folded in her lap, tears streaming down her cheeks as Abby holds her arm loosely. Indra is on the other end, beside Octavia and Aden, her eyes searching for something to tell her that this isn't true, that the daughter she never birthed isn't dead, that she hasn't lost another loved one to a damned war, but she never finds it.
"We let her spirit rest in peace," the champlain finishes quietly, "joining those of her parents and fallen comrades. Today, we send her a final farewell."

The crowd stands and the soldiers in her line snap a salute. The rain is coming harder now, picking up some rain with it as the pastor up from where he'd been standing at the side of the podium. The champlain joins the honour guard and stiffens his back as the older man takes the stage. Anya flicks her gaze over to the framed photo of her sister's face, searching for something—anything—to reassure her that she's not dead, that this is all some sort of sick joke.

When she blinks, she sees the flames again.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven," the pastor says quietly in a gentle hum. Anya looks over to see that Clarke has her head bowed. The pastor is still staring at the crowd blankly as he continues his prayers. Anya gulps tearfully.

"Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," he murmurs, closing his eyes as the people repeat after him. Anya sucks in a sharp breath as she looks up the posted picture her sister hanging on the mantle behind him, memorial wreathes tied around the frames. Lexa's face is staring at her with a timid, sheepish smile as she breaks free of the photo. Anya chokes back a gasp as she looks up the posted picture her sister hanging on the mantle behind him, memorial wreathes tied around the frames. Lexa's face is staring at her with a timid, sheepish smile as she breaks free of the photo. Anya chokes back a gasp as she walks over to stand at the casket's side, looking down at the coffin with sad expression before tilting her head up to offer a mournful, yet still familiarly lopsided smile.

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Anya watches Lexa step over the grave like she's walking on air -- and maybe she is, because fuck, Lexa isn't real -- before coming to stand before her. The pastor's still talking but the scene is changing and she's standing on that field, surrounded by the sun and the warm summer breeze. Lexa's smile is radiant and pure as she reaches down and takes her hand, giggling and free before she's leading Anya through the tall grass and towards tree at the top of the hill. Anya follows, heart caught in her throat but damn her if Lexa feels so real. Anya's struggling to keep up as Lexa takes her to the tree, the rusted old tire swing.

"For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever."

The world is so beautiful, Anya, Lexa whispers as they gaze upon a valley of flowers. The air is thick and humid and Anya's never felt more at peace. The soldier looks over at her sister and watches as Lexa's arms open and she lets out a childish laugh, breathing in the sweet summer air. Anya's breaths leave at a quick, shaky pace as clouds form over their safe haven, thunderclaps rolling in the distance. Lexa looks blissfully unaware as she remains standing with her arms spread wide, like she's trying to embrace the world and never let go. Lexa Woods, always the dreamer, Anya reminisces her father's words.

"Father," the pastor says as Anya watches the field of flowers begin to burn and the grass turn to ash and blood, "hallowed be thy name."

Anya wants to scream but before she can, a deafening explosion rips through the air and Anya feels the wind get knocked from her lungs. She screams for Lexa, watching in horror as flames engulf her sister's frame. The younger brunette's head turns and Lexa smiles sadly, tears glistening in her eyes. Her skin is peeling away, but her eyes remain clear and watching bravely as she walks forward, shedding each layer of flesh as she goes until all that remains is her skeleton.

A bloodied hand sticks out and Anya can't breathe when Lexa whispers, get knocked down, get back
Anya blinks open her eyes to see that she's back at the cemetery. Her eyes are watery and she wipes at her face with her glove, not noticing when she'd started crying. She nods her head up and chokes when she sees Clarke staring at her with a soft, near-sympathetic expression. Aden clutches her hand tightly and Indra's staring too, but she looks away. She can't be weak. Not now, not while she still has a duty to honour her sister's final passing. There's a rustling in the wind as the crowd turns their heads to see the lone bugler pick up his horns and raise it to his lips, ready to play the lament, "Taps".

Twenty-four notes.

That's all it takes for Anya to finally break.

=====Clarke's eyes stay glued to Anya's own, her heart breaking inside her chest as she watches the older Woods sibling struggle to hold it together. The anger from the past few days simmers to a low boil, and intense sadness grips her instead. Aden holds her hand tighter as the bagpiper takes up his instrument and pipes out the iconic tune of "Amazing Grace". The band joins in after the first intro and Clarke can hear her mother humming the lyrics beside her. Clarke chokes as she looks over to Lexa's picture, holding her son's hand tighter as the few days' worth of grief sinks deep into her aching bones.

She watches the casket being lowered into the grave and she knows that this it.

This is her final goodbye to the woman she has always loved.

It doesn't feel real, though, Clarke thinks as she watches the coffin lower until it's no longer visible. It doesn't feel real when the tune fades into silence and everyone's heads bow. It doesn't feel real when the Colonel and his men set themselves up for the three-volley salute to their fallen captain. It doesn't feel real when she glances down at her child, a child that looks identical to her dead lover, that all of those years she'd spent loving Lexa are over.

None of this feels real.

And so she closes her eyes and grounds herself to the memory of her wife as Colonel Jaha steps in front of his men.

"Ready."

Clarke catches Lexa at the corner of the math hallway in their alma mater, nervously trying to get her attention and blushing when she does so.

"Aim."

Clarke's fingers tingle when she remembers the sensation of the first time Lexa had ever held them, so soft and pliant in her hands.

"Fire."

Clarke feels her heart rocket when she tastes Lexa's lips on hers in that messy first kiss at her parent's lake-house.
"Ready."

Clarke's body lights with a burning passion as Lexa's body meets hers for the first time, skin on skin with nothing between them but love.

"Aim."

Clarke holds back the sob when they have their first fight and Lexa storms off in a mess of tears and shaking limbs.

"Fire."

Clarke's kissing her again, drunk and messy, aching for them to piece themselves back together, and they do -- good God they do.

"Ready."

Clarke sees Lexa on one knee outside their first apartment with a ring in her hands, her eyes glazed over, nervous as she poses the question.

"Aim."

Clarke watches Lexa holding Aden so gently after his birth, like he's made of glass and worth more than the world, than anything.

"Fire."

Clarke hears Lexa's last goodbye before getting on that plane, lips curled up in that signature lopsided grin as she waves from the security line.

Only this time, Lexa -- her lovely, sweet, oh-so-good Lexa -- never comes back home.

There's more silence and then the people filter over towards the lowered casket. Clarke stays frozen with blurred vision as the box of dirt is passed around, each of the soldiers she'd commanded and saved taking a handful and throwing it to the coffin. Her mother stays by her side, giving her arm an extra squeeze as they both watch Indra hobble up to the dug grave, her shoulders trembling as she sobs and shakily grabs a handful of dirt and lets it fall to the empty casket. Tristan, the son of a man Clarke knew to be one of Lexa's closest friends, holds her tightly to his chest as he takes his own handful and sprinkles it down.

"Mama," Aden's voice croaks from beside her, trembling and afraid. "What are they doing?"

Clarke swallows and squeezes his small hand before nodding down at him to whisper, "they're saying goodbye, sweetie."

"Are we going to say goodbye?" Aden asks as he looks back to where the people are slowly starting to filter away from the open grave. Soon, only Indra remains with Tristan's arms locked around her shoulders in a tight grip. It's only then that she allows Abby to tug her forwards, pulling Aden and Octavia long with her. The pastor and champlain look at her grimly, offering the box. Clarke looks at its contents and shudders, her gaze flitting to the casket as she bitterly sighs.

"Can I?" Aden asks, puffing out his chest bravely. Clarke looks down at her son and sees Lexa staring up at her. He may look like Clarke, but the blonde knows that her son is more of his other mother than she could ever be ready to admit. Nodding silently, she leans down and pecks his hair before handing him the box. Aden takes a deep breath before stepping forward, taking a handful of
dirt in his tiny hands and staring down at the flag-covered casket.

"Goodbye, Mom." His voice is small in the pattering rain, but still so strong. "May we meet again. I love you."

Clarke chokes as he returns to his side, courageously blinking back tears so that he can hold her hand again. Her son, as brave and caring as his mother, stands at her side like a stoic guard. Octavia takes the box next and offers her soft goodbyes, wiping away a few trailing tears. Abby joins after, and while the surgeon hadn't always approved of Clarke's choice in spouse, she'd grown to love Lexa as her own daughter. Her loss hits hard as she throws in her own handful of dirt. She waits a moment, looking down at the casket as she lets a tear drop before turning back to pass Clarke a comforting nod.

Lincoln and Anya walk over now, relieved by Jaha and Kane as they take their posts at the grave. Clarke's eyes are trained on her sister-in-law, unable to shake the sheer desolation present in her hazel eyes as she watches Lincoln take the box next. He stands strong, murmuring a faint goodbye in their native language before shaking away the tears that well in his eyes and handing the box to Anya. Clarke's breath catches as she watches Anya take it slowly, cautiously.

But Anya doesn't move.

"Aden," she whispers to her son, "you and Grandma need to take Tris to the church. I'll meet you there soon, okay?"

"I don't wanna leave," Aden says protectively, and Clarke can hear the fear from miles away. Clarke just kneels slightly and pecks his forehead.

"I need to say goodbye," she tells him honestly, her voice cracking on the words. "I'll find you, I promise."

Aden frowns, eyes flickering from his aunt, to the grave, and then back to his mother, but he begrudgingly agrees and loops his arms around her neck. Clarke gasps when she hears him murmur, "ste yuj, Mama." It's something Lexa would always say whenever he hurt himself or felt scared. Clarke closes her eyes and presses her nose in the nape of his neck, thanking whatever deity that exists that her son is as wonderful as he is. Aden holds on tightly, bravely, until she lets go and gives him another kiss to his damp, sandy hair. Abby takes him when he pulls away, but his eyes stay glued to hers until they reach the crest of the hill.

Clarke turns back to the casket to see that Lincoln and Octavia have left with Indra and Tristan, leaving only Anya and Clarke at the open grave.

Swallowing, Clarke steps around the side to stand at Anya's side, watching as the soldier's eyes glaze with her approach. Anya's head nods up in the slightest and Clarke whispers at the broken look in her eyes. All traces of the stoic, nonchalant, and unwavering warrior are gone, replaced by a shattered, haunted soul. The older woman goes to say something, but all that leaves her voice is a haunted croak. Clarke can't take the anger she has against Anya anymore.

So instead, she reaches forward and places her hand over the soldier's scarred knuckles.

"I'm sorry," Anya chokes as she bows her head in shame, "I'm sorry I couldn't bring her home."

"I know," Clarke whispers as she reaches into the box and curls her fingers into the dirt. "You did what you had to for them to survive. You both did."

"Clarke," Anya says hoarsely, "I..."
A silence falls between them when the older woman can't finish her thought. They stand in the rain, alone and lonely despite each other's company. They're in two different words, bound together by the same loss. They're tethered together like an anchor on a sinking ship. Intertwined and wrapped delicately around each other like a heliotrope vine, but at the same time, they're so far apart. Clarke swallows as she hears the clenching of Anya's jaw, the slight scrabble of her nails upon the wooden box as she tries to steady herself, to be strong in a world that takes and takes and leaves her so achingly weak. She tries and she fails.

Anya wants to scoff but she can't. It seems that all she's good at is failing.

"Did… did you really watch it happen?" Clarke stumbles over the words as she breaks the wall of silence. "Did you really watch her die?"

Anya waits a moment before she nods, tears streaming down her chiseled cheekbones. Clarke's still not looking at her, and Anya's not sure if it's out of fear or disgust. She focuses her stare on the pale hand clenching the dirt between her fingers. Clarke sucks in a laboured breath, her heart aching as she nods, accepting the admission. Anya sees her tense up from her peripheral vision and she wants to scream. Her heart feels like a weighted stone and she's drowning in an ocean of her own remorse. Everywhere she looks, all she can hear, see, feel is Lexa, and it tortures her from the inside out. Clarke chokes up again.

"What happened?" Is all she can croak out in a mere attempt at questioning the older woman. "Why did she do it?"

"I didn't try hard enough," Anya whispers as she looks to Clarke's hand in the dirt, "I… I'm the reason why… she… she did it to save us."

Clarke can't say anything. No words could possibly formulate how she's feeling in this moment, watching as the seasoned soldier falls apart beside her. There's heavy overtones of guilt that seep from Anya's voice as she croaks, "I made the call to send her to the valley. I told her that it would work. I was so sure."

Anya sniffles and shakes her head, her nails digging deeper into the wooden box. "I was so wrong."

"Anya…," Clarke whispers as she feels the rain drench her now, mixing with the tears on her face. Anya just shakes her head and sobs into her chest.

"She's dead because I made a wrong call," Anya growls through gritted teeth and Clarke visibly flinches at the words, "she's dead because I didn't think it through, because I tried to be smart one. She's dead because I told her that I was sure when I should have known better. She's dead because I let her go."

Finally, Anya swallows down an aching cry as she turns to Clarke and hoarsely whispers, "she's dead… because of me, Clarke."

Clarke looks over at the older woman and bites her lip when Anya shakes her head and looks up to blink away the tears. "It should have been me."

"Anya," Clarke breathes out, feeling a pang in her chest as she sees the older woman close her eyes and gasp through soft, inevitable cries.

"It should have been me," Anya croaks again as she opens her eyes and looks despondently to her sister-in-law, "I should have taken the shot. I should have fought harder to keep her safe, to bring her back home because dammit, she was the only one… she… she was the only one who had something
worth fighting for. She was the only one who had someone to come home to, a family to love, and I... I took that away from her. I took that away from you."

Clarke's jaw clenches and she watches Anya's shoulders tremble and the woman falls to her knees, not caring about the dirt smudging her dress blues.

"I took her away from you," Anya heaves into herself as she shakes her head, "I broke my promise and now she's gone because of me."

Clarke's hand is still full of dirt and she stares at it, now growing moist from the pelting rain. Anya's confession remains solidified in her mind, the words having sunk in and anchored themselves in her broken heart. She listens to Anya sobbing into herself, the box of dirt long-since having tumbled into the casket as result of her painful admission. Clarke's eyes remain fixated on the older woman as she protectively winds her arms around her chest like a child. Clarke's heart catches in her throat when Anya's head tilts over the grave and she cries relentlessly. Clarke looks up, teary-eyed as she sees Lexa's photo staring back at her. Those gentle green eyes are watching hers, but she knows what Lexa would want if she could be here, if she could see this and experience it vicariously.

"It's not your fault," Clarke whispers as she keeps her eyes on Lexa's, "it's not your fault, Anya."

The repetition is stronger, well-guarded and pure as she sees Lexa give her a soft, seemingly approving smile -- however mournful and sad it may be -- in her direction. And with that, Clarke joins Anya on her knees and looks to her palmful of dirt. A pale, ghostly hand curls over her own and she can feel Lexa inside of her, willing her to be strong. She closes her eyes and clings to the memory of her lover, of her best friend, of the woman who grew up beside her and held her through the darkest nights. Clarke closes her eyes and she drinks in the last of Lexa, of a final goodbye that she knows will have to do until her heart can heal.

When she releases the dirt into the grave, Clarke swears she can feel Lexa smiling down at her proudly.

Moments later, Clarke opens her eyes and looks to a broken and weary Anya and opens her arms, drawing her in. Anya clings to her and sobs against her chest, crying out in more self-loathing and guilt that she's been holding onto since the explosion. Clarke buries her face in Anya's hair, trying to ignore how familiar Anya seems, how much she feels like Lexa when her palms graze over the corded muscles in her back. Clarke cries against her as the rain continues to drench them, alone in their own little bubble of grief, surrounded by the lingering grazes of a ghosted lover, sister, and friend. Both of them cry harder at the sensation, unable to take the sorrow any longer. They keep themselves locked to each other in their grief, wordlessly promising to never leave no matter what.

Because both Anya and Clarke painfully know that they're the only family they've got left.

"It's not your fault," she whispers again into Anya's hair, holding her closer, "you tried, Anya. You tried and it just wasn't enough but it's not your fault."

"I'm so sorry," Anya sobs into her chest, shaking her head, still unable to accept anything but the blame. "I'm sorry I took her away from you."

"I know," Clarke whispers as she closes her eyes, seeing Lexa once again. "I forgive you, Anya."

Anya only sobs when Clarke opens her eyes and looks to casket, softly whispering, "and so does Lexa."
Beep.

"Give me a status report."

Beep.

"No change in her charts, sir."

Beep.

"Injuries?"

Beep.

"All treated. We're waiting on her to wake up."

Beep.

"Good. Keep me updated. The second her eyes open, you notify me immediately."

Beep.

"Of course, sir."

Beep.

Rustling ensues as the beeping drowns out to background noise. There're voices, languages she can barely understand through the muffled noises around her. Her body feels heavy, like lead. A mask is taped to her mouth and her body is bare, except for wrappings around her chest and a pair of pants covering her legs. Pain shoots everywhere, but she's too weak to do anything about it except let it burn a path all up and around her body. She can't feel, and at the same time, she still feels everything. There's a tube down her throat that presses on her gag-reflex but she can't heave. She can barely register the numbing throb.

C-fibres and a-delta fibres, inhibitory interneurons, projection neurons, somatosensory cortex... you know, gate-control theory.

Beep.

That's why we rub the area when we get hurt. It's a soft, familiar rasp in her ear. It's to redirect the pain. Our brain's backup system, if you want.

Beep, beep, beep.

"Sir! Sir, her blood pressure's rising! One-fifty over ninety-five and counting."
Beep, beep, beep--

You lose those c-fibres and you're done for, babe. A gentle hand traces her knuckles. It's like your body's shield. Without it, you can't fight pain.

"Get me the boss. I want a crash cart on standby."

Beep.

But sometimes you shouldn't fight it. Her voice is so soft, so far away. Sometimes… well, sometimes you need pain. We all do.

"We're losing her, dammit."

Beep.

Why? A soft chuckle pulls her rapidly beating heart into a soft lull. Pain keeps you alive, duh. You'd walk into traffic without the fear of it.

"She's… she's coming to, she's waking up! Get him in here."

You can't know comfort without pain, her lips burn the words against her jaw, you can't know life without death.

Beep.

And I need you alive, she whispers softly, her gentle hands tracing over the skin that aches for her burning touch, I need you to come home.

"She's waking up!"

Can't you see what I'm trying to say?

Beep.

I need you.

"Move aside."

A blinding light takes over and the world is thrust back upon her. Two figures loom overhead and she gasps when the tube is wrenched from her throat, bringing forth a wave of bile and blood along side it. Someone's rolling her onto her side, holding a bucket under her lips to catch the remains. She barely registers the harshly exchanged words from the multiple people she can sense in the room before she's slammed back down onto the bed with that light back in her eyes. It flashes from side to side before it's pulled away, leaving her disorientated, white spots creeping up in the corners as she readjusts to the dim walls.

"Finally," a gruff male voice chuckles from beside her bed, "it's good to see you alive and well."

"W-Who… who…," she garbles the words, choking from her dry throat and lack of use, "w-where…"

A hand fists itself in her shoulder and she nearly screams from the searing pain the shoots down her side from the scabbed-over bullet wound. She blinks open her eyes again to see a man with a clean-shaven face and dark brown hair staring down at her. Her gaze jumps wildly to the other people in the room, noticing a mix of American and Afghan men and women alike, and she's confused. She
tries to move her hands, but she looks down to see them tied to the metal bed.

"Who are you?" She croaks as she struggles in the restraints, feeling her heart drop when she sees him smirk, "w-where am I?"

"Who I am is not of importance to you -- not yet, anyways." The man chuckles and removes his hands before leaving his side and gesturing to the Afghan man beside him, dressed in scrubs. He sends her another gleaming smirk as she begins to thrash and fight against her restraints, trying to free herself.

"There's no use in that," he tells her as she fits upon the metal bed, the cool steel digging into her bare back, "no one will find you here."

The beeping is growing louder now, and before she can volley out an insult, something sharp jabs into her neck and she falls back to the bed in a heap.

"Sleep well," the man chuckles as she feels her head spin and eyes grow heavy, "we'll be talking soon, don't you worry."

Before she drifts off into darkness, all she hears is the ghosted whisper of a familiar voice.

*I need you*, blue eyes and gold hair repeat the near-silent words as their lips meet in a soft kiss, *I love you, Lexa.*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and leave a comment if you want!

As per usual, find me on Tumblr @ a-class-act-president.

Much love, xx.
Chapter Summary

Lexa finally wakes up, Anya fights the demons in her head, and Clarke tries to push down her grief.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, GORE, DEATH, AND EXPLICIT TORTURE.

If you feel uncomfortable by any of the above listed, do NOT read any of the following parts:

The first section starts in the first break at the line, "desperate times call for desperate measures..." and continues throughout the duration of the rest of the section. This one has MILD TORTURE and BLOOD.

The second section starts in the third break after the line, "... he will do the honours", and progresses towards the line, "...they're not patient like I am." This one has DEATH, VIOLENCE, and GORE.

The last section starts in the last break and is the ENTIRE PART IN DURATION. Do NOT read this last section if you are turned off by EXTREMELY EXPLICIT DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND TORTURE. It is VERY GRAPHIC.

I HOPE THESE CUES HELP!!

Thanks so much for all the love and support on this one. It's quite sadder than the last one but about a thousand words shorter, my apologies. If it's any consolidation, there is a happy ending. It's just far away. But the journey to that ending is beautiful, my friends. I already planned it out with my beta, soldierofthenight, and I can tell you, it's worth every gruesome and agonizingly angsty chapter that's coming up :P

The song lyrics are from, "To Build a Home" by The Cinematic Orchestra ft. Patrick Watson.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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there is a house built out of stone  
wooden floors, walls and window sills  
tables and chairs worn by all of the dust
"Finally," a gruff voice pulls Lexa from unconsciousness, "you're awake, Captain. I was beginning to worry that we’d still be kept waiting."

Lexa blinks upwards to feel herself tied to a chair, restrained by a leather belt against the strong points in the chair. Her body is without bandages this time, and Lexa can feel her sore wounds aching. It registers just what these mystery men and women have done. They've healed her, only to bring her down and break her again. But, she growls to herself, she will not be broken. The man in front of her has a clean-shaven face and wavy brown hair, donning a jeering smirk.

"You surely recognize me, right?" The man chuckles as he takes a seat in front of her. "A face like this doesn't go unnoticed by your kind."

Lexa knows better than to engage him with a conversation, so she stays quiet. The man just chuckles again and extends his hand in a comical jest.

"Cage Wallace," he says with a chipper grin. "CEO of Wallace Industries." Lexa's gaze flickers to his outstretched hand and then back up to his face without any emotion.

Nothing.

"Alright, I get it. You don't want to talk," Cage says as he throws up his hands in mock jest. "But do remember, we saved your life, Captain Woods."
Lexa just swallows as she subtly takes in her surroundings. She's in a cell, in what looks to be some sort of underground bunker or cave. Lexa blinks slowly and rolls her shoulders before adjusting herself in the seat, simply residing to keeping silent for this interrogation. She hears some shuffling in the background coming from the hall, but she doesn't make herself appear to be phased. Cage just smiles and turns his head, watching as something flickers by the door.

"Mung darlodal ya-e," one of the guards barks out as the door creaks open and three armed Afgan soldiers walk in, glaring at Lexa.

The soldiers part ways and Lexa's eyes widen slightly when she sees that they've brought another hostage. She recognizes those colours anywhere. Delta sector's known for communications and reconnaissances. The figure screams and struggles, their head covered by a burlap sac as they're thrown to the grown.

Cage stands from his seat and walks over, placing his palm over the top of the sack and fist in his hands. His gaze remains glued to Lexa's own, expecting a response or reaction. Lexa steels herself and doesn't say anything as Cage smirks and whips the sac off with force and the figure is brought to light.

Lexa doesn't understand how she manages to hold in her gasp but she does.

"We found her outside one of our drop points," Cage chuckles as he stalks back to the chair, "thought you'd be better with recon, Captain. You're getting sloppy."

Those familiar curled locks of hair are matted to the woman's dark, freckled skin as her head nods upwards. Her eyes widen slightly when she sees Lexa bound to the chair, but the icy glare in her captain's eyes tell her to remain silent. Cage sighs, displeased by the show of resilience by both women. Standing, he barks out an order in Pashto to the guards and they leave. Two of them stay behind to tie the soldier to the chair Cage had been sitting in so that she faces Lexa. After they're done, they go take their place guarding the door as Cage glances between two women, both staring at each other with unreadable expressions.

"I think you two have some talking to do," Cage says with a curl of his lips, "I'll be back soon, and don't worry, nothing will happen to either of you… yet."

He files out of the room with an amused chuckle, leaving Lexa and her soldier alone. As soon as he's gone, Lexa reels on the woman with wide, furious eyes.

"Did you speak?" She snarls in a low voice, glancing over the woman's shoulder at the guards. "Did you talk, Private?"

"What do you take me for?" The other woman snorts, shaking her head. "You're as stubborn as you always were, aren't you?"

"You don't know me," Lexa growls as she returns her gaze to the other woman, her eyes telling a different story. "You don't have a family, any husband or wife or kids. You don't know anything, you hear me? All you know is that my name is Captain Woods and your name is Private Green. That's it. Understood, soldier?" Private Green looks unsure, but at the two guards speaking in hushed, rapid-fire Pashto, she begrudgingly agrees. Lexa's face softens at the admission, but only slightly.

After a few moments of silence in which the guards take to entertaining themselves with a deep conversation, Lexa looks up to the woman.
"How did they get you?" She asks softly, eyes flitting over the multitude of scars and bleeding wounds that litter Private Green's face. The woman sighs and shifts on the chair, trying to rub at her aching, chaffed wrists. Her bottom lip quivers as she grits her teeth and muscles up some strength to face her CO.

"They nicked us at the recon point," she whispers defeatedly, "Cruz and Mendel were shot down. I heard they… beheaded Verona on camera and took me so that they could send a message. I don't know what message they intend on sending, but knowing that Wallace is on this, it can't be good. I always knew that guy was corrupt. If he's working with the extremists, I can only imagine what it must mean." Lexa bites her lip at the knowledge, trying to sink it in and make a plan.

"You can't do anything," Private Green coughs with a sad sigh, "your quick brain isn't going to save us this time, Captain."

Lexa ignores the sting at the way the woman curls her lip at the name and instead focuses on her surroundings.

"We'll find a way out," Lexa mutters as she looks around the cell for something. Private Green shakes her head sadly, eyes watering.

"They told us you were dead," she whispers in a hoarse croak, "your sister--"

Lexa's eyes snap back to the private's vivid speckled pair and she lets out a low growl.

"You know nothing," Lexa hisses under her breath, "I don't have a sister. You don't know me, Private."

"She nearly died," Private Green continues, ignoring Lexa for a minute, "they said she ran right into the hundred yard dead zone with no armour."

Lexa bites her lip hard enough to draw blood as she wills herself to not think about Anya risking her life, of her dying in the sand. Instead, she just continues her steady glare at the private until the woman hangs her head and swallows sadly. Lexa can hear those screams, of Anya hauling her rifle into her arms and sobbing as she'd mowed down the enemy. She remembers the tears streaming down her face, the cries of anguish that had left her lips when Lexa had made a run for the trucks. She prays to a God she doesn't believe in that her sister somehow made it out alive and made it back to their home safely.

Home, she thinks mournfully, what an foreign concept now.

"Does it matter?" Private Green scoffs despondently, tears burning in her eyes as she nods her head up. "We're both gonna die here, aren't we?"

"Shut up," Lexa growls as she glares at the soldier, garnering her attention. "We're getting back. You just need to listen to everything I tell you, Private. I am your captain. You follow my orders. We are going to get out of here but right now you need to shut the fuck up before someone comes in here and makes you. Whatever these guys want, they will get if you break. You will not break, Private. Is that understood?!" Lexa hisses the words and Private Green swallows thickly.

"Yes Captain," the woman parrots back coarsely, "I understand, loud and clear."

Lexa nods with determination. "Good, then stay quiet and keep your head down, Private. We'll get out of here by the skin of our teeth if needed."

Just as Private Green goes to respond, footsteps echo down the halls and Cage returns with a bunch
of maps and a wide grin on his face. He lays them out on the table beside their chairs and drags it over, the metal grating against the cobblestoned floors. Lexa keeps her eyes on Private Green as Cage pulls out a massive schematic and lays it atop the maps. Lexa's gaze drifts over the materials for a few moments before giving an emotionless stare in Cage's direction.

"The US Military has an undercover reserve housing six nuclear warheads in the outskirts of Kandahar," Cage begins with a cool voice. He points to a red circle on the map, located in the middle of the Registan Desert. Something in her chest clenches, but she doesn't show any emotion when Cage continues to say, "now, don't you think it's unfair to be hiding nuclear warfare in foreign territory, especially the territory that you chose to invade? What gives you the right, huh Captain?"

Lexa doesn't speak.

"My company was put under lock and chain with the US Government," Cage growls as he leans off the table, "I gave them all the equipment and technology they needed, but then as soon as my job was done, it was the cold shoulder from then on out. And then, five years later, I find out that they're still using them."

Lexa shifts her gaze away, seeming disinterested. Cage only rolls his eyes at the nonchalance she's expressing.

"Listen, Captain. I'm not a terrorist," Cage says innocently as he steps in front of her, leaning down to place his hands on her armrests. "I'm a businessman. I want the best cut for my people and me, nothing more. I don't care about this idiotic war. I want the money, Captain Woods. I want my goods back in my hands." He turns around and points to the guards staring at them in silence, guns at the ready and scowls on their faces. He smiles at Lexa knowingly.

"Desperate times called for desperate measures," Cage says with a shrug, "I found a better deal. I've had enough of the US Government taking what's mine." Lexa holds back a growl when he straightens and smiles at Private Green behind him. He walks over before drawing out a knife, flicking it open and standing directly behind the tied up soldier with a grin. Lexa swallows thickly at the fear in the soldier's eyes, at her heavy breathing and trembling lips.

"You're the Captain," Cage smirks as he draws the knife down to hover over Private Green's cheek, "and I know you know where they are."

Lexa doesn't answer, her eyes burning a glare into Cage as he digs the tip of the blade into the soldier's dark skin. Private Green whimpers as blood trickles down her cheeks and drips off her jaw. Private Green gasps as Cage keeps his eyes on Lexa when he drags the knife up higher, towards her lips.

"Come on, Captain. Don't you care for your soldiers?" He asks with a cock of his head. "Don't you want to go home? Don't you want to be free from this place?"

Private Green screeches as the blade dips into the corner of her mouth and pulls back. Bright crimson blood gushes out as she screams. Lexa's eyes well with tears but she shakes them away, proving to be strong and stoic like she knows she must be. Cage has the upper hand. She knows the location of the missiles, and if they break her, she can only imagine what they would do with them. Sucking in a deep breath, Lexa turns her gaze to Cage and ignores her soldier's screams as the man digs deeper. Lexa and Cage stare at each other while Private Green writhes, daring for someone to break the silence.

Luckily for Private Green and Lexa, Cage has a short temper.
"Fuck," he snarls as he pulls the knife back and punches the woman across the mouth, "your captain is pathetic and cruel. Your death will be slow. *Painful.*

"Sir?" Another husky voice sounds from the door. Lexa cocks her head up to see a bulky man with full-grade military armour on and a cap.

"Emerson," Cage says with a smile, "right on time."

"Of course," Emerson says with a raspy laugh, "it's my favourite part. Which one?" He eyes the two soldiers, his gaze lingering on Lexa.

"We've seen the camaraderie of the great captain, but how about we test her limits?" Cage suggest as he hands Emerson the knife, still coated in Private Green's blood. The metal glints in the bare slice of sunlight that filters through a small crack in the cell's walls. Emerson nods and grins, approaching the captain.

Emerson brandishes the knife a few times, teasing Lexa and taunting her, but the woman doesn't respond.

And then, with a low growl, he smashes it down upon the back of her hand, lodging the blade into the wooden armrest. Lexa grits her teeth and suppresses the hiss that aches to be free from her tight lips. Emerson yanks it out, watching with glee as a river of blood flows onto the floor, coating her hand in the viscous liquid. Lexa holds her breath and then releases it, diverting her energy into redirecting the pain as she clenches her good hand, nails scrabbling against the wooden armrest. Cage watches her, displeased with her lack of reaction to the torture. Again, Lexa remains emotionless as she stares on in silence.

"Alright," Cage says as he raises his hands disarmingly, "so you won't talk."

Lexa's eyes widen a fraction when Cage smirks and reaches down to pull at Private Green's jaw. "But maybe she will."

Without warning, Emerson plunges his knife into the still-healing bullet wound on her collar, wrenching the blade deep inside her skin. Private Green's eyes widen as she trembles in her seat, watching as Lexa bleeds before her horrendously. Lexa shakes her head, unable to hide the tremble or slipped, choking cry as she tenses in the seat, causing more blood to pool out and dampen her shirt. Cage smiles when he notices the reaction and nods to Emerson. The man grins and digs it in deeper, barely eliciting a hiss from the soldier. Private Green is whimpering now, desperate to speak, to spare her captain any more pain of the gruesome and bloody torture.

"Don't speak, Private." Lexa's voice is strangled and choked up as she snarls at her subordinate viciously. Cage chuckles and Emerson dislodges the knife.

"So, the great Captain Woods *does* have a voice," Cage laughs as he lets go of Private Green's head. "Well, that's always good to know."

Lexa curses herself for slipping up, but her warning has managed to school some sense into her soldier. Private Green looks absolutely remorseful but Lexa shakes her head again. Emerson wipes the knife on her shirt before handing the metal back to Cage, who pockets it with a smirk. Lexa keeps her teeth gritted as Cage takes a glance between her and the soldier one more time. He nods in approval before muttering something to Emerson. The man nods and quickly takes his place behind Private Green's chair, grabbing at the ridges at the back of the wooden frame and tilting it downwards. The soldier gasps as she's moved, wide-eyed from horror.
"Take her to the other cell block," Cage orders without taking her eyes off Lexa, "looks like we've got our talker."

"No," Private Green whimpers as she thrashes, "good god, fuck no, please--"

"Don't give them anything, Private!" Lexa yells as Private Green is dragged out of the cell, still tied to the chair. "Don't you dare fucking talk!"

"Your methods are weak," Cage observes when the soldier is taken out from the room, "your devotion to confidentiality is pointless."

"Fuck you," Lexa spits at him before leaning back in her chair, "I know nothing. Neither does she."

Cage nods, as if in agreement, before he calmly leans forward to whisper in her ear, "we'll see about that, Captain."

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September 15th 2009, 23:10

Griffin-Woods Residence, New York

Clarke lays awake at night, staring up at the ceiling blankly as she tries to will herself to find some sleep. Her eyes are glassy with unshed tears, sore and red from holding back her sorrow that festers like a tumour in her heart, growing exponentially with each passing day.

She's not sure why she tries to move on and act normal, considering her dreams are plagued with nothing but thoughts of Lexa. No one's talked to her in the last three months, bare for Octavia. Lincoln and Anya had left to be with Indra after the woman had been hospitalized from stress. Even Aden was being distant with her, not that she could blame him. He's like his mother in that way -- choosing to compartmentalize everything and deal with it on his own. It was always Lexa's biggest flaw.

"God," Clarke rasps as hot tears stream down her cheeks. "Lexa."

The room is too big, the bed too empty, the air too cold.

She’s so alone.

"I miss you," Clarke gasps as she rolls over to grab at Lexa's pillow, crying into it when she realizes all trace of her wife’s scent has gone. Her hand ghosts over Lexa's pillow, no longer able to feel the familiar imprint of Lexa's head, or even those faded drool marks she once abhorred. "Where are you? I need you."

For the first weeks after the funeral, Clarke found a groove of taking on extra shifts at the hospital to divert her attention. Any time she spent alone was time spent mourning and she didn't want that. No, Clarke realized that she can't fathom the swelling ache in her chest that catalyzes with her loneliness.
She thinks and thinking leads to grieving and grieving leads to her sitting under Lexa's clothes in their closet, sobbing her eyes out as she tries to take in the last lingering scent of her dead wife. She avoids the house and finds herself aimlessly wandering at times. Octavia stays home to take care of her kids while she works, and a part of her feels guilty for leaving them in another’s care, but she can hardly look at them. Not without thinking seeing Lexa in them, in their smiles and speech; most importantly, she looks at them and she always sees how both of them have lost one mother, and in a sad sense, are beginning to lose their other one.

No, Clarke wills away the beliefs as she blinks back tears, I won’t think like that. I can’t think like that.

A soft cry interrupts her thoughts and Clarke quickly brushes away her own self-deprecation so that she can stumble out of bed and make her way over to the cot in her room. Tris whines and fusses in the sheets, her cries high-pitched and needy. Her face is scrunched up in terror as Clarke looks down at her, the miniature clone of her wife. Tris cries harder with the lack of attention, hands fitting and body twisting in the small crib, and Clarke sucks in a deep breath.

Reaching inside, Clarke softly places the fussy baby in her arms, gently cooing as she rocks her back and forth until Tris finally calms and falls back asleep. Her tiny face lays tucked up against the crook of her neck as soft snores part her lips. Knowing she won’t be able to get anymore sleep herself, Clarke decides to abandon the bed and walks downstairs to sit on the couch with the lights on, still holding a slumbering Tris, now adjusted so her head is in her elbow’s nook.

"She would've loved you so much," Clarke whispers into the little girl's ear. "Your mom was… God, you would've had her wrapped around your finger." Clarke blinks back more tears as she presses her lips to Tris' soft skin, drinking in that new baby smell as Tris snuggles closer. One of her small hands curls around her index finger and Clarke whimpers. Tris begins to fuss again at the distress coming off her mother, but Clarke simply shakes her head and kisses her again.

“She would be so proud of you,” Clarke whimpers as tears fill her eyes again, “God, I wish that you could’ve met her. We tried so hard to have you, baby. You are our miracle child you know that? I'm not getting any younger and we nearly couldn’t have you. We tried so many times and it never worked and then… God… I just wish… I wish that your mom could be here to see how beautiful you are. She would hold you so tight and she'd sing to you. She has a gorgeous voice.”

Tris answers with another soft snore and a tighter curl of her finger.

“I’ll protect you,” Clarke whispers shakily as she kisses Tris forehead, “I won’t let anything happen to you, okay? Your Mom may not be here but I am, and I’m never leaving you. That’s a promise. I'm sure your Mom's out there watching over you. She'd never let us go… not that easily. I love you, my little Tris.”

It’s getting pretty late and Clarke finds her limbs growing heavy with sadness and fatigue. As much as she prefers to push it down and ignore her loss, her body can’t do the same. Coupling that with the recent pregnancy and her age, she’s exhausted. She yawns and stands up, stretching the sore muscles in her back before she glances down at her slumbering child once more, pride and awe still flickering in her gaze. Tris turns her head and nuzzles closer to her breast, a few more snores escaping her lips as she whimpers in her sleep. She presses one more kiss to Tris’ forehead before heading to the stairs.

Just as she's about to set Tris back to bed, there's a knock on her door.

Frowning, Clarke looks to the time to see that it's nearly twelve in the morning. Cautiously, she approaches the door and peeps through the small glass to see Anya waiting with her head bowed.
She’s dressed in a simple leather jacket and ripped jeans, her left shoulder still heavily bandaged under the leather from the bullet wound. Her uninjured arm is propped against the door, her hand holding her forehead. The older woman’s eyes are closed and she looks so haggard and weary.

Without hesitating, Clarke uses her free hand to open up the door. Upon the click of the lock, Anya jumps a little and tilts her head up, blinking open her eyes. There’s a flash of fear that flickers through her distant hazel gaze before the stoic metal wall is raised up once again. The older woman swallows thickly and leans off the wall. Clarke looks at the deep, dark bags that hang under her eyes and she nearly gasps at just how old Anya looks. The woman is barely six years older than herself, but at this rate, she looks like she’s nearly ten years older from the exhaustion on her face.

"Anya," Clarke greets her, confused. "What are you doing here? Is Indra okay?"

"Yeah," Anya rasps, her throat sore as she nods. One of her hands reach up and slide down her face in fatigue. "I… uh, just got back. She’s okay. Lincoln’s still with her. They’re just making sure she’s settled and then he’ll come back tomorrow evening." Clarke runs her gaze over Anya’s slightly trembling body.

"Come in," Clarke steps aside and motions for Anya to enter, "can I get you a coffee or tea? Some water? How long have you been driving? Her place is far."

"Nah," Anya says as she keeps her eyes to the floor, "I'm not staying long. The drive was okay. I'm fine."

Clarke nods, a silence coming between them as they awkwardly stand there. Tris begins to fit again, the sound of her cries being the only thing that draws Anya’s solemn gaze upwards. Her hazel eyes are dull with grief as she stares at the baby in Clarke’s arms. Clarke looks at the child and then back up at her sister-in-law. Swallowing, Clarke walks forward and holds Tris out for Anya to see, nodding her head down towards her child with a soft sigh.

"Do you want to hold her?" Clarke asks quietly. "She's been a bit fussy with me today and she's usually good with you."

Anya reaches out and takes the baby from Clarke’s arms, eyes misting when Tris calms almost immediately in her aunt’s strong arms. Clarke turns around to come and stand at Anya’s side, looking over the taller woman’s shoulder at how her child snuggles up against the soldier’s front. Anya’s free hand involuntarily comes up and places itself upon the baby’s chest like a protective blanket before she leans down and kisses Tris’ forehead, murmuring something quietly.

"She loves you," Clarke affirms when Tris’ hand curls around Anya’s index finger. "She's usually fussy with Octavia."

"She's a good kid," Anya murmurs as she cradles Tris close to her chest before handing her back to Clarke, "she's spirited, but she's good… strong."

"She's a lot like her mother in that way," Clarke whispers, mostly to herself as she walks back into the house. Anya feels a sting of something sharp hacking away at her heartstrings as she automatically lowers her gaze. Clarke turns her head over her shoulder and watches her carefully, her eyes soft and caring.

"Come on," she murmurs as she nods to the house, "you're letting in a bit of a draft."

Taking a deep breath, Anya nods and closes the door behind her. She steps further into the living room and looks around the house, uncertain as to why everything feels so different when nothing has
changed physically. Of course she knows why, but she can't let it affect her, not yet. She can't let the reality of her world, of the nightmare that plagues her conscious form, bring her down when she still has one more mission to complete. Clarke cradles her baby with a few soft coos and some gentle rocks, and once Tris is back asleep again, she turns to face Anya, who looks despondently lost, far away in an unreachable realm.

The stoic woman seems almost empty... in a sense.

Clarke understands. She feels the void, too.

"No disrespect or anything, but why are you here, Anya?" She asks with a gentle prod. Anya bites her lip and rubs the back of her neck awkwardly.

"I, uh...," Anya stammers over the words, too tired to formulate a coherent sentence, "I... I just wanted to check in. It's been awhile. How's Aden?"

"It's been two months," Clarke confirms without any bitterness, but unresolved, lingering sorrow still coats her words. "I'm okay, An. It's hard, but I'm adjusting. Aden is... well you know how he is. He's just like..." She can't say her name, Clarke realizes as she stammers over the end of the statement. Anya gets it.

"Yeah," the older woman mumbles as she looks to her feet before concealing a sniffle. She nods her head up, still avoiding Clarke's eyes. "Yeah, I know. You're right. He's a spitting image, really. Sometimes when I listen to him talk I..." Anya trails off, voice choking up. Clarke nods, blinking back tears as she clutches Tris tighter against her chest. Anya sighs and looks to her feet, struggling hard with holding in her emotions. They're silent for a few moments longer until Clarke decides to speak, her eyes lifting upwards to drink in the slumped, seemingly defeated posture of the once-stoic and impenetrable woman.

"What about you?" Clarke asks softly, taking a step in her sister-in-law's direction. "You holding up okay, Anya?"

"Yeah," Anya swallows thickly, barely meeting her gaze as she chokes out a feeble, sad chuckle, "...adjusting, right?" Anya scoffs at herself with the words, tired of their truth. It's been so long since she's last slept, last felt safety on her own, last looked at herself in the mirror; instead, it's been too often that she's heard those explosions, watched the bullets slam into her body and knock her to her knees, seen her ethereally calm face as she'd turned around with a smile--

"It's all going to take some time," Clarke reminds her softly, drawing Anya away from the painful memories. Clarke sighs sadly, reaching out with her free hand to touch the hard edge of Anya's uninjured shoulder. The older woman flinches and Clarke can see the tears brewing in those big hazel eyes for only a second before Anya's blinking them back and steeling herself. Each weathered brick piles on each other, piece by piece until the broken wall has been built up once more. The soldier nods and takes a step back guiltily. Her hands fidget in front of her waist with child-like nervousness as she struggles with a response.

"Right," Anya hoarsely croaks, "but... I... I should go."

"You must be exhausted," Clarke says sympathetically, "just spend the night. Take the spare bedroom upstairs. I don't mind, An. Just don't risk driving in this state. It rained yesterday and I know it's slippery out there. I really don't mind if you stay. I can make up the room in five minutes."

"No," Anya says a bit too quickly before she softens her voice, "no, it's fine. I just wanted to make sure you're okay, is all. I'll... uh, I'll go."
Clarke doesn't know how to respond, but before Anya can walk back to the door, she steps back towards the older blonde.

"Wait," Clarke blurts out as she moves closer towards the door. Anya freezes, but doesn't turn around. Clarke clears her throat and swallows.

"Why?"

At this, Anya tenses. "What?" She barely croaks out the response. Lexa's voice is there again, cold and mournful.

_They're your family now._

"Why did you come here?" Clarke whispers. "Why are you… doing this?"

Again, Anya tenses. Lexa’s grabbing at her shoulders now, forcing her to look into her eyes as she frantically steadies her swaying body. She’s screaming over the roaring gunfire, voice strong and stern as she manically snarls, _protect them, Anya, they're yours now. They need you, I need you—_

"I…," Anya trails off, battling the voices in her head. Yet, she can’t find the strength to reply.

When she looks to the door, all she sees is Lexa’s marred face glaring at her in disappointment. Blood drips off her fleshy cheeks, the bone underneath cracked and broken, peppered with shrapnel. The mix of metal engrained with the bone is beyond horrifying, but Anya can’t look away from the gory image. Lexa’s eyes flit over her shoulders to where she knows her sister-in-law is waiting on the answer. Her gaze is hollowed out, empty from icy claws of death.

_Tell her, _Lexa growls, blood pooling from her lips, _tell her why, Anya._

Clarke watches as the older woman curls her fingers into weak fists, her arms trembling like she's using all of her strength to hold down a sob. Her back is ramrod straight, and Clarke can see that she's definitely suffered from degrees of sleep deprivation for her body to be trembling that hard. Clarke swallows harshly again, waiting with ticking patience as Anya takes a breath before she finally tilts her head over her shoulder to give Clarke a remorseful glance, her gaze still not quite there. Her hazel eyes are cloudy with unshed tears and brimming with agony. Clarke nearly gasps at the sight, but she holds it back.

"Because," Anya chokes, "I made her a promise."

Clarke doesn't get a chance to reply because without another word, Anya walks out and closes the door behind her.

As soon as the door slams shut, Anya leans against it and slides down, slumping against the wood with her head in her hands. Earth-shaking cries pierce her lips as she holds herself together by each loose seam. It all unravels, the brick wall crumbling like it's been smashed by a wrecking ball. The night sky remains silent, the stars watching from above as the woman is the one to implode upon herself, her shoulders quivering and aching as the sobs consume her. Anya feels cold hands grip her wrists and pull her hands away from her head, causing her to look up into the eyes of Lexa’s haunting frame.

_Chin up, big girl. You did this, _Lexa murmurs as she traces the back of Anya's left wrist with her thumb, _you deserve this after what you did_.

Blood trickles from the hollow gap in her cheeks and Anya swears she can feel it ooze into her veins...
as Lexa glares at her viciously.

*What you did that day will haunt you for the rest of your days,* Lexa tells her as she lets go of her wrist and stands, and that is more painful than death.

"I'm sorry," Anya chokes as she scrambles back to her feet, knowing she's delusional to be following a ghost, "please--"  

*You killed me,* Lexa whispers as she presses her face close to her sister's broken one, *now you must live with it.*  

"How?" Anya asks as she wipes away her tears with her jacket sleeve. "How can I live with it when you're right there, when I can still feel you?"

Lexa pauses, her lips curling up into a sad smile before she looks over to the Clarke's closed door. The traces of demonic Lexa have left, replaced by the sweet and kind girl that Anya had grown up with. The blood and gore drifts away from her face, leaving her pure and clean for only a moment. Anya's eyes well with tears again as the girl Anya remembers to be her sister, not the twisted hallucination of her dead body, steps in front of her and gently places her hands around her shoulders. Anya closes her eyes and sobs as she senses the warmth in the tender embrace as Lexa's body coils around her own, soft and innocent.

*I'm always with you,* Lexa murmurs into her ear sweetly, *you just need to fight, Anya. Don't stop fighting. They need you. I need you, Anya.*

"Lexa…," Anya whispers as she opens her eyes, only to find the empty street and flickering lamplight before her. The older woman's cheeks are soaked from tears and the steady drizzle of rain. Anya looks up to the clouded skies before frantically searching around for that haunting ghost. "Lexa?!

With a hand over her mouth, Anya crumbles to her knees and sobs violently, shaking her head as she barely whispers, *"please… come back."*

Lexa never answers back.

Anya doesn't sleep that night. Or the next. Or the one after that.

Her reality has become her nightmare and she can't wake up.

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**Date and Time Unknown**

**Location Unknown**

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Lexa blinks open her eyes to the sound of muffled voices coming from the other end of the cell door. The soldier tugs on her restraints, feeling them not budge from their locked position against the
cobblestone walls. The doors to the cell wall kick open and two Afgan guards march in, immediately walking over to her and unchaining her from the wall. Lexa doesn't move as more soldiers march in, barking orders in Pashto to move her out of the cell and to their intended location.

Lexa's dragged from her position, and when she refuses to walk, she's decked across the face. One of the soldiers barks an order in her face before landing an uppercut to her bruised ribs. The woman barely chokes out a gasp as she's brought to her feet. They shove her from behind, telling her to walk. Keeping a steady glare, Lexa faces forwards as they lead her through the hallway.

Not knowing the next time she'll be let out, Lexa takes the time to monitor and record her surroundings. From the way they're moving about, they're underground. She can hear water rushing through a set of pipes above her, leading her to believe they must be close to a lake. There's chanting coming from ahead, followed by a bright light. Lexa squints as her rods adapt to the daylight, getting bleached by the sudden change in brightness. White spots dance in the corners of her eyes as she shakes away the change in luminosity, continuing to be marched forward until she's outside the confines of the cave and stumbling into a dusty village centre.

There's a courtyard, Lexa notices, but she's not in the middle of nowhere. There are children, some with guns slung over their shoulders and others barely old enough to walk, watching her as she is lead into the middle of the village square. Mothers, fathers, and elderly have formed a crowd around the centre. It's then that Lexa makes out Private Green standing, held up by two Afghan guards and looking worse for wear. A strike of pity snaps Lexa's heartstrings, but she shakes the thoughts away and instead focuses on the sights of the woman bound in the same way she is. One of the guards shoves her in the other's direction.

"Captain," Private Green gasps as soon as she sees Lexa, "what are they going to do to us?" Lexa glares at her, urging her to stay quiet.

"Oh God, are they going to cut our heads off?!" Private Green whimpers as they watch a bunch of Afghan militia march their way, holding a sobbing man and shoving him in their direction. Cage and Emerson follow suite, but they appear to be placid and collected as they follow the big bearded man and his soldiers. The sobbing man keeps begging in Pashto, apologizing and pleading, and in that moment, Lexa wished she'd never learned the language in the first place.

"Captain," Private Green shakily stutters out her name, "they're going to… what are they--"

"Not another fucking word," Lexa growls under her breath, her eyes trained on an eerily smiling Cage, "you give them nothing."

The big bearded man throws the other villager to the ground and keeps his foot on his back while staring at the two soldiers. Cage steps down and stands beside him, arms behind his back in a power stance as the Afghan man parrots off a few words in his native tongue, eyes glaring upon them.

"Welcome," Cage translates, gaze locked on Lexa and Private Green. The sobbing man begins to plead again, but this time Cage chooses to translate.

"I used a satellite phone to call my wife," he says as the man continues to blubber, tears streaking down his chin, "she's pregnant. I jeopardized your location, I’m sorry." The bearded man doesn't seem to make a move, other than press him further into the dirt. The other man cries out in pain and anguish as he shakily points to one of the children surrounding them, a boy about Aden's age with a rifle around his shoulder. He continues to beg, folding his hands together pleadingly.

And then, the bearded man speaks in a calm, collected voice.
"We have the same blood," Cage translates again, his eyes never leaving the two American soldier's own, "Zaheed is your nephew. He will do the honours."

Lexa controls the pounding in her chest as she watches the boy step forward, shaking a little as the bearded man hands him a gun and lifts his foot off the person beneath him. He takes a few steps back and flickers his gaze upwards to seek out the soldier's responses. Private Green looks pale and sickened as the boy looks hesitant to lift his pistol and pull the trigger. Lexa's eyes are hardened, her back ramrod straight. She cannot give in, no matter what happens.

The bearded man looks to the boy and nods stoically before barking out an order.

Finally, Cage's stare leaves them to look at the boy with a stern expression.

"Kill him."

The boy chants out a prayer before he closes his eyes and squeezes the trigger.

Private Green gasps and looks away, blurtting out obscenities as the brain matter trickles into the sand and the blood pools at the dead man's corpse. Lexa grits her teeth as the boy schools himself for letting a few tears escape. His eyes flit upwards to meet Lexa's own, but any trace of childlike innocence is gone. He's a warrior now, to live and die by his people. The body remains on the ground as the people return back to their duties in the village, like nothing ever happened.

Only the bearded man remains, still talking to them.

"This is our country," Cage translates in a cold voice, stepping over the man to stand in front of them menacingly. "You should not be here." The soldier beside her shrinks under his icy gaze, but Lexa stands tall and unwilling to falter. The man behind him is still speaking, his lips curling up in a cruel, threatening snarl.

"Tell this message to America," Cage says as he points to where Emerson is holding a camera, recording them. "Say it," Cage translates as the bigger man presses his boot to the dead man's skull, causing the bone underneath to shatter and more brain matter to ooze out sickeningly. Private Green swallows back a gag as she shifts closer to Lexa out of pure fear. The man sneers again and growls something low, his hands fingering at the holster of his firearm.

"Or," Cage chuckles when he looks to the man, who simply gives him a nod, "he'll force you to say it. Tell your people to leave this country, now."

Lexa doesn't move. She doesn't speak. She doesn't even look at the blood that has now stained the bare soles of her feet.

Cage growls disapprovingly, stepping forward to grab at the collar of her shirt, clenching tightly.

"Say it, girl. Unless you don't value your life," he snarls as the man behind him draws a gun, "they're not patient like I am."

Private Green whimpers again, shuddering under his gaze. Cage catches the noise and lets go of Lexa, scanning his eyes over the other soldier. His lips turn upwards in a gleeful smile before he barks something back to the bearded man in Pashto. The man hesitates a moment before nodding, gesturing at them with his gun. Two guards come behind each of them, taking them with rough hands and forcing them back towards the entrance of the cage. The blood is dried and sticky under her feet as she's lead back through the rough, cobbled steps of the cave hallways until they reach the cells, where they're both tossed into one.
The guards tie them back up against the walls and snicker something in their native tongue before shutting and locking the cell door. Lexa keeps her stare grounded to the metal bars of the doors, counting them silently in her head. She replays the map, putting her basal ganglia to the test after not having used it in God knows how long. She curses the fact that she'd been knocked out. But, judging by the heat levels outside, there is no way it can still be summer. It has to be past that, perhaps early fall instead. The sand hadn't been blistering, but it wasn't cool either. She tries to remember every detail, but she's interrupted.

"He was a kid," Private Green whispers, shaking her head as tears well in her eyes, "he just… he picked up the gun and he…"

"Hold yourself together," Lexa mutters as she keeps running the schematics of the camp in her head, "we need to get out."

"For fuck's sake," Private Green snarls as she whips her head around to glare at Lexa. "A kid just shot someone and you don't care. He was as old as--"

"Stop." Lexa's eyes flash as she turns her cold stare towards the darker-skinned woman. "I do care, Private. But it's not our concern right now."

"And what is our concern, then?" The other woman sneers as she wriggles against her chains. "Huh, Captain?"

"Enough," Lexa spits out through gritted teeth, "you need to reel it in, Private. You give anything away and they will murder you. All of this will be for nothing."

"So we die either way?" Private Green scoffs. "Great plan, Captain."

"Listen to me," Lexa hisses under her breath, "you even peep a word and you'll be a public fatality, another soldier beheaded. We need to get out of here so that we can relay the message to Colonel Jaha. We need external help for this one, Private. You need to keep it together and not tell them anything, understood?!"

"I have a husband," Private Green barks out, tears welling in her eyes as she glares at Lexa. "I finally have a family to come home to. A family that I was starting to adjust to, that I was falling in love with. I was happy… especially after what happened between us; didn't I deserve that at least? And now here I am, stuck with you. Again." Lexa doesn't react to the harsh string of accusations that leave the darker-skinned woman's lips, not even when her mouth curves into a menacing growl.

"I loved you," Private Green continues to snarl in a low voice, "I spent so many years wasting my time getting over you--"

"You're out of line, Private--"

"For God's sake!" Private Green nearly screams at her. "Just stop being so damned frank for a second, Lexa. Just look at me and tell me why you couldn't just--"

"Enough!" Lexa roars back, hands clenched tightly into fists. "I told you, we don't know each other. You don't know who I am, where I come from, or my history."

"Oh I know exactly who you are," Private Green snarls with a disappointed shake of her head. "You're a damned coward, Lexa. You're no one's war hero."

"Private Green," Lexa scolds in a colder voice, "don't you dare utter another word."
"Or what?" Private Green scoffs as she allows her head lean against the cool floor, closing her eyes. "What will you do, Captain? Because let's face it, if you were told to pick between me or a one-way ticket out here, we both know what you'd pick." Lexa shuts up at that, her eyes glazing as she looks to the ceiling. Private Green blinks open her own chestnut depths and stares at her with a despondent, broken expression lining her freckled cheeks and bloodied face.

"Lexa Woods, girl scout of the year -- would die for their country and make others do the same. Isn't that right?" Private Green softly rasps with a shake of her head. Tears drip from the corners of her eyes when she looks away, her gaze locked on the cell doors. "Too bad we all don't share that level of patriotism, huh?"

"Be quiet," Lexa growls as she hears footsteps rattling down the halls. Private Green only sighs and slumps against the ground.

The cell doors burst open and Lexa goes rigid when she watches two guards reach down and hoist Private Green into their arms. Lexa feels her heart constrict as the woman's eyes widen in fear and she shakes her head, struggling against them as she's dragged from the cell, kicking and screaming. Lexa pulls at her restraints and feels her heart accelerate with the increasing pitch and amplitude of Private Green's screams receding down the dank cave hallways.

"Don't give them anything!" Lexa shouts, her voice cracking. "Don't let them have anything. Be strong, Private!"

The woman only gets more incoherent screaming as her answer. Before she can go to shout again, Lexa looks up to see Cage walk into the door with a stack of pictures in his hands. The man says nothing as he kneels in front of her, keeping the details of the Polaroid pictures quiet until Lexa calms and meets his stare.

And then, with one quick flick of his wrist, Cage tosses the photos to the floor.

Lexa sees pictures of Private Green's family, alongside a single picture of Clarke and Aden from three years ago at the boy's first piano recital. It's the one she always kept in her uniform for safekeeping, and now, she realizes it's about to become her kryptonite, the weak point in her armour. Lexa doesn't let her eyes linger on any of them in particular, despite the nagging fear crippling her limbs. Cage's eyes haven't shifted from hers as he stands to his full height, straightening out his uniform before he bends over to pick up the pictures. After sorting them back into a neat pile, he nods his head back up to her, eyes blank and emotionless.

In the background, Lexa hears a bloodcurdling scream echo down the halls from Private Green.

Cage looks to the photos in his hands and then down to her, his lips forming a tight line as he speaks.

"We'll find out whom belongs to whom soon enough," he murmurs as another scream rattles through the air. Lexa glares at him, unwilling to react.

"We will break her, Captain Woods. You already know that," Cage chuckles lowly as he turns to leave, "and then we'll see just how much you can talk."
Clarke downs her second cup of coffee before grabbing her clipboard. She sits at the break table and reviews her patient files for her last walk-in before signing off on the forms and walking out into the dull, blank halls. Everything around her seems to be moving in slow motion, like she has no concept of time. Her body responds sluggishly, and she's sleep-deprived to the point where she's no longer being called into the operating room or to work in the Emergency Wing. Her shifts have been reduced to walk-ins and low-level injuries. Her own mother has tried to pull rank in weaning her off her workload, but Clarke keeps returning for more.

It’s the only way she can function. Saving lives, she muses, how ironic. Is she really saving them, though?

"Griffin," Monty's familiarly soft voice breaks her from her thoughts. She blinks up at the paediatrics nurse as he smiles in her direction warmly.

"Miller," she quips back, trying to make a joke. Her voice cracks on his name and she goes to scold herself, but Monty smiles wider at the attempt.

"Got something for me?" Clarke asks as he walks alongside her briskly. Monty hands her a clipboard with a bit of a solemn face.

"She requested you," Monty says with a bit of a soft voice, "I told her that you're busy--"

"No," Clarke says as she places the sheet on her clipboard and swallows thickly. She signs off on the forms and offers a bleak smile. "I can take her. Thanks Monty."

"Anytime," he nods with a smile. Clarke goes off in the direction of the outpatient wing, but then Monty gently grabs her arm. "And Griffin?"

"Yeah?" Clarke croaks as she sees the sympathy in his eyes. Monty gives her another assuring smile before letting go of her arm.

"I'm here for you," Monty says with a shrug, "you know… if you want to talk."

Clarke trembles a bit at the connotation behind his words, but shakes it off with a barely-there nod. Monty smiles one more time before ducking into another hall. Clarke takes a breath and looks back to the charts, eyes growing misty for a second before she makes her way in the direction of her next patient.

Up ahead, she spots her mother talking to an elderly woman, placing a hand upon her shoulder before sending her off with a prescription. Not wanting to get her attention just yet, considering how she'd been breathing down her neck for the past few weeks, Clarke picks up the pace and finds her door. A file sits in the door and she picks it up. There's a slight pinch in her chest when she checks over the injuries before she slides the papers into her clipboard and steels herself.

With a deep breath, Clarke opens the door.
Anya startles on the bed when the door clicks open, her body tensing and hands gripping the edge hard enough for her fingers to rip through the thin sheet of paper. Clarke offers her a disarming smile, trying to ignore the sadness that she can see in Anya's hazel eyes, as well an insurmountable presence of guilt. Anya coughs, suddenly feeling awkward as she sits there on the bed, her uninjured arm coming to wrap around her clothed torso as she bites her lip.

"I requested Doctor Griffin," Anya says as she avoids Clarke's peering gaze, "I thought they were going to give me Abby, sorry. I can wait for her if you want."

"My mom's a bit backed up in outpatient at the moment," Clarke replies as she walks over, setting the paperwork down before standing in front of Anya. "Besides, it's just a check-up. I just need to see how your wound is healing and to make sure there aren't any abnormalities to watch out for." Anya nods, keeping her head bowed as Clarke reaches for the otoscope and plops on a sanitary cover before motioning for Anya to turn her head.

"Hmm," Clarke mumbles as she peers inside to take a closer look at her tympanic membrane, "nothing ruptured. It looks good so far. Any issues with hearing?"

"No," Anya replies quietly, almost awkwardly. Clarke sighs as she pulls the device back to give her sister-in-law a serious look.

"You need to be honest with me," Clarke tells her strictly, "you were around explosions, Anya, that's got to have left a mark, serious or otherwise."

"Fine," Anya mutters, "I get some fuzziness when it's too loud and some ringing."

"Okay," Clarke nods as she writes it down before tossing the clipboard back on the bed and reaching for a tongue depressor. "Open."

Anya widens her jaw and Clarke presses the depressor down on her tongue, shining a light through the opening of her mouth. "It could be possible that you have some dysfunction in your Eustachian tube, the one that connects your ear down to your throat. The primary function of the Eustachian tube is to ventilate the middle ear space, ensuring that its pressure remains at near normal environmental air pressure, so the change in decibel range could've damaged the nerve linings on the inside. If you hear ear popping or crackling noises, this is most likely the cause. Is the ringing constant or does it come and go?"

"It's not constant," Anya says when Clarke pulls the depressor out, "it's just… there."

"Alright," Clarke nods as she writes it down and discards the stick, "take off your shirt, I need to check your ribs and shoulder."

Anya nods and reaches for the hem of the cotton layer, pulling it upwards. When she reaches her shoulders however, she hisses at the pull in her side and the ache in her arm. Upon hearing the noise, Clarke nods her head up in concern. Quickly placing the clipboard back on the bed, she gently takes the hem of Anya's shirt in her hands and tells the other woman to relax. Anya allows her to help with her shirt, ignoring the way her skin burns when Clarke grazes it slightly. When it's off, the older woman gulps nervously and looks away, tears burning in her eyes as she sees Clarke placing her shirt on the bed beside them.

"Okay," Clarke says as she grabs at her stethoscope, "you know the drill. Two big breaths and then slowly exhale, please. Try to get the air in as deep as possible."

Anya nods and shifts her body, allowing Clarke to place the round, cool metal upon her back. She
takes two deep breaths, trying to hide the trembling as the cold touch reminds her of tour four years ago, when she and Lexa had been stuck in a cave after an ambush. Anya's jaw locks as she remembers how they'd been caught under an explosion that took out twenty of their best men and women. Anya had taken a shot to the leg while Lexa had faced the brunt of the explosion, scattering shrapnel over her shoulder and chest. They'd managed to escape to the cave and took care of each other as best they could.

When Anya blinks again, she finds herself in that cave again, a fire dying out and a trembling Lexa lying next to her.

"Take your jacket back," Lexa hisses from under the two jackets as Anya's teeth chatter, "you're going to freeze to death, Lieutenant."

"I-Is that an order?" Anya tries to joke, shuddering as her skin erupts in painful goosebumps. "B-Because if not... I-I'm not t-taking it."

"Anya," Lexa growls as she looks up, feverish and sweating from the infection, "take it back."

"Stop p-pulling rank on me when I'm older t-than you," Anya tries to joke as she gives Lexa a lopsided grin. "I promised Dad, remember?"

"That was years ago," Lexa groans back as she tries to shift atop their laid-out packs, "I was barely old enough to consent to it."

"I didn't m-make it with you," Anya chuckles again as rubs up and down her arms, "I made it with Dad."

"Y-Yeah?" Lexa trembles harder as sweat pools down her face and drips into her matted hair, "tell me about him."

There's distance to her voice, one that Anya knows is accompanying the wound that is bleeding her sister out slowly and steadily. She looks down at the younger woman, who's now peering up at her with faded green eyes and a lopsided grin. She swallows thickly and shrugs, looking up at the cave walls where the dim light from the fire flickers off of them. In the distance, the both of them hear the faint cackling of gunfire and tense. Anya reaches for her gun and Lexa attempts to sit up, only to be pushed down by her older sister with a rough grumble. Once the noise settles down, they both relax a little more.

"An," Lexa wheezes out in a rattling breath, "tell me about Dad."

"You look just like him," Anya murmurs as she puts her gun back at her side. "I always looked like Mom, or that's what he would say. But you look like him. Same curly brown hair and bright green eyes. You're just as stubborn as he was too, you know? No wonder why you ended up with so many quick promotions. There's gotta b-be something in the genes... something hereditary probably." Lexa chuckles before bursting into a pained, wet cough. Anya's eyes flash worriedly as Lexa curls a bit further into herself, eyelids fluttering shut. The older woman inches closer and reaches out to stroke her tangled curls.

"He loved you," Anya whispers in a croak as she remembers her childhood, "he thought you could do no wrong, you know. The g-golden child."

"B-Bullshit," Lexa croaks with a raspy snort, "you're the better one between us."

Anya shakes her head, even though she knows Lexa can't see the motion. "Not true. Well m-maybe... on l-looks." Lexa chuckles again sleepily.
"Do you think that he'd be proud of me?" Lexa breathes shakily, flickering her fading green eyes open again. "Do you think I'm doing okay, An?"

"Okay?" Anya scoffs as she bends down to kiss her sister's clammy forehead. "You're d-doing amazing, Lexa. Dad would be so proud. I'm proud of y-you."

For a second, she remembers her childhood spent taking care of a sick Lexa after their father passed and they went to live with their Uncle Titus and his wife, Indra. Anya would always smuggle in treats when Indra refused the younger girl anything but awful protein shakes and bland soup. Lexa would always curl up against her side and sleep with her head against her chest, always above her heartbeat. She remembers how she would wrap Lexa in blankets and cuddle her close, always terrified of being separated from her whenever Titus would come home and yell at them for being weak, that they've got strong blood.

"An," Lexa wheezes again as more blood blossoms under the tightly wrapped cloths, "please... take the jacket. You'll freeze."

"You're l-losing more b-blood than I am," Anya grumbles as she shakes her head, "y-you need it. The cold constricts t-the blood vessels and... a-and there's a cessation of blood flow to the d-distal tissue." Lexa frowns up at her, but Anya just continues, despite her chattering teeth. "A-As the t-temperature of the tissues r-rapidly falls, sympathetic nerve c-conduction is interrupted and v-vasodilatation occurs." Lexa shakes her head and lets out a choked laugh.

"Y-You've been spending too much time with C-Clarke," Lexa chuckles roughly, wincing as more blood seeps through the strips of cloth covering her shoulder. "I-I swear... you should have been a d-doctor instead." Anya barely suppresses a wheezing chuckle as she leans closer to Lexa, still heavily trembling.

"I wasn't meant to save lives," Anya murmurs sadly as her eyes slide shut. There's some rustling and gasping from beside her, but before she can react, the warmth of her jacket drapes over her boney shoulders. Anya barely blinks her open to see Lexa hazily staring back at her before the younger woman nuzzles closer. The two of them pull each other as close as possible, not wanting to miss out on the body heat while it still lasts. In the morning a rescue chopper will find them, but until then, they'll keep each other warm and alive while they wait. Lexa nuzzles under Anya's nose, cheek pressed against her neck.

"You're wrong Anya," Lexa whispers as Anya feels her younger sister start to grow limp in her arms, "you saved mine."

Anya blinks again, but this time, she's back in the sterile room with Clarke staring at her worriedly.

"Anya?" Clarke's voice is fuzzy, but it pulls her from the memory. "Anya, what happened? You zoned out."

Over her shoulder, she sees a bloodied and marred Lexa glaring back at her, eyes hollow and grey with death.

"I'm fine," Anya whispers, not looking at Clarke as Lexa's head cocks and a cruel smirk pulls her cracked lips apart, gushing blood everywhere.

Clarke still looks skeptical as she watches Anya's gaze grow glassy, but she doesn't push the soldier. Instead, she goes ahead and starts to inspect the GSW on her shoulder. Clarke's breath hitchs as her gloved fingers ghost over the bandage wrapping before she steadily unfurls it. The cloth comes away clean, and the wound itself, however terrifying as it may look, seems to be well healed. Clarke stares
at it for a moment, knowing that Lexa had one just like it but on her stomach. The blonde sucks in a deep breath as she runs her finger over the edge of the bubbled line; her jaw tightens when she feels Anya tense considerably at the light touch.

"Hurts?" Clarke asks as she tilts her head to the side. Anya looks over, her breath hitching when Clarke's eyes glaze worriedly.

"No," Anya whispers back as Clarke moves her other hand down her abs, ghosting over her tattoo until she reaches the bandage around her midsection. Clarke moves so that she's standing between Anya's legs as she unwinds the bandage and looks at the stitched wound. This one had been slightly more problematic than the shoulder wound, and both of them know that not all of the metal was taken out as a result of safety issues. Clarke sighs as she gently prods Anya's flexing stomach, her eyes wandering over the tribal tattoos that wrap up from her hips to the underside of her bra before curving onto her back.

"What about this?" Clarke croaks as she lightly presses on the ring of muscle just above the wound. "Does that hurt?" Anya hisses slightly, eyes glazing as she barely mumbles, "just a bit sore. It's fine."

Clarke keeps her hand on the skin, trying not to let it hit her that Anya's wound came from the same day that had taken her wife. Her fingers quiver upon the tattooed flesh, where the words, together forever, never apart..., are inscribed into the middle bracket of ribs on her left side. Clarke's breath hitches because she knows this tattoo better than any of Anya's other ones, mostly because Lexa's side covers the last piece of the puzzle. They'd gotten them when Anya had graduated university as a prideful celebration of how far they'd come, coupled with copious amounts of alcohol and some egging on by their friends.

Clarke remembers what's on Lexa's half, and as she looks up to Anya's strangled expression, she realizes maybe her loss isn't to be faced alone after all.

"Anya...," Clarke breathes out her sister-in-law's name when she sees a single tear drip down the older woman's cheek, "hey…"

"I'm fine, Clarke. I… I just… I'm fine," Anya says with a shake of her head, pleadingly gazing at Clarke to ignore her cracked voice. The doctor watches as Anya reaches for her shirt and pulls it on with shaking limbs, blinking back the rest of her tears before steeling herself and nodding at Clarke. "What's the verdict?"

Seeing as though the soldier looks antsy to get out of the hospital, more so away from her, Clarke just swallows and centres herself back into professional mode. She reaches for the clipboard and scribbles some things down on a prescription pad before tearing the paper off and handing it to Anya. The woman eyes it suspiciously, but accepts it regardless. She looks down at the paper and frowns, but Clarke shakes her head and reaches out, placing her hands on Anya's wrist, giving her an assuring squeeze. The older woman remains stoic and emotionless when staring back at her, but Clarke doesn't waver under her gaze.

"The first is a mild decongestant to unblock and reduce the swelling in your Eustachian tubes," Clarke speaks with a stern tone. "The second is--"

"I don't need a shrink," Anya growls as she takes her hand back from Clarke's reach, "I'm fine, Clarke."

"Your sister died," Clarke lets the words slip and Anya shudders under the weight of them, "you
watched it happen. You need to talk about it, Anya."

"What if I don't want to talk about it?" Anya snarls as she whips around, tears burning in her eyes. "I… I can't talk about it, Clarke."

Clarke doesn't reply instantly, but instead she reaches out and tugs Anya into her arms, burrowing her head into the older woman's uninjured shoulder. Anya stiffens as Clarke's eyes mist and she brings Anya in for a tighter hug, both of them trembling as the younger woman's fingers reach up to cradle the back of the other's head. Clarke tries to blink away her tears, but she can't. The salted drops slide into the crook of her sister-in-law's neck and Anya whimpers.

"Please," Clarke murmurs as she closes her eyes, "you promised her to be there for us."

"I am," Anya croaks as she finally wraps her arms around Clarke's warm body, "I'm here, Clarke."

"Physically, yes," Clarke whispers as she pulls away to gently tap at Anya's temple, "but not in here, An."

"Clarke," Anya whimpers as she closes her eyes, "I…"

"It's what she wanted," Clarke swallows as she pulls her hands away to give Anya another hug, "she was going to ask you to join her in a session after…"

Anya's heart clenches when Clarke can't finish the statement.

"I'm not ready," Anya tells her softly as she pulls out of the hug, "I just… I can't think about it right now. I'm sorry."

"Aden loves you," Clarke replies as she squeezes Anya's good shoulder again, "I love you. I don't think either of us could handle losing you, too."

Anya doesn't respond not even when Clarke leans in and pecks her cheek. "Please, An, just think about it… for us… for her. You don't have to do this alone."

"Clarke," Anya mutters as Clarke steps back, wiping at her eyes, "I…"

"Just think about it," Clarke whispers as she places the doctor-mask back over her darkened eyes, "you know that she wouldn't want to see you like this."

"And you?" Anya croaks when Clarke tries to step around her. "What about you? I know you slave your way through work as a distraction, barely spending time with Tris or Aden. Look at you, Clarke. You're not eating; you look like you've not slept in days. You need to talk to someone, too. You know it." Clarke growls, biting her lips as tears spill down her cheeks at Anya's truthful accusation. The older woman steps forward and bravely sucks in a breath, tugging Clarke into an embrace.

"If I get help, so do you. We do this together or not at all, Clarke. I can't do this on my own," Anya admits with a waver to her voice. Fear grips her like an iron fist, spreading coldness through her veins and freezing her over. She trembles when Clarke sags against her. She kisses Clarke's hair and closes her eyes.

"Please," she whispers in a hoarse voice, "I can't do this without you. I… I can't lose you, Clarke. You're all I have left of her. I need you. Please… please…"

"Okay," Clarke replies as she squeezes Anya tightly, taking in the comfort of someone that feels so
similarly to her wife. She closes her eyes and imagines that she's hugging Lexa, that those hands rubbing her back, fingers trailing over the dips and rises in her spine, is Lexa's touch. She tucks her head in Anya's nape, catching the faint, but still familiar, scent of that cologne that Lexa would wear. Her arms shake as a sob crawls up the back of her throat, her lips quivering as she tries to press herself to Anya in the hopes of finding some semblance of the woman she'd lost, the woman she loves with every inch of her soul.

Anya gives Clarke's hair another kiss as she looks over the woman's shoulder to where Lexa stares on in silence, her blood still silently painting the floor upon which she stands. Anya's eyes glaze but Lexa's haunting expression doesn't change. There's almost a pang of jealousy that's present in those hollowed-out eyes that glare into her soul. Anya holds Clarke tighter from fear when Lexa begins to walk over towards them. The older woman watches as Lexa's hand drifts forwards and the mash of bone and flesh rests upon Clarke's shoulder. A broken whimper breaks Anya's lips when Lexa looks up at her mournfully.

"I'm sorry," Anya chokes as she starts to cry in Clarke's arms, still looking at her dead sister's ghost, "I'm so sorry, oh God, I'm… I…"

"Ssh," Clarke whispers shakily as she breaks into her own cry, "I know."

But Clarke will never know, Anya scolds herself as Lexa's eyes bear into her own, unblinking and distant, because Clarke wasn't there.

Clarke didn't make the call to change their attack.

Clarke didn't let her slip between her weathered fingers.

Clarke didn't watch her get shot four times before falling to her knees in the dust.

Clarke didn't feel the heat of the explosion or the stickiness of bloodied destruction.

Clarke wasn't there.

But… Anya was.

And maybe, she thinks as she looks down at her mourning sister-in-law, that's why it's my burden to bear.

And Anya will bear it until she draws her last breath. This is the last time anyone else will break over her, drown from her, burn themselves with her.

This is the last time anyone else dies for her.

Date and Time Unknown

Location Unknown
"Again!"

Lexa holds back her scream as she feels her entire upper body being ducked back into the ice water, a firm hand upon the back of her head holding her under for a longer period of time before she's brought back up for air. She refuses to gulp it in, to remain like steel as Cage circles her like a hawk, refusing to get his hands dirty as he motions for the guards to seat her back against the chair. He runs a hand through his hair, seething through his teeth in frustration.

It takes everything in Lexa to not smirk.

"I don't like having to repeat myself," he whispers in a low growl, "tell me location of those missiles, Captain Woods."

Lexa offers nothing, not even a flinch when Emerson's fist smashes against her cheek. Snarling, Cage points back to the ice tub.

"Again!"

Lexa doesn't protest when she's dunked back in, the cold water stinging her bruised cheek. She doesn't resist again as they heave her further into the liquid, some of the ice water filling her mouth and closing up her throat. After a longer time spent underwater, she's hoisted back up and dragged across the cell to the other end. Her shirt is torn apart by two of the guards, leaving her in just her chest wrappings and her pants as the tie her up against the wall. Chains lock around her wrists and chaff them hard enough to draw spots of blood as she's raised up against the crimson cobblestone walls.

"I will make you speak," Cage growls as he inches closer, rubbing the smooth expanse of his jaw. "I want those coordinates, Woods. Now, or else."

Again, Lexa stays silent.

"Emerson," Cage snarls when he realizes he's not going to get a response, "you have two hours. I want to hear the bitch scream."

"With pleasure," Emerson grins as Cage walks out and locks the prison cell behind her. Emerson turns to her and pulls up his cart of tools.

"You know you're just making it harder on yourself," Emerson chuckles lowly. "At some point, you or Private Green will break. No one can be tortured forever."

Lexa doesn't talk. She doesn't even look at him.

Her gaze is strictly facing forward. Unwavering.

"Bitch," Emerson growls as he stands, grabbing a set of pairing knives, "look at me when I am talking to you!"

With that, he plunges one of the knives into the healing bullet wound on her shoulder and rakes a line down her arm, pulling a stream of crimson blood with the incision. Lexa clenches her teeth and wards off the pain as Emerson removes the knife before plunging the other one into the wound in her leg, cutting another line upwards towards her hip. She says nothing, doesn't even hazard a peep of a noise in return for the torture. Emerson growls and throws the knives on the cart, pacing back and forth while she bleeds emotionlessly, offering nothing.

This is what she's been trained her entire life to do. Survive, she reminds herself, life is
about survival right now. She needs to keep breathing, to find a way out, to get the message back to her commanding officers and protect her family. She cannot and will not let them win. If she falters, everything she’s sacrificed will be for nothing. All this agonizing torture will be in vain if she fails her mission.

And Lexa won’t go down without a fight.

Emerson just picks up his pliers and walks over to her in mock sympathy.

"Are you willing to die for her?" Emerson taunts her, but Lexa remains stoic even as he brandishes his new weapon. "For your soldiers? For your family? Your country?"

Again, Lexa offers no response.

Shaking his head, Emerson chuckles. "The best way to make a man talk is to stop him from being able to talk. But… you're no man, are you? You’re Captain Lexa Woods." He sneers her name with a sarcastic jest, a low rasp building in his throat.

Lexa's widened briefly as Emerson grabs at her jaw, tilting it downwards. His fingers linger over her lips and Lexa doesn't miss the chance to slam her head forward and clamp down on his index finger with her canines, clenching as hard as she can until she jerks her head to the side and rips the limb straight off his hand. Emerson screams in a blistering pain as Lexa spits his chewed-off finger to the floor, blood dripping down her chin and onto her chest as this time, she’s the one who chuckles.

"You think you're funny?!" Emerson growls at her, throwing the pliers to one of the two guards as he limps to the cart. "Do you think you're fucking funny, you bitch?!

Lexa lets her chuckle grow a little louder before Emerson finally shakes his head in frustration, glaring at the two guards who look mortally horrified at her actions.

Good, Lexa thinks as she glares at them challengingly, let them be afraid.

"Teach her a lesson," Emerson hisses through clenched teeth, grasping his bleeding hand, "if she doesn't want to talk, so be it. We have plenty of other ways in getting information that don’t involve her using her pretty mouth. I’m sure she won’t mind. Right, Captain?"

Lexa clenches her fists as the guards get the message and nod, albeit with a slight amount of fear, before walking over to her slowly. One of them grabs at her jaw roughly, being careful to avoid her teeth while the other digs his two fingers into her nostrils and yanks her head back, forcing her mouth open. The first guard snarls at her as she struggles in her chains, eyes wide and chest heaving. Sweat drips down her exposed collar and glides into the slip of her bra. The first guard raises the hand with the pliers and hovers over her open mouth just as Emerson returns with a bandage around his hand and a sick smirk on his face. He licks over his lips delectably at the sight of her strung up, helpless to the torture that's about to test her pain threshold.

"Tell me," Emerson coos, running a hand down her bare side before digging his thumb into the open wound on her ribs, "where are those missiles?"

Lexa breathes heavily, unable to speak even if she wanted to as she stares at him with a cold expression. Give nothing away. Be strong. Survive. Emerson waits a moment before nodding to the guard with the pliers. The woman's body tenses up when the dirtied metal, stained with her own blood, reaches into her mouth.

"Go for the molar," Emerson orders, eyes staying on Lexa the entire time. "Take it out slowly. Wouldn't want to hurt the princess too badly, now would we?"
The cool metal clips onto her tooth and Lexa forces herself to be calm, but she can feel her anxiety rising. Emerson waits, giving her the opportunity to break out of the torture, but she remembers that she's the only one standing in the way of protecting her family from being killed. If she gives in, they die. Everyone will die.

And so Lexa closes her eyes and braces herself for the inevitable pain.

The un-anaesthetized, abhorrently violent tooth extraction turns out to be far worse than she could’ve imagined. She's glad that her mouth is wrenched open because she can't scream as she feels her tooth being forced from where it's dug into the nerves of her jaw. She thrashes in her chains, trying to shake her head to get them off of her, but it doesn't work. In fact, it just makes her torturers' jobs easier as she feels the calcified bone being ripped from her mouth. Blood drips down into the back of her throat, causing her to gag as it fills up her mouth. The guards are shouting at her and the two fingers in her nose strain her head back further.

And then, with one merciless tug, Lexa feels the tooth wrench free.

The guards let go of her, allowing her to spit the blood to the floor as searing pain cuts the upper side of her mouth. She clenches her fists tight enough for the long, uncut nails to dig into their flesh and draw more spots of her precious crimson liquid. Her chest heaves as she rattles out a muffled sob as Emerson begins to laugh. The guards step back, guns trained on her body as she thrashes again in her restraints, still spitting blood as it pools in her mouth. She knows that if she can't get medical attention soon, it will become septic and then she's done for. Looking up, she glares at Emerson venomously, blood staining her teeth.

"It would all be so much easier if you just cooperated, Captain. Tell me where the missiles are," Emerson says softly, eyeing the blood dripping down her chin. "Tell me the location of those nukes and I'll let you and your Private Green go. No questions asked. It's so easy, Captain, all I need is two sets of numbers and you're free." The woman licks over her chapped, sore lips, but can't give an answer.

"Think of Clarke, Lexa schools herself mentally, think of Aden and Tris. Anya, and Lincoln and Octavia. You need to be strong. You can't let them win, Lexa.

"Still nothing?" Emerson scoffs with a shake of his head. "Fine, have it your way. Turn her on her back and hand me the cat o' nine with the blades."

"Survive, she thinks as she watches them approach, all you need to do is survive.

The guards rearrange her so that her face rests against the cool, cobbled wall. For a minute, she envies the ice water because she's now broken out into a fever from her tooth. Sweat dribbles down her forehead as she hears the whip being brandished behind her. She moves her head to her arm and enslaves her jaw over her forearm, knowing that if she keeps her mouth without some sort of gag, she'll probably lose her tongue with that tooth. Emerson's steps are loud against the roaring in her ears.

The first strike against her back leaves her breathless, clamping down onto her skin and barely giving her enough time to recover before she's lashed a second time. And then a third, fourth, fifth, six -- the pacing increases until Emerson is nearly manic, barely getting the hits in for it to be considered harmful. Lexa's body crumbles and falters, and for once she feels grateful that the chains are holding her up and preventing her from falling to her knees on the ground.

"Talk, you bitch!" Emerson howls as he whips her again. "Fucking talk!"
"Enough," Cage's voice cuts in coldly, "I've got a better idea."

Emerson snarls and whips her once more harshly, flaying open a patch of skin over her shoulder before he throws the whips against the wall in frustration. “Fine.”

Lexa feels her hands behind unchained and her body being roughly turned until she's forced and bound against a rickety chair. It's only when she sits she realizes that there's a hole in the seat, primed right under her crotch. Gulping down her fear, Lexa nods her head back upwards. Cage just smiles sweetly in her direction as he approaches with a larger, machete-looking blade in his hands. She thrashes against the chair and the man just tsks in amusement before he slides the blade under her jaw and then quickly passing it off to Emerson. The second-in-command spits at her feet, eyes lit with a furious vengeance, as he looks to her in sickening glee.

"Shave her," Cage says without emotion, "I want you to cut off that damned mane."

_Clarke, Aden, Tris, Anya, Lincoln, Octavia, Gustus, Indra…_

Lexa doesn't fight back as Emerson grabs a patch of her hair and starts to hack away at it. It feels like she's a farm animal being herded to the slaughterhouse as he continues to shred through her thick brown locks. Lexa blinks down her burning tears as his blade nicks her scalp and draws blood. It drips down the back of her neck and mixes with the crimson on her flayed back. It takes a few rough hacks until she's left with short, tacky hair that sticks out in tufts. Cage is staring at her intently when Emerson pulls away with a lock of it in his grubby, bloody hands, his ruthlessly sickening grin almost breaking his lips.

"I won't ask you again," Cage tells her coldly as Emerson lets the hair drop to the floor, "where are the nuclear warheads, Captain Woods? I want their coordinates."

Blood streaks down Lexa's forehead, but she refuses to answer. She won't break.

_Clarke, Aden, Tris, Anya, Lincoln, Octavia, Gustus…_

"Captain Woods," Cage says as he pulls at the cart and whips out a heavy-looking pipe wrench, smacking it on his palm, "are you a lefty or a righty?"

Lexa grits her teeth, not speaking when Cage looks up and lets the wrench hang down at his side for a moment.

"Let's try that again," Cage says in a softer coo, stepping closer until they’re at eye-level, "are you, Captain Woods, a lefty, or a righty? It’s such a simple question."

Lexa stares at him, indifferent.

Cage shouts out expletives as he swings the heavy wrench against her left arm, shattering the humerus with one harsh stroke. Lexa feels blinding pain nearly knock her out but Cage continues, moving to her other side before swinging the wrench against her gut, causing her to reflexively spit out a wad of blood. Her ribs crack under the pressure of the metal device and strain when he removes it from her flexing, bare abdomen. Bruises are already starting to form along her tattered skin.

"It could be so damned easy." _Tris, Clarke, Aden, Anya, Lincoln, Octavia… "All you need to do is cooperate and you are free. It’s two sets of fucking numbers, bitch."

Cage steps to the front and eyes the hole in the centre of the seat with a grimace. "But still, you continue to remain silent. And for what? Is this _really_ all worth it?"
Lexa stares at the wall over his shoulder, gritting her teeth in defiance.

*Clarke, Aden, Tris, Anya, Lincoln…*

"Huh?" Cage demands, his voice growing louder as he smacks the wrench against the ground. "For what, Captain Woods?! What matters so much that you won’t talk?!

*Clarke, Aden, Tris, Anya…*

"Take her pants off," Cage demands and the guards quickly rush to undo her belt. Lexa gives them no reaction as they cut the damned waistband of her trousers and tear them off her like she's some sort of animal in a cage -- which by now, she supposes that's exactly what she is. "Now listen, Captain, I'll get it out, one way or another. If it's either by you or your pathetic Private Green, it doesn't matter. I always get what I want. I'll give you one more chance. Where are the nukes?"

Lexa watches as he parts her legs, the wrench lightly swinging to and fro between them. Steeling herself, Lexa looks up to him with a hardened glare.

And from her lips, she only speaks three words.

"Go to hell."

*Clarke, Aden, Tris…*

Cage blinks twice and takes a deep breath before squaring his shoulders and moving the wrench back in preparation.

"So be it."

Lexa's nails scrabble against the armrest of the chair as the wrench swings upwards and smashes against her boxer-clad groin. She feels nausea settling in her stomach as the fiery pain lances down her legs. Blood's dripping but she can't tell if it's from between her legs or from her thighs when Cage swings again. The chair tips over and Lexa gasps, closing her eyes shut as she muffles the howl of agony that threatens to part her lips.

*Clarke, Aden…*

"Tell me where they are!" Cage demands in a harsh shout, kicking at the hole in the seat and causing Lexa's head to knock backwards.

Lights dance in her eyes, just specs as she finds her head swimming and her eyes growing heavy.

"Lock her up," Cage snarls as he throws the wrench to the floor. "Send Amin in to heal her when she wakes. In the mean time, bring me Private Green."

"Got it sir," Emerson says, his voice hazy as Lexa coughs on her own blood. “Let’s go, Captain.”

Lexa feels herself being untied and dragged towards the cell where she's been rotting in for god knows how long. They toss her in like a rag-doll, not bothered with tying her up as they laugh and exit the cell, locking it behind them.

There's only one name she can taste on her bloodied lips as she lets her head fall against the dusty ground, one name that gives her strength while her body threatens to quit and fall apart. Her fingers scrabble against the ground as she sighs, her mind finally succumbing to the pain of her sustained injuries.
Survive, she tells herself as she tries not to cry, you need to get back to her.

Lexa can barely keep her eyes open when she feels her body grow numb.

You need to get back to Clarke.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the gruesome quality of that torture scene. This is the last and probably only physically violent one. The next few are more psychologically-based scenes than anything else. Also a lot more Anya + Clarke interaction and Aden gets more screen time, too. I hope that this chapter was worth the wait, though!

Thanks for reading and please leave a comment if you can! No worries if not, but they help so much and especially with stories like this, it's hard to tell if I'm being too dark or overly violent -- it's a major flaw of mine! Your input and thoughts do wonders, trust me! Plus I love reading them and replying back :)

Updates for other stories to come shortly!

Much love, xx.
Intoxicated

Chapter Summary

Anya tries to get help, Clarke deals with denial, Aden steps up, and Lexa's torture takes a new turn.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: MILD DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE AND BRIEF EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE.

If you are concerned about these triggers, here is the only cue:

The very last section with Lexa, starting from the line, "You did well for yourself…" and goes until the end. It's not very descriptive (that'll come in the next chapter) but it's a heads up just in case. Everything else in the chapter is fairly dialogue/plot heavy, and isn't really going to be more on physical torture anymore.

There aren't any real Clanya moments but they do interact more in this chapters. When they do get to their moments (again, probably in the next chapter based on the time jumps) I will post a forewarning for anyone who wants to skip over their parts and just read for Clexa only. I totally understand! :)

The lyrics at the beginning come from the song, "Alone Made of Ice" by Maldito. But if you're looking for more mood music that fits this chapter, listen to "Arrival of the Birds/Transformation" by The Cinematic Orchestra.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

my body is made of boiling water

that keeps me from starting storms

these mountains are covered in a powder

that keeps me from feeling warm

keep me alive, make me cold

carve me up, and i will shine

your body is made of ice inside

it's hard just to see your heart
your brain is my favourite place to hide

it's broken in separate parts

keep me alive, make me cold

carve me up, and i will shine

(keep me alive...)

December 20th 2009, 03:34

Griffin-Woods Residence, New York

Clarke flips through the channels, trying to find something to watch as the ironing board lays open in front of her. A pile of Lexa's clothes lay scattered on the couch behind her as she continues to work at pressing the shirts. The blaring sports game re-run tunes out to white noise in the background, leaving Clarke distracted. The house is cold, despite the heating being turned up. It's empty. Desolate. Aching. A splintering wound that never seems to scab over still fester in her heart.

It's... grief.

With a heavy sigh, Clarke lifts one of her wife's shirts to her nose, closing her eyes and breathing in the long-dead scent of her missing lover. Tears well in her eyes as she fails to pick out that distinct spicy cologne, mixed in the with the natural freshness of pine and sweetness of lavender. Clarke turns the iron off and leans backwards so that she falls to the couch, shirt still pressed to her nose as she holds back her cries. It's been well over six months since Anya had showed up to her door, bearing the news of her lost lover. Snow continues to blow wildly against the windows, providing a light pattering sound against the glass. She's been in denial for so long, pushing down her grief and ignoring the clawing ache that curls around the weakened organ of her heart. She convinced herself that she's being strong for her children, but she knows it's just a lie.

(She wishes it was all just a lie.)

The hockey game that she'd been tuning out as white noise soon comes to an end and the after-program starts up again. Clarke slumps against the sofa and holds the shirt against her face, stifling her tears and her cries as she feels the cold, bitter ache of loss swim through her mind once more. Shaking her head to clear her of the daze, Clarke folds the shirt and reaches for another one before standing up and leaning back over the ironing board, steeling herself once more.

As she's about to put the hot iron down upon the crinkled cotton, the phone rings.

Frowning, Clarke abandons her iron and picks up the phone, raising the device to her ear as she

"Anya?" Clarke asks, bewildered at the sound of her sister-in-law's voice. "Where are you?"

"Mm," comes the response, followed by some clinking and a low argument, "at Grounders. I know it's like one in the morning, but, um, I had a few drinks -- well, a few expensive drinks, I guess -- but anyways, I uh, kinda owe the bartender forty bucks." Clarke closes her eyes and rubs her forehead tiredly.

"Anya," Clarke mutters as she glances at the time, "it's three o'clock in the morning. What are you still doing there?"

"I always come here," Anya drawls again like this is some sort of routine, "I just… got caught up tonight."

"An…"

"Listen, Clarkey," Anya chuckles into the phone, "I'm a little too fucked to drive and a bit low on cash. Do you think you could... you know..."

"I have two kids and it's three in the morning," Clarke hisses into the phone as she curls her fingers through her greasy hair. "I can't--"

"Please," Anya whispers into the phone, a little more muffled and quieter than before. "I... I just..."

Clarke pulls her bottom lip into her mouth as she hears Anya's raspy breathing on the line, ragged and slow. She takes a deep breath and glances at the shirts on the ironing board before she sighs, rubbing her forehead with a grimace as she blinks at the droning noise of the television.

"Fine," she mutters as she powers off the television. "Don't move. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Anya doesn't reply.

===

"You know this isn't healthy, right?" Niylah asks the moping woman leaning over her bar. "This is the fourth time this week, An."

"Mm," Anya grumbles as she fingers around the mouth of the empty glass in front of her. "S'okay. It helps, you know."

"You need real help," Niylah mutters as she cleans off the countertop and crosses her arms. "So does your liver. This has to stop."

"It never stops," Anya whispers under her breath as she moves her fingers off the rim of the glass, blearily staring up at Niylah with a crooked grin. She's about to say something when the bell at the door chimes and the wood squeaks open. Niylah looks over Anya’s slumped shoulders to an angry-looking Clarke stomping into the bar, an equally disappointed and mournful expression adorning her face as she steps over to Anya's side.

"How much do I owe you?" Clarke murmurs as she fishes in her coat pocket for her wallet. Niylah
looks over at Anya, giggling at herself as she holds her hand up and stares at the faint scratch she'd gotten from cutting her hand open on a glass shard. Sighing, Niylah reaches for the empty glass and shakes her head.

"Just take her home," she replies kindly, with some sympathy. Clarke shakes her head and pulls out a fifty, sliding it over to Niylah with an apologetic sigh. "Clarke, I'm serious. It's not a big deal. Just... get her out of here." Gulping, Clarke eyes Niylah's slender hand as the bill is pushed back in her direction. Mumbling a quiet appreciation, Clarke turns and glares at Anya, who's still chuckling at her hand. She reaches out and taps her shoulder roughly.

"Clarke?" Anya perks instantly, a dopey smile coming over her face. "Niylah look, it's Clarke. I told you she'd come." She chuckles again and teeters on the barstool before shoving her palm in Clarke's unamused face. "Look! I had a fight with a beer glass and I won. Kinda looks like a waterfall, huh Clarke?"

"Anya," Clarke snaps sternly, causing Anya to blink dazedly. "I have two kids sleeping in a parking lot at three in the morning. You think this is funny?" Anya's mouth shuts upon receiving Clarke's rage, but she continues to smile dopily in her direction. Clarke rolls her eyes and reaches under Anya's arm, heaving her upwards so that she's standing. Before Anya can get out a response, Clarke shakes her head and abandons her with a swift turn of her heel, barely barking out, "hurry up". The two women inside the bar watch as the door swings open and Clarke disappears. Anya sighs and rubs the back of her neck sorely.

"Go home," Niylah tells her without a hint of malice, but pity instead, "get some rest, soldier."

"Don't call me that," Anya mutters as she clenches her injured fist, "I'm not a soldier. Not anymore."

"Then what are you?" Niylah asks, crossing her arms. Anya stares at the ground, gulping down the swell of nausea burbling up at the back of her throat.

"I don't know."

===

Clarke pulls into her driveway, grateful that Anya had remained both silent and well-kept in the car ride back to the house. She casts a glance over at the older woman, now propped up against the glass of the window with her eyes dully trained on the steady, but light snowfall. Swallowing, Clarke powers off the ignition and sits for a minute, her hands gripping the leather of the steering wheel as she struggles to come up with the right words.

Are there even any right words?

"I need you to carry Aden," Clarke mutters as she pulls the keys from the ignition and turns away from Anya. "I'll take Tris."

Anya doesn't speak, but she nods.

Together, the two of them leave the car and open up the passenger doors. Clarke takes her seven month old into her arms and kisses her scalp, grateful that she's managed to sleep through the ride. Aden, on the other hand, stirs a bit in his aunt's arms as she hoists him into her grasp. Clarke's widen briefly with worry when she sees Anya sway and stumble a bit, but the older woman nods again, letting her silently know that she's fine and can handle holding her son.

And then, as Anya walks towards the house, back to her in the light of the night sky, Clarke is suddenly reminded of the times Lexa would carry Aden to bed after a long night spent hiking or
crying. A sting of grief stabs at her heart as she rakes her eyes over the straightened back of Anya's frame, of the faint limp in her step, and she finds her eyes tearing up again. She instinctively nods her head down and kisses Tris' scalp again in search of comfort. Her child mumbles against her, yawning into the safe crook of her neck before Clarke shuts the door and locks the car before following to where Anya waits on her to open the door. The older woman is staring at the wood with a distant, lost gaze as Clarke unlocks the door and leads them inside.

The two of them tuck the children in before stumbling back downstairs. Anya is about to head for the door when she spots the ironing board and the leftover masses of Lexa's old shirts strewn about on the worn leather. The older Woods stiffens and clenches her fists again, her breath caught in her lungs as she hangs her head and breathes through gritted teeth, keeping her back to Clarke to shield her from her reaction. Swallowing down the pain, Anya blinks and stumbles away from the couch, towards the door. Before she can reach for the doorknob, Clarke's voice grunts and clears from behind her.

"Stay the night," Clarke demands coolly, moving into the kitchen to retrieve two glasses of water. "You're in no state to drive."

"I left my bike at the bar," Anya mumbles back, still not looking at Clarke. "I need to--"

"Worry about it tomorrow," Clarke responds as she hands Anya the glass. "I'll make up the spare room."

"No," Anya insists as she takes a sip of the water, feeling her head beginning to pound. "No, it's okay. I'll take the couch."

Clarke doesn't reply. Instead, she nods and maneuvers around the older woman to gather up the few shirts of Lexa and sluggishly walking upstairs. The blonde only comes down once more to pack up the ironing board and place it against the wall. She hands Anya a blanket and a spare shirt (one that Anya doesn't fail to recognize as Lexa's old Superman workout shirt) and some pants. Clarke and Anya both stare at the clothing before the younger woman coughs out something about needing to check on her children. Anya just swallows and nods, thanking her quietly before Clarke stumbles back upstairs, flicking off the light. She goes to the downstairs bathroom and reaches into the drawer for a spare toothbrush, scrubbing at her teeth until her gums sting and bleed.

Still, even months later, she can't look at herself in the mirror as she spits out the foam.

After placing the brush on the counter and wiping her mouth, Anya changes into the clothes and plays with the hem of the shirt. Tears burn at the base of her eyelids but she shakes them away furiously, before turning off the light and heading outside. Slumping on the couch, Anya stares up at the ceiling in silence, her thoughts filled with the countless memories of Lexa, of their childhood, of her laughter and smile and unrestrained silliness that never ceased to charm her wife and bemuse herself; and yet somewhere, in that dark void of her mind, she hears Lexa's screams. Even when she tries to tune them out, they're there. Haunting her.

Taking a breath, Anya cups a hand over her mouth and stifles her cries when memories of the blast rocket through her, leaving her a whimpering mess. She turns onto her side, still a bit drunkenly, before she closes her eyes and curls into a ball. She sobs into her frame, trying and failing to suppress her day old grief. Nothing can bring her sister back, that she knows all too well, but she can't help thinking that there must be a way to get rid of the noise, of the flashbacks. Her stomach aches and yearns for the familiar burn of alcohol and she knows that she's helpless to the pull. She hates the way she rises from the couch and stumbles into the kitchen, prying open the door of the fridge and
reaching for a bottle of beer. She uncaps it with her teeth and leans against the counter.

*Drinking won't make you forget, big girl.*

Anya's eyes snap up to where Lexa's mutilated ghost is leaning against the doorway, an unamused expression painted on her face.

"Please," Anya rasps as Lexa snorts at the beer bottle in her hand. "Please just--"

*Is that your plan then? Get drunk every night to forget your problems? Make my wife come pick you up in the middle of the night like a teenager?*

"Lexus--"

*Pathetic.*

"I know," Anya whimpers as she hangs her head, "I know, okay?! I… I fucking know."

*Then shape up, big girl. You made me a promise, remember?*

"Promises are meant to be broken," Anya sighs as she closes her eyes, warding off the self-deprecation for as long as she can. Lexa snorts again.

*Not this one.*

"Not this one," Anya echoes softly, blinking open her eyes to look at the half-empty beer bottle in her hands. She nods her head up, only to find Clarke standing in the doorway now instead of Lexa. A bitter expression flickers through those hazy blue eyes as Anya lowers her gaze once more. Sighing, Anya downs the last of the beer before casting the bottle to the side of the sink. She rubs the back of her head and closes her eyes, trying to ignore the pounding in her head.

"I have two kids," Clarke growls at her as she watches Anya rub at her face. "They lost their mother, Anya. I lost my wife. You lost--"

"I fucking know what I lost," Anya seethes as she grits her teeth, "I know, Clarke."

"Then get your act together," Clarke scolds, shaking her head in disgust as she turns around. "I'm not doing this again. I can't let Aden or Tris see you like this. You're their aunt. You're all they have left of her. I won't let them watch you destroy yourself. You're not the same person." Anya snorts and looks away.

"Like you're the same, Clarke." The older blonde's voice cracks as she toes the cold tiles of the kitchen. "You think I haven't noticed? You don't even pay attention to Aden or Tris. You barely talk to Octavia or Lincoln. You barely talk to *me.*" Clarke steps forward and fists Anya's jacket in her hands angrily.

"You aren't someone I want to talk to right now," Clarke growls under her breath as she lets go. "Not while you're… like this."

"So much for 'I need you', right?" Anya scoffs, shaking her head as tears burn her eyes. Clarke's breath hitches as she closes her eyes remorsefully, knowing that the lack of sleep and stress, coupled with the depression and grief over Lexa's loss have weighed down on her. She knows that Anya's troubled, and more so than she'd thought if the recent alcoholism seemed to be a sign of anything. Taking a deep breath, Clarke steadies herself and rubs her neck aching.
"I do need you," Clarke whispers as she gently places her hand on Anya's shoulder. "Just… not this version of you."

"I'm not the same person anymore," Anya mumbles as she moves Clarke's hand away, "I know."

"Why are you so keen on shutting me out?" Clarke asks, her voice hoarse. "Why do you push everyone away and let it eat away at you?"

"I could ask you the same," Anya retorts again, offering Clarke a small shrug. "But we both know the answer. Yet, neither of us will say it. Right?"

Clarke hangs her head and takes a minute to let the silence sink into her harrowed and worn bones. Anya's eyes are glued to some spot over her shoulder, and it's then, as she sees the tears burning in those worn hazel eyes, Clarke knows. She knows that both of them haven't even come close to recovering. In fact, she'd go as far as saying that they've done the opposite. They've regressed into two people they can't recognize in the mirror. Death has changed them.

Wordlessly, Clarke scurries through their shoddy kitchen drawers and fishes out a first aid kit before silently going to work on bandaging Anya's hand. The ex-soldier doesn't react, not even a wince, when Clarke sniffs and swabs away the blood with an antiseptic wipe. As soon as she's bandaged the wound, her head falls to Anya's shoulder, her breaths pattering against the older woman's neck. She doesn't even move an inch when Anya's hot tears drip into her scalp and upon her forehead. It takes a few moments before those long, muscled arms wind around her waist and tug her close to the older woman's chest.

"I miss her so much," Clarke chokes, pressing herself closer to Anya. "I… I keep thinking she'll be back. Everyone tells me to move on but I can't. I lost my wife, An. I lost her."

Anya's quiet, and if it weren't for the slow, soft strokes of her hand upon her back, Clarke would've thought that she was frozen and faded away in painful memories. Clarke just closes her eyes and presses herself closer to the older woman, allowing a few tears to leave her lids as she tries to imagine the body under her hands as Lexa's own. She noses the ragged scar from Anya's wound and pictures it as Lexa's shrapnel scar. Even Anya's smell reminds her of her wife. Before she knows it, she's sobbing in Anya's arms, her breaths uneven and shallow as she tries to get air into her weathered lungs.

"I know," Anya murmurs sadly as she holds Clarke closer to her chest protectively. "I know, Clarke."

"I need her back, Anya, I need my wife, I need my Lexa," Clarke howls against her neck, scrabbling against her shirt as she cries harder. Anya's knees buckle and they both drop to the floor. One of the metal handles is dug into the older blonde's spine, but she doesn't move her position. Instead, she gathers Clarke up in her arms and holds her like she used to hold her younger sister when she'd have nightmares as a child. She presses her lips to Clarke's hair and hums solemnly.

"You were there," Clarke gasps through her sobs as she looks up achingly. "You… you saw it happen, didn't you?"

Anya bites her lips, swallowing hard. She nods, closing her eyes.

Clarke takes a breath before she asks the next question, softly and slowly.

"What happened?" Clarke asks in a bare whisper. "How did she die, Anya?"

The older woman stops stroking and opens her eyes, her gaze glued to the image of Lexa's cheery
face with Aden at the boy's piano recital that's framed on their fridge. Beside it, Lexa stands, face
bloodied and teeth poking through her sheets. Metal litters her body, her clothing torn and frayed
from third degree burns. Some of it clings to her charred skin. Anya's breath quickens as Lexa
smiles, causing blood to pool against her cracked lips and gush to the floor.

Go on then, big girl. Tell her what you did.

"I…," Anya chokes out, unable to speak as Lexa's eyes soften upon glancing at Clarke's back. A
pang of agony strikes low in Anya's belly when Lexa shuffles forward, the blood and grime
disintegrating until she kneels beside Clarke, unharmed and pure. Anya's eyes follow Lexa's hand as
it reaches for Clarke's shoulder. Those green eyes look up to hers and a faint smile paints her
younger sister's face. She watches as Lexa's other hand reaches out for her cheek. For a second,
Anya almost believes that she can feel her sister's fingers upon her jaw, her thumb tracing that faint
scar from when she'd fallen off her bike at six. The animosity and hate is gone now, replaced by
sympathy and solemn grief.

"She's at peace now," Anya stutters out as she watches Lexa turn her gaze back to her wife.
"She's… she's not in pain. The blast… she… she wouldn't have felt it." Clarke shudders against her
as Anya continues to say, "Lexus… she wasn't in pain. She went peacefully." Clarke sobs in the older
woman's arms and Anya can't help but feel guilty that she's keeping some of the truth. Yes, Lexa
probably wouldn't have felt the blast (or at least she hopes) but she'd watched Lexa get shot down
four times, and that had been enough to break her soul. She had watched her proud, brave, strong
sister fall to her knees in defeat.

"I just wish I could see her," Clarke gasps as she digs her face deeper into Anya's neck. "I just want
to hold her again, An. I want to tell her I love her, just one more time. I want her to know. I want her
to feel that I've never loved anyone like I love her. I just wish that she knew." Anya sighs and blinks
back tears.

"She knew," Anya mumbles into Clarke's hair as she holds her sister-in-law tighter. "Trust me, Lexa
knew. And she loved you just as much, Clarke."

"Then why did she do it?" Clarke asks as she looks up to look into Anya's watery eyes. "Why would
she give herself up so easily?"

Anya doesn't have an answer. She knows what Clarke is really asking.

Why wasn't it you instead?

"Because she's Lexa," Anya replies bittersweetly. "It was always her blessing and her curse, her
selflessness."

"I know," Clarke admits with a sad chuckle. "It's what made me fall in love with her in the first
place. She stepped in front of some kid during dodgeball and got nailed in her face. She broke her
glasses but didn't blame it on that boy. Instead, she handed him her ball and asked him to throw it." Anya smiles as she remembers that day, when Lexa had come home with a bruised cheek and her
twisted glasses. Titus had yelled at her for being irresponsible, but Lexa simply had shrugged it off,
taking each word without so much as a flinch. Her sister had always been the more unguarded one
between the two of them.

"Thank you," Anya murmurs after sometime, and Clarke looks up at her with a confused expression.
Anya clears her throat and starts again. "Thank you… for loving her. Lexa… she got it. She
understood love. She was good at things like relationships. She was just a kid when our father died,
and I was so scared that it would hurt her in the long run, that because we were adopted and poor
and from the rough side of town that she'd never find anyone. When you came along… when Lexa came home so happy and in love and smitten… I just… I… thank you. You made my baby sister happy, Clarke. And for that, I am so grateful."

"Lexa was special," Clarke opts to say as she stands up from where she'd been cramped in Anya's lap. "Anyone would've been lucky to fall in love with her. I'm just glad it was me." She wipes her hands on her jeans before she looks down at Anya, who's slowly stumbling back to her feet with a subtle sway. Anya nods and looks down, still teary-eyed and mournful. Clarke glances at the time and sighs, knowing that she's got to be up for work in a few hours for her shift.

"Do you need something else?" Clarke asks as she nods towards the couch. "You know where the spare blankets are if you need them." Anya nods.

"I'm fine," she mumbles back, eyes still glued to her feet. "You should rest. I'll… I… I just need a few minutes." Clarke nods and goes to leave before she pauses and turns around. Leaning up on her toes, she wraps her arms around Anya's shoulders and gently pecks her sister-in-law's cheek before stepping back.

"You need to talk about what happened," Clarke whispers as she reaches down for Anya's hand, gently holding it in her own hand before looking back up to her distraught sister-in-law. "If not with me… just with someone. Please, Anya. I can't lose you too. Neither can the kids. Lexa was special, but so are you." Anya's eyes well with tears and her head bows. Clarke squeezes her hand once more before going to back away. Before she can leave, however, Anya squeezes back.

"Four times," Anya rasps as Clarke freezes, cocking her head over her shoulder. Anya's gaze is locked on hers, agonized and bleary.

"What?" Clarke echoes softly. Anya shakes her head, letting go of their hands.

"Four times," Anya breathes out as she looks to her socked feet. "That's how many times she was shot before she fell to her knees."

Clarke's heart tenses up like a pit obstructing her throat as Anya sniffles and wipes away the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I vowed to our father that I would protect her. I told him that I would take care of her even if it costed my last breath. I promised him that I would keep her safe and I didn't." Anya's voice cracks on the last word as she shakes her head angrily. She clenches her hands into tight fists, unable to look into Clarke's shocked and mournful eyes.

"She was my baby sister," Anya repeats in a hoarse sob, "and I let her down. I broke my promise. I was supposed to cover her but I didn't… I didn't do it properly and she… she fell, right in front of me. She didn't scream. She just crumpled, like she was made of jello. I watched as she raised her gun. I was the one who screamed, not her, as she pulled the trigger and caused those trucks to explode. I was the one who stood in the aftermath of the fire, knowing I would never see her again. I stood there, knowing that the reason why I was breathing was because she was not." Clarke's silent through Anya's crying intensifies.

"She died, Clarke." Anya's voice is clipped, raw, grating as she choke out the words. "She died because I couldn't stop her. I couldn't convince her to be selfish for once. She died because of me. We both know that." Clarke bites her lip as tears roll down her cheeks and drip off her chin when Anya sniffles harder. This time, instead of denying Anya's confession, Clarke remains silent. The anger, the image of Lexa being shot like some target in a shooting range makes her blood boil and stomach churn. The previous appeasement that Anya had tried to use to ease her misery suddenly courses through her in a raging wildfire.
"I'll see myself out," Anya whispers as she senses the change in Clarke's mood. Her chest is heavy and she's too tired to fight. Too tired to tell Clarke everything. Instead, she pulls herself over towards the coat rack and slips on her jacket and her gloves with trembling hands. Before she can leave, Clarke's voice pipes up.

"Why tell me this?" Clarke croaks as she crosses her arms protectively over her chest, tears still escaping down her cheeks. "Why not spare me the truth?"

Anya bows her head, hand lingering upon the doorknob as she sighs. "Because the truth is all I have left. I... I can't explain what it felt like. I can't... I can't tell you everything that I saw, things that I could never find the words to explain, but Lexa never lied to you. She loved you until her last breath, Clarke. My sister -- your wife -- died a hero. But she was so much more than that. She was... ."

Anya trails off for a bit before she takes a breath and looks at Clarke. "She was special." Clarke swallows down her anguish when Anya's eyes flit again to some point over her shoulder. The blonde turns a little, but finds nothing behind her. When she turns back, Anya's gaze is glassy and distant. The older woman twists the doorknob and goes to leave when Clarke finds her voice again.

"You see her, don't you?" She asks in a rough voice. "That's why you were zoning out five months ago at your check up. It's why you drink. You can't forget what she looked like when she died. She... haunts you." Anya's spine stiffens and Clarke knows her prognosis is correct. As if to add to her confirmation, Anya looks to the same point over her shoulder again with a harsh swallow before nodding. She doesn't say anything else. She doesn't need to. Clarke sniffles lightly.

"Stay," she whispers in a raspy croak as Anya goes to open the door. "Just... you need to rest too. Stay, An."

Again, Anya is silent. This time, however, she lets the door close and strips off her parka without a fight. Clarke watches as her fingers flex up and down a few times before she shuffles into the living room towards her couch. Anya turns one last time, her eyes not able to meet Clarke's as she sits down. In that moment, Clarke understands. While she may have Aden and Tris, her mother, and even Octavia and Lincoln, Anya doesn't have anyone. Sure Lincoln is her cousin, but she'd never really been all that close with him. Lexa and Anya were a packaged duo. One didn't come without the other. And Anya lost that. She lost everything.

Just like Clarke lost everything, too.

"An?" Clarke asks as she sees Anya beginning to cry again. She rakes her eyes over her pale, skinny arms. Bones are jutting out, sharp and edgy with signs of malnourishment. Deep bags line the undersides of her bloodshot eyes. Her lips are cracked and dry from dehydration. Everything about Anya is void of life, of love, of reason and hope to move forward. The other woman can barely nod her head upwards to meet Clarke's as she sits down. In the moment, Clarke understands. While she may have Aden and Tris, her mother, and even Octavia and Lincoln, Anya doesn't have anyone. Sure Lincoln is her cousin, but she'd never really been all that close with him. Lexa and Anya were a packaged duo. One didn't come without the other. And Anya lost that. She lost everything.

Just like Clarke lost everything, too.

"I mean it," Clarke whispers as she steps into the room and kneels at Anya's side. "You're not alone anymore. Neither am I. We'll get through this."

Anya sniffles again, before choking on a sob and bowing her head once more. Clarke places her hands on Anya's wrists and tries to ignore the fine scars underneath, old and faded, but still burning under her touch. She leans up and envelopes the taller woman in a tight bear hug, unable to hold down her own cries when she hears Anya finally letting loose and sobbing uncontrollably against her chest. Anya holds onto her like she's a lifeline, and perhaps in some strange sense, that's exactly what she is. If the world were to suddenly be at an apocalyptic end, she knows without a doubt that Anya would protect her and her children above all else. As much as she's come to look at Anya with a
small sense of disdain, she can't ignore that the woman has been grieving alone, her own way. However deprecat ing and toxic that way may have been, she had been holding inside a world of pain, of hurt, of loss that she would never understand.

"Together," Clarke whispers as she slowly lays an exhausted Anya on her side upon the couch. "We'll get through this together. I promise."

“She left me. *Clarke,*” Anya stammers out between muffled cries. “She was my sister and she’s gone. She’s all I had left. She was my only family and now she’s gone. God fuck, she left me and now I've got no one. How many more people do I have to lose?”

Clarke's heart breaks faster and harder in her chest at Anya's pained words. She's always seen Anya to be the stronger of the two Woods sisters, the more guarded one. Lexa had her walls too, but nothing compared to Anya. Lexa had told her ample amounts of stories of how protective the elder Woods had been while they'd grown up under the strict tutelage of Indra and Titus. Indra had been more lenient but Titus caused too many emotional scars to count on both of them. He was the one who'd prevented Lexa from dating and seeking love, who'd scolded her on weakness. Little did Titus know, Lexa had been a woman with a heart as big as the moon. Her love had been a supernova, one that hit her at once but filled her with the elements that she needed to live and breathe.

Lexa was everything to her.

“You're not losing me,” Clarke rasps softly, reaching out to stroke Anya’s unruly, greasy curls. “I need you, An. You need us, too.”

“I'm just…,” Anya chokes, “I'm so tired, Clarke. Of living, of fighting, of being alone.”

“You're not alone,” Clarke urges tearily as she sinks to her knees beside the couch so she can be at face-level with her sister-in-law. “I'm here. And I'm not leaving you. No more fighting. No more distance. I'm here.”

“Please,” Anya begs through sniffles. Clarke nods and leans down to rest their foreheads together as she intertwines their fingers.

“I'm here, An.” Clarke hums the works as she presses a light kiss to Anya’s tear-stained cheek. “I promise I'm not leaving you. Ever.”

“I miss her,” Anya rasps softly, “I miss my baby sister. I loved her so much, Clarke. I loved her so much and I lost her because I wasn't good enough. I lost her, I lost my best friend.” Clarke closes her eyes as she nods against Anya’s head, squeezing her hand tightly as she listens to Anya crying harder.

“She knew that you loved her,” Clarke hums soothingly against Anya’s cheek. “She knew, Anya. She always knew and she always loved you just as fiercely as you love her. And you know she wouldn't want you to be like this. She would want you to be safe and happy. She would want you to live, sweetheart.”

At Clarke's words, Anya looks up over her shoulder to see the bloody apparition of her sister staring back at her, silent and unwavering. Anya gulps and watches as slowly Lexa begins to waver and grow translucent until she disappears completely. After she's gone, Anya’s gaze falls back to Clarke. The blonde stares at her earnestly and it takes Anya a few minutes before she managed a tired nod before slinking into the couch cushions and dropping her eyelids shut.

Clarke watched as Anya slips into a well-deserved sleep. She stays sitting on the floor for a few
moments. Anya’s hand is still tightly clenched with her own. Every so often, the older woman will squeeze tightly and let out feeble yelps in her sleep, to which Clarke picks a familiar tune that used to calm her wife after an anxiety attack or nightmare.

Upon singing, Clarke notices Anya calming easier than before. Her breathing steadies out and the strangled sounds of distress reduce to nothing but faint mewls. Clarke keeps humming, knowing that right now Anya needs her to be strong. Present. There.

Before she gets up to leave, she pecks the older woman's clammy forehead and sighs as she hears the gentle snores sound from beneath her. She sits at Anya's side for a few moments, simply stroking her hair and clenching her heart whenever Anya lets out a whimper of pain and flinches in her sleep. She sits until the woman finally falls into a deep sleep, in which her limbs are heavy and lids closed loosely. Clarke continues to stroke her hair gently until she manages to pry herself away and stand, walking over to turn the light in the kitchen off before retreating up the stairs and towards her own bedroom.

When she opens the door, she sees Aden curled into her pillow in a tight ball. Swallowing, Clarke sighs and slides under the covers, pulling him close. Her son twitches and whimpers in his sleep before burrowing in her arms. She holds him closer until she manages to fall into her own slumber. Her dreams are plagued with images of Lexa, of their memories shared together from high school to before she'd departed on her last tour. As if sensing her distress, Aden crawls closer to Clarke's chest and burrows against her. His arms are thrown around her waist as he protectively mumbles soft words of comfort. Tears spring to Clarke's eyes upon the similarities between her son and her late wife. It strikes her then, that perhaps Lexa hasn't left her completely.

Not yet.

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The banging of metal jolts Anya from her sleep. She nods her head up and groans at the pounding at her temples from the hangover she's nursing. Blinking upwards, she spots Aden carrying a fitful Tris in his arms as he walks around the kitchen, soothingly humming to his sister as he walks back and forth in soothing patterns.

“Ssh,” Aden hums as he taps his sister’s cheek. “It's all going to be okay. Your bottle is in the microwave, little sis.” Tris garbles in response, drooling all over Aden’s shoulder in the process. Aden flashes her a gentle smile before pressing his lips to Tris’ soft hairs at her forehead.

Flashbacks of taking care of Lexa in the same way rush through Anya’s mind. She remembers how she would walk Lexa through the gardens in the backyard and sit with her under that old oak tree so they could listen to the birds chirping. Lexa would giggle at everything, always content. Her small fingers would clasp around Anya’s forefinger and hold on tightly, like the world would end if she let go. Her small hands were strong from the start. Anya had always known she would be as brave and beautiful as their mother.

Anya looks to that same hand now, the voices of Aden humming a tune and Tris giggling fading to static in the background. She traces the lines of her palms, catching the nicks and burns from so many scars. She turns back to face Aden and Tris again, tears welling in her eyes.

In the back of her head, she hears Lexa’s voice pleading for her to keep her promise.

Blinking back tears, Anya rises from the couch and stumbles into the kitchen, lightly rapping on the door frame as to not startle her nephew and niece as they bond.
“Hey kid,” Anya hoarsely says as she nods to the boy. Aden looks up and smiles fondly, not ceasing his gentle rocking of Tris. He kisses the top of her head again.

“Morning Aunt Anya,” Aden greets her kindly. “We’re making breakfast for Mama.” Anya cocks her head as she watches Aden set Tris down on the booster seat and hand her a sippy cup after testing the temperature on the inside of his wrist.

“We?” Anya chuckles with a bemused tone as she watches Tris hastily gulp down milk. Aden nods as he skips to the fridge. The old machine squeaks as it opens and Anya suddenly takes the second to look around the kitchen, at the old pots and pans, the rusted gas stove, and old cabinets. Aden pulls out some eggs and cheese before walking to the stove.

“And why are you making breakfast? You should have woke me, kiddo. I could have done it.” Aden pauses a moment in cracking an egg before turning to face Anya with a solemn look of sympathy.

“Mama’s sad,” Aden says with a shrug. “I think it's because she still misses Mom. So I cook for her when I can. She doesn't eat otherwise.” Anya’s heart clenches when she hears the sadness in his voice, and that’s when it hits her just how affected the kids have been by her sister’s passing.

“Here,” Anya murmurs as she sees Aden struggling with lighting the stove. “This thing is a piece of junk isn’t it?” Aden giggles when Anya finally, after many attempts, manages to get the flame lit and the frying pan on the stove. She goes to the cupboard and pulls out the bread and reaches for the toaster, plugging it in swiftly. Aden finishes up some scrambled eggs while Anya whips up two pieces of toast. The two of them lay it out on a plate and add a cup of coffee to its tray.

“Thanks,” Aden says with a sparkle in his eyes. “The kitchen is a bit…”

“Old?” Anya chuckles with a smile. Aden blushes a bit before rubbing the back of his head and nodding sheepishly.

“Just a bit,” he replies, taking the tray in his hands and heading towards the steps. Anya sighs and looks over to Tris, happily slapping at the table as she gurgles out more incoherent nonsense. Swallowing down another bout of tears, Anya walks over and reaches for her niece and the burping towel draped over her booster seat.

“Just like old times,” Anya whispers to herself as she raises Tris to her shoulder and gently begins to pat her back. The baby snuggles against her, drooling mostly on the cloth but a bit against her neck, too. Anya hums a song from her childhood as she sets to pacing around the room, dutifully watching how Lexa’s ghost traces her steps, eyes mournful and grey, like she's right there, aching to reach her daughter and hold her, to be in Anya’s place. To counter her grief, Anya chooses instead to press a kiss to Tris’ forehead.

“This kitchen really is a mess, isn't it?” Anya sighs softly as she stares at the old equipment. She knows that Lexa wanted to remodel after she came back home, to make it her safe haven because of her love to cook. Her sister had inherited that unknowingly from their father, who would always treat them to delicious meals.

“Maybe we need a change in environment,” Anya muses as she looks out at fridge and stove before pulling a now fully burped and sleepy Tris into her arms to smile at her. The girl giggles again, slapping her hands against Anya’s chest and drooling some more on her bib.

“I’ll take it as a yes?” Anya asks the baby, who only squeals and giggles some more. Anya smiles and leans forward, her lips pressed against Tris’ crown as she closes her eyes and breathes in her
scent -- a scent all too familiar to her own sister.

“She loves you so much,” Anya murmurs softly, cradling not her niece closer. “She would be absolutely entranced with her, you know that right? She would smother you in kisses and never let you go. She’d spoil you rotten and chase every potential love interest out the door with a baseball bat.”

“She would,” Clarke’s voice sounds from behind her, soft and raspy from sleep. Anya turns slowly with Tris in her arms. At the sight of her mother, Tris giggles and fits against her aunt. Clarke smiles sadly as she approaches her daughter with cautious steps. She reaches out and smoothed her hair down, kissing her head tenderly.

“Good morning, my love.” Anya watches the soft encounter with silence as Clarke prays her daughter back into her arms. Clarke rocks her gently, murmuring sweet nothings to her sleepy baby with her mouth pressed up against Tris’ temple. Anya watches the scene with bitter sadness, but somewhere between the pain and loss, there is beauty in the innocence in Tris’ hazy green eyes. It pulls at Anya’s heartstrings when Tris yawns and curls up in Clarke’s arms.

“I’m here,” Anya tells Clarke with a soft rasp. Clarke frowns, looking upwards in confusion. Anya steps forward and gulps, placing her hand upon Clarke’s shoulder as she looks to Tris.

“I’m not Lexa, and I’m not their mother or your wife, but I’m here. I… I want to be here;” Anya whispers as she looks at Clarke with a gentle nod. Clarke’s eyes mist as Anya looks back to Tris, and then over where Aden waits at the base of the steps with a hesitant, but hopeful look.

“We’ll get through this,” Anya says with a nod, “we’ll do it together, as a family.”

Date and Time Unknown

Location Unknown

In. Out.

One twenty over eighty. It's normal. Drop below eight over fifty and you'll lose yourself. Rise above one-forty over ninety and you'll be in danger of going into cardiac arrest. You need to keep your blood pumping. You need to keep breathing.

In. Out.

Raise your arm. Increase circulation.

In. Out.

Fight, Lexa.

“Be quick.”
The slamming of the door is what jolts Lexa from her sleep. She cracks her good eye open to see the blurred image of a woman and a little boy being thrown into the joint cage she's sharing with an equally beaten Private Green. The woman and child look petrified to be in the same room as her, but Lexa can't blame them. She can imagine how she looks.

She can only guess that it's been months since she's been taken captive, tortured daily until she's expected to break like a shard of glass. They shave her head each time it grows out to past her shoulders. They make her watch in the mirror as Emerson hacks away at it without an air of gentleness to his gestures.

"Eh munē marse, ma. Munnē nutthi kurwu," the boy whimpers to mother, wringing his hands in her tattered dress. The woman shakes her head and whispers something inaudible to the boy, gently assuring him of everything being okay and no harm coming to him. Lexa hears him whimper again as he is pushed in her direction with a small kit.

The boy approaches her with trepidation, seemingly unaware of how to progress towards her. His knees tremble and he looks about the same age as Aden. Lexa shoves down the resemblance and steels herself. When he gets near, he flinches out of fear.

"Ma!" He cries out to the woman tending to her fellow soldier. "Ma, munnē nutthi kurwu!" Lexa grunts and the boy jumps.

"Ssh," Lexa murmurs gently. "Saab tique hoijase. Mari naam Lexa chē." The boy seems shocked at her Gujurati. As soon as she'd heard it, she recognized the dialect. It's similar to Urdu, which most of the locals in the village seemed to switch between using alongside Pashto. Both the boy and his mother look worse for wear, and instantly Lexa knows that she isn't the only prisoner here. She tries her best attempt at a smile given her busted lip and barely healing tooth wound from a few months ago.

"W-What?" The boy asks, looking over to his mother, who gives Lexa a suspicious glance.

"I won't hurt you," Lexa murmurs as she shifts against the wall. The boy still seems unsure as she closes her eye again and hums.

"Ma?" The boy asks back with a whimper. The boy's mother still looks unsure and wary, but she nods at her son before glaring at Lexa.

"Kuthē," the woman hisses as she shakes her head. Lexa doesn't even shudder as she spits on the floor by her feet before turning back to a terrified looking Private Green with disgust.

The boy gulps and turns back to Lexa. He reaches into his bag with shaky hands, drawing out a bandage and some alcohol, alongside a few raggedy towels. His knees wobble as he inches forwards and frantically tried to calm his distressed breathing. Lexa continues to eye him.

"Astē thē," Lexa hums gently, her eyes drooping shut from fatigue. "I won't hurt you, child." The boy still quivers under her stare but he gulps and steals himself. Dodging, he inches closer and shakily reaches out to dab at the cut on her arm with a bit of hesitance. Lexa stifles the wince and instead offers a smile and a nod, encouraging the boy to continue his ministrations upon her wounds. The boy starts to settle, his nerves easing as he continues to help clean the cuts.

"You speak English?" Lexa asks gravelly after sometime, flinching slightly when the boy swipes over one of the deeper cuts on her shoulder. The boy blushes and shrugs, looking at his feet.

"Not good," the boy responds, "still, um… bunuchu."

“Thank you,” the boy says again as he takes back a towel. “You speak Gujurati?”

“Tutelu futelu,” Lexa says and the boy chuckles and tries to hide his smile. Lexa’s lip curves upwards in a soft smirk at the boy’s laugh and closes her eyes again, sighing in fatigue.

“Eh tho chalē,” the boy responds as he looks up at her, “munē tho sumjun parē.”

“Good,” Lexa chuckles as she looks up to see the boy standing above her with a small cloth. He dabs at the shallow nick on her cheek. They both stay silent after that, bare for the occasional hiss of stinging pain from Lexa when the boy reaches a deeper cut or infected wound. As he pulls away and goes to pack his things back in his bags, Lexa notices a faint burn mark on the child’s arm. Her heart clenches in her chest at the sight of it.

"Lāmbā tamē kēvī rēthē ahīțhā karavāmāțhā āvī chē?" Lexa rasps, causing the boy to tense up. He looks over her in fear and she nods to the burn.

The boy gulps and stays silent.

"Tamē manē kahī śakō chō," Lexa whispers to the boy, cautiously eyeing his glaring mother over his shoulder. The boy whimpers and shakes his head.

"I… can’t," the boy chokes as he rises to his feet, wiping at his tears, "they would… I…"

"Listen, just… manē sāmbhaḷō!"

"No," the boy growls as he stares down at her with a glare. "You are a liar. A traitor. I… I won't give in. I won't tell you anything."

Before Lexa can say another word, the boy runs to his mother’s side and fists his hands in her tattered skirt. She whispers harsh words into his ears, her eyes never leaving the soldier's the entire time. She continues her searing gaze before the guard comes to their cell to take her away, and with his entrance, both Cage and Emerson are present with sick grins on their face. Lexa watches as the mother and son are ushered away roughly, yelping in discomfort. She's been here for months, and still, she can't help but remind herself of Clarke and Aden, as well as her newborn daughter that are still waiting on her to come home.

She’s got to stay strong.

"You're awake," Cage notes as he walks into the room. Emerson crosses over and kicks at Private Green’s leg, causing her to gasp in pain as his steel-toed boot connects with a long-since shattered femur. Cage approaches Lexa slowly, a grim smile twisting his lips upwards as he kneels beside her. Lexa remains stoic and unaffected, throwing up the last of her damaged walls to prevent him from getting any information.

"It's been about half a year since you've been here," Cage informs her as he looks to his nails indignantly, "and still, nothing."

Lexa lists the names again in her mind, her mouth dry and eyes sore from the dust.

Gustus.

"I think that our technique is failing. Perhaps we should try something… new."
"And maybe, if you feel willing, you can tell us a few bits of information."

"If you don't, I can't guarantee your safety, or Private Woods' own."

"One of you has a family. One of you will break first."

"It doesn't have to be this hard. You can still save them."

"You can still be the hero, Lexa."

Lexa looks up at Cage with an empty, harrowed expression in her gaze as she curls her lip. And with a snarl to her voice, she spits in his face, "that's where you're wrong. I was never a hero."

Cage chuckles and shakes his head and stands back up, smiling down at a terrified looking Private Green as she's being dragged to her feet. Lexa watches as she fits in the guard's arms, calling for help. It takes everything in her to keep watching with a stoic expression as they tear the bare cloths covering her from her body violently, leaving her in just a dirtied bandeau and pair of tight shorts. Private Green struggles in their tight hold as they haul her towards the door.

"Tell me," Cage says softly as he walks over to her fellow soldier and grabs at her chin, "is this all worth it?"

Lexa doesn't speak when Cage turns to her and sighs.

"It's not, Lexa. She dies for nothing."

Private Green fits in her restraints as the guards haul her, kicking and screaming, out of the cell and down the tunnels. Inside, guilt and anger churns up in her gut as Cage walks back over to her and kneels again. His hands reach out and trace the faint scar that cascades down her shoulder from an old shrapnel wound.

"They will all die for nothing," Cage murmurs as he pulls his fingers back and looks over at her sadly. "Isn't that the unfortunate way life works?"

"Fuck you," Lexa spits as she turns her head away in frustration. "I won't tell you shit."

"I gave you a deal, a walk-free, a chance to go home," Cage tells her as he stands again. "Remember that you are making this choice, Captain."

Lexa closes her eyes as she blinks back tears at the sound of Private Green's screams echoing down the tunnels, louder and more agonizing than ever.

"Remember," Cage says as he walks towards the door, "you're the one that will kill them all."
As he leaves, Lexa stares down at her chaffed and shackled ankles, with only one thought running through her mind as the cell door closes shut.

_I know._

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**January 4th 2010, 15:10**

**Maimonides Medical Centre, New York**

"Griffin?" Monty's voice chirps from beside her. "You're off shift now, go home."

"Is that your nice way of saying I smell and need to leave?" Clarke snorts as she flips through her workbook in the staff room. Monty adjusts his scrubs and sits beside her, trying to hide the subtle crinkling of his nose as he folds his hands on the table. He gives her a sympathetic nod and gestures to the door.

"Your kids need you more than we do," Monty tells her assuringly. "We can handle the late shift tonight. Just… rest up. You need it."

Sighing, Clarke reluctantly agrees and motions to pack up her stuff. Monty gives her another kind smile before he takes her clipboard and tells her that he's got the rest of her patients covered for the day. Clarke rubs the stiffness out of her neck as she trudges down to the change rooms and grabs her bag. She spends a few minutes changing before slipping her jacket and parka on and walking towards her car. She opens the door and sits inside, silent for a moment.

As she palms over the steering wheel, memories of her time spent with Lexa rush through her mind. It's been almost seven months now that Lexa's been gone. She's been hoping, trying to listen to the gut feeling that screams at her that her wife is still out there. She closes her eyes and leans back into her seat, feeling the fatigue wear down on her. She knows that Aden goes back to school soon, and that he won't be able to take care of Tris as much as he did during winter. Their Christmas had been a quiet celebration, with a lot of emptiness and longing. Even with Anya and Indra, Octavia and Lincoln, it never felt right.

Bringing in the New Year without Lexa was even worse.

Before Clarke can further ruminate, a buzzing sound erupts from her purse. Sighing, she reaches inside the handbag and fishes out her cellphone, registering Octavia's number on the caller ID. Clarke rubs between her brows as she presses the green button and raises the phone to her ear, breathing out slowly.

"O?"

"Hey, Clarke."

"What's wrong?" Clarke asks with a rasp, looking at her watch. "Do you need something?"
"No, not me. I was just wondering when you decided you were getting in renovators, is all."

Clarke frowns. "Renovators? For what?"

"I don't know, but there's a van outside and Aden is talking to one of the workers."

Clarke's fingers tighten around the plastic as she jams her keys into the ignition and powers on the car. She tells Octavia not to worry and that she'll be there soon, but she can't help but have several different thoughts running through her head at once. As she pulls out of the parking lot, she switches the radio to the news channel. First the weather and traffic reports come, but Clarke tunes it all out. All she cares about is getting back to her family, and not losing anyone else.

She screeches her tires into the driveway to see that her door is open and the van is still parked there, with its two side doors also open. Clarke jumps out of the car and rushes into the house, frantically following the sounds of laughter and the familiar voice of her son. She opens her mouth to call him, but before she can make that move, she discovers just exactly why the renovator's van was outside. Clarke stands still at the doorway of her kitchen, mouth agape.

"An inch to your left," Anya says as she holds Aden up on her shoulders, her hands protective clasped on his thighs. Aden giggles and takes the paintbrush in his hands and swipes a clean line down the wall, that has now been ripped of its once-peeling floral wallpaper. Upon his strike, Anya grins and nods approvingly. Beside her are two other men, both of which if she wasn't so tired, she'd know. The entire kitchen is completely ripped to pieces, with the flooring scraped and the cabinets destroyed. For a minute, Clarke is baffled from pure shock, but then it settles and she finds her voice again.

"Anya?!" Clarke demands in a low growl. Anya turns, with Aden pivoting atop her shoulders. Aden giggles and beams at his mother, completely covered in small streaks of white paint. Clarke puts her hands on her hips and shakes her head, walking into the living room with an exasperated snarl of frustration.

"Yikes," Aden says as he looks down at his aunt, "she doesn't seem so happy."

"Mm," Anya mumbles as she sets Aden down and hands him over to one of the lumbering men, Ryder. The man chuckles before lifting her nephew onto his bulky shoulders. Anya gives him a nod before bounding off towards the living room where Clarke is pacing, clearly livid and disapproving of her decision.

"What. The. Fuck?!" Clarke hisses as she slides the door shut to prevent her son from hearing. "You've destroyed my kitchen."

"It was supposed to be a surprise," Anya tells her as she rubs the back of her neck. "Aden wanted to do something for your birthday, and I know how much you always griped to Lexa about that shit stack of a kitchen. I got together a few old army buds and well, we started working today while you were at work." Clarke rolls her eyes and turns away before resuming her steady pacing. Anya sighs and sits down on one of the couches, careful to avoid smudging her paint.

"Look," Clarke says as she finally stops the walking, "I get that you want to help, but you have to talk to me about this first, An. It's my house."

"I know," Anya replies as she stands up, placing her hands on Clarke's shoulders. "And I have, but you've been too tired or busy to listen. Aden's been picking up a lot of your slack, Clarke. He doesn't deserve to be a full time parent when he should be playing and being a kid. He's having fun, just… just watch, okay?" Anya reaches down and takes Clarke hand before opening the door and taking
them back towards the doorway of the kitchen.

Together, the two of them watch as Aden laughs when Ryder knocks him into the other man, Johann, causing paint to spill over into his hair. The two men play around with the boy, causing Aden to laugh even harder. Tris is seated in her booster chair, cooing and gurgling as she giggles alongside them. For a minute, Clarke stops worrying, stops thinking, and just focuses in on the joyful sound of her children's laughter. It's unbridled, light, free from loss and burden.

"All I ask is that you give it a chance," Anya hums as she stands beside Clarke, hands in her pockets as she sighs. "Think of it as a fresh start. For the New Year, it's our project, as a family." Clarke's brows furrow and she licks over her chapped lips, contemplating. She can't forget the loneliness or bitter ache of grief, but seeing Aden laugh and look like a child again is too good to pass up, even for her. She turns to Anya and sees a bit of that sadness lifted from her gaze when she watches Aden and Tris so blissfully happy again. She knows that Anya had stepped up big time, to the point where she practically lived with them.

It's not that she didn't expect Anya to step in and help out, but that she hadn't expected Anya to step in as much as she has in the last month. She's the one who drove Aden around to school or a friend's house, who treated him out to ice cream on one of the coldest days in winter because it was something he and Lexa would always do together. They'd go together, Clarke and Tris included, to the ice skating rink and glide around until their skin turned pink. Aden grew close to his aunt and Clarke could see that trust building between them. It wasn't that they were never close, it was just that Lexa always had that hold on him. She knows, just as well as anyone, that no one could ever replace the void Lexa's death has left in their lives, but Anya wasn't a replacement.

Anya was… well, Anya.

"Mahogany," Clarke says as she stares up at her sister-in-law. Anya blinks down at her in confusion. "What?"

"Mahogany," Clarke repeats as she nods towards the kitchen. "If we're doing this, I want mahogany cabinets." Anya's face is serious a moment before she bursts into a hoarse chuckle, her lips spreading in the first genuine smile she's had since before Lexa's death. The sight of it is so infectious that Clarke herself begins to grin and giggle again, feeling her heart swell with the sound of happiness. It feels lighter, like the cloud of grief has been lifted momentarily.

"She hated mahogany," Anya sighs humorously as she looks back to Aden and her friends, "she said it reminded her of our grandmother."

Clarke snorts. "The one with the twenty-something cats and weird german muffin obsession?"

"Fourteen cats," Anya mumbles with a shake of her head, "and all she ever did was bake or watch wrestling."

"I remember when she gave me that weird grasshopper brooch and said it would protect me from bad juju. She was an… interesting woman."

"Interesting is a polite stretch," Anya replies with a low chuckle. "I'd definitely go with delusional, actually. Senile, too."

"That's what Lexa would always say," Clarke sighs as she leans her head against the doorframe to watch the progress of her kitchen being so suddenly remodelled. Anya slumps a bit into herself as she stares on with Clarke, letting a silence filter between them. Only this time, it's not a heavy one,
not a burdened or confusing or hurting one. They just stand together, not even looking at each other as Aden is lowered again to the floor so he can run over to them.

"Mama!" He says as he hands her a paintbrush. "I'm not really all that great at painting. Can you help me do the other wall instead?" Clarke looks to the brush and then the waiting gaze of her son. She swallows and looks up at an encouraging Anya before she smiles again and nods down at the sandy-haired boy.

"We'll let your Aunt Anya fix up that wall, won't we?" Clarke asks, looking over to Anya. The woman lets out a feigned groan and Aden laughs.

"Alright, alright!" Anya says with a grumble as she playfully throws up her hands. "How bad was it?"

"Collateral damage," Aden says, crinkling his brow sheepishly. "I kinda dropped paint on Johann too."

"Is that so?" Anya chuckles as she looks up to where Johann is struggling in his clothing and being laughed at by Ryder. "I suppose that's good news. He always needed a splash of colour in his life." Aden and Clarke both laugh at the joke and Anya beams, glad that she could provide them with some kind of warmth.

"Well then," Clarke smiles at her son as she grips the brush before flashing a glance at Anya, "shall we start?"

Anya returns the warm gaze with one of her own as she nods.

"Let's do it."

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They finish close to nighttime, and by the time Johann and Ryder have left, the kids are asleep.

"I swear, it'll look better when we're done," Anya tells Clarke as they walk around the bare room that used to be a kitchen. Clarke nods and sighs, rubbing the dry patch of paint on her elbow. She looks at the spot where the stove used to reside and sighs. Anya takes a sip of her water before handing it to Clarke.

"She was a great cook," Clarke muses as she graciously accepts and tips back the bottle for a few sips. "I think that's what Aden misses the most. I'm decent, but she was on a whole other level."

Anya chuckles softly, with nostalgia as she comes to stand beside Clarke as the stare at the empty hole where the stove used to be. She purses her lips and remembers her days with Lexa as teenagers.

"No one really could whip up banana pancakes like she could."

"Extra syrup and two spoons of whipped cream," Clarke says with a cringe, "it was diabetes on a plate. The potassium was pointless."

Anya laughs and nods, sighing as she sits down against the unpainted wall opposite to the stove. She slumps to the ground and sighs, looking up at the ceiling that they've laid some plaster down to merge the cracks. Clarke finishes off the bottle of water and slides down beside her so their shoulders brush.

"Her mac n' cheese was the best," Anya adds with a raspy grunt, "four layers of cheesy goodness. The secret was--"
"The hot sauce," Clarke finishes as she shakes her head and laughs. "Now that was a heart attack on a plate. It screamed carbs."

"Eh," Anya shrugs as she smiles lazily upwards, "she burned it off."

"In more ways than one," Clarke mumbles, trying to be out of earshot but failing. She stifles her laugh when Anya's face scrunches up.

"I didn't need to hear that," she mutters with good humour, "constantly walking in on you guys was more than enough."

"Oh come on," Clarke jests as she prods Anya's side, "it was only like twice."

"Try fifteen times, Griff. You guys were like rabbits," Anya pokes back with a cock of her brow. "There are many shocking things I've seen in my life, but nothing really lives up to watching my sister go at it with one of my best friends like a pair of animals in heat." Clarke wheezes with laughter at Anya's garbled explanation. The older woman arches her brow, but can't stop the smile from spreading from her face when Clarke's head leans upon her shoulder.

"It was worth it," Clarke sighs as she looks to the dismembered kitchen again. "Lexa was… amazing."

"She was," Anya whispers as she swallows down her emotions. "She loved and was so incredibly loved. I just… I hope she knew that."

"She did," Clarke assures her gently as she lets her hand creep downwards and gently take Anya's hand. "An, she loved you, but more so she would never stop talking about how much you loved and cared for her. It was one of the things she told me at the start, you know, before we started dating. She told me that her sister came before anyone else in her life. I respected it then and I respect it now." Anya's eyes grow misty at Clarke's tender words. That slender hand squeezes hers gently and Anya feels a few tears slips down her cheeks. She looks down at the blonde to see an equal amount of emotion present in those blue pools.

"Thank you," Clarke whispers as she leans up to kiss Anya's cheek, "for all of this. I know it's a lot and I'm still angry you didn't consult me, but Aden hasn't smiled like that in months. Neither have I. We… we needed this. So thank you, Anya. Seriously." Clarke gives Anya's hand one more squeeze before she tilts her head and leans it back on the older woman's shoulder. Anya remains still for a few moments, allowing the words to sink in, alongside their meaning.

"Thank you," Anya gasps back as she holds Clarke's hand tighter, "for giving me another chance. For letting me in again."

"She'd be proud of you," Clarke sighs as she nuzzles Anya's neck, "wherever she is, she's always with you, An."

Anya looks up to the door by the kitchen, to where Lexa is sitting in one of those old rickety chairs, watching in silence. There's no blood on her skin today, but her eyes are still empty and her lips are still cracked and pulled into a tight line. Her stare is glued to Clarke. It takes a few moments before those green eyes flicker upwards to meet Anya's watery gaze. It takes a few seconds of agonizing silence before those lips curl upwards in a faint smile as Lexa nods at her. Anya's chest deflates as she lets loose a shuddering breath. Lexa smiles again and her eyes look lighter, not so haunting, as her ghost starts to fade until it disappears completely. A part of her body aches for that apparition to come back, to provide her with that same comfort that also drained her, but she knows that it's time to let her go. Like she'd told Clarke earlier, this is their fresh start, their New Year. She has to make
peace with Lexa's death, even if she doesn't want to accept that her sister, her best friend and only family, is gone forever. Anya has to accept that she's moved onto a better realm.

Lexa's fight is over, but her legacy still remains in Aden and Tris, and even Clarke.

As Anya gazes over at a sleepy-looking Clarke, she knows that she'll do anything to make sure that they stay safe and happy and loved.

And maybe, she thinks wistfully, somewhere in the nostalgic midst of moving forward, she could find love too.

"Let's get you to bed," Anya hums in lieu of answering properly, but Clarke can hear the appreciation in her voice. "It's getting too late."

Clarke goes to lift herself when she feels strong arms around her shoulders. The blonde tiredly yawns into Anya's shoulder as she feels one arm drape over and the older woman lift her upwards. Clarke nuzzles again into Anya's neck as they trudge up the steps. Anya deposits Clarke in her bed and tucks her in, pressing a kiss to her forehead before murmuring a goodnight and leaning over the crib where Tris is rolled up in her blankets and sleeping soundly. She bids her beautiful niece a soft goodnight before disappearing into Aden's room to check on him. She watches him sleep for a few moments before adjusting the blanket around his shoulders and whispering sweet nothings and words of comfort and support. She presses a kiss to his forehead and then backs away, smiling.

Anya changes into her night clothes and hops into her own bedroom across the hall. She lays there for a few minutes, simply staring up at the ceiling in silence. Fatigue creeps up on her, but for the first time in a long time, Anya isn't scared of what sleep will bring. Instead, she tilts her head to the side to see the room void of Lexa's presence. She moves one of her hands upwards and places it over her chest, directly above her heart, as she closes her eyes and sighs.

"I miss you," Anya hums as she melts into the sheets, "but I… I accept it, Lex. I just hope you're okay, wherever you are now. I love you."

Only silence answers back, but somewhere in the tranquility of the room, Anya hears her soft voice, her gentle tone with a slight husk to her words.

I love you, too.
"You're growing," Lexa chuckles as she's reminded of her own son, somewhere miles away. "You need it more than I do."

"I am not hungry," the boy responds. Lexa shrugs and leans her head against the brick wall. She's tired. Aching. Mournful.

Lost.

"Neither am I, kid." The words are raspy and scratchy from lack of use. The boy starts with tending to her wounds, shifting his gaze to the untouched roll with hungry eyes. She hears his stomach growl and lets another soft chuckle part her lips. Closing her eyes, Lexa relaxes as she feels the dirt and grime be wiped from some of the infected scratches. It doesn't take as long this time, mostly because some of her wounds are too far gone for him to clean at this point.

"Why are you here?" He asks after sometime, ignoring the hiss of annoyance from his mother in the background. Lexa blinks open her eyes.

"Because I am a prisoner," she answers simply, knowing better than to beat around the bush. The boy stays calm and assertive.

"For what crime?"

"None."

"Then why are you a prisoner?"


"There are two sides to every war, kid." Lexa answers him, ignoring the scalding gaze of the mother. "Not everyone gets so lucky. You know that."

The boy frowns for a minute, processing her words. "Yes. I suppose." Lexa looks to the cracked ceiling and sighs again.

"Do you have children?" Kareem asks softly, dabbing at a cut on her arm. Lexa flinches, but not from pain.

Yes.

"No," she whispers quietly, knowing she can't give anything away. "I do not."

"Oh," the boy replies with another frown. Lexa looks at him with an empty gaze.

"Āścarya?" She asks. Kareem shrugs, putting away his materials.

"Hā," he nods, "tamē mātā jēvā lāgē. Kō'ī ēka śānta chē."

"You're not my enemy," Lexa tells him as she looks over his shoulder to the glaring mother. "Neither of you are my enemy."

Before she can continue the conversation, footsteps thunder down the tunnels and Lexa tenses up. The boy scurries away and joins his mother's side, tugging at her tattered dress with a whimper as Emerson comes into view with four other guards. He barks an order out to the woman and boy to step aside as he walks into the cell and grabs at Private Green. The woman fits in his arms and Lexa is helpless to watch as she's wrangled back into the arms of the guards.
"Please," Private Green begs, "please, no more."

"Shut it, bitch. We're not finished," Emerson barks at her with a devious grin before turning to face Lexa. "Yet."

"Please," Private Green cries out as she hauled outside, "please, I can't do this anymore."

The boy and woman watch in horror as the guards punch and kick at her until she's silenced and beaten down. Lexa grits her teeth and turns her head away as the woman is dragged back down the tunnels and towards the awaiting room. Emerson spares her one last smile before following suite, leaving her with the other slaves. When he's gone, the boy looks back at Lexa with a saddened expression, his dark eyes pooling with unshed tears.

"She is your friend," he says softly with an aching croak, "why do you let her get hurt?"

"I…," Lexa chokes out as she fumbles for words.

*I gave you a choice, Captain.*

"I…," Lexa rasps as she closes her eyes and holds back her own tears, "I can't."

"Kē sā māṭē tēō rākṣasō chē," the woman snarls in her direction as she grips her trembling boy against her waist. "Ā tēō suṁ chē."

Without another word, Kareem and his mother leave the cell and Lexa's subjected to the same symphony of screams from her soldier down the hall.

An hour later, Emerson comes in with Private Green. A sack covers her head and it isn't until she's thrown to the ground does it slide off. Lexa watches in horror as Private Green doesn't even react when Emerson chains her back up to the wall. Her eyes are distant, her skin sickly and pale. Her skin looks clammy with a chill, almost like she'd been dumped in a bucket of ice despite being dry. Emerson kicks at her leg and Private Green does nothing, bare from the involuntary loll of her head. Emerson grunts before stalking over to Lexa and covering her head with a sack. Lexa tries to writhe against his hold as she feels her shackles being eased out from the brick wall, but before she can make a move, a sharp prick stabs into the crook of her neck.

And then, nothing.

===

"Clarke."

Lexa's eyes blink open when she hears her wife's name come from the chestnut-haired man standing in front of her with a wide grin.

"Clarke Griffin-Woods, age thirty-two. Aden Griffin-Woods, age ten. Does that sound about right?"

As best as Lexa tries to mask her fear, her body's physiological signs take over and she pales in front of Cage with a grimace.

"Cute," Cage chuckles as he throws down the photo that had been fished from their belongings. Lexa looks around at her surroundings, noting that she's in a dark room in the middle of nowhere. "Your son looks just like his birth mother. Clarke, I'm assuming, carried the child right?"

Lexa quivers and tugs at her restraints holding her to the chair as Cage nods at the picture of her wife.
with a sick smirk.

"You did well for yourself, Captain." Cage continues to jeer her on as he paces around her chair. "Don't worry, I'll take care of her once you're gone."

"Fuck you," Lexa spits venomously as she struggles in the bindings to the chair, "I'll fucking kill you, asshole."

Cage only smiles and leans back against a wooden table littered with different torture weapons. Lexa eyes them and laughs sinisterly.

"You can do anything you want," she snorts as she leans back in the chair, "I won't talk."

"I don't want you to talk," Cage answers nonchalantly, leaning off the table to motion at the door behind him. The metal grates against the floor as light floods the room. Footsteps echo upon each step, and soon, Emerson approaches Cage with a non disposable syringe filled with red liquid. After handing him the metallic item, he walks over towards Lexa, tightening her straps and chuckling into her ear as Cage removes the air from the syringe with a gentle squeeze.

"Private Green didn't talk, if that's what you're wondering. Not in the way you'd think," Cage murmurs as he looks to the syringe a few times before glancing down at Lexa. "She was faithful to you, wasn't she? She loved you, she said. And all you did was walk away, leaving her a broken-hearted mess. How classy."

Lexa can't say anything now because Emerson is gagging her roughly with a cloth, making sure her head snaps backwards and her eyes face the ceiling as the chair is reclined back a bit. After tightening all of her restraints, Emerson reaches for two long pieces of tape and grins before roughly attaching the strips to her eyelids and pulling them backwards, forcing her to keep her eyes open. Cage flicks his wrist once Emerson is done and the man backs away with a chuckle.

"Costia," Cage says with a lilt to his voice, "a beautiful name, don't you think? It's a shame she was so... weak."

Lexa growls and strains against her hold, but she's not strong enough to break free. Cage sighs and taps at the needle.

"I know you won't talk," Cage repeats what he'd said earlier, "not yet, at least. I figured we needed a change in environment. Perhaps a new outlook."

"F-Fuck you," Lexa garbles against the gag. Cage shakes his head and leans down, placing the point of the needle in the crook of her arm.

"I want to know what scares the great Captain Lexa Woods," Cage whispers as he stares at her icily. "But, I know you won't tell me."

He pushes the needle in and Lexa bites down on the gag, struggling as best as she can to no use. Cage fingers over the trigger on the syringe, letting the red substance steadily pour through her bloodstream. Warmth rises to her face and her mind begins to swim as Cage empties the contents before pulling back and reaching for something scratchy and cloth-like. Lexa's vision stretches and blurs, like she's on a bad trip of acid like she'd done once in high school.

Only this time, it's far worse.

Cage pulls on a mask and Lexa starts to hyperventilate as her skin crawls. Her gaze shifts downwards to see bumps raising and falling underneath the pale exterior. She screams and writhes as
the skin begins to break and a mass of tiny black insects pour out. Lexa looks away, but the itchy, crawling sensation spreads to her entire body now. The mask that Cage is wearing contorts until it shifts into something that makes her heart jar to a stop in her chest.

Cage has become… Clarke.

"So Captain," Cage asks as his voice changes to a higher pitch and his face finishes contorting, "I just have one last question to ask of you."

Behind him, Anya, Aden, Octavia, Lincoln, Indra, her father and mother, and Private Green walk into view. Each of them wear a glare upon their face, looking at her with such disgust that Lexa feels her eyes welling and straining with tears. She claws into the restraints, but barely registers the feeling. Clarke steps forward, blue eyes lit with rage and disappointment. Her hand reaches out, icy and cold as it takes her chin between those slender fingers before whipping it to the side violently. Another muffled scream leaves Lexa's lips, but she can't move. She can only stare straight ahead at the image before her.

The image that she sees is more terrifying than anything else.

Long chestnut hair, piercing green eyes, and a crooked smile stare back at her. Never in her entire life had Lexa thought she would feel such trepidation from her own reflection, but looking at the way her lips curl upwards and a harsh chuckle leaves her mouth, she knows that she's been wrong for so long. Her body steps forward to stand beside Clarke and Lexa shakes her head and deliriously as her reflection reaches forwards and grabs at her face, lips pursing.

"Tell me," the words leave her reflection's lips in a harsh snarl, "are you ready to face your fears, Lexa?"

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the wait on this chapter, but my grandmother passed away two weeks ago. Not only did I not have time to write, considering I just flew back into Vancouver on Friday from London, but my grieving is still a bit raw considering my grandmother practically raised me and I loved her dearly. A lot of this chapter I wrote on the plane while digesting my sadness and bereavement towards the loss of such an amazing woman in my life, so I apologize if parts of it are really sad or hard to read. It's real pain, I assure you. Loss is never easy.

Thank you for your patience and amazing reviews so far. I am blessed to have such an amazing audience that reads and supports my work like y'all do. I thank you so much, from the bottom of my heart, for everything. I hope that this chapter is worth the wait and I assure you, I'll have more for my other stories soon. Please feel free to drop a review or send me a message on your thoughts about this story and how it's progressing, as I know it's a pretty difficult topic to handle. I just want to make sure I've got a good level of balance.

Much love, xx.
Chapter Summary

Lexa faces her fears, Aden meets a new friend, and Anya and Clarke both rebuild in more ways than one.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL TORTURE, DEATH, BLOOD, GORE, AND MENTION OF THREATS OF RAPE (not to any character, just the word comes up and a threat is made).

Sorry I've been gone for so long y'all. I had a mess of family issues that are still persisting and it's just not looking good for me right now. I am just updating this because I wrote it on the plane ride to Montreal. I hope it's good and long enough considering the wait. Thank you for the patience and consideration, as well as the messages of condolences on that last chapter. One of my best friends died a month ago so I was still trying to process both deaths at the same time. It's just been a really rough summer and I needed some time on my own. I hope that this is understandable and I promise I'll try to get on top of working with my other fics.

TRIGGER WARNING CUES:

The first section from "I'm coming back for her. I will protect her" all the way to the end of the section contains scenes of GUN VIOLENCE, PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE, DEATH, AND MILD GORE.

The third section, from "I already told you" to the end of the section contains scenes of MENTIONED RAPE, VIOLENCE, AND MILD PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE.

The entirety of the last section contains scenes of VIOLENCE, GORE, TORTURE, DEATH, BLOOD, MENTIONED RAPE, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE. This one is the hardest section of this chapter, but if you could get through the torture scene in chapter three, you're fine for this one. That was the worst of the torture scenes.

Next chapter will start with Lexa's escape and another time jump. Don't worry, there won't be too much more torture, if any, from this point onwards. The focus on this story is more-so centric on the relationships of all the characters post-Lexa's arrival, so that's why these parts may seem a bit rushed. Don't worry, a lot of the past stuff will come into detail if they haven't been touched upon in greater detail as of yet.

Thanks for sticking with me on this story if you're still here. It means the world!

The song in the quote is from the song "Looking Too Closely" by Fink. The song that Clarke and Anya sing at the karaoke bar is called "Let My Love Open the Door" by Pete Townsend.

Enjoy!
this is a song about somebody else
so don't worry yourself (worry yourself)
the devil's right there (right there in the details)
and you don't wanna hurt yourself (hurt yourself)
looking too closely (looking too closely)

put your arms around somebody else

don't punish yourself (punish yourself)

truth is like blood (underneath your fingernails)

and you don't wanna hurt yourself (hurt yourself)

by looking too closely (looking too closely)

i could be wrong 'bout anybody else

so don't kid yourself (kid yourself)

it's you right there (right there in the mirror)

and you don't wanna hurt yourself (hurt yourself)

by looking too closely (looking too closely...)

Date and Time Unknown

Location Unknown

"Lexa."

Darkness churns all around her, clouding her mind in the fearsome whispers that dart from ear to ear.

"Lexa, look at me."
The whispers are growing, the tingling spreading along her arms and into her chest. The bugs crawl through her brain, eating her alive.

"Lexa!"

At the scream of her name, the brunette jerks her eyes open to see her reflection staring back at her with an unamused expression.

"You can't hide from me," her reflection chuckles, "I am you, remember?"

"No, you're not!" Lexa snarls as she tugs against the restraints that hold her into the chair. Her wrists chaff against the cold metal as she struggles. "You're just a fucking hallucination, nothing more. Stop fucking haunting me. Get out of my mind." Her reflection snarls and Lexa feels a jolt of electricity shoot into her spine. She grits her teeth and screams between them, writhing harder in the chair. Blood starts to prickle her palms as she wrangles her wrists around the cuffs.

"Stop fighting them," her father's voice cuts in sternly, "you deserve this pain. You must protect your people at any and all means."

"What about me?" Clarke asks, her reflection now having transformed into the image of her wife. "You've been away for so long. Don't you care about me?"

"Please," Lexa begs as she struggles in her confines, "please don't do this. I don't want to do this. I've had enough."

"Then tell them where the missiles are," Costia speaks now, the figure transforming again. "I'm suffering because of you. Haven't you done enough?"

"I can't…," Lexa gurgles as she feels her mind spin again. "I won't… I won't do it."

"He knows about me," Clarke pleads again, "he knows about our son and our family. He'll kill us. Please don't let him kill us. You love us, Lexa. Just tell him."

"I can't…," Lexa shakes her head as tears pool in her eyes. "I can't do that, I'm sorry, Clarke, I'm so sorry--"

"It's because she doesn't love you," Anya's cold voice cuts in as she comes to stand beside Clarke. Her head turns and she smiles slyly at Clarke. "But don't worry," she says as she reaches for Clarke's hand and then raises it to her lips, pressing a soft kiss to her wife's knuckles. "I'll love you, Clarke. I'm here."

"Anya," Lexa breathes out in disbelief as Clarke smiles back and accepts Anya's affection. Her sister's cold gaze sifts over her shoulder and Lexa can't find the air to get her lungs to inhale. Before she can even come up with a response, Anya reaches for Clarke's face and pulls her into a soft kiss. Clarke moans in delight as her fingers tangle into the older blonde's hair, smiling into their kiss. Lexa's heart breaks with each second that passes, even when they both pull away.

"You did it to yourself," Clarke tells her sadly, as she latches onto Anya's hand. "You pushed us all away. I told you I needed you, and you left me."

"I had no choice," Lexa croaks as she struggles again in her restraints. "I had no choice, Clarke, you know that I would if I could."

"You didn't have to go back," Clarke growls at her, tears burning in her eyes. "You could have told Kane that you were done. You had a choice. We all have a choice, Lexa, and you made the wrong
one. You don't love me. Something makes me wonder if you ever did."

"I do, Clarke, fuck, I'm alive because I love you," Lexa pleads as she watches Anya pull her wife closer to her side. "I would die for you."

"Then die," Clarke spits angrily as she reaches out for Anya again, "because I don't need you anymore. Anya loves me. She came back for me."

"Please," Lexa begs as she shakes her head. She tries to remind herself that this is all a grand illusion, that it's the drugs talking, but her body is tired and her mind is wearing out from the constant torture. Anya steps forward, almost protectively, in front of Clarke and bares her teeth in fearsome snarl.

"Do you know what will happen if you come back?" Anya chuckles lowly, her face twisting until it morphs back into her reflection. "You will destroy everything that you've ever loved. Clarke will die because of you, because you are nothing. You are worthless, a cold-blooded killer that cares only about herself."

"That's not true," Lexa snarls through her tears, "I love Clarke. I'm coming back for her. I will protect her."

"Lies," her reflection spits as she reaches into her waistband to pull out a gun. "Do you want to see what you will do if you come back?"

"Stop," Lexa begs, but her reflection is unrelenting as she mercilessly grabs at Clarke's collar and turns her roughly. The blonde yelps and screams as her reflection presses the barrel of the pistol at Clarke's clammy forehead. Clarke's begging and pleading as she writhes in her reflection's strong arms.

"Don't kill me, please don't kill me. I don't want to die, Lexa!" Clarke yells out, tears streaming down her face as her reflection smirks back at her sadistically. She turns her head and presses a series of kisses down Clarke's neck, ignoring every plea of discomfort and fear coming from the blonde. Lexa snarls and struggles in her chains as she watches Clarke's hands claw at her reflection's wrists, begging and aching for her to let go.

"Stop," Lexa snarls as she lurches against her chains, "stop it, you fucking sick bitch. Let go of my wife."

"What are you afraid of, Lexa?" Her reflection asks in a sickeningly sweet tone, mumbling against Clarke's racing pulse. "The truth?"

"Let go of her!" Lexa shouts, her voice straining from yelling. "I'll fucking kill you, bastard."

"Mom!" Aden's voice pipes up and Lexa watches helplessly as he runs towards her reflection and Clarke with worry splayed across his face. Her reflection lets out a laugh as she cocks the gun and kisses Clarke's neck again, her teeth scraping against her jugular sadistically. Aden turns to face her, betrayal and anger evident in his blue-green eyes as he inches closer to Clarke, shaking his head in disgust. He stares her down with a hardened glare that leaves Lexa breathless.

"Ade," Lexa whispers as she cries out for her son, "sweetheart, I won't hurt you."

"You promised you would come home," Aden sniffles as he shakes his head bitterly, "you lied to us, Mom. How could you?"

"Aden, no, I never lied. I never meant for any of this to happen, I swear. It was supposed to be the last tour. I was supposed to come home!"
"But you didn't!" Aden screams as Anya reaches for him, pulling him into her side protectively. "You lied, Mom. I hate you."

"Aden," Lexa cries out as she shakes her head, trying to hold back more tears. "Son, I promise I'm coming home."

"You're a monster now," Clarke growls as her reflection primes her finger over the trigger. Before Lexa can shout anything else, her reflection pulls the trigger and Clarke's head bursts in a cloud of blood and brain, splattering everywhere. Aden and Anya both scream in terror, but before they move to help, her reflection shoots them down too. Lexa screams and thrashes, crying out as her reflection slowly lowers her gun, the smirk still painted upon her face.

"And don't we all know that monsters don't deserve to be loved?" Her reflection asks, smiling up at Lexa. "You and I are all we need, Lexa."

"No," Lexa cries as she shakes her head, tears streaming off her cheeks and dripping into her chest as she continues to sob. "No, no, no… I never wanted this."

"Oh honey," her reflection coos with a sad chuckle, "it's not about you want. It's about what you deserve."

"This could all be over," she hears Costia say as the woman comes to stand beside the slaughtered bodies on the floor, before looking up. "You just need to tell them. You could save us all. Instead, you're choosing to be selfish. Who are you really doing this for, Lexa? You're choosing to suffer. Don't you see it? You're going to kill them all. But then again, should I really expect anything different. You broke my heart and you're letting me suffer now. You're selfish, Lexa."

"I'm sorry," Lexa cries as she shakes and trembles in the chair, "I never meant to hurt you, I never meant to hurt anyone."

"But you did," Clarke's voice whispers in the back of her head, "and now you're going to pay for it."

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**January 30th 2012, 21:30**

**Griffin-Woods Residence, New York**

Clarke parks her car in the driveway, groaning at the sight of the snow piled up on the front step. She carefully maneuvers over it and unlocks the front door. She enters her house, shucking off her coat and gloves as she adjusts to the warm heat from the fireplace in the living room. After prying off her boots, Clarke walks into the room, only to have her heart melt at the sight before her. She leans on the doorframe and simply takes it in with a small smile.

Aden and Tris are curled up with Anya on the couch, both of them clambered over her in some fashion to leave the older blonde almost squished beneath them. Tris' small toddler body is pressed up against Anya's chest, with one of the woman's arms clasped protectively over her daughter's back.
as they rest. Aden is rolled on her side, his head tucked into her neck and an arm thrown over his sister's back while Anya's other arm curls around his shoulders.

Deciding that the moment is too good to let go, Clarke fishes out her phone and snaps a picture before walking in and kneeling before the slumbering woman. She gently strokes the fine hairs on the back of Anya's wrist as to not startle her. Her face heats up when a gentle hazel eye peaks open and a soft groan leaves the older woman's lips. She shifts and attempts to go back to sleep, but when it's clear that Clarke isn't having any of it, Anya finally opens both her eyes.

"It's almost ten," Clarke whispers as she looks to her children. "What did you guys do that got you all wiped out?" Anya can't stop the lazy grin from creeping up on her face as she looks down at Tris and then over at Aden with a protective and loving expression that melts Clarke's heart.

"I took the kids out for a snowball fight with O and Lincoln. Indra tagged along and even brought your mother into it. The kids had fun," Anya murmurs as she fondly gazes upon the children. Clarke knows that Anya's aware that the children are her nephew and her niece, but there are somedays that Clarke knows that Anya treats them as if they were her own offspring. One of Clarke's hands reach up to softly tangle with Anya's own on Tris' back, playing with her fingers.

"So you took my three year old out for a snowball fight with people more than twice her age?" Clarke asks with a soft, teasing voice as she arches her brow. She holds back her laughter when Anya's eyes comically widen with guilt and worry, but upon seeing the playfulness in Clarke's eyes, she relaxes again.

"You know, Tris can hold her own. She's a feisty little one," Anya says proudly as she presses a kiss to her daughter's soft brown hair. "She's gonna be driving boys and girls crazy when she's older with the amount of sass and energy she has." Clarke rolls her eyes and looks to her daughter with a sigh.

"I hate it when you talk about their futures like that. To me, she's just a kid and she'll always be a kid. I don't want her to grow up," Clarke hums as she places her palm on the back of Tris' head and lets her fingers play through her soft hair. "She's already so tall and big now." Anya mumbles something in agreement, her eyes drooping again as she fights off the fatigue. Clarke chuckles and then gives her sister-in-law a gentle squeeze of the hand.

"Come on," Clarke urges gently, rising to her feet. "Let's get the kids into bed and then I'll make us a cup of tea."

Anya nods, letting Clarke take Tris so she can take Aden into her arms. It's been a bit of a routine of theirs when either of them come home late from work. After being out of the military, Anya was struggling to find purpose in her life. Stuck between grieving and feeling guilty over her sister's death had left the woman lost and out of sorts. When Clarke had suggested that Anya continue her passion for helping people, she decided to do some schooling to hopefully become a youth counsellor for at-risk kids in the mainland area. It was only now, after three and a half years, that she's found a way to open back up.

"So…," Clarke says as she pulls her own cup into her hands, "have you thought about what we've been talking about?"

Anya pauses, letting the mug warm her hands before she takes a deep breath and nods. Clarke arches her brow and leans forward. "And?"

"And…," Anya trails off as she looks to her tea before glancing up at Clarke with soft, vulnerable eyes. "I want do it. I… I'm ready."
Clarke nearly bursts from her happiness as she leaps forward and wraps Anya in her arms. She squeezes harder when she feels Anya's arms link around her waist and her face bury in the crook of her neck. She smooths down the frazzled dirty-blonde curls before pressing a kiss to her sister-in-law's temple. Happy tears cloud in Anya's eyes as she pulls Clarke tighter and lets herself fall apart in the woman's strong and comforting arms.

"What changed your mind?" Clarke asks as she pulls away and sits back on her seat, one her hands still entwined with Anya's own. The older woman smiles and looks to the base of the steps for a flash of a second before turning to look back at her sister-in-law with a brave smile.

"The kids at the clinic, O and Lincoln, Tris and Aden, and, uh, you…," Anya stumbles awkwardly as she blushes, rubbing the back of her head. "I just wanted to be better, and I think that I can only be better if I take that first step, you know? Help is something I've never really done before, and working with these kids has helped me realize that I don't have to berate myself over what happened. I mean… I still miss her and I think about her all the time and there are some days that are just… just so fucking hard," Anya chokes up a bit as tears well in her eyes, but she musters up the courage to continue when Clarke squeezes her hand.

"There are days in which I can't get out of bed, nights where I can't get any sleep because all I transport myself back to is that day that I lost her. It's driven away my confidence and has weighed down on me for too long. I… I need to be in a place where I can accept what happened. Where I can forgive myself." Anya pauses for a moment, her eyes watering as she looks up to Clarke with a heartbreakingly pleading gaze. "I… I… do I deserve forgiveness?"

The question is croaked out so hoarsely that Clarke feels her heart ache tenderly at the words. She knows all too well of Anya's deprecation over her sister's death. Instead of responding with words, she pulls Anya back into her arms and hugs her close. She lets Anya cry into her shoulder, knowing that it's hard for the older woman to show emotion, especially sadness and grief, with anyone. Their bond had strengthened over the past few years as they dealt with the adversity of facing each day without Lexa. But, as the old saying goes, time heals; and it has been healing, for both of them, even if they don't always see it.

"You are forgiven," Clarke whispers into Anya's ear, "you have nothing to be sorry for, but for whatever you seek forgiveness from, you deserve it." Anya just sobs harder at the words, gripping onto Clarke like she's a lifeline. Clarke only clutches her back harder as they both take their time to heal in the silence.

"I want you to come with me," Anya murmurs weakly into Clarke's shoulder, swallowing thickly. "If… if you could… or even want to?"

"Of course," Clarke says warmly as she kisses Anya's head. "You know that I'm here for you, An. We're family."

Anya just sighs and nods, nuzzling underneath her friend's jaw as Clarke hums gently. They both pull apart, and only then does Clarke allow herself to yawn and slouch a little. Anya watches her with fond bemusement as she holds out her hand for Clarke to take. The woman sighs and allows Anya to hoist her to her feet. The two of them place the mugs in the sink and turn off the lights before heading towards the bottom of the staircase. Clarke's arms weave around Anya's waist and the older woman's arm slides over Clarke's shoulders. Her lips press a kiss to the top of Clarke's head, earning a sleepy sigh of contentment from her.

"Come on," Anya chuckles tiredly as she lets out a yawn of her own, "it's getting late. We should get some rest."
"Mm," Clarke mumbles as Anya takes her to her bedroom and pulls out a pair of pyjamas and a top. She leaves for the bathroom, allowing Clarke the privacy to get changed before Anya can return. When the older blonde comes back, she's dressed in a pair of boxers and an old gym shirt. Clarke smiles when Anya fidgets, always unsure before Clarke pats the space beside her. Anya sighs and allows herself to settle beside the blonde on the bed.

After sometime in silence and darkness, and just as Clarke is on the verge of slipping off to sleep, she hears Anya's voice whisper next to her.

"Clarke?" She croaks, and Clarke can tell from the tone of her voice that it's a bad attack soon to happen. Anya's PTSD had a way of hitting her at random times, with darkness or nighttime being the most vulnerable environments. She'd awoken one night a year ago to a phone call at almost six in the morning. Anya had been borderline incoherent, mumbling and crying about an overpass and alcohol. It had been a miracle that the bridge was close to the house and Clarke was able to make it in time. And, in turn, Anya had seen her in her darkest moments.

During the transition of Lexa's one-year death anniversary, Clarke hadn't even left her room or talked to a single soul. She'd holed herself up in their bed and cried the entire day into Lexa's pillow. She pushed away everyone for a good few months after that, even her own children. She barely was able to look at Tris or even take care of her, without the thought of Lexa intruding on her mind. It had been Anya and Aden that had taken care of her daughter and gave her the love and attention she was unable to do as a result of her grief. And yet, despite it all, her children and family were forgiving and patient, knowing what Lexa had meant, and will always mean to the blonde. She knows that she may never date again, at least not soon, but even then none would compare to her wife.

"Come here," Clarke whispers as she opens her arms and beckons Anya to come in. "It's okay, An. You're safe. I've got you."

Anya doesn't speak, not that she ever does during a particularly bad attack, but she trembles and cries into Clarke's arms. Clarke just hums the same song that would calm Lexa after a bad night, not surprised to find that her raspy voice holds the same power over the older Woods sibling. Anya still twitches and fumbles under the covers, but soon enough, she allows herself to let Clarke guide her back to safety. She lets Clarke take the reigns of her mind and anchor her to a safe spot, a place that she can call home, a place where she never has to feel the weight of her grief alone. And when it's time, Anya will do the same for her.

They both know they need to talk about it, about how they feel comfort in each other's arms, how nights are harder to get through without each other's comfort. They both know they need to talk about the soft touches and gentle glances, the jokes and the way they cling to each other like two peas in a pod. They need to talk about how Tris accidentally calls Anya her mother and neither of them are particularly harsh when they correct her. They need to talk about how they get flustered at the sight of each other baring a little more skin than usual, whether it be in the form of a swimsuit or an accidental run-in on the way to the bathroom. They need to talk about how people they've never met always see them as a couple instead of two people recovering with each other.

There are so many things they need to talk about, but not tonight.

No, not tonight.
Lexa feels something warm and wet dripping down her nose as she thrown into the torture cell with a harsh shove.

The drug is vicious, she discovers, making her tremble and ache for another dosage within only a few hours. Each hallucination is similar to the next. Images of her killing Clarke in all sorts of grotesque mannerisms. It drives her insane and it makes her rip out whatever tufts of hair she has left. Whenever she sees even a few strands of the chestnut curls, her mind transports itself to her reflection, of the atrocities she commits, and Lexa can't help but pull them out.

"Get up," Cage bellows as he reaches for his tool kit. "We're going to try this again."

"I already told you," Lexa snarls as she spits out a wad of blood, "I'll tell you fucking nothing."

"We'll see how long that lasts," Cage growls back, reaching for her shirt collar and hoisting her upwards. Two guards wring their arms around her shoulders and shove her into the chair. "Besides, I'm not coming to torture you. The chief wants a word with you first." Lexa snaps her jaws like a feral animal, chuckling lowly.

"Wow, a visit for me? What did I ever do to accommodate such a wealthy fame?" She replies with snark to her voice. Cage snarls and backhands her violently.

"I almost felt that one," Lexa chirps again, earning another set of punches to her ribs and a final kick to the groin. "Fucking bastard."

"Enough," a deep, growly voice interrupts. Lexa nods her head up to see the chief walking into the cell with his hands behind his back. Beside him, a man with a camera walks in. Both of them are glaring at Lexa with pure hatred in their eyes. The look of anger causes her to deflate a little, but she keeps her chin up.

"I am not here to torture you," the chief says as he nods at Cage to leave. Once they're gone, the chief pulls up a chair and stares at her.

"Your eyes are bloodshot," he observes carefully, raising a brow. Lexa chuckles, spitting out another wad of blood near his foot.

"Drugs'll do that to you," she says with a shrug. "But what would you know about it?"

"Considering I fabricated the substance," the man says as he leans forwards, "I do, in fact, know everything about it, Captain Woods."

"Then I'll have to say that your chemistry skills need some improvement," Lexa chuckles as she looks up, her teeth coated in blood. One of the guards growls and rises from his post at the door, his hand going for his baton. Before he can move, the chief holds up his hand, not once breaking eye contact with her.

"No," he says in calm voice. "We are not here to impose violence. We are here to seek reason."
"Reason?" Lexa spits in disbelief. "What a load of bullshit. You are sadistic whoremongers. The only reason you want is something to curb your torture porn."

"Let me make myself clear, Captain, I am not here for negotiations," the chief says sternly, leaning forward. Lexa frowns slightly. Without speaking or ordering a command through his hands, the camera man steps forward and places the device in the man's hands. Lexa looks to the camera and then the chief.

"I want to show you something," he says as he turns the camera around and presses play. "Just watch."

Lexa goes to turn away, but then the guards come and hold her back. They peel back her eyelids and tape them to her brows to prevent her from closing her eyes and disobeying. The chief looks unaffected as Lexa struggles, but soon enough, she can't help but watch the small screen, her expression going from hardened to disbelief in an instant. She stares at the images flashing by, tears welling in her eyes as she struggles in her chains painfully.

"Where did you get this?" Lexa asks, her voice shaking. "What the fuck is this?"

"This," the chief says as he pulls the camera away and leans back in is chair, "this is why you are my hostage."

"I…" Lexa stumbles on her words as she feels her eyelids being untaped. "I didn't order any of that."

"And yet, they still did it." The chief responds, calm and collective. "It seems as though you lack the necessary skills to lead a team, Captain."

"You made it up," Lexa says with a shake of her head, "my men would never--"

"Never is a big word, Captain Woods. I used to say I'd never eat goat meat as a child. Now? I love it," the chief responds. "Never and always do not exist."

"I didn't tell them to do that," Lexa says as she struggles in her chains. "Your fight is with them, not me."

"My fight is not with the men who raped my wife and cut my son's throat," the chief rasps as he stares at Lexa blankly. "Their fight is over. My fight is you and the others like you, the ones that give the orders and hold the power. These men are soldiers following orders. It doesn't matter if they do or do not. What matters is that they were told to do something and were not given a parameter. They were not given rules to which there are consequences if they're not followed. My fight is with the lack of leadership in your troops that decide to intervene in a place that does not need their presence or so-called protection."

Lexa stays quiet as the chief leans forward and folds his hands in his lap. "You see, Captain Woods, I am a man of order. I am a man of honour. I believe that power is granted to those and with that power, comes responsibility of things beyond just the lives of my people. It's the lives of my people's children, of their children, of their futures. My power can ensure that they never have to fight a war, that they receive education, food and water, shelter -- things that I never had. It is something that I hold with as much humility as I can. If I can use my power to protect my people, then I will. But I will also use my power to govern my people, to introduce a standard of living that they can live by, rules and consequences that enable them to understand respect. Power is nothing to a man with a gun, Captain Woods, but instead, it is only a weapon to a man who chooses pragmatism and logic over violence."
"I don't understand," Lexa growls as she fits in the chair. "If you cared so much about your stupid power, why torture me? Why keep slaves?"

"I am simply letting you entertain the same treatment your soldiers would give my people in their containment prisons," the chief replies without a breath. "I assumed that you would not be quick to believe the sight in the video, but I thought that maybe some first-hand experience would help you." Lexa shakes her head and spits again, her veins pulsing as she feels her mind spinning. The chief motions for a guard with a briefcase in his hand to come forward.

"Something tells me that your treatment requires an added strength," the chief says as he clicks open the briefcase and draws out a metal syringe with the red drug inside of it. Lexa hates how part of her mind sings at the sight of it and practically aches to have it course through her veins. She tries to fight the addiction, but she's helpless when the chief stands and places the sharp end of the needle at the crook of her neck. She feels the bite of the metal piercing the skin before the chief gently presses down on the plunger to inject the drug into her system. He looks down at her, mouth parted in a clean, tight line.

"Sweet dreams, Captain."

March 19th 2012, 13:10
Public School 131, New York

"This week we will have a pop quiz and there is a paper at the end of the month…"

Aden doodles absently in his notebook as his teacher rattles on at the front of the class. He looks down to see the face of his mother forming in the top corner of his paper, and he sighs, placing the pencil down and rubbing his face. Before the teacher can finish, the bell rings and the middle-schoolers are hopping out of their chairs and bustling to their next class. Not wanting attention to be drawn to himself, Aden packs his things and stands.

"She's really beautiful," a voice sounds from behind him, causing the boy to jump and turn in fear. His face pales as he sees Jackson Winters, the captain of the soccer team, staring back at him curiously. He grins, revealing the small gap between his green-and-blue braced teeth. His shaggy brown hair spills over the side of his face and hides some of the freckles on his cheeks. He nods to his notebook and offers him another smile, causing Aden to gulp nervously.

"So…," Jackson trails off, his hand coming up to grip one of his backpack straps, "who is she?"

Aden looks to his watch and gives him a weak smile. "No one. Listen, I have to get to class."

"Chemistry?" Jackson asks, his voice gentle and light. Aden frowns.

"How did you know?"
"We sit across from each other," Jackson says with another kind smile. "It's okay if you didn't notice. You're not all that good with paying attention."

"Chemistry is boring," Aden says as he fidgets on his feet. "It's a bit easy for me."

"From the way you ace every test, I figured as much. You're really smart," Jackson says, a bit of a blush tinting his cheeks as he says the last part. Aden smiles weakly again and shuffles towards the door, trying to hide his anxiety as Jackson follows him, running a hand through his hair as he continues to talk.

"My sister is really smart. She's pretty good at Math. She's in high school. Hard to believe we'll be there next year, huh?" Aden fiddles with his backpack as he nods absently, not really paying attention to Jackson. The boy screws up his brows and sighs as the two of them reach the door to their class.

"Look," Jackson says with a soft, almost vulnerable voice. "I'm sorry if I seem intrusive or something. It's just that, you've been here for three years and I've never seen you speak to anyone that isn't your project partner. I don't know if you just don't like people or something, but I just think you're really good at art and a great student and seem really cool and I thought I could talk to you but I didn't mean to offend you or something. I just… yeah. I'm sorry about this. I just figured I would ask if you wanted to be my friend. Like, we could hang out and stuff. But I was totally wrong and again, I am so sorry about misreading you."

At the boy's flustered bumbling, Aden can't help but look up. The pause has Jackson squirming, and Aden can't help but a small smile pull at his lips.

"You didn't," he says gently, "I'm just not a people-person. I don't know if you can tell, but I don't really have friends."

"Oh," Jackson replies, his voice deflated. "Well, I guess I'm sorry that I kinda got in the way of that. I should have just kept my mouth shut--"

"Jackson," Aden says, interrupting the rambling boy with another smile. "It's okay. I'm just not used to people talking to me. Everyone thinks I'm a weird loner."

"I don't," Jackson nearly blurts out as he looks at Aden with bright eyes. "I think you're awesome."

At that, Aden can't help a blush of his own and Jackson coughs awkwardly, his cheeks a bright red from embarrassment. "Again, I'm sorry for--"

"Are you Canadian?" Aden asks, stopping the boy from another rambling apology. Jackson frowns, shaking his head.

"No, why?"

"You apologize a lot," Aden jokes lightly, giving Jackson another smile. Jackson's mouth opens and Aden presumes he's about to apologize again, but before he can speak, their teacher calls the students to sit at their seats because the lesson is about to begin. Aden nods over to the seats in the back and smiles again.

"We should probably…"

"Yeah, we should."

Together, the two boys sit down and pull out their notebooks and begin to fill in the worksheet that
Jackson fumbles out another apology, which earns a chuckle from most of the class. He would be embarrassed if it weren't for the sweet sound of laughter coming from the sandy-haired boy beside him. At the sound of Aden laughing, Jackson turns and finds his nerves easing. Aden just shakes his head good-humouredly before resuming his work on his page. He continues to doodle in his book after he's done, but not the image of his mother this time.

Instead, he draws blue eyes and shaggy brown hair, a gap-toothed smile and freckles.

*Maybe*, he thinks as he looks back to Jackson frowning over his homework sheet, *maybe having a friend could be a nice change.*

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**May 15th 2012, 18:00**

**Griffin-Woods Residence, New York**

Clarke walks into the living room of her house, only two notice two things.

1. Her children are gone.

2. Anya is standing before her, dressed spiffily in a button-up and dark-wash jeans.

"What's this?" Clarke asks with a goofy grin as Anya comes over and takes her bags and jacket with a charming smile. Anya shrugs and places the items on a hook by the door before shoving her hands
in her pockets with a bit of nervousness. Clarke can't help but smirk at the awkwardness billowing off the older woman as they both stand there in a blissful silence. Anya finally draws a breath, rubbing the back of her head anxiously as she shuffles on her feet.

"Well, I convinced O and Lincoln to take the kids for the night," Anya explains as she smiles at Clarke. "I figured you needed a night out. Or, we both did."

"I'm thirty-seven," Clarke laughs as she shakes her head, "am I not a bit old for that?" Anya frowns.

"If you're saying you're old, what are you thinking about me?" Anya jokes with a dip of her head. "C'mon, Griff. We deserve a night out."

"Where would we even go?" Clarke asks as she looks at the time. Anya's smile grows confidently and Clarke cocks her brow.

"I have just the place," Anya says as she extends her hand, "if you trust me?"

Clarke eyes her hand for a moment before she smiles and takes it softly in her own palm, trying to ignore the shivers that run down her spine at the touch. Anya blushes slightly at the sensation before she musters up some more courage to give Clarke's hand a soft squeeze. The blonde purses her lips and smiles.

"I do."

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"A karaoke bar?" Clark asks with a chuckle as Anya opens the door of the bar and leads her inside. "Are we back in the eighties all of the sudden?"

"Don't diss the eighties, C. It was the best decade," Anya jokes as she lightly shoves Clarke's shoulder. "Especially with your perm."

Clarke blushes and shakes her head and shoves Anya back as they both go to sit at the bar. Before Clarke can place an order, Anya speaks for them.

"She'll have an Amaretto Sour and I'll take a Orange Screwdriver," Anya says as she flashes the bartender a smirk. Clarke laughs as soon as she goes back to make the drinks, shaking her head at her sister-in-law. Anya gives her a mischievous wink when Clarke tries to hold back her smirk.

"You know, as much as I loved the eighties, I do remember that my liver suffered through them, too." Anya laughs at Clarke's response and she shakes her head, sliding a bill on the table when the bartender returns with the drinks. The two of them take a sip and immediately cringe, setting them back down on the table.

"Yup," Anya says as she screws up her face, "I strongly agree with that."

"Man, it feels good to get out though," Clarke says as she takes in the ambience of the bar. It's been far too long since she's let herself have a night to herself, and she knows that the exact same goes for Anya. The older woman nods and hums as they both listen to the music and take a few more sips of their drink.

A few minutes later, with another couple of drinks in them, the two head over towards a small booth and order a plate of nachos to wash down the alcohol and give them some sustenance so they won't completely regret it in the morning. They're nursing their fourth round, their hands playing with each other atop the table as they continue talking about random things, like their old days in college back
when Clarke had been in a sorority and a total party monster, while Anya had been part of the track team and hung out exclusively with other jocks. Clarke ribs her about the protectiveness Anya would exert whenever anyone tried to make a move on either her or Lexa, of how during those years Clarke had secretly thought the protectiveness was endearing and cute.

"I'm not cute," Anya mumbles into her glass as she slumps back against the seat, eyes glazed from the alcohol. "I am a total badass."

"Sure you are," Clarke giggles as she pokes her sister-in-law in the ribs playfully. "You used to binge watch Bill Nye when we were kids and dressed up as him for a solid eight years. Don't even try to deny it. We've been friends since forever, An. You are cute. I will tell you that you are cute. Get used to it."

Anya rolls her eyes and Clarke laughs again, noticing how Anya's lips curl upwards in the faintest smile. Anya gives their hands a small squeeze and Clarke closes her eyes and hums, leaning her head upon the older woman's shoulder. She takes a whiff of Anya's cologne and she feels her heart skip a beat. Anya's lips crash into her hair and the older woman lets out a raspy laugh when they watch a drunk couple dancing in the main floor. Just as the song ends, the host calls into the microphone for the next volunteers. Before Clarke can even take a sip of her next drink, Anya is hoisting them up and towards the mic.

"What are you doing?" Clarke laughs as she stops, pulling her hand away from Anya. The older woman smiles and points to the stage.

"There's no point coming to a karaoke bar if we don't actually do karaoke!" Anya tells her with a giggle. "Now come on, I want to see what they have."

"You go," Clarke insists as she pouts and crosses her arms in a way that makes Anya blush. "I'll be your fan-girl."

"Come on, Clarke!" Anya pleads, pulling on the blonde's arm. "Just one song."

"No," Clarke chuckles, shaking her head. The host goes to call out another volunteer when Anya decides to just take the mic herself. She whispers something into the host's ear before nodding. The host laughs and goes to the computer to pull up the next song. Clarke stands by the bar, arms crossed in amusement as Anya stumbles onto the stage. She's clearly drunk, but Clarke lets her achieve her dreams of being a karaoke star.

And then, the first note of the song begins to play.

Instantly, Clarke feels a blush creep over her face as Anya takes the mic and holds it close to her lips.

"Alright, so my date for the night decided that I come up here and do this alone, but we all know that this song is more of a duet, so I hope she'll come up and join after the first verse or chorus or something." Anya slurs the words with a happy, drunken rasp before the guitar part kicks in and the song starts to play.

"When people keep repeating that you'll never fall in love," Anya sings as she sways to the music, her voice low and smooth. "When everybody keeps retreating. But you can't seem to get enough, let my love open the door." She repeats the last phrase the four times before dancing out to the instrumental. She makes eye-contact with Clarke and curls her finger, playfully beckoning her over as she begins the next verse with a rhythmic clap from the dancing crowd.

"When everything feels all over, when everybody seems unkind," Anya belts into the microphone,
pointing to Clarke again, "I'll give you a four leaf clover. Take all the worry out of your mind. Let my love open the door, let my love open the door... to your heart." At this point, with both the crowd cheering her on and Anya relentlessly beckoning her to come onto the stage, Clarke can't help but leave her spot at the bar and rush up the steps to take a mic from the host. The crowd cheers as Anya steps back to give Clarke the floor as she takes the mic and starts to sing her own verse.

"I have the only key to your heart; I can stop you falling apart," Clarke sings the bridge into the mic as the crowd whoops and cheers, "try today, you'll find this way; come on and give me a chance to say let my love open the door."

"It's all I'm living for," Anya chimes in, pulling her fist in and shuffling from side to side.

"Release yourself from misery," Clarke echoes back, closing her eyes. "There's only one thing gonna set you free, that's my love."

"Let my love open the door," the two of them sing in unison, earning a few people from the crowd joining them. "Let my love open the door, to your heart."

"When tragedy befalls you, don't let it drag you down," Clarke sings as she looks up to Anya, who gives her a nod and a wide, beaming grin.

"Love can cure your problems," Anya finishes as she reaches out with her spare hand to clasp it with Clarke's own. "You're so lucky I'm around!"

"Let my love open the door," they sing again, dancing with each other as they finish off the song. "Let my love open the door, to your heart."

When they're finished, the crowd cheers and screams for an encore, which both politely decline as they stumble back to the booth. Clarke's hand remains tightly intertwined in Anya's palm as they resume their spot at the booth, watching other couples go up and embarrass themselves just as much as they did. The only thing the both of them know for sure is that it's been too long since either of them have had a night in which they've felt so damned free.

Anya and Clarke stumble back to the house just after two in the morning, still drunk and laughing from their night at the karaoke bar. They snag the bottle of tequila from the kitchen and make their way to the living room. Together, the both of them collapse in a heap by the fireplace with a huff. Anya rests her back against the bed of the couch and Clarke leans up against the mantle of the fireplace, picking at the embers with the poker as Anya takes a Drag of the liquor. Clarke fumbles at the record player until she finds an old U2 album. With a satisfied giggle, she throws it on and the song "Bad" starts to filter through the room. Anya snorts and smiles lazily, leaning her head back against the couch as she looks up at the ceiling with a dazed expression.

"When I was like, seventeen or eighteen, I used to listen to this song over and over again," Anya muses as she watches Anya light the stick and take a drag, before blowing the smoke out and letting it settle between them in a faint cloud.

"Me too," Clarke agrees as she watches Anya light the stick and take a drag, before blowing the smoke out and letting it settle between them in a faint cloud.
"Really?" Anya asks with a bit of disbelief, though her tone remains joking. "I wouldn't expect U2 out of you."

"How long have you known me for?" Clarke asks with a shake of her head. "Why does that surprise you?" Anya shrugs and takes another drag.

"I just... I dunno," Anya fumbles as she shrugs before glancing up at Clarke with mirth in her eyes. "I guess I always took you for more of an N'SYNC fan."

Clarke gasps and reaches over to grab the bottle of tequila, but not before shoving Anya teasingly. "Fuck you." She eyes the stick and motions to it.

"Give me that."

Anya arches her brow. "You sure, Doctor?" Clarke gives her a stern look and Anya, a little dazed and a bit doped up, can't help but resist in handing it over. Shrugging, Anya leans back against the couch and watches in awe as Clarke almost naturally lifts the stick to her lips and takes a massive drag. She waits a moment before forming an 'o' with her mouth and then puffing the smoke out in tiny donut rings. Anya's brows raise in amazement and she claps with a nod.

"So the good doctor does know some party tricks," Anya muses as she takes the stick back and inhales a bit, "I can't believe I had you pegged wrong all these years."

"I was the one that taught Lexa how to smoke," Clarke laughs in a raspy voice as she sips from the bottle. "Poor thing choked the first time."

"Such a lesbian," Anya adds with a chuckle. "Sucking and choking. Thank God she never had to give a blow job to anyone."

"Actually," Clarke says with a drunken hiccup, "one time we tried oral with the strap-on. She wasn't too bad. I was better, though. She loved it. Her reaction was priceless."

"Jesus," Anya recoils in feigned disgust. "TMI, Griffin."

"Oh come on," Clarke prods as she pokes Anya's leg, "like you're any worse. Remember that time Lexa and I caught you fingers-deep in Becca Reinheimer in the pool? I mean, that was a public space, An." Screwing up her brows, Anya struggles to remember until the memory flashes through her mind and she blushes.

"Oh," she coughs out as she reaches for the tequila to down a shot, "that."

"For the first few years of our friendship I got Lexa to do all my homework," Clarke chuckles as she takes the stick from Anya and does another smoke-ring. "I was the badass, but it was just too bad your old ass wasn't there to see it. You think I'm such a square, don't you?" Anya watches as Clarke eyes her hazily, her pupils blown wide and lips curled upwards in a lazy smile. Another blush creeps up on the older blonde's face, but this time not from embarrassment. She quickly gulps down another sip of tequila before smiling over at Clarke, her head leaning against the armrest of the sofa.

"I think I'm starting to reassess," Anya hums as she grins at Clarke, "Snoop Dogg."

"Funny," Clarke jokes as she slides over to the couch so she can get away from the flickering embers of the fire. "You're a real jackass, you know."

"Born n' raised," Anya says as she proudly claps a hand over her chest. Clarke snorts and laughs again, letting her hands wander down to graze the tips of Anya's fingers. She sighs as she takes the
bottle from her sister-in-law and takes a sip. "Just because I was a cheerleader in high school doesn't mean that I was a goody-two shoes. If anything, Lexa was the teacher's pet. I was the resident bad-girl who always got detention." Anya smiles lazily over at her, the blush spreading to her cheeks.

"Yeah," she rasps with a chuckle, "but remember, you ended up dating a football player before leaving him for the nerd with the tape holding her glasses together. Your life is essentially every high-school romantic comedy, Griffin. Just with a queer twist." Clarke sighs and looks at the bottle with a nostalgic smile.

"I am such a cliché," she jokes as she looks up with a sparkle in her eye, "aren't I?" Anya waits a moment before she laughs and nods.

"That you are," she replies with a nod. Raising her stick, Anya nods to the bottle in Clarke's hand. "To the jackass and the cliché. May we fit the roles of our stereotypes forever." Clarke shakes her head and laughs, but raises the bottle to her lips and downs a sip anyways. When she pulls the bottle back, she watches Anya puff out that same kind of smoke ring. For a moment, she's reminded of her younger days, when she would watch Anya hang around the school yards with her tougher looking friends, smoking joints and drinking. In that way, both Lexa and Anya were vastly different. Lexa was more timid and shy, whereas Anya had a personality larger than life, even if her glare looked sharp enough to slice through a brick wall in a single slash.

Anya is someone she's always admired and feared from afar. She'd gotten close to her in university, when both Lexa and Anya ran track for the varsity team. Anya was the overprotective, brutish older sister with an attitude, one that put Clarke off when she'd first started dating Lexa. While they remained good friends, Clarke treaded lightly during the first two years of her relationship. But as soon as Anya warmed back up, their relationship became tighter knit and Clarke even regarded Anya as her best friend. Any time she had an issue or even troubles in her relationship, Anya was the first person she'd talk to for advice.

"You were kind of a pain in the ass though," Anya hums after a while as she lolls her head slightly to the side to give Clarke a drunken grin. "I meant that."

"Thanks," Clarke snorts in mock hurt as she leans against the couch, "you too."

Anya takes a second to just drink in the image of the woman beside her, a woman she knows has been through hell and back. She'd been there when Clarke's father had passed away during their senior year of high school. She'd been there, staying up with Clarke on those sleepless nights, talking about the one thing that Lexa never could understand. She hadn't been old enough to properly experience the death of a parent, for she'd been only six when their father had died. Anya never remembered much of their mother other than her beauty and kind heart. She'd always been close with her father, and losing him at twelve had nearly broken her. So, when Clarke turned up on her doorstep, piss-drunk and sobbing, Anya immediately understood. Lexa had fretted and felt out of place, but Anya knew that if she could've understood, she would have done the exact same thing she'd done with Clarke -- offer a shoulder to cry on and a place to vent.

"Hey An?" Clarke's raspy voice pulls Anya from her thoughts. Anya nods and adjusts herself so she's facing Clarke.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks," Clarke whispers as she continues the gentle tangling of their fingers. "You're right… we both needed this."

Anya's smile softens as Clarke's eyes slowly drift upwards. It's in that moment, that her tongue gets
twisted and heavy in her mouth and she finds herself unable to understand just how or why she can't produce words anymore. Clarke's tongue darts out and wets her lips, her chest rising a little as she draws a quick breath. Nervously, Anya's gaze drifts to Clarke's lips and her head swims with a million different thoughts at once. Clarke's head is suddenly leaning forward and before she can stop herself, Anya finds herself involuntarily leaning in, her eyelids drooping shut as they come closer together.

Their kiss tastes of alcohol and smoke, with a sweet but burning tang of tequila and the sharp kick of inebriated lust.

Clarke's free hand comes up and cups Anya's cheek with her palm. She knows that this is so, so incredibly wrong, but she can't help it. She's warm for the first time in three and a half years. Anya's tongue is soft and smooth and she tastes good, with a hint of a smokiness to her breath that uncharacteristically screams Anya. It's Clarke that parts her mouth first, letting loose a soft gasp when Anya's tongue chases her own back into her mouth, eager and warm. She tests the waters with experienced rolls and licks of her tongue, pushing deeper when they both feel comfortable. The older woman leans a bit further forward and Clarke whimpers, fistng her fingers in the baby curls at the back of Anya's neck, still being mindful of Anya's sensitive skin and boundaries.

They continue their kiss until they run out of air and are gasping for breath. It's only then do their foreheads lean together, eyes still closed and lips puffy and slightly parted. The two of them look at each other, eyes glazed over by both alcohol and lust.

Anya is the first one to move, gently sliding her free hand around Clarke’s waist and allowing them to tip backwards so she's pressing her weight atop the younger woman. Clarke gasps and reaches for her shirt, fingering under the hem to lightly graze the sharpened v-line of the other woman's abs. Anya kisses Clarke harder, hissing at the feeling of the soft touches. Clarke's fingers tap and trace over the rings of muscle that adorn her abdomen, moaning in pleasure.

And then, it's Clarke making the next rushed movement, tipping Anya to the side as she rolls on top, grinding against the older woman’s waist as she loses herself in the motions. Anya’s whimpering into her every touch, her hips involuntarily canting upwards and meeting Clarke's soft thrusts. Somewhere in the midst, one of their hands meet and squeeze, as if they cannot bear to be apart, to not have skin on skin as they move together in a gentle rhythm.

It's only as Clarke’s hands slide under her shirt and accidentally graze over the scar from when she'd been cut in Tagab, does Anya suddenly become aware of just who she is kissing. Clarke seems to make the same realization, but instead of moving her hands away, they remain still under the shirt, frozen to Anya's scalding flesh. Their other hands that had been connected don't detach right away, not until Clarke pulls away first. Anya fights to keep the pain from her eyes as Clarke shakes her head and holds back her tears. The older woman bites back her own feelings and waits in a horrid silence for Clarke to speak.

“Fuck,” Clarke swears miserably as she can't stop the crack in her voice. “I... I just, I'm so sorry.” Anya feels tears well up under her eyes as she feels Clarke's hands retract from her stomach to reach for her face, her thumbs tracing the sharp line of her cheeks softly. Her touches are so delicate, so careful and attentive.

Their breaths patter against their mouths as they remain leaned in towards each other, but neither of them pull away. They're both trapped in the unknowable realm of tender healing. Any wrong move, and all these years of dealing with their harrowed grief could disappear almost instantly. Both of them know it and they can't risk it.

They can't break each other.
"We can't," Anya says first in a bit of a choked whisper, "it's not... I..."

"I know," Clarke whispers back shakily, a tear sliding down her cheek from under her closed eyelids. "I just wish... I..."

"I know," Anya repeats as she reaches up and snakes her arm around Clarke's shoulders and draws her in for a hug, tequila forgotten. "We both need time. And this... we're not ready for this. I'm not even sure if we should be ready for this. Not that I don't... it's just..."

"We're trying to fill a void that can't be filled," Clarke sums it up in a desolate whimper as her head slumps against Anya's chest in a tired motion. "The only one who can fill it is gone. I don't know what to do, An. I can't move on from her. And you deserve better than to be my rebound. I can't bear to hurt you, An."

Anya lets the words wash over her and she sighs, pressing her lips to Clarke's hair softly. "You don't have to move on, C. You guys were soul mates. But that doesn't mean that space will be empty forever." Clarke nods her head upwards and Anya opens her eyes to gaze into those glassy blue eyes with a sad, but still hopeful expression. "We'll fill it, Clarke. One day, we won't be empty. We'll be good again."

"Promise?" Clarke asks in a hoarse voice. Anya nods, squeezing their hands and leaning forward to peck her crown protectively. Something in her heart cracks as she realizes that she'd just kissed her sister-in-law, when her own sister died with her last request being she take care of her family. Pushing the chilling thought away, Anya focuses her energy and attention on Clarke. She smoothes down her tense spine with loving and tender strokes before kissing the top of her head again. Her lips are trembling and her hands feel like they're about to fall off, but she doesn't feel like running. She just inches closer and sighs.

"I promise," Anya hums into her skin. "One day, none of this will hurt as much. One day, we'll be full and happy."

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**Date and Time Unknown**

**Location Unknown**

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Lexa startles awake from the sound of her cell door slamming open. She blinks open her good eye to see Kareem and his mother walk in, trepidation painted across both of their expressions. Behind them, Emerson walks in with a smirk tinging his lips as he shuffles into the musky cell. He grabs at the beaten captain roughly, hauling her upwards with a stifled grunt. Lexa hisses as her metal cuffs dig into the chaffed skin upon her wrist. Her body trembles and aches for another dose of the red, no matter how traumatizing the hallucinations she receives. She has no idea what's in the drug, but it's irresistible.

"Pick it up," Emerson growls as he shoves her into the narrow walkway, "he doesn't like to be late."
Lexa spits at him, earning herself a jab to the side from Emerson's baton. Electricity courses up and down her spine, rattling off the metal chains to further burn at her damaged skin. She bites back a growl and reluctantly obeys, shuffling forward with a barely-concealed limp. She squints as harsh sunlight bursts through the entrance of the cave, showering her in a frigid, pale light. She stumbles into the snowy courtyard, estimating that it must be in the middle of winter from the piercing cold that bites at her hollow cheeks. But what makes her shiver is not the cold, but what she sees in the middle of the courtyard, knelt beside Cage.

Costia.

It's been months, Lexa guesses, since she'd last seen her fellow soldier, and she looks worse for wear. Scars line her dark skin, some fresh and others scabbing over with infection. One of her chestnut eyes is now a sickly grey, and her lips are chapped and cracked, bleeding into the white snow. Her clothing is in tatters, lashes covering the sides that are exposed from the ripped fabric. Her fingers, once long and slender and smooth, now worn and broken in awkward places. Her breathing is ragged, barely hanging on as all of her energy is exerted in the slight tilt upwards of her head, giving Lexa a pleading and desolate expression.

Lexa's shoved to stand right in front of her, and for a minute, the withdrawal of the drug fades and all she sees is the loneliness and pain in Costia's gaze. How could I let it get this far? Lexa finds herself asking as tears well up in her eyes at the way Costia shakes her head and sniffles. A heartbreaking whimper escapes those blood-spattered lips as Costia folds her hands and begs up at Cage, her words incoherently mumbled through harsh sobs.

And then Lexa's shackles are being undone and Kareem is standing before her, shuddering as he holds a pipe in his hand. Lexa glances at him, and then the metal with a blank expression. Kareem swallows, his small hands reaching out to offer her the pipe. There's an unrelenting amount of fear in his gaze as he looks down to Costia with guilt and sorrow. Seeing as Lexa is frozen, Emerson roughly takes the pipe and shoves it into Lexa's dominant hand with a grunt.

"What is this?" Lexa asks slowly, her words coated in caution. She doesn't know why she's asking. She knows what this is.

"We have no use for her anymore," Cage answers for her, crossing his arms as the village's chief comes to stand beside him, brandishing his pistol. "She holds no value for us, and there are too many mouths to feed to keep her here." Costia begs again, pleading and shaking her head but she's kicked again by an irate-looking Cage. Costia's pleads become whimpers and she shakes her head, tears streaming down her cracked cheeks as she bleeds into the white snow.

"She is a weight on our shoulders," Cage continues as the chief glares at the soldier. Lexa gulps subtly, not showing the crack in her resolve.

"That's not my problem," Lexa growls, trying to pull a bluff. "We did not choose to be captured."

"As we did not choose to be invaded," the chief cuts in, his words laced with menace. He gestures to Costia again. "You refuse to cooperate. This is the result."

"Then do it yourself," Lexa mutters, throwing the pipe on the ground. "I'm not a murderer."

"Are you not?" The chief asks, quirking his brow. "Was it a ghost that killed three hundred of my men? Was it a spirit that sent soldiers to rape and pillage my villages? Was it all a dream when my wife returned to me with the slain body of my three year old son, or the defiled corpse of my sister?"

Lexa's eyes flicker with rage as she clenches her fist and fights down the swirl of adrenalin that courses through her veins from the withdrawal of the drug.
"That wasn't my fault," she counters with a snarl, "I am not responsible for any of that."

"They acted under your orders," Cage answers coldly, "you are responsible for all of them."

"I didn't tell them to kill innocents," Lexa replies, her response weaker than she'd intended. "I would never."

"Lies," the chief scoffs as he pulls his pistol up and aims it at her forehead, "typical Americans. Living in your little bubble of righteousness. You never see beyond yourselves, do you? All you do is good, is that right? You came here because you thought intervention was your decision to make? You came here because you think you hold the power to create a change, but all you do is destroy. You charge headfirst into battle without thinking of consequences."

"We did what we had to do to protect our people," Lexa growls as she takes a step forward. The chief snorts.

"You come into our country and stake your claim based on a threat that had been executed by a narrow-minded group of individuals. You placed the blame of a terrorist attack on the heads of all, not your target. You come to our country, you take our supplies, you rape our women, kill our men, and then expect this war to settle. You possess weapons greater than any other country. You hold power but you do not know how to wield it. You know nothing of protection."

Lexa swallows and hardens her glare and clenches her fists again. "You lie," she grits out. "We aren't monsters like you."

"Monsters?" The chief spits the world like it's acid. "I did not chain your people to a leash and carry you around like dogs. I did not strip you down and defile you. I did not take a prison that has been closed for a damned good reason and reopen it to curb my own sick desires. My government did not cover up the dastard place as an 'isolated incident' and pretend that it never happened. I did not take your innocents and torture them mindlessly, just because I could. No, Captain, we are not the monsters. Unlike you, my people believe in justice, not revenge or vengeance. Blood must have blood, Captain."

"You drugged me," Lexa growls, her fingers clawing at her tattered shirt. "You tortured the both of us. You're a hypocrite."

"I drugged you and tortured you because you are the one who caused all of this," the chief says with a click of his tongue. "You gave orders and my people suffered as a result of them. You are not innocent, Captain. There is far more blood on your hands than there ever will be on mine. You may lie to yourself as long as you like, Captain, but you know that no one, not even you, can escape the truth. And the truth is that the loss of all those lives falls to you."

"Fuck you," Lexa snaps, though her eyes still well with tears. "I serve my people and I will protect them with my dying breath."

"And what are you willing to do to ensure it?" The chief asks calmly, his head tilting upwards. "What would you sacrifice to keep them safe?"

"Anything," Lexa says back, her jaw clenching with rage. "I would rather die than for them to suffer."

The chief's lips purse into a tight line, looking down to Costia and then back up to her with a hardened glare. "Prove it."

The chief looks to Cage and nods, jutting his chin upwards defiantly as Cage picks up the pipe and
"Kill her," the chief tells her as she feels her blood ignite with a need for a new dose of the drug. When Lexa doesn't move, the chief cocks his gun at her.

"Kill her or I'll kill you," he orders with a cold voice. "And when I do, I will do to your people did to mine. I will kill your son and rape your wife, just as your soldiers did to my family. I have their address, their photos, their contact information. They will be helpless. You kill your soldier and I'll spare them and you."

"No, please." Costia begs as she looks up at Lexa, "please, don't. I don't want to die like that, please-"

"Captain," the chief says as he ignores Costia's whimpers and pleas, "prove to me that are not like your men. Make your decision or I'll kill both of you."

"I won't," Lexa shakes her head as she tries to ward off the images of Clarke's bloodied body strewn across her lap in pieces from her hallucinations. "I won't do it, you can't make me do it. I am not a murderer." The words are getting muffled and garbled as her head spins, the images before her contorting as the sounds of the crowd shouting and egging her own begin to overwhelm her. She looks from the blank-faced chief to Costia in quick flickers of her gaze.

"Lexa," Costia begs as she cries harder, shaking as she cowers beneath Cage's glare and the glinting of the pipe in her hands, "please, fuck, please don't do this! You said you had a plan, you told me that we would get out. I still trust you, please, oh God, fuck, Lexa no, please don't do this, please, please, please--"

"You have a family," the chief states coldly, interrupting Costia's merciless begging. "Do you not want to see them again?"

"Lexa!" Costia is screaming now, "Lexa stop, please! Just look at me, don't do this. Don't give in, don't--"

The soldier's shouting is muffled by a boot to the face by Cage as the man glowers over her. "Shut up, bitch. Treat your captain with respect."

"Lexa," Costia whimpers as she shifts in the snow, "please…"

"No," Lexa says to the chief, trying to reign in her surroundings as they begin to shift with the effects of the withdrawal. "No, I won't do it."

"You don't believe me?" The chief asks as he pulls out his cell phone and pushes the keys before holding it up to his ear. Lexa waits, her breath misting as anxiety pummels through her. The line picks up and Lexa watches as the chief holds the phone out and presses the speaker button.

"Hello?" Clarke's voice sifts through the garbled static. Lexa's eyes widen and she lurches forward.

"Clarke?!" She screams, tears pooling in her eyes. "Clarke, I'm here, Clarke. I'm still alive and I'm coming back for you--"

"Hello is anyone there?" Clarke asks, annoyance in her voice. Lexa looks confused, but then she sees that the phone's microphone as been muted. Just as she's about to shout again, another voice sounds on the phone and it nearly breaks her heart.

"Clarke? Is everything alright?" Anya's voice sounds from the back, dripping with concern. Inside
her chest, Lexa's heart thuds and she sees blackness pooling at the corner of her eyes. There's a pause before Clarke hangs up the phone and the chief puts it back into his pocket. He cocks the gun again, looking up at Lexa with a blank expression. From behind him, a man with a camera approaches, the red light flickering on to signal that he's begun recording their interaction.

"I have a man stationed outside of your wife's house with a loaded gun," the chief tells her smoothly. "All I have to do is call. I won't ask you again."

"Lexa," Costia begs again and the sounds of the people starting to grow antsy begin to make her thoughts drift astray. "Lexa, don't do this, he could be lying."

"Kill her," the chief says again, holding his gun higher. "Or I kill both you and your wife. Make your choice."

Lexa looks to the pipe as sweat furls on her brow and her heart rate accelerates. She tries to breathe and keep under control but she can't hear anything past the sound of Clarke's voice, a voice she hadn't heard in so many years, ringing in her ears. The people roar for her to make a decision as the chief shoots a warning shot into the air before pointing the gun back at her. Costia is sobbing, crying and writhing around as she tries to escape from where she's cornered, but Lexa registers nothing. Her mind is no longer in the present because it decides to finally give into the temptation of the drug's potent withdrawal effects.

"Kill her," the people chant as the snow fades into darkness and the chief's face morphs into her fathers' own. "You will murder them. You will kill your wife and child. Are you just going to let them get away with that? Are you going to let their deaths mean nothing to you? Kill her, Lexa. I raised you to protect your country, not to be a coward. You are weak and spineless, nothing like the daughter that I brought up. Do your job and protect your people. Kill her, now."

Lexa gasps and begins to breathe raggedly as she looks down to Costia's face to see it shift into her own. Her long brown hair lays in tatters and she's laughing cruelly, her reflection holding nothing but malice and sadism. Her hands are coated in blood, the sight of her mauled son and battered wife laying at her knees. That sickening laugh reverberates off the dark walls and Lexa's eyes fill with tears as she sees her reflection holding up her hands to reveal a still-beating heart.

"You did this," her reflection tells her in a low rasp, "and you let it happen. You killed them. You are nobody's hero."

From behind Kane, Indra, Gustus, Kane, Octavia, and Lincoln appear with angry faces as they glare at her. At once, their mouths part and they speak.

"You're a murderer," they tell her in unison, the word burning a hole in her heart as she hears them repeat it again and again. "Murderer, murderer, murderer..."

Lexa looks down to see Anya cradling Clarke and Aden's body, her eyes lit in rage as she cries over the corpses.

"I loved them," Anya snarls at her with malice. "Unlike you, I was there. I protected them. I deserve them, not you. They deserved better than you."

"No," Lexa chokes back as she stares at Clarke's glazed blue eyes, bloodshot and still as they stare up at her. Beside her, Aden's mangled frame lays in Anya's lap, his head protectively cradled by her sister's hands. Her gaze flickers back to her reflection as it continues to laugh at her, a crazed smirk curling her lips.
"See," she says as she cruelly grins up at her, "you are a murderer, Lexa."

"No!" Lexa shouts, her mental restraints snap and she raises her pole and slams the pipe down in the direction of her laughing reflection. She swings the pipe mercilessly, screams leaving her lungs and burning her chest as she beats down on the smirking face of her worst nightmare. She smashes the metal down over and over again like a crazed woman, each swing harder with the bellowing chant of the people around her. She doesn't care about the blood spattering her front and flicking into her mouth. She doesn't care about the pained screams she hears in the distance to a voice that isn't her own. She doesn't care about anything except the anger that drives her to relentlessly bringing the pipe down on her reflection.

She doesn't stop until the pipe is bent out of shape and the screaming stops.

"There!" She shouts as she throws the pipe on the ground and looks up at her father. "Is that what you wanted?! Is that what you wanted?! Tell me!" Her father's face begins to twist back into the chief's own. She breathes raggedly, almost feral in her movements as she screams again, scratching at her near-bald scalp. She keeps glaring at the chief, ignoring the look of shock on Cage's face and the deadly silence of the people around her as they watch her meltdown. Kareem's eyes are blown wide and his cheeks are slick from the tears streaming down his cheeks as the front of his pants darken with urine. The camera man even lowers the device to stare at her in disbelief. Lexa lets out another scream, this one less angered and more agonized than the one before.

And then, finally, she looks down to see what she had done.

Costia's face is no longer any resemblance of the woman she'd once known, and at an early point in her life, once loved. The white bone of her skull is broken through her blood-spattered skin, revealing the gory insides of a still brain. Blood pools into the snow, staining the pristine white a dark and mournful crimson. Costia's body is left defiled and unrecognizable, and Lexa feels her stomach flip when she looks to her hands to see her soldier's blood all over her palms.

"You see, Captain," the chief's voice cuts through the silence, "you know nothing of sacrifice or honour."

Lexa can't even move, her eyes glued to the lifeless and mangled body at her feet. She slowly nods her head upwards to see Clarke standing before her, blue eyes glazed over in tears as she holds her hands over her mouth. Lexa raises her hand to reach out to her, but Clarke flinches and pulls back, crying harder.

"Who are you?" Clarke asks, her voice cracking as she cries harder. "What did you do, Lexa?! How could you do this?"

"I did it for you," Lexa says in a strangled plea. "Clarke, I did it to protect you!"

"No," Clarke says with a snarl to her voice. "You aren't the woman I fell in love with long ago. You're nothing but a murderer."

"Clarke," Lexa gasps as her heart thuds inside her chest, "Clarke, please--"

"They're right," Clarke says as she points to the frozen image of the chief and Cage. "They were all right about you. Look at what you've become."

"They did this to me," Lexa tries to fight back, but her words crack upon leaving her mouth. "They turned me into this. Baby, this isn't me--"

"Is it not?" Clarke asks, her voice changing as her face morphs into her own reflection. "Tell me that
"I…," Lexa stumbles as tears burn at her eyes. Her reflections chuckles sadistically and shakes her head before reaching out and placing her hand on her shoulder. The tears pool from her eyes freely now, the strength of keeping them back having been broken by her actions. Her reflection offers no pity.

"You did this, Captain. You killed them because that's all you know how to do," her reflection says sternly. "It's in your blood now. You're a killer, Lexa."

"Captain," Cage's cold voice cuts in and shakes her from her thoughts. Lexa blinks, only to see herself kneeling in the snow with patches of her skin in the bed of her nails. Something hot and wet slides down the stubbled side of her head. She absently swipes at it and looks at her hand, blanching at the sight of her own blood on her hands. Glancing up, Lexa sees that she's still in the courtyard and everyone is still staring at her, waiting for her next move.

"Take her to the cave," the chief orders after he pockets his gun and turns around. Before he can leave, Lexa's eyes snap upwards, cold and angered.

"You made me a promise," she growls the words through her unshed tears and cracking voice. "My wife and child are not to be harmed."

The chief pauses and turns, a sickening smirk plastered to his face as he chuckles lightly. "And I will keep it. You did your job, Lexa. I'll do mine."

"I still won't tell you anything," Lexa snarls as she writhes when Cage begins to chain her hands again. "I won't give you anything, you bastard!"

The chief’s grin remains and nods to her. "No worries, Captain. You already gave me everything I needed."

Before Lexa can question him, something hard connects with the back of her head and all she sees is black.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the details on the torture and the gore in Lexa's bits, but I just think that's important to not gloss over the fact that these are things that do happen in the real world. I want to make this story as realistic as possible, and I know that the PTSD and trauma will be explored in even greater detail, especially in explaining Lexa's recovery process and how she copes with the intense torture inflicted upon her, as well as Anya's survivor's guilt and Clarke's grief. Aden and Tris will also have a bigger role, too.

Anyways, until next time! Thanks for all the love and support on this fic. It means everything <3

Much love, xx.
Escape [Part One: Instinct]

Chapter Summary

Clarke and Anya decide to take the next step in their relationship and Lexa is forced to make a tough decision.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, GORE, TORTURE, BLOOD, ATTEMPTED RAPE, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, AND DEATH.

Hey guys, sorry for the wait again on this one. Luckily (or unluckily, depending on the type of reader you are) this is a hella long chapter (25,000+ words), and it's only one half of the chapter! This has some Clanya parts that are more intimate than their kiss in the previous chapter, so I'll put them in the cues.

TRIGGER WARNINGS AND CLANYA CUES GO AS FOLLOWED:

The FIRST SECTION contains MILD DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, and starts from Cage saying, "wake up, bitch" at the beginning, and goes all the way to when the chief enters the cell room and stops them.

The THIRD SECTION contains PTSD FLASHBACKS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, VIOLENCE, DEATH, and MILD BLOOD AND GORE, and it starts from Clarke saying, "you're okay" and goes all the way to the end of the end of the section. This one has a few a severe suicidal thoughts and flashbacks, so be warned. It's intense. It does have a Clanya interaction and mentions of an assumed relationship between them, but nothing explicit.

The FOURTH SECTION contains ATTEMPTED RAPE, VIOLENCE, DEATH, AND BLOOD AND GORE. The rape doesn't actually happen, but it is pretty triggering if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe with that subject matter. It starts from "that's enough food" and goes until the chief says, "Cage, that's enough." This chapter isn't as intense with the violence as it is with the attempted rape warning, so be careful and take care of yourself.

The FIFTH SECTION contains an EXPLICIT CLANYA SEX SCENE, A PTSD FLASHBACK and DEATH, which starts at the end of the first === and goes to the end of the section. The flashback here isn't as intense as the first one.

The SIXTH SECTION contains GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, BLOOD AND GORE, DEATH, MENTIONED/IMPLIED RAPE, and SUICIDAL THOUGHTS. Not as serious on the rape warning for this one, as it's mainly mentioned in vague details. There is a lot of gore and violence, however. The entire section contains these triggers so read accordingly and be sure to take the steps you need to keep yourself safe.
Those are a shit ton of triggers, but that should be all of them. Let me know if there's anything else I can tag or post a warning to, because I am totally okay with it. I know it makes the chapter notes unbearably long, but as long as it helps people, I honestly do not mind at all. Thank you guys for sticking through with it, despite the long ass chapters and the sometimes incoherent writing style. It means the world to me, especially right now.

The song in the quote is, "Save Me" by Remy Zero. I've created a Spotify playlist under the username of commandmetobewell; it's titled, "Sisters", which holds all the songs from the story used so far, and more. There are roughly around eighty or so now, but I'll be adding more as the story progresses! :)

Enjoy! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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i feel my wings have broken in your hands
i feel the words unspoken inside and they pull you under
and i will give you anything you want, oh
you are all i wanted (all my dreams are fallen down)
(crawlin' around and around and around…)

(somebody save me)
let your warm hands break right through it
(somebody save me)
i don't care how you do it, just stay, stay
(c'mon, i've been waiting for you…)

i see the world has folded in your heart
i feel the waves crash down inside and they pull me under
i would give you anything you want, oh
you are all i wanted (all my dreams have fallen down)
(crawlin' around and around and around…)

---

Date and Time Unknown
"Wake up, bitch."

The sensation of something hard smashing against her cheek draws Lexa from her weak slumber. She barely reacts as she flicks open an eye to glare up at Cage, hovering over her with a grin plastered to his face. One of the guards reaches down and grabs at the scruff of her torn shirt, hoisting her upwards. Lexa spits on him, baring her yellowed, cracked teeth as she snarls at him. The guard hisses and shoves her against the wall, but Lexa struggles, screaming incoherently with an almost feral look to her bloodshot eyes. Her arteries pound with the need to consume, to gnaw at the flesh before her as she thrashes.

"Lash her," Cage orders coolly, watching with his arms crossed as Lexa tries to rip herself free from the arms of her captors, still screaming like a dying animal. A loud crack fills the air as she's struck by a whip against her side, drawing blood from under her tunic. Another whip lashes against her back and she laughs manically. She grits her teeth and inhales, grinning over at Cage as she's whipped a few more times. Her head shakes and she laughs again, her body shaking.

"More," she pleads as she looks to the guards with a hysterical, pleading look. "Do it again. Hit me harder. I dare you to hit me again. C'mon, you know you want to. Just whip me one more time." Cage scowls as the guards look to each other with confusion. When neither of them move, Lexa's laugh wipes off her face in place of a smouldering glare. She bares her teeth again and launches forward, trying to snap her jaws in the direction of the man with the whip.

"Enough!" Cage bellows as he reaches into his pocket for a small device. He flicks on the switch and Lexa falls to her knees, howling with pain as she covers her bleeding ears. She looks up from where she's a crumpled mess on the ground, her eyes dark with a need to get her fill of her next dosage. Cage keeps the device on as he steps forward, lifting his boot before smashing it down upon the woman's ribs. Lexa grunts and takes the blow, her mind too distracted by the feeling of the ringing in her ear. Cage keeps his boot down upon her shoulder, pressing her to the ground as he nods to the other guard.

"Bring me the iron," he says with a cold voice as he glances back down to Lexa, "it's about time we brand the bitch."

"Fuck you," Lexa spits between harsh, gurgling breaths, "I'll fucking kill you, each and every--agh!"

The threat gets cut off when Cage kicks her in the side again, right in her solar plexus. The hit is enough to wind her, leaving her trembling and writhing on the floor for breath. The sound of boot steps draw closer, causing Lexa to thrash again, weaker than before. Cage nods to one of the other guards, who reaches down and slices Lexa's shirt in half, exposing her bare back to the cold air. An involuntary shiver wracks her body as Cage keeps his boot pressed down.

"This is what you get for noncompliance," he tells her as he nods at the guard with the iron branding rod in his hand. "You will never forget this."

"I'll give you nothing!" Lexa shouts as the man approaches and holds out the iron for Cage to hold. "I won't ever tell you anything, you sick bastard."
"Very well," Cage says as he brandishes the iron, smirking at the helplessness of the woman beneath her. "Take your penance."

The searing metal singes against her bare skin, causing Lexa to let out a sharp snarl of pain. She tries to thrash away from Cage's hold, but her body has been beaten down far too many times. At this point, she knows that they only feed her to keep her alive so they can continue their mindless torture. At last, Cage removes the iron stick and steps off her, chuckling to himself as Lexa wheezes. Her entire back is covered in scars or welts from the abuse, but now there's a branded symbol, probably the symbol of whatever terrorist organization this is, seared into the back of her shoulder. There are no tears to shed, however.

No, those ran out long ago.

There's nothing left for her to give, Lexa admits. She won't give up the location of the missiles, but even she has her limits. She sees Costia in her nightmares, alongside her delusions. Her reflection is constantly there, mocking her and blaming her for this situation. She doesn't even know how long it's been since she's been captured. Her life has been nothing but this incessant torture and mistreatment, and at this point, she's not sure if it'll ever end.

"Sir," Emerson's voice calls out from the distance somewhere, "the boss wants to talk to her."

Cage sighs, like he's bored of the entire situation. "Fine. You know what to do, then. Tie her up and call him in."

Emerson nods like the faithful lackey he is as he makes his way over towards woman lying on the floor. Lexa makes no effort to fight as she's hoisted up and her arms are fastened into the sharp, metal cuffs. She barely hisses as she's attached to the hanging chained, while the guard cranks the lever to tighten the tension on the chains as her arms are lifted above her head. Her ribs protest, and she can feel by the lack of breath, she's broken a few once more. Cage watches with stoic eyes, unwavering as the cell doors open and in walks the chief and his bodyguards. He takes one look at her and sighs, shaking his head.

"I see you've been busy," the chief says dismissively to Cage, clearly unimpressed. "I thought I told you that she's done enough."

"I thought I'd have my fun," Cage replies with a shrug, glaring over at Lexa. "She was being resilient."

"That's what the drugs are for," the chief growls, stalking over to him until he towers over the man with a piercing glare, "not you."

"Whatever," Cage snorts like a petulant teenager. He looks to Lexa with a scowl. "She won't tell us about the missiles."

"Mr Wallace," the chief says, venom dripping from his voice as he speaks. "I think you've had your fun for today. You are dismissed."

Cage looks confused for a second, but then the chief's lackeys come up to him with stern expressions. Sighing, Cage shakes his head and leaves the room with Emerson following behind him dutifully. Once he's out of the room, the chief sighs with relief and looks over at the still-hanging Lexa upon the wall.

"Now," the chief says with a dip of his head, "let's get down to business, shall we?"

"I won't tell you where the goddamn missiles are," Lexa grunts as she tries to shift on the wall, "so if
that's what you're waiting for, just kill me."

For a minute, the chief is silent. Then, he leans forward and cocks his head in confusion. "Is that why you think you are here?"

Now, however, it's Lexa's turn to be confused and silent. The chief laughs slightly, shaking his head. "I couldn't care less about the missiles, Captain Woods. I don't want a mindless war," he says to her in a low voice. "I want justice."

"You want vengeance," Lexa spits, shaking her head. At this, a fire ignites in the chief's eyes as he rises furiously.

"You don't want to see my vengeance," the man hisses ruefully as he nods at the guard to take a hit at her. The blow comes to her abdomen, around her kidneys. Lexa splutters at the force as she's struck once, twice, and then a third time. The chief calls them off and circles her, observing the festering burn upon her shoulder. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small box. He opens it up and reveals a granulated, white powder inside. Lexa watches him with wide eyes, but the chief remains nonchalant and emotionless as he takes a pinch of it and rubs it into his fingers before looking up at the woman.

"Tell me," he says without an ounce of emotion to his voice, "why are you here, Captain?"

"Go to hell," Lexa spits at him. The chief growls and thrusts his hand down onto the wound, causing Lexa to let out a bloodcurdling scream that makes even the guards look uncomfortable. She writhes in her chains, thrashing and yelling as the chief continues to smear the white paste into her wound. She has tears running down her cheeks as she feels a fevered sweat break out on her brow. Her entire body trembles as the chief looks to her again, stone-faced.

"Why are you here?"

"Fuck you!" Lexa screams as the chief presses harder, causing blood to burble to the surface and run down the surface of her back in scarlet rivulets. The man keeps staring at her like he's expecting an answer, but Lexa won't give him one. She refuses to bite the bait he dangles in front of her. She endures the pain.

But for what?

"You have proven to be a stubborn cause," the chief says as he releases his hand from her back, motioning for the guard to hand him a damp towel. Lexa can smell the acidic scent that billows off in waves from the cotton and her eyes widen. The chief gives her one last expectant look, knowing how much this will pain her. Lexa holds back her whimper and shakes her head, refusing to say anything as she tenses her muscles in anticipation. The chief's brows narrow.

This pain, Lexa decides, is far worse.

Her screams tear her vocal cords and cause her jaw to ache. Her fingernails, now overgrown and probably carrying some type of infection, claw into her palms hard enough to draw blood. She feels her body becoming drenched in sweat as the acid penetrates through the skin and interacts with her raw flesh. The man just sighs through her screams, his gaze never once turning sympathetic or pitiful. Lexa gasps and writhes and screams, but she does not beg for mercy.

"You think yourself a martyr," the man says with an arch of a brow. "You think you deserve this pain for what you did. That this is your punishment."
Lexa stays silent as the towel is removed and she's left a shuddering mess, tears slipping down her cheeks as she tries to hold back her pain. The chief just watches her for a few moments before he tells his guards to leave. They all look skeptical, but he nods in affirmation. Not wanting to disobey the man, the guards file out of the room until it's just the two of them. The sounds of Lexa's muted sobs fill the air and breathe through the tension in the room.

And then, finally, the chief reaches for the table, grabbing at a clean towel and some bandages.

"Unfortunately, we did not have saline. I apologize that the raw form had to be the substitution," the chief mutters as he reaches for the water pitcher and pours some on the cloth before approaching her sweaty, bloody back. He begins to wipe around the wound, sighing with content like the act is cathartic. Lexa would flinch away and mutter a vulgar response, but she's spent. Her body hangs limply, simply swaying back and forth with the pressure of the damp cloth on her skin. The chief finishes cleaning the wound and bandages it up before going over to the crank and releasing the tension on the chains.

Lexa falls flat on her stomach, the wind knocked out of her again. She barely is able to move as she is hoisted into a metal chair and bound with her hands behind her back. Her head hangs forward, her scraggly hair forming a curtain barrier in front of her face as she feels her eyes grow heavy with fatigue. The chief takes his own seat in front of her, simply staring at her for minutes, maybe even hours -- Lexa's not even sure what time is anymore because of this place.

"Come on Captain," the man says quietly, rising from his seat as if he's done analyzing the woman. "I have something to show you."

The chief calls in the guards and barks out an order for Lexa to have her ankles unchained from the floor. The men work quickly on unfastening the latches, but even when they're done, Lexa refuses to move. The chief nods to the two guards, who hoist her up and shoulder her weight, forcing her to stand. Lexa's head nods up slightly, her face slick with sweat and blood and tears as she looks to the chief, completely defeated and broken. The man sighs and beckons to the guards to follow him with Lexa in tow. They walk through the cold, damp tunnels until they reach the entrance of the cave.

The bitter autumn air nips at Lexa's cold skin as the sun nearly blinds her as they enter the courtyard. The chief leads them through the city centre, where Lexa observes through her good eye as the children play in the streets like they're not in the middle of a war, that there isn't someone being tortured literally a few paces from where they are enjoying each other's company. The women and elders are conversing and knitting in the city square, talking and laughing as they share stories. The men are jovial in manning their market stands, proud of the brilliant smells that come from their many assortments of food for sale.

"Kareem's father makes the best bread in the valley," the chief says with a smile as he approaches one of the men with a dazzling smile. The man brightens instantly, nearly bowing to the man as he pays him a few coins for some bread. The chief tears a piece off and holds it to Lexa's mouth.

"Here," he says in a gentle voice, "taste some."

Lexa stares at the bread, and then looks up at the chief, silent.

"It's rude to not accept a gift," the chief says as he shrugs at the woman before popping the piece into his mouth. He turns and kindly thanks the man before leading Lexa through the rest of the city. It's only then that Lexa starts to realize that of all the people that resided in this small town, only a few were armed soldiers. Most of them looked to be militia, volunteer men and women that only hoped to provide a level of protection for their people.
"War doesn't touch all corners of the map, Captain Woods." Lexa's thoughts are pulled from her mind as she hears the chief speak. He gazes to his people with a proud, almost reserved look before turning to face her with a soft nod. "Sometimes, there is beauty in even the darkest places." Once more, Lexa is silent, unable to respond to the man. She decides to steady her stare into a permanent, defensive glare. Her shoulders tremble with the cold as she remains standing and exposed in front of the villagers. One man comes from his stand with a pelt in his hand, offering it to the chief with a nod towards Lexa's shaking form.

"Thank you," the chief says as he shakes the man's hand. The man just nods, but he still looks at Lexa with a wary expression. The chief takes the cloth and drapes it over Lexa's shoulders, sheltering her from the cold. He doesn't smile, but he doesn't frown at her either. Finally, Lexa decides to speak.

"Why show me this?" She asks, her voice raw from screaming minutes ago. "Why keep torturing me only to show me this?"

"To give you perspective," the chief says as he crosses his arms behind his back and looks out at his people. "I wanted you to see what I have spent my years as chief doing. I wanted you to see that my people dote on me to protect them. My methods are harsh, but my people are safe. They respect me. They respect order. And as a result, they flourish and live in peace, tucked away from the war that your people rage upon my own. We live normal lives, Captain. Or, we used to until you and your soldiers came and invaded our lands, took away our rights, and forced us into a path that we never wanted to take."

"We did it to stabilize growing threats," Lexa argues as she's being herded back to her cell. "We did the right thing."

"So opening up a prison and subjecting my people to humiliating torture, physical and sexual abuse, sodomy, and murder is the right thing? Is it right that you send your men in here to protect, but instead they take our women and children and use them in ways that should warrant more than a death penalty? Is it right that you stood by and let this all happen under your control?" The chief questions, a bit of bite to his voice as he turns to glare at the woman.

Lexa's dumbfounded. "I told you, that wasn't me--"

"Then who was it?" The chief asks, quirking his brow. "Who gave the order for those soldiers to take camp here?"

"I…," Lexa trails off, her brows furrowing. "My intent was never--"

"Your intent means nothing," the chief spits hotly, and his voice draws the attention of the entire village. "Not when I lost innocent men and women to your charades. Not when my family was killed because of the colour of their skin and the cloth that adorns their head. Not when my entire race is subjected to the pained alienation that stemmed from one small group. Not when my children fear leaving their homes in case a plane flies over head and drops bombs upon our village and murders the few that live here. Tell me, Captain Woods, what was your intent when you told your men to come and place themselves here?!"

Lexa's silent as she feels the eyes of all four hundred villagers on her back. Her hands itch and her throat goes dry as she shakes her head. Tears well in her eyes as she dips her head, sucking in a deep breath as she wills her anxiety and panic to leave her alone so she can just focus on the present, to be strong.

But she isn't, and she hasn't been strong in a very long time.
"I… I…," Lexa chokes out, tears welling in her eyes as she looks up to the chief with a guilty expression. "I'm sorry."

The words leave her lips in a broken sob as she shakes her head, tears streaming down her face now as she repeats, "I'm so sorry that your people went through that, but I never meant for any of this to happen. I was simply trying to protect my people." The chief's face hardens, but there's a flicker of something else in his eyes as he looks upon the soldier that now apologizes in manic repetitions. She pulls her hands up and pleads with the chief, her lips trembling with her cries. She turns to look at the villagers, repeating her apologies in both English and Gujurati, her knees wobbling as she sobs some more.

Lexa takes her hands and grips at her head, clawing into her scalp as she shakes her head. The guards are so surprised by her actions that they aren't able to hold her up when she drops to her knees in the dirt. The cold scrapes against her boney knees as she curls over and screams into the dirt. She wraps her arms around her bruised torso and sobs, her face wet with sweat and tears. Some of her tangled hair sticks to her face as she cries harder until no sound comes out.

And then, the unexpected happens.

The chief places his hand upon her shoulder and kneels beside her, staring at her with a less-cold expression. "Captain Woods."

"God, I'm sorry, I'm so fucking sorry--"

"Do you know why you are here?" The man whispers again as he looks to his people. Lexa sniffs and looks around, her eyes bloodshot. The chief looks at her with a stoic expression, but not without nodding to her with what she thinks, in her delusional, drug-addled mind, seems to be an ounce of pride.

"You are here to learn," the chief says as he nods to her again. "I believe you have done exactly that. An apology does not fix the past, but it is a start."

"The torture?" Lexa growls, though her voice doesn't have that same bite to it anymore. "Costia?"

The chief sighs, removing his hand from her shoulder.

"You needed to see the extremities our people went through," the chief says to her stoically, "and you needed to go through it yourself to understand them."

"So what do you want from me?" Lexa asks, her voice cracking as she looks to the people staring at her with wide eyes. The chief's stare hardens.

"What I wanted from the start," he tells her sternly, "for your people to leave, and allow ours to live our lives in peace." The chief reaches behind him for the loaf of bread, breaking off another piece before holding it out to Lexa's mouth. His eyes are not condescending, nor are they malicious. They are simply neutral.

"Now tell me," the chief asks as he holds out the bread, "is that so much to ask?"
Anya walks along the park's gravelly park, Indra at her side with an arm looped through her own. They are both wrapped up in their fall coats and scarves. Ahead of them, Clarke walks with her arm wrapped around Aden and her other hand holding Tris' own. Aden has his head leaned against his mother's shoulder as he talks, causing her to laugh occasionally at something he's said. Even Tris will give off a little giggle here and there, eagerly bouncing in the snow.

"Dear," Indra rumbles lightly, "I am afraid I'm not as young as I once was. I need a little rest." Anya nods and smiles at her, helping her aunt to the nearest bench. She shoves off any remaining snow and allows Indra to use her as a support as she eases downwards with a low grunt. The older woman sighs as soon as she sits down, patting the space beside her for her niece. Anya takes a seat, folding her hands in her lap as she stares at the people in the park.

"It's been awhile since we've gone out like this," Indra hums contently as she looks over to where Octavia and Lincoln are approaching from behind them. Anya looks to her aunt, to the woman who'd become her mother after her own had past away when she was six. She leans closer towards Indra, sighing. Her breath mists in front of her mouth as she lets the cold nip at her exposed skin. Indra's gaze is set, hardened and stoic, like she's always been as she stares ahead.

"It's times like these in which I miss your sister," Indra whispers, her voice trembling. Anya looks ready to burst into tears at the crack in her aunt's voice. Her head turns and Anya's heart breaks when she sees the tears streaming down the older woman's cheeks. Immediately, she reaches out and wraps Indra in her arms, tucking her head against her chest as she pecks her adoptive mother's head. Indra shakes in her arms, a sob breaking past her lips as she sighs.

"They took my sister and now my niece… and I'd vowed to keep her safe. I promised your mother I wouldn't let either of you be harmed and I failed," Indra whimpers against Anya's collar. She shakes her head again, sniffling. "I'm so sorry, dear, I never meant to get so emotional… I just… after Titus died…"

"I know," Anya says gently as she continues to hold the other woman. "I know. It's been a rough couple of years but we're getting through it."

The two of them stay silent after that, holding each other through the mourning grief that encompasses them. After awhile, Tris comes waddling over and pats Anya's knees. Smiling down at the little girl, Anya removes her arms around her aunt before reaching down and hoisting her niece into her arms. She pulls her tight against her chest, feeling her heart splinter as the little girl murmurs a content purr against her neck. One of her hands clasps the collar of her jacket. Indra smiles over at the two of them, one of her hands stretching outwards to tuck a strand of Tris' chestnut hair behind her ear, giving the girl a gentle nod.

"Nona," Tris murmurs sleepily as she nuzzles closer to Anya, "why are you crying?"

"It's nothing, sweetie. I was just telling your aunt how much I missed your mother. You look just like she did when she was your age, did you know that?" Indra whispers softly, still slowly combing her fingers through the younger girl's hair. Tris sighs in content and snuggles closer to Anya, before tilting her head upwards to look up at her aunt with a curious but somber expression.
"What was mommy like?" Tris asks, cocking her head in confusion. Anya's breath hitches in her throat as she holds Tris tighter.

"She was beautiful just like you," Anya whispers as she pecks Tris' forehead. "She was sweet and kind, had a heart of gold. She loved you very dearly."

Tris contemplates the words with a furrowed brow, her lips flat in a tight line. "Did she give good hugs like you?" Anya's breath hitches as tears well in her eyes. Beside her, she can see Indra's lip quivering with her niece's innocent question. She wraps her arms around the little girl tighter, kissing her wavy brown hair. With a deep inhale, she takes in her scent. Her chest aches when she is reminded of when she and Lexa used to be younger, of how she would hold her baby sister the same way as they grew up under the careful tutelage of her aunt and uncle. When she realizes that she hasn't given Tris an answer, she turns and smiles. She cradles the back of her niece's head as she glances up at Indra, who looks wistfully over at the little girl.

"The best hugs you can imagine," Anya tells her gently, giving her an eskimo-kiss. "They were like coming home after being away for a long time."

"You feel like home too," Tris mumbles sleepily as she rests against Anya's chest. Anya looks down to her niece and takes a deep breath.

"Thanks, kiddo," Anya whispers as she hugs her tighter, "you do, too."

They stay sitting like that for a few minutes, the two adults keeping silent as the younger girl dozes against her aunt's chest. Clarke returns with Aden, Octavia and Lincoln trailing behind them. At the sight of Tris safe and warm in Anya's arms has Clarke's heart stuttering in joy. Aden grins as he takes a seat beside his aunt, but not without first checking over his sister to make sure that she's okay. As soon as he sits down, Anya playfully nuzzles against him. The teenaged boy tries to get away, but happy chuckles rise up from deep in his belly, making the cold winter day seem just that much warmer.

"Mama?" Aden asks as he leans against Anya. "Can we get ice cream?"

And just like that, Clarke is frowning again. "Aden, it's freezing. You will catch a cold and then you'll complain. No."

"Ice cream?" Tris' head perks up, hitting Anya in the chin with a harsh thud. The girl looks up, wide-eyed and afraid, but Anya just playfully winks down at her before looking up at Clarke with wide, innocent puppy-dog eyes. Clarke crosses her arms, glaring at her sister-in-law and her kids teasingly.

"Yeah Mama," Anya drawls out the word with a laugh, "please can we get ice cream?"

"Any, you're supposed to be the adult here."

"Excuse me? I love ice cream."

"It's the middle of winter. No."

"That's the best time," Anya practically whines, causing Aden and Tris to giggle. "Please, Clarke?"

"We'll cook dinner for you, Mama!" Tris adds, beaming her toothy grin at her mother. Aden nods, his eyes lighting up.

"Yeah! I'll wash the dishes and Aunt Anya can dry them."
"Hey! I hate drying the dishes. Let me wash them."

"No," Aden says to her aunt with a roll of his eyes, "everyone knows that washing is the best part."

"Ahem," Clarke clears her throat, causing the three people to blush at her crooked brow. Indra and her son are holding back their laughter, while Octavia looks about ready to buy the ice cream herself. Clarke continues her impassive stare, but it's soon turned into an expression of shock when a ball of snow splats against her face. She gasps, moving away the cold ice to look at a cheeky-looking Anya, pointing to Tris with a not-so-innocent wag of her finger.

"Hey!" Tris yelps as she shoves her aunt. "Mama it wasn't me, it was totally 'Nya! She just doesn't want to get into trouble because you're more of an adult." Scrambling off her aunt, Tris takes refuge in Indra's arms, looking up at her mother innocently. The pout on her face causes the older woman to laugh as she maneuvers the younger girl out of Clarke's death glare. Anya leaps up from the bench with her hands up with feigned shock, though she grins.

"I did ask nicely," Anya tries to defend herself as Clarke reaches on the ground for some snow. Anya's eyes widen imperceptibly and she shakes her head. "C'mon, Clarke. You know that's not what you want to do. Think of your children, of the example you'd be--umph!"

Anything that she'd have said is immediately muffled by the sound of snow hitting her face. Clarke and Aden burst into laughter as Anya splutters, yelping as the cold shocks her system. The pout on her face causes the older woman to laugh as she maneuvers the younger girl out of Clarke's death glare. Anya leaps up from the bench with her hands up with feigned shock, though she grins.

"Oh that's it!" Clarke snaps as she whirls, only to be met with another snowball to the face. This time, it wasn't thrown by Anya.

But, instead, her attacker is her own son.

"Betrayed by my own boy?!” Clarke asks, aghast. "How could you, Ade?"

Aden shrugs as he rounds up another snowball. "You said no to ice cream, Mama."

As he winds up to throw, Clarke ducks, watching as the ball of snow hits Lincoln instead of herself. The big man grunts and eyes Aden with a darkened expression, causing the boy to pale. Anya bravely steps in front of her nephew protectively, her hands holding two round snowballs.

"I know, I know!" Tris pipes up from Indra's arms. "How about you guys have a snowball fight? If Mama wins, no ice cream. If you lose, ice cream?"

"I think that's perfectly fair," Anya says with a smug expression. Octavia snorts as she walks over towards Tris and Indra.

"That's great. I think this match needs a score keeper. I volunteer," Octavia says, ignoring the gasp of shock from Clarke. "I'd rather not get wet."

"Uncle Lincoln and Mommy versus Ade and 'Nya!" Tris chirps, clapping her hands together as she snuggles into her grandmother's arms. "Go!"

Before Clarke or Lincoln can even prepare, Aden and Anya are hurling snowballs in their direction. At the beginning, it looks like the two have an obvious advantage over Lincoln and Clarke, but then Lincoln manages to pelt a snowball into Aden's side, catching him off guard. Just as Anya looks over in confusion, Clarke sneaks up and yanks back her shirt, delivering a payload of snow down her
back. The older blonde shrieks and hops around until she slips and falls, but not without taking Clarke with her. The two tumble to the ground with a grunt, causing the others to laugh. Clarke shakes her head as she tries to shove away from Anya. She looks down, her cheeks blushing as she realizes that she's laying with her hands on Anya's chest, her nose grazing the column of her throat.

"I think it's a tie," Tris whines, breaking both women from their stare. The two tumble away, coughing awkwardly as they stand up. Clarke doesn't miss the knowing glance Octavia shoots her way when she gets up. The younger woman stares between the two in-laws, choosing to remain stoic and silent.

"Come on," Clarke says as as she clears her throat, giving her daughter a smile. "I think Grandma will be home from work soon. We can make hot cocoa and hot chocolate, how about that?" Tris brightens at the sound of hot chocolate. Aden perks up as well, and Clarke can tell by the look on his face that he regrets the snowball fight with his current drenched coat. Lincoln drapes an arm over Clarke's shoulders, chuckling at the sight of his dishevelled nephew.

"Let's get you guys cleaned up, shall we?" Lincoln hums, chuckling when Aden huffs something stubbornly. "We don't want you to freeze to death."

"They look exhausted," Octavia comments as she helps set aside the last dish in the cupboard before turning to gaze upon their family in the living room. Clarke wipes her hands on the towel before she follows her sister-in-law's gaze to where her daughter and son are sleeping atop their exhausted aunt. Anya has her arms around both of the kids, protectively curling them into her body as they slumber on the couch. Lincoln rests on the armchair, snoring away with his mouth open. Abby is chatting with Indra in a low voice by the fireplace, half-full tea mugs still steaming in their hands as they talk. It all seems so... domestic.

"Would you say it's bad that it doesn't feel so... empty anymore?" Clarke breathes out, already knowing what Octavia's thinking. There's a bit of fear in her voice as she speaks, but Octavia doesn't pass any negative judgment. Instead, she looks over at Clarke and waits for the blonde to continue her train of thought.

"You know...," Octavia says softly when she notices Clarke isn't brave enough to speak, "it's okay to feel at peace. It's been almost four years."

"I still feel like she'll walk through that door," Clarke chuckles sadly as she leans against the countertop. "I just am waiting for her to come in, booming laughter and muddy shoes. I'm half-expecting that door to open and for my wife to come back and swoop me in her arms and kiss me like we're in a fairytale." Octavia's hand slides into her own as tears well in her eyes. Clarke bows her head and sucks in a deep breath, allowing the moment of sadness to pass.

"But then I look at them," Clarke whispers, nodding over to where her children rest with her sister-in-law, "and I know it's okay. We're okay."

"You like her, don't you?" Octavia bluntly asks, nodding towards Anya. "You guys seem... closer than usual."

"I don't know what I feel about her," Clarke mutters to herself, running a hand through her hair. "On one hand, she makes me feel more alive than I've been in the last three and a half years, but on the other hand, she reminds me so much of Lexa. It's good but it's bad, too. There will be somedays in which she'll hug me and I'll feel like Lexa's holding me. I know it's not right, but I can't help it. She's
just… she…"

"I know," Octavia gently tells her, "I can see it, C. But… she does care about you too, you know. A lot, at that."

"I know," Clarke murmurs as she stares at Anya on the couch. "She cares so much. She's done so much for the kids. Tris practically sees her as her mother."

"Is that such a bad thing?" Octavia asks tentatively. Clarke is about to open her mouth and argue when the brunette continues softly, "not as a replacement, C, but like another parental figure? I mean Anya has practically moved in with you. They're getting familiar with her and she's doing the same with them. It's not that she's their mother, but that can't stop her from being a bigger part of their lives. The kids deserve that much, at least. With your work schedule, they don't get a lot of time to see you, not like Anya does. The kids are attached to her hip. She's protective over them and it's sweet and endearing to see, honestly."

"Yeah," Clarke whispers as she trails off, sighing contently as she watches her family rest. "She's pretty great with the kids."

"And with you?" Octavia asks, quirking her brow. "How is she with you?"

At this, Clarke flushes. "I… I… we're just friends."

"You totally kissed," Octavia nonchalantly says with a low chuckle. Clarke frowns, but Octavia shakes her head. "You've got a tell, Griffin."

Sighing, Clarke relents and turns her gaze back to Anya. She thinks pensively before she swallows her nerves.

"Do you think it's wrong that we did?" Clarke asks with a slight hint of trepidation in her voice. "She's Lexa's sister. I… it feels weird."

"Well, no shit. It's definitely going to be awkward. But wrong?" Octavia asks, her voice light and neutral. "I don't know about that, Griffin."

"I just feel bad feeling that way about her," Clarke whimpers, looking away in shame. "Lexa's been gone and I'm interested in her sister?" There's venom and self-loathing dripping from her words, but Octavia shakes her head and places her hand on her sister-in-law's shoulder. She squeezes lightly before nodding.

"It's a little fucked up, yeah, but honestly Clarke, with all the shit you've both been through, you guys deserve to be happy. You shouldn't have to feel like you are unable to move on and love again. It's been four years, almost five, since Lexa died. Your heart deserves a break," Octavia tells her encouragingly. "You and Anya need to find peace, and if that peace resides within the both of you, why are you risking it all by pushing it away?"

Clarke doesn't answer, not when her mind is swimming with a million different things at once. Octavia shrugs, gazing fondly over at Lincoln.

"I say you go for it," Octavia tells her softly, her voice gentle. "You already know how fleeting life can be. Why wait?"

"Because it's not that easy," Clarke argues back, still torn between her love for her late wife and her recent feelings for her sister-in-law. Octavia snorts.
"Clarke," she replies with a wise arch of her brow, "nothing about life is easy. You know that. Just like you know what's holding you back from Anya."

Clarke's mouth closes and she frowns, choosing to focus her stare to a rigid place on the counter. Octavia sighs, checking her watch before fidgeting around the counter and in the direction of her husband. Clarke watches as Octavia wakes him gently with a kiss to his cheek and a light rub up and down his arms. Lincoln stirs and smiles into her kisses, humming delightfully as he's pulled from his slumber. He rises with her, keeping her body close to his as they retire up to the guest bedroom. Clarke waits until they're out of sight until she trains her gaze back to the sleeping body of her children and sister-in-law.

*You know what's holding you back,* the voice inside of her head tells her, *but when will you let it go?*

But Clarke knows what she's *really* asking herself.

*When will you let her go?*

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**December 14th 2012, 20:45**

**Metropolitan Centre for Mental Health, New York**

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"You ready for this?"

Anya gulps as she looks over to the blonde next to her, waiting on her response. The two of them are parked outside the clinic, watching pedestrians walk across the pathway towards the building. Sweat builds up in the ducts between her finger pads, her mouth drying by the second as time ticks by.

"I suppose." Anya takes another breath, trying to stop her hands from shaking. "As ready as I'll ever be, I guess."

"Come on," Clarke tells her assuringly, reaching down to lightly grasp her hand. "I'll be there the entire time, right by your side."

Together, the two women leave the apartment and make their way over towards the building. Anya's entire frame tenses up as they walk through the doors and into the small office. The receptionist greets them with a curt nod and a smile as Clarke checks them in. Anya's hand is deathly gripping the other woman's own. Clarke leads them back to the waiting room and Anya takes a seat beside her, trying to ignore how the sounds and scents around her mull her senses.

"You're okay," Clarke's voice whispers into her ear, floating in among the sensory overload, "you're safe. I am right here. Squeeze my hand."

Anya takes a breath and follows Clarke's orders, giving her hand a gentle squeeze. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Clarke nod.
"Good. Now feel my fingers," Clarke hums gently, her thumb grazing up and down the fine hairs of her wrist. "That's it… nice and slow, An."

Anya complies, and before she knows it, she's coming back into the present life. Her chest nearly flattens with the relieved sigh she releases. Glancing over at Clarke, she offers a grateful smile. Clarke leans forward and pecks her cheek, whispering her assurances quietly in her ear before settling back in her seat. Their hands remained clasped together as they wait for the receptionist to assign them a room to see the psychologist. Clarke remains stoic and brave beside her.

"Excuse me?" A soft voice pipes up from beside them, causing the two blondes to look over to see an elderly woman smiling back at them.

"Yes, ma'am?" Anya replies, smiling at the older woman. She just smiles back and nods at the two of them.

"I just wanted to say that you two make an adorable couple," the woman compliments them, "it's refreshing to see a love as beautiful as yours."

"Oh," Clarke cuts in, turning a shade of red as Anya awkwardly coughs and averts her gaze, "we're not--"

"Woods, Anya?" The receptionist's voice interrupts her reply, causing Anya to startle in her seat. The old woman they had been talking to simply smiles knowingly when Clarke goes to comfort her sister-in-law with soft squeezes of their intertwined hands. She waves them off and tells them to take care of themselves, and neither blonde have the heart to tell her the truth again. Instead, the two rise and follow the receptionist to the back offices.

"Dr Jarod will be with you within a few minutes," the receptionist tells them, flashing the both of them a smile. "Make yourselves comfortable."

"Thank you," Clarke says with a nod, protectively letting Anya slide against her. The older woman is still tense, eyeing the room and the exits carefully before she finds a spot on the couch. The receptionist gives Clarke an understanding look before shutting the door behind her and heading off to find the doctor. The sound of the door clicking shut seems to trigger something in the older woman, causing her to lock up and claw into the armrest of the couch.

"Anya?" Clarke asks, her voice soft and concerned as she reaches out to graze her sister-in-law's cheek. "Hey, An, it's okay, look at me…"

Only, this time, she's not there. Not emotionally, at least.

When the silence between the two women is broken by the sound of a car in the distance backfiring, Anya loses it.

Anya begins hyperventilating as she curls herself up into a ball on the couch. The dull interior of the room falls away and suddenly, she finds herself in that dusty battlefield. Flames lick at her skin and screams pierce through her mind, making her want to reach up and tear her hair out. Anya slams her eyes shut, grateful for the comfort that darkness brings. The bleak obsidian mimics her current emotional state as she finds herself back in that desert, blood dripping from every inch of her skin as she stares at the mangled bodies that litter the scorched earth. She's never felt so broken, so lost, so hurt, so confused. Everything inside of her wants nothing bare for death. Her entire frame shakes like she's trapped in the epicentre of a level eight magnitude earthquake.

And then, she hears Lexa's voice from the distance, calling out to her.
"Anya."

The older woman's head snaps up, only to see the image of her sister standing amongst the blown up bodies on the ground. Lexa's face is half-ripped to shreds, revealing the sticky and grotesque lining of her flesh and bone on her left side. Each time her mouth opens, crimson blood pools out. Her arms hang limply at her side, her feet dragging with a scuffle as she limps forward, her stomach blooming with blood as her uniform burns away to reveal a gaping hole.

"Anya," Lexa whispers softly, falling to her knees in a heap. "Anya, it hurts… please…"

"Oh God," Anya cries out as she tries to move forward and reach for her sister. Her body won't move, however. She frowns, shaking her head in frustration as she fights harder to try and make it to her injured and scared sister. Her eyes water with tears as she gasps in shock at her state. "God, no! No, Jesus, I'm sorry, Lexa. Just wait, little one, I'm coming. I'll protect you, just wait." At her words, Lexa just starts to cry, a low, agonized wail leaving her lips.

"It hurts," Lexa begs as she collapses on her side, the blood pooling around her body as she raggedly coughs. "Please make it stop, Anya. You promised you would save me. Please… please make the pain go away. It hurts too much." Lexa's choking on a wet clog of blood as she wheezes and fits on the ground. Anya shakes her head and fights the invisible barrier to try and get back to her wounded sister, her heart breaking in her chest as she struggles in her efforts.

"Lexa!" Anya screams as she watches Lexa's tears slide into the blood on the sand. "Lexa, just wait, I'm coming, just hold on!"

But she doesn't. She never could.

Because before either of them can move, the world explodes around them in a flash of white and red.

An agonizing shriek pierces Anya's lips as she curls further into herself. Her entire body feels like it's on fire as the screams of fighter jets roar overhead, deafening the older woman. The voices are so prominent now, the voices of her sister, of Gustus, of her father and of her mother. Anya closes her eyes and sees her father and mother's dead gazes staring back at her, those empty eyes watching her with nothing but betrayal and disappointment. She hears Lexa telling her about sacrifice as she'd stubbornly raced off to help the block from getting into the city. She watches her body being blown to bits into the air as the blast literally sucked the life out of her. Everything crashes down at once and Anya's mind incinerates with the blast. The only thing she wants to do is to cut out the pain with her knife, or to shoot out her heart with her Glock. She craves the burn of physical torment, like she's back at the desert. It was the only thing that ever reminded her that she were alive, the sweet pain of blood rushing from her skin and pouring down into the earth that made her. Anya knows that she's never been suicidal, but right now, she wants nothing more than to be consumed by the sickness in her head and to join her sister; she wants to die.

"Anya!" Clarke's piercing scream pulls her from her lucid daymare as she blinks back into the present. Arms are pressed tightly around her back, sandwiching her in a cocoon of warmth and safety. She still hears Lexa's cries in the back of her head and it drives her insane. The last proverbial shoe drops and Anya knows that this is it… this is how broken and lost she's become despite the last three and half years having been a process of steady healing.

She had been wrong this entire time.

Anya gasps through shallow breaths as she painfully realizes that she doesn't want to be here anymore. Everyone has their own threshold, and she's just about burned through her own. After all these years of repressing her grief, it finally hits her how much pain really festers within her. She
can't feel her legs or her arms as she continues to thrash around upon the floor like some sort of a
dying animal. Clarke's arms are tightly wound against her body, but it's no use. She can hear the
younger woman speaking loudly, but her voice is muffled. Anya finds herself unable to answer or
talk, or even understand what she's saying. It's like she's been trapped in one of her characteristic
nightmares, but this time, she's not waking up because *this time*, she's not asleep.

Oh, how Anya wishes she was asleep.

"Ssh," she hears Clarke's soothing voice call out, but she can't open her eyes. Anya tastes nothing
but remorse and guilt on her lips. She hears nothing but the roaring gunfire and the bloodcurdling
screams. Her chest is wound tight with anxiety, her mouth tastes bitter, and her hands feel like they're
on fire.

"Ssh, An, I'm here," Clarke murmurs shakily, her voice closer now, "please, you need to breathe and
calm down. You're not getting any air through. I need you to take three big deep breaths and hold
them. Focus on the sound of my voice, Anya. You're not back there anymore. You're here, in New
York, with me, Clarke. You are safe and you are loved, An. *Breathe.*" Anya somehow finds the
energy to open her eyes to see Clarke kneeling in front of her, blue eyes blown wide with concern
and worry. Tears blur Anya's vision from properly making out her sister-in-law's face, but she can
see that Clarke's on the verge of crying at the sight of her so torn apart. Her hands are trembling as
they place themselves upon Anya's taut biceps, over the hand that holds her body together. At what
point had she curled into herself like a child, Anya has no idea. She can barely sense anything bare
for tingling numbness setting in her spine and the ringing in her ears.

"I'm here, okay? It's okay," she whispers, her hand trailing upwards to run through those tangled
locks. Anya watches as a few tears straggle down Clarke's cheeks as she leans forward, wrapping
her arms around the older woman and pulling her into her pale arms. Somehow, Anya ends up half
on the couch and half on the ground with her face pushed into her sister-in-law's chest. She sobs
against her shirt, her hands clutching at the material as her body finally fractures under the pressure of
her violent and abhorrent memories. The waves are too big this time, and her anchor to reality isn't
holding.

"It's okay," Clarke repeats again into Anya's ear as she kisses her temple, "it's okay."

But that's just it.

It's *not* okay. It's been four years and it's still not okay.

It will *never* be okay.

Anya reluctantly pulls herself away from her chest and looks up at her distant gaze. Something in
those blue eyes causes Anya to cry out in pain; perhaps it's the guilt or the fear, but it scares her to
death. Clarke is lying to her, she's trying everything to protect her from the war that wages inside
her mind, but she's no knight in shining armour to Anya's trauma. She hasn't seen the violent perils of
war, felt the stickiness of blood on her fingertips as she holds together the fraying fragments of a
soldier. Anya's head spins and aches and her palms are clammy and shaking as Clarke pulls her close
to her body again. Anya can't help but bury her head in the crook of her sister-in-law's neck and cry
harder. She wishes that Lexa were here, how she wished she could have been quicker.

It hits her then. She watched her sister *die* and it was her fault.

And to think she made *progress*.

Anya's mind goes blank as Clarke's hands rub soothing lines up and down her back. She wants to
disappear, to save Clarke the misery of carrying her burdens. She wants to save her the same misery. The whisper comes softly as Clarke's arms tighten around her back, but this time, the voice isn't spiteful or hostile.

*Kill yourself.* It's pleading with her, begging her for release. It's a low, condescending snarl as it speaks again, the sound reverberating in her shattered mind. *Kill yourself before you kill anyone else.* *Kill yourself because you killed her. You deserve nothing but a painful, slow death.*

*You are nothing but a murderer, Anya.*

She stops crying as the weight of the words bears down on her shoulders. For a moment she considers the option, the proposition that sifts through her brain. It's tantalizingly tempting, to be free of all the pain she's been through in the last four years. She thinks about her parents, and how she couldn't stop them from leaving. She sees Gustus and Lexa, and she bitterly remembers how each of them had died protecting *her*. She opens her eyes to see Clarke staring back her with a patient, but equally worried expression. Her hands are still on Anya's shoulders, lightly rubbing to distract her. Anya remembers the whispers.

Could she stop herself from doing the unthinkable if it really came down to it?

The sad thing, the thing that wrenches her heart into uneven, jagged pieces, is that *Anya doesn't know*. She doesn't know how much of this she can take. Anya's changing into the darker side of her burdens and memories. She's losing the true essence of what makes her, *her*. Anya will try to deny it, what with the recent, somewhat faux-euphoria that she's been experiencing, but she knows that she no longer sees herself in the mirror anymore. What she sees is the shadow of the woman she'd once known a long time ago, too long ago. She can see what could have been, instead of what currently. Anya's a shell of a woman, even if she will try to hide it. She'd had seen it in her father after the war, and now she knows that she can see it in herself. She's not here anymore.

Despite the mocking sense of reality she now has, Anya knows her mind is truly lost in the desert from three years ago, staring at the ashes of a dead body.

A soft knock on the door interrupts Anya from her thoughts. She feels weak and sickly in Clarke's tight grasp as she begins to shake uncontrollably. But still, she glances at her sister-in-law looking down at her, wanting to know if she truly is ready for this. Her eyes are so soft and warm, but also so guarded and concerned with her wellbeing that it fills Anya's heart with a warmth she never thought she could feel again. And then, in that same moment, she feels guilty again, because that's Lexa's wife, the love of her life, the woman that her baby sister had pined over for years before she finally had the nerve to ask out. The guilt turns into a churning mess in her stomach when Anya realizes that she's kissed the woman that her sister loved with every inch of her soul.

How *could* she?

Shaking away the thought, Anya sucks in a sharp breath as she tries to untangle herself from her sister-in-law's body. Clarke calls out for the doctor to give the both of them a moment, and his gentle voice acquiesces from the other side of the wooden frame. Clarke reaches down and helps her sister-in-law back onto the couch, her hands coming to rest on her thighs as she gazes at the older woman with sympathy and sorrow. Anya avoids her gaze, feeling ashamed of all that had happened in these past years, and especially now. Clarke takes a shaky breath as she leans forward and wraps the older woman in a tight hug.

"I love you," she whispers against Anya's shoulder, pulling back to wipe away the stray tears from your face. "It's okay to not be okay sometimes, An. That's why we're here." She gives Anya a feeble smile before she cleans the other woman up with a few tissues. She gives out a soft sigh before
straightening Anya's shirt and pecking her cheek in support. She dips her head and sighs into the older woman's shoulder, closing her eyes for a brief moment before she takes a deep breath and turns around, sitting on the armchair beside Anya. She calls for the doctor to come in, saying they're both ready. The doorknob clicks and he walks in, but Anya remains unmoving and still, her gaze glued to the floor. She's paralyzed to her seat, her hearing fuzzy and her head throbbing from the crying.

"Ms Woods," the doctor says softly as he takes a seat, but Anya can't look at him just yet. He leans in on his chair, gazing at her sympathetically as he tries to get a read of the other woman. Clarke remains still beside her, watching carefully as Anya tries to raise her head. She gets as far as his collar before she begins to shake. Clarke bites the inside of her cheek, her heart wrenching at the sight of the woman so broken. It'd been so long since her last big attack. She'd known how bad her PTSD could get, but she thought that she'd been getting better as they years had gone by, what with the renewed support and love from family.

"Does this happen often?" Dr Jarod asks, looking at the woman with a neutral expression. "It's alright. It's expected from veterans."

Anya licks her quivering, chapped lips and remains silent. Clarke can see that she's not here, but still dwelling in the realm between past and present.

"It isn't as often as it used to be," Clarke says softly as she reaches over to give her hand a soft squeeze. "I think it was the backfire of the car that set it off."

"Triggers are difficult," the doctor states rather obviously, but he still gives them a smile and leans back in his chair. "My apologies, we haven't met…?"

"Clarke," she says as she extends her free hand for the doctor to shake, "Clarke Griffin-Woods." The doctor raises his brow and hums.

"So you're her wife, I'm guessing?" Dr Jarod assumes as he pulls out a pen and reaches for his clipboard. Anya flinches and Clarke bites her lip.

"Um, no. Anya is my sister-in-law. My wife…," Clarke chokes up on the word before steadying herself. "My wife died three and a half years ago."

"Soldier?" The doctor asks as he writes down the information. Anya tenses again, but Clarke grips her hand like a lifeline. Tears burn in her eyes as she nods. Clarke tries to push down her feelings and her own memories of the day she found out that Lexa had died, but watching Anya fall apart only makes her want to give into the temptation of sadness that still festers within her. Dr Jarod is silent for a few minutes, simply observing the both of them with a neutral gaze.

"Well," the doctor says as he puts his clipboard aside and looks between them with a stoic expression, "why don't we start now?"

Clarke and Anya glance at each other before nervously looking up at the doctor. Dr Jarod offers a smile as Clarke furrows her brows.

"From where?" Clarke asks, her voice trembling. The doctor sighs and gives them an encouraging nod.

"From the beginning," he tells them as they both tense up, "from when you both lost Lexa."

===

"Why don't you go freshen up?" Clarke says as she places the car keys in the empty bowl beside the
door before turning and locking the frame. Anya remains silent, just how she'd been for the past two hours. The therapy didn't go successfully, per say, but she'd managed to stick through the entire session, even if she never really said a word and let Clarke do all the talking. Anya had been too caught up in the voices and the memories of her flashback to have concentrated on what Dr Jarod had been asking her. Instead, Clarke had taken to answering questions, and for a moment, it was as if Anya hadn't even been there.

She wonders why she even bothered. Maybe it wasn't in her to get better. Maybe she wasn't capable of moving on.

"An?" Clarke's voice calls out again, but Anya can't seem to acknowledge her. She's so wrapped up in the past and the burning anger and resentment that billows in the hollow of her chest; she's not even certain if she's even existing in the present. It's funny, Anya thinks, because before this appointment, she thought she was okay. She thought that she was managing through the pain and the grief, but what she'd actually done is push it all down and ignored it. And now?

Now, Anya's paying for it.

Clarke gazes at Anya with concern as she remains frigid by the door. She's staring at the floor, no doubt feeling empty and worthless. Before the older woman had been angry about even thinking about visiting a psychologist to help sort through her survivor's guilt, now she, as she stands with her shoulders slumped, she just looks depressed. Anya feels like there's an elephant strapped to her back, crushing her body. She doesn't move as Clarke walks over to her slowly.

"Oh An…," Clarke whispers her sister-in-law's name in a soft coo, her hand coming up to place itself upon her tear-stained cheek. Anya barely gives a reaction, neither by moving nor speaking. It's like she's frozen in a moment. Clarke's head leans up slowly and she presses their foreheads together, her hand wrapping around the back of the older woman's neck. Their breaths bounce of each other's lips as they cushion themselves in the grief that surround them.

"We'll get through this," Clarke murmurs in a croak, closing her eyes. Anya can tell by the way she's breathing that she's thoroughly exhausted, but she manages to reserve some of her strength for her. It's not fair, and Anya knows it. Clarke has her own struggles, her own anchor pulling her down that she's still trying to work on. She has her own worries, about her family, about her mother, about Anya, and the older woman feels guilty again. Anya stiffens as her heart stops beating at her own internal thoughts. She manages to look down into Clarke's distant eyes and she sees her love shining through her glossy, sorrowed gaze.

And then it occurs to Anya: what if she's the anchor pulling Clarke down?

Anya closes her eyes and places her hands on Clarke's shoulders, gently pushing her away from her. As much as she wants and yearns for Clarke's comfort, right now she can't distinguish one thought or feeling from the other as they whirl through her mind. Clarke inaudibly gasps, but she doesn't say anything as the older woman silently nudges past her, heading for the bathroom. She opens up the door and closes it softly behind her back. At first, Anya's tempted to lock it, but she doesn't. She valiantly avoids the mirror as she pulls down her pants to sit on the toilet. She conducts her business in silence, trying to block out the sounds of Clarke's soft cries from the other room. She finishes up and washes her hands, her eyes glued to the water running over her palms in the sink.

\[Oh\text{ Anya}, \text{ the whisper calls out, aren't you so fucking pathetic? You do know it wasn't supposed to be her that died that day, right?}\]

\[\text{It was supposed to be you.}\]
Anya winces, but she shakes her head to try and ward off the deprecating thoughts. She turns off the tap and hangs her head over the sink. She grips the edge of the porcelain with a mighty force, nearly breaking it apart with the force of her grip. Tears break their way out of her closed eyelids as the darkness churns inside her mind. It eats away at Anya like a festering parasite looking for a place to feed and devour until nothing is left but her bare bones. Her flesh twists and burns with the passing anxiety making its way through her veins, and it's as if she's fighting an infection that won't get better. Anya breaks out into a cold sweat as panic washes over her, and as she looks down to her shaking hands, she can feel the blood. She's brought to her knees on the cold tiles, pressing her clammy hands upon the floor, her head wedged against the cupboards of the sink as she begins to cry again. The whisper returns again with a vengeance.

*Kill yourself,* it repeats again in a growl, *do it, you coward.*

"'Nya?" A soft, feminine voice croaks from the other side of the door, startling Anya from her thoughts. The woman takes in a stuttering breath, struggling to hide her tears as she stumbles to her feet and unlocks the door to see a scared-looking Tris staring up at her from her tiny height. Anya kneels and holds back her tears, only able to nod in an effort to let Tris know to continue with what she wanted to say. The little girl hiccups and stretches out her arms nervously.

"You said that I give hugs like my mommy," Tris says quietly, her voice trembling. "And you said she gave the best hugs. I know that when you or Ade or Mama hug me, I don't feel so upset or scared anymore. Can... can I give you a hug? It might make you less sad." Anya's heart melts at the innocence in her niece's voice. It's then that she sees Lexa standing before her from ages ago, from when they'd been nothing but fearful children in a scary, big world.

"How could I say no to one of your hugs?" Anya whispers in a choked tone, opening her arms. "Come here, my little one."

Tris beams and launches herself forwards, enveloping the older woman in the tightest, most secure hug she could give. Anya's breath stutters for a moment before she finds her head sliding down to rest in the little girl's neck, drinking in the scent of her niece. Tris only squeezes harder and gives Anya a sloppy peck to the cheek. Smiling, the older woman pulls away and hoists her niece up into her arms, letting their bodies be joined again in another hug.

"Thank you," Anya whispers as she nudges Tris' nose with her own. "You do give the best hugs."

"Are you and Mama going to be okay?" Tris asks quietly, looking past Anya to where Clarke and Aden are embracing in the kitchen. Anya takes a deep breath as she looks to the other woman with a distant expression. Clarke's eyes are brimming with tears as she cradles Aden into her arms, kissing his ear as he rubs her back and does his best to comfort her. Anya takes a breath and walks up towards them, Tris still in her arms as she approaches the younger blonde.

"We'll get through this as a family," Anya tells her niece, pecking her forehead before holding out her arm for Clarke and Aden. They both wait for a moment, unsure of the embrace. Anya's eyes well with tears as she chokes out, "we're fighters, this family. Nothing can break us. We're together until the end."

With that, Clarke finally caves.

The younger woman very nearly throws herself at Anya, wrapping her arm around Anya's midsection as she sobs into her neck. At the sight of her crying, Aden bursts into his own cry as he nuzzles into the space between Clarke and Anya. The ex-soldier holds them both to her chest as she rests her head upon Clarke's head. Her sister-in-law's hands come up to press against her abdomen, her fingers curling in the material of her shirt as she continues crying. Aden sniffles as he wraps his
arms around his mother and aunt, before nuzzling his head against Tris' trembling body. Anya sighs, revelling in the warmth of them surrounding her in the solidarity of their strength. Even though it's been so long since Lexa's death, she knows that this pain might not ever go away.

At some point, though, it might not feel as bad as it does now.

And maybe it might not ever get better, Anya thinks as she gazes down at her family mournfully, but she knows that in the end, they'll be okay.

They *have* to be.

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**Date and Time Unknown**

**Location Unknown**

"You look better."

Lexa's head slowly nods up to see Kareem walk in with his plate of bread and a cup of water. The boy looks less skinny than before, and actually wears a smile on his face as he approaches the other soldier. Lexa sighs and scoots over, giving him some room as he sits and breaks the bread, offering her a piece. She eyes it for a minute before taking it and popping it into her mouth. Her tongue still isn't used to the taste of food after being fed liquid drugs like electrolytes and other saline solutions through an IV, but she's starting to get the hang of it now, from what she assumes is a few months later. Kareem grins at her and chews his own bite. The bright smile on his face is enough to lift the dark cloud that seems to permanently hang over Lexa's aura.

"You've gained weight," Lexa nods as she swallows. "It's good. You look stronger."

"Chief has given my father a new job," Kareem beams again, "he helps with the farmers now too. I had meat yesterday. I wanted to bring you some."

"Why?" Lexa asks, wondering why the boy would want to help her still after everything she's done. He'd wet himself when he watched her kill Costia. Kareem just shrugs, however, and continues to eat his bread with a smile on his face. Lexa finds herself thinking of Aden whenever she looks at him, and her heart always tugs at the sensitive topic of her family. She wonders how they're doing, if they've moved on without her there, or if they are even in New York anymore.

"Do you miss your family?" Kareem asks as he sees her drifting off, reading her thoughts. Lexa arches her brow, but doesn't reply. Kareem shrugs.

"That's enough food," a low growl interrupts, causing Kareem to stiffen. The boy shoots upwards as Cage and Emerson walk into the room, looking pissed off as per usual. Lexa barely offers a snort as they walk in with their chests puffed out and snarls on their faces. "We don't want the others to go hungry, right?"
"Kareem," Lexa growls as she shifts so she's in front of the boy, "go to your mother. Now."

"But--"

"No," Lexa says sternly, protectively. She won't admit how much she's grown fond of the boy. "Just listen to me, and go."

Kareem frowns and glares up at the two men, but he obeys Lexa's command and heaves himself up to his feet. He leaves the room, but not without passing one final glance in Lexa's direction. The woman offers a measly smile and a nod in his direction, which is the only thing that propels him to run down the hall.

"I don't understand why he comes back," Emerson snorts, "he's not a slave anymore. He doesn't owe you anything."

"Perhaps it is I that owes him," Lexa quips back in a musing tone, "but you would know nothing of that, would you?"

"I still want the location of those missiles," Cage hisses as he looms over her, bringing his leg up to kick her in the face. Lexa's head snaps backwards and she lays there, her vision blurring. Her body has become accustomed to the physical torture, but she doesn't have the strength in her to fight back anymore. Cage nods to Emerson, who leans over and holds her down as Cage delivers a series of blows to her midsection and back, growing more frustrated with each blow in which she doesn't respond. He grips his head and screams expletives at her, following it with a final kick to her abdomen, right in the stomach.

"Done?" Lexa wheezes as he walks away, pacing back and forth like a caged animal. "I think you need to work-out more. I'm not really feeling anything."

"Shut up!" Cage shouts at her, gripping his head. "You fucking bitch, you think you're so smart? I'll show you. Take her pants off."

Lexa's eyes widen as she watches Cage's hands go to his belt, unlatching it as Emerson tears her pants off. She struggles as his knee pins her body down, preventing her from struggling away. Cage's eyes are dark, one of his hands inside his pants jerking his member to hardness as she lies helpless on the ground. She begins to hyperventilate, unable to fathom the idea of this being her end. After all the torture, it will all come down to this moment.

"Stop," Lexa warns as she struggles again under the weight of Emerson's body, "Cage, stop it."

"Tell me where they are," the man growls as he stalks closer, "or else I'll do it."

"Cage, stop," Lexa says as she shakes her head, "don't do this. Please, I don't know where they are. I swear--"

"You do," Cage tells her as he kneels and fishes his dick from his pants, "and I'm not patient anymore."

"Sir," Emerson says as he watches the interaction doubtfully, "sir, maybe we should reconsider--"

"Shut up!" Cage snarls at him, his hand reaching for Lexa's thigh and yanking her downwards. "I've had enough of the bitch. I want to see if she's as tight as she is stubborn." Lexa thrashes and yelps, trying to kick away from the man, but Cage's grip is relentless. Emerson looks between them, obviously conflicted.
"Mr Wallace," a familiar cold voice interrupts, "that's enough."

At the sound of the chief's domineering tone, Cage whips around and draws his gun. A split second later a gunshot goes off and Lexa finds her naked backside smeared in blood. She cocks her head, straining it over her neck in fear, only to see the chief standing with his pistol raised, smoke whizzing from the end. Emerson jumps to his feet, but before he can move, the chief shoots him down too. Lexa flinches as more blood covers her body, but she remains still.

The chief waits a moment, his gun still raised, before he lowers his arm and sheathes his weapon. Behind him, Lexa makes out the worried gaze of Kareem, hiding behind the pant-leg of his mother. The woman for once looks at her with sympathy, not anger or resentment. The chief nods to them and orders the guards to take Emerson and Cage's body from the room. The woman comes over with a few cloths and a fresh pair of clothes, her movements slow and gentle.

"Why?" Lexa asks as she watches the men being removed. The chief remains stoic, but can't help pass a glare at Cage and Emerson's dead bodies.

"I had no more use for them," the chief admits nonchalantly. "Besides, they were starting to get on my nerves. They served their purpose and my people are better defended now. I didn't need them to be here to hurt the others." Lexa remains quiet as the woman gently reaches for her face and cleans the cuts upon her face. Her eyes are soft, filled with pity and warmth that Lexa hasn't seen in five years. She hums a quiet lullaby as she starts to clean the other woman up.

"What's happening?" Lexa breathes out, her voice trembling as she looks to the chief in confusion.

"Because you've learned your lesson," the chief tells her, crossing his arms behind his back. "I've arranged for a convoy to arrive to take you home soon."

At this, Lexa freezes. Did she hear that right?

"You…," she trails off in a broken voice, "you're letting me go?"

"Yes," the chief says as Kareem's mother continues to clean her up and help her dress. "You are no longer needed here. You will tell your people to leave."

"And if I don't?" Lexa asks, shaking her head in confusion still. "Then what?"

"Are you not going to?" The chief asks, still steady and even in his tone of voice. Lexa's mouth falls shut in silence. The chief appears satisfied by her answer.

Nodding, the chief passes Kareem a small wink and his mother a gentle smile before he departs without another word. Lexa remains laying there, now back in proper clothes and bandaged up. She looks up to Kareem's mother and sees her look over to her son, who looks happy at Lexa's slight smile. He bounds forward and wraps his arms around the soldier's shoulders. Lexa gasps slightly as she remembers the feel of Aden's arms around her. Her eyes mist at the thought of going home, of holding her son in her arms and kissing her wife. She can't help but hug Kareem back and smile, tears welling in her eyes.

"You may see us as savages," the woman says softly as she packages up the supplies, "but it is how we have survived out here. This is our culture."

Finally, Lexa seems to get an understanding of it all. She hears it in the woman's voice as she looks to her son, now having clambered off Lexa and sitting beside her again. She opens her arms and the boy burrows inside of them, grateful for the warmth. It's then that Lexa notices how much has
changed in the woman and her child in the however many so years that have gone by since her captivity. She looks healthier and happier, and her clothing is no longer ratty or tattered, but instead more civil. Her cheeks are no longer gaunt and she looks physically unharmed. Apparently, the woman catches her gawking and smiles.

"Chief took us in when he liberated a refugee camp that had been run by rogue soldiers," the woman explains, bitterness in her voice as she explains. "They raped me for days, tortured my husband, and made my child do things that were unspeakable. I never thought we would get out alive, not until he came and freed us. Ever since being back, we've been accepted and loved by the village here. We are fierce, but we are protective and caring for our people." Lexa's eyes mist with tears as she sees the woman's head nod back up and their eyes meet for a few moments before Kareem's mother clears her throat and sighs.

"You would have protected my son from those bastards," the woman admits softly. "That is enough for me to find it in my heart to try and forgive you."

"You are happy here?" Lexa asks, her voice a hoarse croak. The woman smiles and nods, looking to her son with pride and joy.

"We are safe, fed, and sheltered," the woman says gratefully, "we are more than happy. We are at peace."

"I'm sorry that my soldiers hurt you and your people," Lexa admits as she shuffles into a sitting position with a wince. "I should have known better."

"You will tell your people to leave," the woman says, a bit of bite returning to her voice, "and then I will fully accept your apology."

With that, the woman gathers her son in her arms and leads him towards the exit. Before she leaves, she turns around and nods to Lexa.

"I hope that your return to your family is swift and joyous," she says quietly, "from all I can tell, you must be a good mother to your son. I'm sure he will be glad to see you, as well as your wife." Lexa's taken aback by the sheer genuine tone in her voice. She nods again and offers a half-hearted smile when Kareem tugs on her gown and begs her to come with him to visit the other children in the village, to perhaps grab Lexa some meat for her dinner as a celebratory meal.

When they leave and Lexa's left alone, the woman bursts into a sob. She looks up to see the vision of Clarke and Aden standing in the corner of her cell, wide smiles donning their lips. Anya, Octavia, and Lincoln are watching too, with Gustus and Indra at their side. Her entire family is there, smiling proudly at her.

For the first time since waking up in captivity, she has hope that she's going to be okay.

For the first time, her tears are not of sadness, but of joy.

For the first time, Lexa knows she's finally going home.
"Some party," Clarke sighs as she fills her glass with some more wine, glancing over at Octavia with a raised brow. "I didn't think you still had it in you."

"It's gonna be a new year soon," Octavia grins as she raises her water glass, causing Clarke to look at her with confusion and then excitement.

"When did you find out?" Clarke asks, her eyes involuntarily dropping to her friend's stomach. Octavia giggles and lightly shoves her friend back. She can't help but slide her hand down to her belly. Clarke's gaze softens and she sees the pure bliss in Octavia's eyes as she stares down at the flat ridge of her abdomen.

"Yesterday morning," Octavia replies in a soft whisper, "Lincoln swears it's gonna be a girl."

"He's started to get overprotective already?" Clarke jokes, laughing as Octavia shoots her an exasperated glance.

"Don't even get me started," Octavia groans, "I'm pregnant, not immobile. It also sucks that I'm going to lose my abs. I worked hard on those." A pout pulls at her friends lips as she slides her hand down to her stomach again. Clarke can't help but laugh a little harder as she reaches down for one of Octavia's hands. She gives it a gentle squeeze and nods her approval. At the silent reassurance, Octavia relaxes and smiles. She takes another sip from her water, groaning again.

"Nine months of no alcohol?" She asks with a frown as she stares into her cup. "I honestly have no idea how I'm going to do it. We all know how much I love Lincoln's margaritas. Oh and his Sex on the Beaches. Actually scratch that, I love his sex on the beach in any shape and form. He's not going to stop having sex with me just because I'm about to turn into a bloated whale, is he?" Octavia looks genuinely concerned as she pales, her hands gripping her cup tightly.

"Well, for Lexa it was the opposite. She couldn't keep her hands off me for the first and second trimester. She loved the whole 'glowing' bullshit. Not to mention the swelling of my breasts just about turned her on no matter where we were. If Lincoln's anything like his cousin, you'll be fine in the sex department, O. Just wait for the cravings to hit though," Clarke chuckles as she takes a sip of her wine. "I always had Lexa getting me random things in the weirdest hours of the morning or late at night. I'm pretty sure that she got zero sleep during my second trimester." The words are said without remorse or bitterness, but instead soft nostalgia. She boldly remembers how her wife would grab whatever she'd desired regardless of how far she would have to go to get it.

"Get ready for when you start to show," Clarke continues, lost in her memories. "Lexa would never detach herself from my belly. She'd talk to the baby every night, even when she thought I was asleep. She was insanely touchy and soft, but incredibly overprotective. She wouldn't even let me lift a dish without puffing up her chest and saying that she could do it herself to save the baby from being in any harm. When Aden was born, she was so lost. She spent months reading books and going to parenting classes and practicing with the kids at the hospital. I'd never seen her so amazed by anything than the day our son was born. She held him like she was holding a piece of glass. God, I don't think I've ever seen Lexa cry as much as she did then, and she sobbed on our wedding day."

Octavia's silent for a minute, unsure of what to say. Clarke notes the discomfort and sighs, offering
her a small smile. "Sorry, it's just ever since Anya and I started going to see Dr Jarod, these things have been coming up more. He said that it's something we need to work through, and that talking helps." Octavia nods, smiling back in return as she opens her arms for Clarke to envelope herself in. The blonde accepts the hug eagerly, letting her head rest in her shoulder.

"I never realized how much I missed her until now," Clarke whispers as she grips Octavia tightly. "I can't believe it'll be four years since she died."

"She's always with you, Clarke. She never left," Octavia whispers into her ear, rubbing up and down the tense woman's back. "You still need to heal."

"I wonder what she would think of all of this," Clarke murmurs as she looks to the small gathering of people. Tris is asleep in Abby's arms and Aden is on the couch with his friend Jackson from school. Jackson's parents are there too, talking to Anya and Lincoln about soccer. Clarke's eyes soften as she sees Aden glance over at her from the couch, his eyes narrowed in concern when he sees the tears glistening in her eyes. Clarke shakes her head and gives him a small, reassuring smile as she leans back into Octavia. Aden still looks worried, but Jackson's soft voice gently pulls him away from the attention of his mother.

"So...," Octavia whispers as she looks over to Anya, "how's she holding up? Lincoln said that she's been having trouble with the therapy."

Clarke sighs, her heart aching as she remembers the extremity of the panic attack that had stricken the older woman on their first visit. "She's working through years of repressed memories, not just from after Lexa's death. I always saw her as so strong, you know? Like she was always this immovable object. Lexa would tell me of the things Anya would do to protect her and raise her, but I never knew what she'd do that she'd neglect burdening Lexa with, of all the pain she's endured in her life. God, she was a kid when her parents died, O. She was a kid and she was forced to become a mother at such a young age."

"She's stronger than she gives herself credit for," Octavia says, nodding in agreement. Clarke keeps her stare glued to Anya's back, her eyes gazing over those built shoulders and the defined muscles in her arms. Clarke licks lips, tasting the buzz of the wine upon her lips. As if on impulse, Anya turns, her gaze meeting Clarke's from across the room. Octavia gulps, clearing her throat so that Clarke can look over at her. There's a concerned expression on her face as she sighs.

"Look, Clarke. I don't judge. If you want this with her and she wants it with you, then go for it. Live while you're both still able to," Octavia says softly, though there's a stern undertone to her voice. "You guys are in a fragile state. If this is something you want, just make sure you both are in it together."

"What are you talking about?" Clarke asks, but the rasp of her voice is evident that she already knows what she's talking about. Octavia eyes her warningly.

"I'm talking about you and Anya eye-fucking across the room," Octavia says, without any bite to her voice. She looks to Clarke's glass, still worried.

"You've been drinking, Clarke. Are you sure you're okay?" Octavia asks, glancing between her and Anya. Clarke can't ignore the tingle that shoots up the apex of her spine. Sure, she's had a few glasses of wine, but she's not had physical contact with anyone in so long. She immediately tries to clear her lusted haze as she frowns. Not even a few minutes ago she was talking about her wife. Gritting her teeth in frustration, the blonde bows her head and sighs, rubbing her head.

"I'm sorry, O. I don't know what came over me," Clarke murmurs apologetically as she glances up at
her friend. "I shouldn't be thinking like this."

"If you're going to do this," Octavia says softly as they both watch Anya walk over, "you just be sure that you can handle it, okay? You're an adult, Clarke."

"Hey," Anya says, her voice low and husky as she approaches the two women. Octavia offers a smile, though it's a bit restrained before she excuses herself to find her husband. Anya watches her go in confusion before turning back to Clarke. She hands the younger blonde another glass of wine, which Clarke readily accepts. There's far too much running through her mind to deal with it all sober, so she downs half the glass in a single gulp, sighing with relief.

"Jackson and Aden are going back to his place," Anya says as she nods to the two boys. "He's excited for that ski trip."

"I'm glad he's getting out," Clarke replies with a nod as he watches Aden walk over towards them, "he needs to get out and do things."

"Ade," Anya welcomes her nephew with open arms as he beams at the both of them. Aden accepts Anya's hug, nuzzling his head into the older woman's shoulder before wrapping his arms around Anya's waist. The older blonde simply ruffles his hair and pecks his forehead lovingly. Aden sighs comfortably before removing himself from his aunt's hold and wrapping his arms around his mother's shoulders. Clarke pecks his cheek and holds him closely, drinking in his scent. Everything about the way he protectively embraces her, to even the smell of her son reminds her of her wife and it makes her heart ache.

"You call me as soon as you guys reach the resort, okay?" Clarke asks as she pecks her son's forehead. "I love you, Aden."

"I love you too, Mama. I promise I'll text you before I leave," he replies with a nod, but Clarke arches her brow. He rolls his eyes and groans.

"Fine, I'll call. It's just... it's lame, Ma. No one uses their phones to call anymore," Aden grumpily complains as he pouts. Clarke frowns at him.

"Excuse me? I like talking on the phone."

"Yeah, but that's because you're old."

"Aden!" Clarke says with a feigned gasp. The boy just grins cheekily and bounds up to peck her cheek before rocketing away with a final wave. Clarke shakes her head and sighs at the boy, unable to believe his teasing antics. Anya chuckles as they watch him leave. Clarke's gaze then drifts over to where Tris is still cradled up in Abby's arms as the older woman continues her conversation with Indra and Aurora, Octavia's mother.

"Abby said that she'll watch Tris for the night," Anya says as she licks her lips almost nervously. "The they want to go to the museum with Indra in the morning."

"Is that so?" Clarke asks, her eyes hooded and dark as she looks up at the taller woman. Anya nods, her mouth hinging open a little.

"Do you want to go somewhere?" The older woman asks, still nervous. "Somewhere that isn't... here?"

Clarke can hear Octavia's voice echoing in the back of her head, giving her a warning, but at this point, she's too lost in Anya's eyes to listen.
"Yeah," she replies as she places her wine glass on the counter, "let's go."

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"It's so fucking cold outside," Clarke giggles as she leans into Anya's side, their hands tangling and brushing up against each other as they drunkenly stumble into an abandoned playground. Anya sighs and looks to the side so that her nose brushes against Clarke's hair, breathing in her scent. The two of them walk over to the swings and plop down on them. The metal creaks with their weight as they swing lightly back and forth. Anya reaches into her pocket for a blunt and lights it up, sticking the weed between her lips and taking a long and soothing drag. Clarke just watches in silence as Anya smirks and hands her the blunt.

"Are we not gonna talk about what happened the last time you gave me one of those?" Clarke asks with a rasp to her voice, but accepts the stick. She places it between her lips and drags on the blunt, humming when her lungs fill with warm smoke. She holds her breath a few moments before exhaling.

"Who said we needed to talk about it?" Anya asks back as she lets her feet drag over the wood chips beneath her, causing her swing to rock. Clarke glances over at her to see the older woman staring at the graffiti-covered slide with a distant expression. Clarke sighs, letting the faint buzz of the marijuana settle over her mind as she swings back and forth. There's a silence then, but it's not tense. It's simply… peaceful. Anya takes another hit of the blunt and sighs.

"Lexa and I used to come here when we would get upset," the older woman says as she rocks back and forth. "It was like our little hideaway. She used to burrow up in the slide, despite how much I told her about germs and such. She wouldn't care and would stay there until she felt ready to talk about what upset her."

Clarke remains quiet, not wanting to give into the tears that well up in her eyes. Anya shakes her head and shrugs, looking down.

"Somedays, I still think she's going to come home. Somedays, I still feel like she's going to come home and surprise us. I don't want to believe she's dead," Anya says, her voice growing bitter as she turns her head away from Clarke. "Somedays, I wish that I could go back and try harder to send her home."

"Anya," Clarke whispers, her voice cracking. "You don't mean that."

"It should have been me," Anya whispers as she turns to look at Clarke with misty eyes. "I had nothing to lose. She had everything. She was my little sister, the girl that I raised when our parents died. I promised my father I would take care of her, that I would protect her, but look at what I did. I killed my own baby sister, Clarke. How exactly do you live with yourself when you know that you're the reason why the only good thing in your life is gone?" Tears stream down the older woman's cheeks as she shakes her head. She takes the smoke back into her lips and inhales greedily, wanting nothing more than the burn in her throat.

"You couldn't have stopped her," Clarke says with a soft sigh. "You know Lexa. She's selfless."

"It doesn't mean that what she did was right," Anya bitterly scowls. "What was she thinking, taking a risk like that? Why does she always have to protect everyone? Why couldn't she just let me go? Why couldn't she just let me save her?" The last question is quieter, more defeated than the first few. The anger and bite leaves Anya's voice as she looks down to the wood chips. She simply sniffs and takes a brave breath before nodding at Clarke, offering a flimsy smile.
"Sorry," she apologizes in a croak, "I didn't mean to get... like this."

"Don't apologize, ever. We're both still working through this. It takes time," Clarke whispers, reaching down to lightly grab at Anya's hand. The older woman's breath hitches as she stares at their interlaced fingers with a glassy expression. She takes a minute to compose herself before looking back up at Clarke.

"I'm sorry I kissed you," Anya whispers after sometime, her voice shaky and low. "It wasn't my place and it was inappropriate."

"Maybe it wasn't," Clarke whispers back as she rocks her swing to a slower swing, her lip trembling in the cold. "But I don't regret it."

At this, Anya stiffens and cocks her head at Clarke. "You don't?"

Clarke shakes her head and looks down. "I feel terrible for saying it, but I don't. My wife is dead and I'm kissing her sister? Like how fucked up is that?" Anya winces and averts her gaze, the grip on the chains holding the swing. Clarke takes another breath before looking over at Anya with a bittersweet expression. "But you know what? That night, the night you took me out, the night we kissed, I felt more alive than I had in three years. You made me feel again when I'd been numb for so long. So no, I won't ever regret that kiss. I know how we're still working through our grief and shit sucks, but I'm glad I have you."

Clarke pauses, and then she smiles again, a bit bigger and less guilty than before. "I'm glad I've always had you."

"I care about you," Anya whispers weakly, looking down. "I mean, not just because of Lexa, but because you're... you're you, I guess."

"How did we end up here?" Clarke asks as she looks up to the night sky, wondering if her wife is up there somewhere, watching over them. She wonders if Lexa would want her to just go for it, or if she'd be angry or betrayed, or maybe she couldn't see because her spirit was already moved on into another body. Before she can contemplate the question, Anya's squeezing her hand and drawing her attention. She looks into those glassy hazel eyes and feels her heart break.

"Clarke," Anya whispers as she looks to their hands and then back up to her sister-in-law's face. "What are we doing?"

"I don't know," Clarke replies breathily as she stands from her swing and walks to stand in front of Anya. "But... I want to find out. I'm tired, An. I don't want to be alone anymore. I feel selfish, but shouldn't we be allowed to selfish when all the world does is take from us? Don't we deserve that at least?" Anya stands too, reaching for Clarke's other hand and winding it around her waist so that the younger woman is pulled into the heat of her thick winter parka.

"We deserve better than that," Anya whispers into her hair as she kisses her forehead. "You deserve the world, Clarke."

"So do you," Clarke responds in a soft sigh, holding Anya closer to her. "God... I... I can't help this feeling."

"What feeling?" Anya asks, though she already knows the answer. As much as she'll deny it, she feels exactly the same way.

"Like I'm on fire," Clarke whispers as she runs her hands up from Anya's front to cup her cheeks in her hands. "But I want it. I want to burn... with you."
"Fuck," Anya whispers as Clarke leans up on her toes and presses their foreheads together until their lips are barely away from each other. "Clarke…"

"Tell me to stop," Clarke practically whimpers as she closes her eyes and slides her hands to the back of her neck, "tell me to stop and I'll--"

Clarke's voice is muffled by the sound of Anya's lips moving against hers in a passionate, rough kiss. It's nothing like the gentle press of the first time. No, this kiss is desperate and needy. It's hot like the fire burning between them, cold as the frigid air that numbs them. She feels like she's hurdling through time and space, to another realm. Her body nearly combusts when Anya's hands move to her waist, drawing her in close like she's ready to downright consume her.

"I want this," Anya gasps as she reattaches their lips messily. "Fuck, I want this. I want you, Clarke."

Clarke whimpers as she nips Anya's bottom lip. Her head is screaming at her to stop, that this is a mistake, that if she says yes, she could regret it.

But she can't help herself, and that's what curdles a burning fire in her heart. One night of selfishness can't be bad, right?

"Take me," she decides with a stern voice, practically growling the words into Anya's mouth. "I want you to take me home and fuck me, Anya."

When she looks up, Clarke isn't sure she's ever seen Anya's eyes ever turn so dark.

Anya isn't entirely sure how they got back to her apartment, but all she knows is that she's currently engaged in a tongue-hockey match with Clarke against her front door. The younger blonde is gasping and moaning into her mouth, hot and with fervour. Anya can't help but growl when Clarke's hands slide under her jacket, violently throwing it off before clawing into the material of her shirt, pulling her closer. Clarke's breaths are shallow and lusted, practically aching with the need to have Anya everywhere and nowhere in the same time. Anya's hands slide down Clarke's sides, cupping under her bum and squeezing.

On instinct, Clarke jumps up and Anya nearly snarls as her legs lock around her waist. Anya gasps as her hips start to grind against her pelvis, her fingers still clawing into her shirt. In response, Anya pushes Clarke harder against the closed door, eliciting a sharp, keening moan from the younger blonde. Knowing that they both need something more than the tension between them, Anya pulls them from the door with their lips still locked together as she starts the trek towards her bedroom. She takes the time to slam Clarke against the walls that pass them, grinding against her when the heat of the moment gets too much.

"Bedroom," Clarke practically whines into the older woman's mouth as she claws into Anya's back, "please, An, I can't fucking--"

"I know," Anya hisses as she feels her pleasure burble up and then die down. Fuck, when was the last time she got herself off? "I'm going, just--"

"Yeah," Clarke rasps, biting her lip as she watches Anya kick open the door and nearly throw her to the bed. They both collapse, lips reattaching as they roll upon the sheets, tossing and turning. Their clothes are ripped and torn off, and neither of them realize how destructive their passion is. They speak their words in the forms of love bites, their teeth sinking into skin and their tongues lapping over the sting. Clarke's body is humming from the electric pleasure as Anya pulls her underwear
down her leg and toss it away in the room somewhere. She crawls up the bed and meets Clarke in a fiery kiss, gasping for breath.

"Inside," Clarke growls as she reaches for one of Anya's hands, "please, An, I need you inside me."

"Fuck," Anya swears as she leaves Clarke's kiss-swollen lips to place a harsh bite upon the blonde's neck. "Fuck, okay. How many fingers?"

"Feel me first," Clarke orders as she ruts her hips up into Anya's bare abdomen. "I don't know how wet I am."

Anya's hand slides down and pauses for a brief second over Clarke's trimmed pubic hair. Her gaze darts upwards and she looks for any last minute regrets. Clarke just nods and pushes on her shoulders, eager for her to move. Taking that as her approval to continue, Anya skirts her palm downwards until she's cupping the blonde. Wetness coats her palm and Anya can't breathe when she can feel Clarke contracting against her hand, hot and pulsing and so ready.

"Shit," Anya gasps as she clenches her other hand in the sheets, "you're soaked."

"Fuck," Clarke breathes as she throws her head back and ruts her hips up again. "Two. I need two fingers."

Anya obeys, sliding two fingers effortlessly into Clarke's tight canal. The wet muscles of her inner walls squeeze her in eagerly, desperate for her to come deeper. Anya listens to the delicate sounds silently pouring off Clarke's body, her arms tensing as she curls her fingers. The movement pulls a sharp whine from the woman beneath her. Anya works her way upwards so that she's eye-level with Clarke. Those blue eyes are smouldering sapphire as they stare back at her, eager and wanting. There's a pause, in which Anya is stilled deep within her and they're silent, letting their bodies speak for them.

And then Clarke is hooking a palm behind Anya's neck and pulling her down for a rough kiss, stuttering her body back into motion. Anya starts a slow, hard rhythm, making Clarke moan with each time the bed creaks beneath them. Clarke's kisses grow needier and hotter, igniting her with a fire she thought she'd forgotten since Lexa had passed. Clarke grits her teeth and tries to hold back from coming too early, but Anya soothes her with another kiss, grinding her hips down into Clarke's pelvis to increase the depth of her thrusts. The volcano of her pleasure is rising, and Clarke can't hold back anymore.

With one last deep thrust, Clarke comes with a keening wail, her teeth locking into the skin of Anya's shoulder.

"Oh God," she gasps as Anya's fingers circle her hypersensitive clit to help her ride out the orgasm. "Fuck, that was… Jesus."

"You feel so good," Anya breathes out as Clarke's walls sporadically squeeze down in her aftershocks. "You're so tight and wet, Clarke."

"Don't pull out," Clarke whispers against the slick skin of Anya's neck. "It feels good. I feel so full. God, your fingers are so long."

Anya obeys again, her abdomen muscles trembling as she holds herself above the younger woman. Clarke eyes drift down from her neck to Anya's breasts brushing up against her own. With her rough hands, she gently takes both of them in her hands and kneads, earning a low growl from the older woman. She abandons one of the breasts and snakes her hand into the waistband of Anya's boxers,
humming in delight when she makes contact with the wetness there.

"Shit," Anya whimpers as her fingers curl inside of Clarke upon reflex. "God, that's… fuck, that's new."

"When was the last time someone touched you?" Clarke whispers, leaning up to bite at the corner of Anya's jaw. "The last time someone was inside you?"

"Jesus, Clarke. I don't know," Anya whimpers and shakes her head, her arm moving forward as she feels Clarke getting wet again. "Too long."

"I know," Clarke hums as she kisses Anya's neck softly, "I can feel it."

"Please," Anya begs her in a soft gasp, "I'm so close."

"Easy," Clarke coos as she slowly circles around Anya's clit. Her other hand places itself between Anya's shoulder blades. She urges the older woman to ease herself downwards and lay her weight upon her. Once Anya lowers her body, Clarke increases the diameter of her circles upon Anya's clit. She works her over until Anya is near sobbing in Clarke's arms. Her entire body is trembling and there are tears in her eyes as she gasps and cries into the night.

Clarke's almost sure she's never heard anything more heartbreakingly beautiful.

Anya comes with a quiet, desperate cry as she shivers. The cool air raises the hair on her skin as she presses her thumb to Clarke's clit again. The two of them lie there for a few moments in silence before they slide their hands out and connect them, regardless of the stickiness that webs their fingers together. They don't speak, they don't even look at each other as Anya gently moves off Clarke's body. They simply curl around each other, with Clarke's head pressed into Anya's chest and Anya's arms locked around the width of Clarke's shoulders. The younger blonde traces the scar on Anya's abdomen from the shrapnel, the shrapnel that prevented her from going back for her sister. She inches her body downwards and kisses it, earning a sharp whimper from the older woman.

When Clarke moves back up, they don't talk about it.

They just drift off into sleep, sated in the smallest modicum of peace.

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"She's beautiful, isn't she?"

Anya looks up from her textbook to see her sister practically drooling over Clarke as she walks over to her, Octavia in tow. Anya arches her brow.

"You're so grossly in love, it's making me want to retch."

Lexa frowns and then punches her sister, laying back against the tree with a dopey grin on her face as she daydreams about her girlfriend. Anya looks over again and sighs when she sees Lexa dreamily gazing over at Clarke. The blonde is laughing at something Octavia had said, looking carefree and joyful.

"Well," Anya says nonchalantly as she turns her nose back to her books. Stupid physics and its complicated theories. "You could be more subtle."

"For her?" Lexa whispers as she beams at Clarke smiling at her, before turning to Anya with a cheeky grin. "Never."
"Hey Lex," Clarke greets as she throws her bag on the ground and crawls over to her girlfriend, pressing a kiss to those puckered lips. Lexa hums happily, opening her arms so that the blonde can bury inside of them, her nose nuzzling the underside of Lexa's jaw. Octavia makes fake gagging noises and Anya shoots her an exasperated look, like she should really be looking so disgusted when she's the same with Lincoln. Octavia shrugs, feigning guilt as she grins.

"Do you guys always have to be so PDA?" Anya asks, though she doesn't put any kind of bite in her voice. Lexa's hand is on Clarke's hair, her fingers absently threading through her blonde locks. Clarke practically purrs as she kisses Lexa's ear before settling down on top of her girlfriend, head upon her chest.

"I love her," Lexa grins as she pecks Clarke's forehead, "I don't care who sees it."

"Just as long as I don't catch you two fucking again, I'm fine." Anya's voice is exasperated, but amused nonetheless. "I swear, you're like rabbits."

"Can I help it?" Clarke jokes as she slips a hand under Lexa's shirt to tease her abs. "Have you seen my girlfriend?"

"Oh, you mean my idiot sister?"

"Your extremely hot and completely charming idiot sister," Lexa chimes in as she giggles into Clarke's kiss, drunk off her love. "Don't be jealous, An."

"Hey! I'm the hotter one," Anya argues, blowing a strand of hair from her face. "I lucked out on my genes. The ladies love me."

"I don't see any ladies," Lexa says with faux-confusion as she looks around until she sees her girlfriend, "no one as beautiful as my Clarke, at least."

"Okay stop!" Octavia laughs, her face screwed up in a grimace as Clarke tackles Lexa with another kiss. "You guys are so gross. I have second-hand embarrassment from just looking at you two." Clarke flips her the bird as she continues to suck face with her lover, the two of them completely uncaring that they're in public, on a college campus for God's sake. Anya rolls her eyes, but she secretly loves the idea that her baby sister is happy and well taken care of.

"I'm so gonna marry you one day," Clarke whispers dreamily as she lays her head back on Lexa's chest. "One day I'll be a Woods."

"You'll be the most beautiful Woods of all," Lexa hums as she wraps her arms around her girlfriend tightly. "That not even Anya can disagree on. Right?"

Anya just quirks her brow and rolls her eyes, earning a laugh from Clarke.

"Sure, Lexa. Whatever you say," she retorts good-naturedly, secretly beaming from the amount of happiness flowing off the younger woman. "Now I've let you have your way, can you please tell me what the fuck electromagnetism is all about and why you told me this class would be a piece of cake? I want to die." Lexa laughs and scoots out from under Clarke and reaches her side, trying to explain the slew of mathematical jargon, but Anya remains lost. Her gazes stays on Clarke, who looks at her sister's back like she's the only person that exists, that nothing else matters except for the brunette trying to teach her physics.

So maybe the PDA wasn't so gross after all, she begrudgingly admits as she feels a flare of pride in her heart.
But she'd never tell Lexa that.

"Anya?" Lexa asks, her face screwed up in worry. "Anya, are you listening to me?"

"Lexa?" Anya replies, noting the worry on her face. "Lexa, what's wrong?"

"Anya!" Lexa suddenly screams as a bright light explodes around them. "Anya, we have to find Clarke. Where's Clarke?"

"Lexa!" Anya screams out her sister's name as she tries to see past the blinding light. "Lexa, where are you?!

"Clarke!" Lexa's shouts reign over the screaming and high pitched booming that deafens her. "Clarke, I won't let you die. I'll protect you, Clarke!"

A sudden blast has Anya rocketing backwards, and the older woman looks down to see her stomach blossoming with blood as she's transported back to the desert plains of Afghanistan. She scrambles to her feet, dizzy from her fall. She looks up to see Lexa standing before her, bloodied and cut up. There's a look of sheer betrayal upon her face as she lifts the gun at her side, the muzzle pointing in Anya's direction. The older woman blinks in confusion, but the image stays the same. Lexa's viridescent gaze is murderous, her lips curled back in a snarl as she inches forward, the gun still steady and trained upon her forehead.

"You promised me," Lexa hisses as she cocks the gun, "I told you to protect her. You lied, Anya."

"No," Anya begs as she puts her hands up defensively. "I didn't mean to, it was an accident. She loves you, Lexa, not me!"

"But you fucked her," Lexa tells her in a low growl. "You fucked her when you promised you would take care of her. You lied to me, and now you'll pay."

"Please," Anya pleads as she starts to cry, "please, I am so sorry."

"You lied to me," Lexa says coldly, her finger primed over the trigger. "I hate you. I fucking hate you. You should have died that day, not me."

"Lexa," Anya sobs as Lexa presses the muzzle of the gun to her forehead, "Lexa, I'm so sorry. I know, I know it should have been me."

"She's my wife," Lexa whispers, her voice no longer angry but heartbroken. "You fucked my wife, Anya. How could you?"

"I didn't mean to," Anya tries to explain, but her voice croaks on the words. "I didn't mean to do it, Lexa. I swear to it."

"You know," Lexa says as she looks to the ground and then back up, "that only make things worse, that she means everything to me and nothing to you."

"Clarke doesn't mean nothing to me," Anya says, shaking her head adamantly. "I care about her."

"But you don't care about me," Lexa whispers, looking back up with a distant gaze. "You stopped caring the day you kissed her."

"Lexa," Anya cries as Lexa's finger begins to curl around the trigger, "Lexa, please I'm begging you don't do this--"
"I'm only doing what you know should have happened," Lexa replies coolly, without a break in her voice. "You know you deserve this, Anya."

And with that, Lexa pulls the trigger.

===

Anya shoots up with a start, breathing heavy as she struggles to register where she is. Her hand slips under the pillow for her knife and she holds it out in her shaking hand, trying to find out if there's a danger somewhere. Her dream is too vividly real for her to discern her imagination from reality. She's still hyperventilating as she stumbles out of breath and towards the bathroom. She's shaking so badly that she drops the dagger, her grip slipping as a result of her slick palms. Anya enters the bathroom and flicks on the light. She ducks her head under the cabinet and washes her face, scrubbing at it to try and calm down.

Only, as she looks up into the mirror, she doesn't see herself.

She sees Lexa staring back at her, with those murderous green eyes glaring at her in utter betrayal.

"No," Anya whispers as she grips the sink, "no, no, get out of my head. I told you, I'm sorry!"

Lexa's reflection doesn't move, nor does her stare waver. Anya starts to shake harder, her mouth drying and her stomach churning in anxiety.

And then, Lexa's lips curl into a snarl and only three words leave her lips.

"You promised me."

"No!" Anya snaps as she punches through the mirror. "No, fucking, no, I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Lexa."

Anya's too busy sobbing to feel the stinging pain of glass embedded in her knuckles or the hot blood dripping down her wrist. She's so caught up on the hallucination that she doesn't feel gentle, pliant arms curling around her body and holding her tightly to prevent her from moving. She doesn't know when she ended up on the floor with her head against warm, bare skin. Anya just sobs and begs for Lexa's forgiveness, her high-pitched sobs shaking her frame.

"I'm sorry," she repeats through hiccuped cries, "I never meant to let this happen. I'm sorry, Lexa. I'm so sorry…"


As soon as Anya's back to feeling the world around her, she struggles out of Clarke's arms and looks up to the woman staring back at her with tired, equally guilty eyes. There are tear tracks that streak down Clarke's cheeks as they both try to hold back the sadness and remorse brewing within them. Anya looks to her hand and then back up to Clarke, shaking her head as more tears slip down and fall from her chin to the tiled floor in silent drops.

"I'm sorry," Anya croaks as she looks to the younger woman, "I'm sorry it was me and not her. I'm sorry I couldn't bring her back. I'm sorry I'm not Lexa."

Clarke breaks into a sob as she covers her mouth and cries, shaking her head as Anya continues to cry. The two of them don't speak, but Anya knows. She knows that she hadn't been thinking of Anya last night when they had sex. While she doesn't look that much like her sister, the sheer relation is enough for Clarke to draw some sort of connection, some sort of haven from her. It gave her comfort, it gave them both a sense of comfort, really. But it wasn't enough.
As Anya looks to how broken and defeated Clarke appears in a beautiful, sobbing wreck, there's one thing she knows for sure.

Nothing will ever be enough.

Not even them.

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**Date and Time Unknown**

**Location Unknown**

Lexa's awoken by the sound of gunfire and shouting. She snaps awake instantly, clambering around for a sense of reality, trying adjust to the noise. There's screaming and yelling coming from outside of her cell. Hastily, Lexa stumbles to her knees and tries to peek out of the cracks, but she can't see anything. She hears the shouting growing closer and a fear bellows in her chest, knowing that she's defenceless and tied up. There's no way she can get out now if she tried.

An explosion rockets through the air, causing the brick wall to explode in front of her, sending debris flying everywhere. The air is sucked out of Lexa's lungs as she's thrown backwards, her limbs snagging on the metal chains and nearly threatening to pull her bones from their sockets. The air is filled with dust immediately and Lexa inhales a cloud of it, choking on air as she writhes against the ground. More screams bellow off in the distance, but as Lexa regains her focus, she turns her attention to her feet, where the chains have been nearly knocked loose. Perhaps she doesn't have to wait for the convoy.

"Come on," Lexa whispers as she tugs upon the chains, cursing her lack of strength as she attempts to pull the chains apart. She tugs and lets out a war cry of her own before she hears the clicking sound of the metal breaking free. At first, she's in disbelief, but then she's quickly formulating a plan.

Scrambling to her feet, Lexa turns to run towards the busted door, only to see a man standing in her way.

"Mujhai bachao!" The man screams as he runs towards him. "Madad karo!"

Upon instinct, Lexa finds herself moving away. Before she the man can attempt to come near her, a gunshot goes off and blood splatters in Lexa's face. She coughs and splutters when she realizes that there's pieces of brain covering her face and hands as the man in front of her falls to the ground, a hole in his head. Lexa catches the sight of the armed man that had been behind him and she gasps. The bearded man has his gun pointed at her now, a sick grin on his face.

"Eh mari paseh chē," the man calls out to his friends, "chālō, bhai et benō."

Lexa doesn't move, not even when the man cocks his gun and spits on the ground. "I won't repeat it again, American. Come with me. You're ours now."
Before Lexa can move, swift thud to the back of the man's head sends the terrorist to the ground in a heap. Behind him stands the chief, blood spattered against his face and his chest heaving. He looks from the man and then back up to Lexa before hurrying over. He quickly checks her over, but before he can say something, there's another boom from outside, followed by the rattling of the cage doors. The chief scowls and grips his gun tighter, nodding over at Lexa.

"You said that you came here to protect our people," the chief says, a bit of fear underlying his tone. He holds out his gun, giving her a stern look. "Now is your chance to prove it. There are innocent people in this village. Men, women, elders, and children. I will not lose them to those sick bastards. Help us. Show is what your protection entails." Lexa stares at the man and then takes a glance at the gun. She doesn't move, not until another explosion nearly caves them in.

The chief practically shoves the gun into her hand, staring at her with tears in his eyes. "I've secured your convoy. Just help me protect my people. Please."

Lexa gives him a firm nod and follows him out of the tunnels and into the bright light of the courtyard. It takes a minute for her to adjust to the light, but then she finally adjusts and is horrified at what lays before her. The sight nearly makes her sick to her stomach.

There's blood everywhere, and wherever she glances, there's rebel fighters shooting down innocent villagers. The group of them point over in her direction, shouting orders to each other as they advance. The chief hardens beside her, reaching over his shoulder for his assault rifle as he yells out something akin to a war cry in Gujarati. Around him, his fellow soldiers bellow out the same response as they charge forward. Lexa turns around to see a few soldiers trying to help the women and children get away. There are bodies littered everywhere, blood and guts turning the white snow a scarlet river of crimson instead.

A rocket whizzes past Lexa, efficiently causing those few civilians to be blown to smithereens within a matter of seconds. Lexa's thrown back to the ground, her head hitting the side of a rock as she lays dazed on the ground. She lolls her head to the side to see the chief spraying down a few of the enemy soldiers, angrily yelling at them as he desperately tries to defend his people. It's only then that Lexa hears the roar of F-16s in the distance, and her stomach lurches.

She barely scrambles to her knees as she watches the jet plane whirl past them, releasing a missile that incinerates the front half of the village. Lexa watches as the children try to scramble away, but she knows there's no chance. No one can escape a bomb like that. They're thrown apart, ripped limb from limb as the jet roars on by like nothing had happened. Lexa looks up to see the chief screaming in horror as a little boy is dragged off by one of the men, his shirt being ripped apart by two soldiers as he's thrown onto the round before being beat mercilessly. He screams and shouts for them to stop, but they do nothing.

And then, Lexa sees what's approaching in the distance.

The camouflaged print of her regiment's squadron rolls up in their Hummers, shouting and screaming orders at each other before beginning to gun down everyone and anyone that passes in their line of fire. Lexa stumbles to her feet, tears blurring in her eyes as she watches a little girl get shot down in the line of fire. The chief is writhing and fighting against the enemy, finally able to land a shot in their chest before he turns to face the US Army. He raises his arms to signal his men to stop attacking, but Lexa watches in horror as her men, the very men she'd once taught and commanded, raises their own weapons and fire.

Once, twice, thrice.

The chiefs body ripples and jerks with every shot as he tries to grab at his own weapon. He coughs
out a wad of blood, but the soldiers are relentless.

Again, again, again, they shoot him until Lexa's certain he's more bullet than he is bone.

"No," she rasps as she stumbles forwards, "no, stop! Stand down! Stand down, they're not the
enemy! Fucking stand down!"

But no one listens to her as another rocket hurtles past her, blowing up the shack behind her. The
ringing infiltrates her ears and Lexa gasps in agony as she's knocked backwards again. Her vision
blurs and instead of the soldiers, she watches as the men and women transform into duplicates of her
reflection. They continue to murder every living person in the valley, regardless of whether they're a
simple civilian or if they're armed. Not even the children are spared as they mow down the people
like they're slaughtering animals for harvest. She can hear a few of them managing a kill count,
trying to best each other like it's a game.

Lexa turns his attention back to the chief, who's now held up in the grip of a bigger man, one that
reminds Lexa of Gustus. He shouts into the chiefs face before throwing him to the ground and
stamping his boot down on the man's face. Lexa shakes her head and goes to move towards them,
but before she can get any further, a gunshot pierces the air and she feels the stinging pain of a bullet
crashing into her forearm. Her grip on the gun falters and she stumbles, crying out in agony as she
falls to her knees. Another gunshot rings out, and the bullet barely misses her head as it embeds itself
into the snow.

As she struggles back to her knees, she's kicked down and something collides against her shoulder.
Lexa growls and drives her elbow backwards, using all of her muscle to throw her weight
backwards. The attacker lands with a grunt and Lexa scrambles to straddle them, only as she turns,
she sees Clarke's eyes staring back at her, blue eyes wet and shimmering with tears. The sight causes
Lexa to tense up, which gives her attacker enough time to raise his fist and smash it against her nose,
throwing her backwards. The face shifts from Clarke to her reflection as a maniacal laugh leaves the
soldier's lips.

Hands wrap around her throat and push her into the ground with a harsh force, causing Lexa to
thrash and choke for air. Her reflection stares down at her, unrelenting and grinning sickly as she
feels darkness cloud the corner of her eyes. Her thrashing is becoming weaker, and even as she
crawls into the hairy, muscled arms of the person above her, she can feel that her struggle is not
paying off. Her eyelids start to droop as the oxygen is rapidly cut from her lungs.

You vowed to protect us, Lexa hears the chief's words in her ears, a distant hum as she recedes her
fight, you told us you were here to serve us.

What happened to that?

With the last effort, the last ounce of stamina, Lexa raises her boot and kicks right between the legs
of her attacker, causing them to roll off of her and onto the snow beside them. Lexa splutters, trying
to get air back into her lungs as she scrambles away from the face of her reflection snarling back at
her. The attacker prepares to pounce, but before he can leap atop her again, a bullet carves through
his neck and splinters his jugular, bleeding him dry in a matter of minutes.

Lexa looks to the side to see Kareem holding the gun with shaking hands, tears pooling in his eyes.
Lexa eases up to her feet and struggles in her way over towards him. The boy still looks petrified, but
he bursts into a sob at the sight of the empty eyes of the dead man in the snow, bleeding out into the
white ice. Lexa's heart breaks inside of her chest as she reaches for him, pulling the boy into her arms
as he continues to weep. Lexa hushes him, though tears streak down her own cheeks as she looks up
to the destruction around her, unable to fathom that her people are doing nothing but wiping out an
innocent village.

"We have to go," she tells him quickly, reaching for the gun before tucking it into the waistband of her trousers. "We have to go, now."

"No," Kareem yelps as he looks back to the battlefield that was once his home. "No, we have to go back for Papa!"

"Your father would want you safe," Lexa tells him, unable to keep the tremor from her voice as she tugs on his hand again. "Come on, we have to go."

"I can't abandon my people," Kareem fights as he wipes his eyes and reaches into his ratty trousers for his knife. Lexa's heart lurches again for the boy, but before she can say anything else, she sees an American soldier heading their way, searching through the rubble and bodies for any more survivors. Lexa goes to warn the boy, but Kareem is already turning around, marching towards the fight. Lexa leaps to her feet and shouts his name, but it's too late.

The soldier looks up and sees the boy, a snarl pulling up his lips as he raises his gun. Lexa bounds forwards and shoves Kareem away, causing him to stumble behind her as she eyes the soldier with a smouldering glare. She whips out her gun and cocks it at him, her grip sturdy and strong as she stands her ground.

"I order you to put down your weapon, soldier. I'm Captain Alexandria Woods of Regiment Five-C and I order you and your men to disengage, now!" Lexa bellows out, a growl tinging her words as she waits for the man to lower his weapon. Instead, all she receives is a snort and warning bullet before her feet.

"Nice try, bitch. Captain Woods died four years ago by these whoremongers," the man growls as he keeps his gun up and trained on her. "Now fucking get on the ground. I can think of more than one way to have fun with you and the boy." Lexa's grip falters as she watches a few more soldiers approach her and Kareem, surrounding them as they start to laugh and jeer at their states. Kareem whimpers behind her, crying out for his father and mother to save him.

"Everyone else is dead," the soldier says, taking a step forward. "There's five of us and two of you. I dare you to shoot me, you cunt."

Lexa falters, her breath hitching as the man's face twists into the face of herself once more. She whips her head around to all the laughing faces of her, those piercing green eyes watching her every move. She glances down to see Aden, instead of Kareem, at her feet. The boy is holding onto her leg for dear life, begging and pleading for them to stop coming closer. Aden looks up at her with wet blue eyes as he cries harder, pushing his face into her pants for comfort.

"Please, Mom!" Aden begs as one of the soldier's stalks around him. "Please don't let them hurt us. You promised to protect me!"

"I promise," Lexa whispers to the boy as she tightens her grip on the gun, "I won't let them hurt you, son."

"My count's at fifty-six, boys. One more and I'll beat Dawkin's over there," the soldier laughs as he points to another soldier looming over a beaten woman, a sick grin splitting his face as he reaches for the latch on his belt. The soldier turns his gaze back to Lexa, cold and hard. "I think I'll take them both and strike a lead. I never did like paying for the drinks back at the pub anyways." The other men laugh in response, but Lexa grits her teeth and stands steady, no matter how much betrayal and fear strikes deep in her belly. Had it really been four years? What has happened to her squadron, to
"Fuck you," Lexa hoarsely gasps out as she feels Kareem tighten his grasp upon her leg, "I won't let you touch us."

The soldier cocks his head, another sick grin splitting his lips as he beams at them widely. "Try me, oh Captain my Captain."

An anger fuels through Lexa's bones as memories of her captivity and torture spread adrenalin throughout her like its a drug. She lets out a feral scream and raises her gun, shooting the soldier point blank. The bullet carves into his kevlar, which stuns him, but doesn't take him out. He falls backwards with a sharp gasp, his head nodding upwards to reveal her reflection grinning back in her direction. Lexa shouts again and empties her gun into the man on the ground. Blood spatters everywhere as her reflection continues to chuckle. The courtyard disappears and she's surrounded by nothing but black and her mocking face.

Something snaps inside of her, and she doesn't hold back.

The searing pain of a bullet slams into her thigh, but she doesn't let the agony deter her from launching herself at the soldiers. She disarms them quickly, launching into a fury of kicks and punches to wind them and drop them to their knees. It soon becomes apparent that they weren't trained in guerrilla warfare quite like she'd been. Her years of working on a special ops team come into play, and Lexa lets her anger and instincts drive her into insanity. She jumps atop one man, her thumbs pried over the soldier's eyes. With a low growl, she applies pressure into her thumbs, gauging the man's eyes out as he thrashes beneath her. She can hear them shouting at each other, of the pain of another bullet grazing her side and then there's a kick to the side of her head that sends her sprawling off to the side. Like a feral animal, Lexa leaps up again and tackles the next laughing version of her reflection, her fists growing numb with her punches. Aden is screaming for her to stop, and somewhere amongst her own voice and her son's one, she can hear Clarke and Anya yelling for her to let go.

"You think you have control?" Her reflection morphs into her father's face. He cocks his head as she strangles her attacker. "You think you're a hero, kid?"

"Shut up," Lexa screams through gritted teeth as she increases the tension on her grip before letting her fingers pierce the skin of the man's neck. Her father's empty eyes stare up at her in disappointment and sorrow, his green eyes dimming as the life is sucked from the man's lungs. "You don't exist. You're dead."

"You were sent to protect them," her father continues to say in a low, displeased voice. "Look at what you've done. They're all dead, because of you."

"No," Lexa says as she feels the body growing limp beneath her hands, "no, it's not my fault! I never told them to do this! You're a liar."

"You're scared of the truth," her father says in a weak rasp as those green eyes start to speckle grey, "and you're letting your delusions consume you."

"No," Lexa cries as she continues to claw into the neck of the man beneath her, "no, no, it's not me, this isn't me…"

"Come back, Lexa. We need you," Clarke's voice begs in the back of her head. "Please stop, just stop fighting and come home. Stop this, please!"
Lexa screams in agony as she releases her hands from the cold neck, her bloody fingers coming up to claw into her head. She pulls out tuffs of hair from her scalp, screaming into the eerily silent winter air as she cries. Blood streams down her cheeks, mixing with the tears as she cradles herself upon the snow. The voices are muddled around her ears, leaving her a winded mess. She's drowning above water, trying to cling onto some desolate sense of reality. Her tears freeze under her chin as she shivers in the frigid breeze, unable to take the quiet tranquility any longer. She blinks open her eyes and looks to the dead man.

Only, it's not a man.

No, all the men that had threatened her are dead.

The man she choked to death hadn't been a man, but a boy.

"Kareem," Lexa breathes out in agony as she scrambles over to the glassy, fear-filled eyes of the boy. Bloody indentations are present on his neck, slowly filtering out the remaining lifeblood onto the pristinely white snow. Lexa shakes her head, her hands clasping over his chest as she starts chest compressions. She manically pushes down, screaming for him to wake up as she feels her shoulders trembling with the efforts. She tips his throat back to open his airway and deliver two breaths, but she turns her head and lets out a gasp when she sees that his chest won't even rise. She shakes the boy, sobbing in denial.

There's the cocking of a gun behind her, but Lexa doesn't have the will to move. She just cocks her head to the side to see Kareem's mother standing with the gun, her mouth going from a snarl to a slacked jaw at the sight of her son laying still and lifeless underneath Lexa's hands. The woman inches closer, still in shock and disbelief, until a heart-wrenching cry tears from her lips and she collapses to her knees at her son's side. Lexa tries to reach out and console her, but she's barely able to form a coherent thought, forget verbal condolences. She looks down at her palms, and then back over to the boy, only to gasp.

Kareem's face has shifted into Aden's own, and instead of his mother, Clarke is staring at her with blue eyes filled with betrayal and anger.

"How could you do this?" Her wife demands in a low hiss, her eyes pooling with more tears. "How could you kill him?! He loved you! We all loved you!"

"No," Lexa gasps as she tries to reach for Aden, "no I can still save him--"

"You've done enough," Clarke's voice cuts into her, bleeding her dry. "All you do is kill, Lexa. You are nothing but a monster. A murderer."

"Clarke, please!" Lexa begs, her voice cracking with her cry. "Please, I can fix this."

"You want to fix this?" Clarke asks her in a low, jeering tone. "Get out of here. Go back to where you came from and stay there."

"Clarke…," Lexa pleads, shaking her head as tears drip down her cheeks. "Please, God, just let me--"

"Go Lexa," Clarke tells her with a softer voice, the bite taken out and replaced with sadness. "It's all you ever wanted, anyways. Nothing else ever mattered to you than this stupid war. I asked you to stay. I pleaded for you to not leave me and our son, but you did. You fought for them but never for us. You never cared about us enough to think that maybe we were the real fight, did you? So you know what Lexa, do what you do best and just go. You don't belong here."
"No," Lexa gasps as she gulps. Something cold is pressed into her hand, and when she looks down, she sees the gun Kareem's mother had been holding. She looks back up to see that her wife is gone, and replaced with the grieving woman who'd just lost her child. The woman stares at her blankly, cradling her dead son in her arms as she looks to the gun and then back up to her. There's disgust, grief, resentment, and betrayal flickering in her dark eyes as she sniffs.

"You do not deserve the mercy of death," she tells her in a low growl, "so leave. Run away and never return. You've done enough."

"I'm sorry," Lexa pleads as she tries to reach for Kareem, but the woman tenses and snarls at her. "Please, it wasn't me… I didn't mean--"

"Go," the woman says, her stare turning distant and blurred with tears as she cradles her son to her chest. "Find your family while you still have one."

"I'm sorry," Lexa repeats again as she stumbles to her feet, her eyes looking over at the bodies that litter the icy floor. She looks back to the gun in her hand and then back to the woman who is murmuring soft lullabies to her son. Before she can move, the woman looks up to her with tired eyes. She glances at the metal weapon and then stares up to Lexa with a pleading gaze. She shifts her dead son in her hands, but she doesn't break her stare with the younger woman.

"If you have any ounce of humanity left," the woman tells her, voice cracking and tears sliding down her cheeks, "you will grant me mercy… please."

"I…," Lexa croaks as she looks to the gun with a torn expression. "I… I can't kill you. I won't kill you or anyone else."

"What does it matter now?" The woman says bitterly, shaking her head. "My son and husband are dead. My home is destroyed. I have nothing left." She takes a pause, staring down at the glassy eyes of her beloved son before glancing back up at Lexa. "At least grant me the mercy of letting me be with them in peace." Lexa's eyes well with tears as the gun begins to tremble in her hands. The woman's head bows before she looks back upwards, defeated and lost.

"You said you would kill us all," she says with a steady tone, "go on then, make true on your promise. Kill me. Let me be at peace."

Lexa remains still, goosebumps littering her skin as she stands in the frigid air, caught between the gun and the woman, who waits patiently for her to make a decision. In the back of her head, she can hear her father's words ringing clearly, of her being a murderer, of betraying all that her family has ever stood for. She can hear Clarke's cries and Aden's screams and it makes her stomach churn. She stares at the woman, who takes a deep breath and closes her eyes, anticipating the bullet to pass through her skull. Lexa can tell just in the way her body slumps, that she needs this absolution, that she needs the suffering to end.

She was right, Lexa knows, this *is* all her fault.

"I'm sorry," Lexa whispers as she raises her gun and holds it steady. Tears streak down her cheeks as she cocks the gun and takes a breath. The woman's eyes open and she nods at her, her face damp with her own tears. Her son remains protectively gripped in her arms. Lexa grits her teeth and pushes away the voices.

A heartbeat later, she pulls the trigger.

The woman collapses in a thud beside her son, her arms still cradling him protectively in death.
Lexa's hand drops to her side and she looks up from the sight of their intertwined bodies and to the destroyed village that months ago, had been brimming with life and innocence. She stares at the rubble, at the strewn organs and littered bodies, and she feels something in her stomach lurch. She can't hold back as the bile works its way up her throat. She turns away, vomiting out onto the snow as sob s start to consume her. This is what she has commanded. This is the power she had held. This is what she did for a living.

Fighting the good fight, her father used to say. Oh, how he was so incredibly wrong.

This is how she became the opposite of what she thought she'd always been.

It's then that Lexa realizes that maybe in war, there is no good fight.

"It's you and me, kid." Lexa's head snaps up and she looks to the side to see her reflection leaning against a tree with a grin on her face. Lexa growls at the sight of herself so smug and proud, as if all the death and destruction was somehow a positive thing. She goes to say something when the delusion shakes her head.

"Oh no," her reflection says sternly as she points to the gun, "we didn't get this far for you to give up. You don't get to give up, Lexa."

"Please," Lexa rasps as she shakes her head and looks to the ground, "I'm so tired… I can't do this anymore."

There's a feather-like touch to her chin, drawing Lexa's gaze back up to where her reflection now stands before her, stoic and unwavering.

"You made a promise to your family," her reflection tells her sternly, before pointing to the bodies. "All of this, you did this for them. Don't let it go to waste." Lexa's blood boils as she storms forward, her body going through nothing as she paces back and forth, the gun gripped tightly in her hands.

"I never wanted this," Lexa spits as she feels the tears return, hot and heavy in her eyes. "I never meant to kill anyone."

"But you did," her reflection scolds in a voice as cold as the ice surrounding them. "Now you will learn to live with it. You don't get to have mercy, Lexa."

There's a moment of silence, in which Lexa's body continues to tremble and shake with the effort to fight off the cold and shock. She looks up again, seeing how her reflection's eyes soften slightly. The woman stalks towards her and places her non-existent hands upon her cheeks, smiling lightly as she nods.

"Come on," she tells Lexa sternly as she nods towards the mountains in the distance, "it's time for you to go home, soldier. It's time for your great escape."

The vision blurs out of sight, leaving Lexa standing still and alone. After a few minutes, she sets her jaw and squares her shoulders. She walks over towards one of the soldiers, the one with the least amount of blood on his uniform and strips him. She takes his jacket and pants, slipping them on before grabbing at the carbine rifle and slinging it over her shoulder. She picks her way through the field of bodies numbly until she finds enough material for some first aid. She considers simply camping out here for the night, since there are so many fires everywhere, but the thought of staying beside all the death -- the death that she had caused -- makes her sick. So, with one final glance at the aftermath of her destruction, Lexa turns and heads for the mountains with the weight of four hundred lives upon her shoulders. She walks with the burden like it's a part of her, an irremovable tumour that
festers beneath her skin and in her marrow.

There's only one thought that runs through her mind as Lexa trudges through the snow and bites her cheek against the cold.

Her reflection was wrong; there is no escape from what she's done.

*There never will be.*

Chapter End Notes

Well, things are about to get really fun now. Everything up to this point has basically been nothing in comparison to what's to come. Stick around, but watch out. It's going to get a hell of a lot darker.

Thanks for all the comments/kudos. You guys are amazing. Sorry again for the wait; I just hope it's worth it.

Much love, xx.
Escape [Part Two: Realizations]

Chapter Summary

Lexa escapes, Aden makes a discovery, Anya opens up, and Clarke receives a phone call that changes everything.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNINGS: MENTIONS OF DEATH, GORE, BLOOD, GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, DRUG ADDICTION/WITHDRAWALS, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, AND PTSD FLASHBACKS.

Y'ALL THIS ONE IS EVEN LONGER WTF. Anyways so this chapter is 25,000+ words, so the two of them comes to grand total of 51,698 words lmao. That's ridiculous and I have a legitimate problem, please help. Anyways, please read the chapter notes at the end because they contain a lot of information about this chapter!!

TRIGGER WARNINGS AND CLANYA CUES:

The SECOND SECTION contains scenes of VIOLENCE, DEATH, BLOOD AND GORE, and a PTSD FLASHBACK. It goes for the entire section. It isn't too heavily descriptive but it definitely isn't a walk in the park.

The THIRD SECTION contains scenes of PTSD FLASHBACKS, DRUG ABUSE/WITHDRAWAL, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, BLOOD AND GORE, and MILD VIOLENCE. This goes the entire section, too. Heavy stuff in this one, for sure.

The FOURTH SECTION contains a PTSD FLASHBACK and starts from when Anya says, "yeah that'd be great". Not as graphic, just kinda sad I guess. I'm putting a warning just in case!

The FIFTH SECTION contains MILD VIOLENCE, PTSD FLASHBACK, and BLOOD AND GORE. It goes from "a cackle in the distance…" and goes into the end of the section. Not as bad, just kind of heavy.

The SIXTH SECTION contains a CLANYA KISS SCENE, and starts from "but sometimes there are no words, just actions", and it goes until the end of the section.

The SEVENTH SECTION contains MILD VIOLENCE, BLOOD AND GORE, AND MENTIONS OF DEATH. It goes the entire section but isn't as heavy as the last couple of sections.

The EIGHT SECTION contains a CLANYA SEX SCENE and goes from the first === to the end of the section. Descriptive and not a petting scene. Aden catches them having sex from the === to the end of the section.

The NINTH SECTION contains MILD VIOLENCE, BLOOD AND GORE, and lasts the entire section. Not heavy.
The TENTH SECTION contains CLANYA SEX SCENE from the start of the chapter to the first ===. Not as descriptive as the sex scene in section eight, but if it's not your thing, don't read that part.

The song in the quote is, "Crossfire" by Stephen. As always, there's a spotify playlist titled, "Sisters", for this fic under my username, commandmetobewell. Songs are being updated as the fic goes on! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

he'd trade his guns for love, but he's caught in the crossfire

and he keeps wakin' up but it's not to the sound of birds

the tyranny, the violent streets

deprieved of all that we're blessed with

(and we can't get enough, no)

heaven if you sent us down

so we could build a playground

for the sinners to play as saints

you'd be so proud of what we made

i hope you got some beds around (cause' you're the only refuge now)

for every mother, every child, every brother

( that's caught in the crossfire)

i'd trade my luck to know why

( he's caught in the crossfire)

and i'm here wakin' up to the sun and the sound of birds

January 3rd 2013, 08:30

Griffin-Woods Residence, New York
Aden slowly blinks his eyes open as bright sunlight filters through the blinds. He turns in his bed and groans, knowing that he'll have to get back to school at some point, so he may as well attempt to and break his late-sleeping habit now. Trying to soak up the last free day he has, he slips off the covers and pads into the hall, rubbing at his face as he tries to wake himself up. As he looks up, he sees his mother and his aunt in the hall, talking in low voices. He watches them from afar as Anya's eyes turn downcast, her hand nervously rubbing her neck as she nods. Clarke stops talking and they both stand there awkwardly for a few minutes. Deciding to find out what was happening between the two women, Aden walks in and clears his throat to get their attention.

"Mama?" He asks as he watches both of their heads jerk upwards in surprise.

"Aden?" Clarke replies with a nervous smile, turning away from Anya. She reaches out and pulls her son into her arms, kissing the top of his head lovingly. Aden sighs and pulls away, frowning as he notices the hesitance in Anya's movement as he goes up to her and gives her a hug. Anya's arms shake a little, but after awhile, she returns the hug with a soft kiss to his forehead. When he pulls back, he looks between the two women in confusion.

"Is everything okay?" He asks. "You both seem… weird."

"We're fine," Clarke is quick to say, startling both her son and her sister-in-law. "Just swell. Anya was about to leave."

At that, Anya's brows raise and she clears her throat, nodding. Aden doesn't miss the sting of tears in her eyes as she turns, reaching for her coat and gloves from where they've been draped over the chair. She picks up the items carefully, folding her jacket over her arm before nodding to the both of them again, mouthing a goodbye. Clarke doesn't go up to hug her as they usually do, and instead Anya leaves, the door shutting behind her and leaving a silence.

"So…," Clarke chokes out after awhile, rubbing her hands on her thighs, "breakfast?"

"… sure," Aden murmurs curiously, still wondering about the interaction between his mother and his aunt. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Of course," Clarke tells him with a soft smile. She frowns a little before she swallows thickly. "We're just working through some… adult things."

"Does it have anything to do with the therapy with Dr Jarod?" Aden asks as he follows his mother into the kitchen. Clarke tenses a bit, but doesn't reply. Aden frowns, watching as she opens the fridge and stares at the contents for a few minutes, seemingly lost in thought. Aden crosses his arms and clears his throat.

"Mama," Aden says loudly, causing his mother to startle and look back over at him with a distant expression. "What's going on with you two?"

"Ade," Clarke whispers as she comes over and gently tugs him into a hug. "we're just going through some rough patches in the therapy. Losing your mother… it was hard on your aunt. I've started talking about it with Dr Jarod, but with Anya it's different." The explanation doesn't sound convincing, but Aden deduces it to the fact that perhaps his mother wasn't feeling up to going into detail about the therapy. He knew how hard it was to open up the old wounds.

"Well, do you want to talk about it with me?" Aden asks, pulling back so that he can look at the older blonde. "I know I'm not an adult, but Ma…"
"Oh sweetheart," Clarke softly mumbles as she reaches out and runs a hand through his hair, "you're just like her, you know that?"

"I still miss her," Aden admits as he looks to the ground, rubbing the back of his neck. "I know it's been so long, and Aunt Anya is great, but she's not her, you know? With Tris it's different. She never knew Mom. She didn't know what it felt like to come home and know that there was someone there always ready to make whatever bad thing that happened in your day just go away. She never knew how loving she was, or the sound of her voice or laughter, or her smile…"

Aden's voice grows smaller as he looks up to see his mother staring down at him with tears in her eyes. "Tris never knew her, Ma. I wish she could."

"I wish she could too, baby. I really do," Clarke chokes out as she lets a few tears stream down her face. Aden sighs and looks away again, blinking back his own tears as he struggles to compartmentalize his feelings. He hasn't really talked about losing his mother in years, and each time he thinks of her, he can't help but feel like his heart is being torn up all over again, that he's back in his room while his mother wailed and screamed into Anya's shoulders a floor below.

"Your mother would be so proud of you," Clarke assures him as she reaches out and tugs Aden back into her arms. "She would see all the things you've done for me and your sister and she would be so incredibly proud. You are her son more than mine, Ade. You've always been so much like her, and sometimes it doesn't hurt so much to know she's gone because whenever I look at you, I see her. I love your mother, and I always will. And she'll always love us, too."

"Promise?" Aden croaks, clutching onto his mother as he cries a little harder. Clarke nods, kissing his head. "I promise, my darling heart." Aden sighs in relief at the soft tone of his mother's voice. They stay like that for awhile until the sound of tiny, pattering footsteps fills their ears. The two turn around to see a sleepy looking Tris padding in, rubbing the sleep out of her eye as she yawns. Aden smiles and walks over to her, leaning down before lifting her into his arms, causing his little sister to giggle and nuzzle against him in pure joy.

"Morning T," Aden greets her as she scrambles to get on his back. "How did you sleep?"

"Good," Tris yawns again as she cuddles into Aden's back, looping her arms around his neck. "What's for breakfast?"

"How about we try to see if we can remake Mom's famous banana pancakes?" Aden suggest, looking up at Clarke. His mother's eyes glisten with tears but she smiles through them, nodding as she goes into the kitchen and whips out the ingredients. Tris looks between them, confused.

"What are those?"

"Mom's pancakes?" Aden gasps in a fake mocking tone, cocking his head to look over at his sister. "They're only the best thing in the world! It's basically bananas, chocolate chips, whipped cream with Nutella, and syrup." Clarke chuckles, shaking her head at his son and watching at how Tris' eyes light up with all the sources of sugar listed. She personally thought the pancakes to be too much, but Lexa always insisted that it was a good source of protein and potassium.

"Can I help, Mama?" Tris asks as she clambers down and waddles into the kitchen. "I want to help make Mom's pancakes, too."

"Alright, you and Aden can get to work on mushing the bananas. How 'bout that, munchkin?"
Clarke asks her daughter, reaching down to pinch her cheeks. Tris enthusiastically grins and nods, grabbing the bowl of now-peeled bananas while Aden grabs the utensil to mash them. The two of them walk over to the kitchen table, which is a little more accessible for the youngest Woods' sibling as they get to work on mushing the bananas into a paste. Aden lets Tris take over and looks up to see his mother looking over with a proud, bittersweet smile upon her face as she nods to him approvingly. Her blue eyes are welled with tears, but she looks happy for the first time in so long. Aden smiles back with the same amount of energy, knowing fully about the ache still present in his heart.

His mother may no longer be here, but as he looks to his joyous sister, he figures that they can at least try to keep some of her traditions alive.

===

Aden bounds down the steps at the sound of the doorbell, a smile upon his face as he opens it to see Jackson standing in front of him.

"Hey!" Jackson greets as he holds out a paper bag and a cup of hot chocolate. "I got us some snacks for while we study for the finals."

"Thanks," Aden accepts the drink with a blush, grinning over at his friend. "Come in! We can study in my room."

"Hello Jackson," Clarke greets from the living room from where she's sitting and playing with Tris. Jackson nods to her and smiles.

"Afternoon Mrs Griffin-Woods," Jackson says politely, shifting a little awkwardly on his feet. Aden chuckles at his awkwardness around his mom and reaches down, tugging on his friend's hand before taking them upstairs. Jackson follows obediently, still blushing as Clarke laughs at her son and his friend's antics. Aden takes them into his room and they shut the door, placing their snacks on the desk before they both plop down on the bed, looking at the ceiling.

"So…," Jackson says after they lay there for a few minutes, "did you think about what I told you?"

Aden sighs, rolling over to face his friend with a frown. "I haven't played soccer for like years. I don't think I'd make the team."

"Who cares about making the team, which I know you'd make by the way," Jackson says as he rolls as well, the both of them barely a few inches apart. "I just… I've seen you play, A. You would totally make the best goalkeeper that our team would ever see. Better than Malone, even. And that dude's like six feet tall."

"I don't know," Aden says as he shrugs, "it's a high school team and I don't know if I could even compete with that level."

"What do you have to lose?" Jackson asks, pressing further. "You know that no one is going to judge you if you mess up."

"It's... it's not about that," Aden sighs as he rubs his face and turns away so he's looking back up at the ceiling. He spots the indentations of the stick-on stars his mother had put up there for his eighth birthday. He misses her now, in times like these. Realizing that Jackson is still waiting on a response, Aden turns around again so that he's face to face with the boy. Jackson's expression softens into something more welcoming and open. It makes Aden's heart skip a beat, and he can't for the life of him figure out why. The blonde boy takes a deep breath and steadies himself, trying to figure out
"My mom and I used to play soccer a lot together," Aden says after sometime, still looking at the ceiling. "It's... the happiest memory I have of her."

"Did you like playing soccer?" Jackson asks softly. Aden frowns, cocking his head in confusion as he glances over at his friend.

"Well... yeah? I love it," Aden replies as he looks back up the ceiling, "it was my favourite thing to do with my mom."

"Then why should you stop it if it's something you love?" Jackson asks innocently, causing Aden to look over at him with a frown again. The boy just shrugs at Aden's look of disbelief, staring up at the stars. Aden ponders his question, the memories of playing soccer with his mother rushing through his mind.

"I just...," Aden trails off softly, "I don't want to forget her. I don't want to taint the best memory I have of her in case I fail."

"You know, when you love something, you don't give up on it," Jackson says with a gentle voice, his hand sneaking down the sheets to gently hold Aden's own. The boy gulps nervously before turning to face his friend, keeping his voice steady as he tells him, "your mom loves you, A. No matter where she is now. Even though she's gone, something tells me that she's not given up on you, nor she ever will. If fear is holding you back, then what's the point of the memory?" Aden stays silent, tears prickling at his eyes as Jackson leans up on his side, his biceps flexing from underneath his shirt as he takes a deep breath.

"From what you've said about your mom, she seems like someone that wouldn't want you to miss out on anything that you're passionate about," Jackson says seriously, giving Aden's hand a gentle squeeze. "If she were here, what would she be telling you to do? Would she want to see you back out on something you love doing just because you're scared that you're going to lose that memory of her?" Aden thinks about it harder, the words hitting his heart as he feels tears start to pool from his eyes and slide down his cheeks. Jackson offers him a softer, smaller smile as he leans in so that their foreheads are pressing together.

"You, Aden Griffin-Woods, are a handsome, brave, sweet, caring, kind, and compassionate boy," Jackson tells him as he squeezes their hands again. "Your mother, wherever she may be, would be so proud to know how amazing you are. She wouldn't want you to back out of the thing you love the most." Aden sighs, sniffing as he is unable to hold back his tears. He tries to make himself smaller and turn away from Jackson, but the other boy keeps his hold on his hand strong.

"Besides," Jackson whispers as he smiles at his friend, "you shouldn't let the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game."

At this, Aden frowns and can't help but burst out into a chuckle. "Did you just quote A Cinderella Story at me?"

"What?" Jackson laughs as he shrugs. "It was a good movie!"

"You're ridiculous."

"But you love me," Jackson says softly, his eyes flicking upwards in an almost nervous fashion. Aden sighs contently, blushing with a light tint.

"I do," Aden whispers in a low chuckle, "I love my best friend, who's a total softie."
Jackson smiles at the light-hearted jest in Aden's voice, even if the smile doesn't quite reach his eyes. He simply clears his throat and asks, "so you'll do it?"

"Do what?" Aden asks, looking back up at the ceiling, feeling a bit lighter than before. Jackson swallows nervously, still staring at the other boy.

"Will you try out?" Jackson chokes out the question in a nervous babble. "You would do amazing, Ade. Serious."

Aden sighs and pauses before he groans, looking over at the other boy with a teasing smile. "Fine. I'll do it."

Jackson practically yelps in happiness, rolling over and smothering his friend in a hug. The two of them wrestle around on the bed until Jackson finally pins Aden to the mattress, a slight pink colour rising to his cheeks as he smiles down upon the blonde boy. Aden stares up at him, his eyes softening as both of Jackson's hands slowly slide into his own, providing him with warm and safety he hasn't felt in so long. The two boys remain like that, waiting for the next move.

Only, they don't have to wait long.

"Boys!" Clarke calls from downstairs, causing them both to break apart. "What do you want for dinner? Tris wants pizza!"

"Uh," Aden nearly squeaks as he scrambles away from Jackson and stands, straightening his shirt as Clarke opens the door and walks inside. Her brow arches at the sight of a near-petrified Jackson standing at the foot of the bed, red as a beet. Aden's hair looks slightly dishevelled, but he plays it off with a nervous smile.

"Pizza's great," Aden says with a nod, looking back to Jackson, who does the same. Clarke looks on suspiciously, looking between her son and Jackson.

"What were you two doing?" Clarke asks gently, her tone suggesting that if he has any information, he wouldn't be judged for sharing it. Aden narrows his brows at his mother and crosses his arms, pouting slightly. The sight nearly pulls Clarke into a fit of giggles, but she holds it together for her son.

"Studying," Aden says in a matter-of-fact tone, "and you're interrupting us, Ma."

"Oh, my mistake. I remember when I used to study at your age," Clarke says, drawling the words in a teasing tone, causing Aden and Jackson to blush a deeper shade of red. "Anyways, I'm going to order pepperoni and cheese, is that alright with you boys?" Aden and Jackson both nod furiously, avoiding her stare.

"Well then," Clarke smiles as she turns for the door, "I'll leave you two to your studying."

"Thanks Ma," Aden chokes out, rubbing the back of his head nervously. Clarke just nods and smiles again, chuckling to herself as she descends the steps and heads back towards where Tris is waiting on her to watch some child show on the television. Once she's gone, Aden turns to Jackson with an apologetic glance.

"Sorry," Aden says as he squirms on the spot, "I was just--"

"It's fine," Jackson replies quickly, hiding his disappointment. "I was just gonna suggest we actually study. That final won't write itself, right?"
"Yeah," Aden says as he follows the other boy to his desk and picks up his books. "You're right."

The two of them start their real studying, but occasionally they’ll look up and gaze at each other from across the room. As their session goes on, they find themselves inching closer to each other until they’re back to sitting side by side on the bed. Aden slowly glances upwards to see Jackson struggling with a concept in their math textbook. He observes his scrunched brow, pouted lips, squinted blue eyes trained on the paper. He looks down to where one of the boy’s hands is resting on the side of the bed. Aden can't help but slowly slide his own hand downwards until their pinkies graze each other.

Jackson's head snaps up and he looks to Aden, but the blonde boy just offers him a shy smile and turns back to his books. As he progresses through reading about US History in the 1900s, he slowly lifts his pinky and overlaps it with Jackson's own, shivering at the spark that courses through his bones at the feeling. He hears Jackson gasp next to him and his heart stutters in joy. The two boys continue studying in silence, bright smiles adorning both their faces.

They don't let go until Clarke calls them down for dinner.

________________________________________________________________________

March 15th 2013, 13:23

Metropolitan Centre for Mental Health, New York

________________________________________________________________________

"You're here alone this time, I see."

Anya snaps her head up from looking at the floor, her hands clasped together as she stares at Dr Jarod with a nervous gaze.

"Yes," Anya says as she gulps. "I am."

"So… I am assuming you are ready to start."

"I…," Anya trails off, her mind still flooded with a million different thoughts. She swallows thickly and nods. "Yes."

"Then let's start at the beginning," Dr Jarod says as he leans back in his chair. "What made you want to enlist in serving during the war?"

"My father…," Anya struggles, still trying to get the gist of talking to a professional. "He, um, was a lieutenant. Worked with Colonel Kane and Jaha."

"So your father was a vet?" Dr Jarod asks kindly, clapping his hands together tightly as he observes the soldier's tense body position.

"Vets are the ones that come back, right?" Anya asks dryly, earning a nod from the doctor. She looks back down and sighs. "My dad never came back, not alive."
"My mistake," Dr Jarod says softly, "I apologize for assuming." Anya just shrugs, her eyes darting around the room for potential dangers.

"And your mother?"

"Died in childbirth delivering my sister," Anya replies shortly, still tense. "Look, I grew up under guardianship of my aunt and uncle."

"And how was that?"

"Like living in a really polished version of hell," Anya snorts as she leans back into the sofa. "My uncle was a marine. He was the one that told us we needed to follow in our father's footsteps. He drilled it into us at a young age that the only life we should have is one devoted to our country."

"Where did he fight?"

"Vietnam."

"Did he ever talk to you about it?"

"Never," Anya says with a shake of her head. "He died from alcohol poisoning, the poor sod. He never really was well liked by Lexa or me, but he raised us as well as he could. He provided for us and gave us an education that extended behind public school and university. I don't regret him taking us in and leading us." The doctor processes the information slowly, digesting each and every word. They remain in silence for a few moments longer until he speaks again.

"So you saw him less of an uncle or father and more of a leader?"

"I suppose," Anya says as she shrugs. "If you want to put it that way."

"Ms Woods," Dr Jarod says as he leans forward and furrows his brow. "You haven't answered why you enlisted."

"I did it because it was something I was told to do."

"But why?" Dr Jarod asks, frowning. "You don't seem like the kind of person that just follows orders."

Anya ponders it for a few moments, her hands fidgeting and unable to stay still as she hears the answer, the right answer, running over and over again like a loop in her head. She takes a deep breath, steadying herself as she looks back up to the patiently-waiting doctor. She scratches her knee and sighs, shrugging.

"My sister," Anya croaks as she holds back tears, "I joined to protect my sister."

"You took that role on after your father died? To be her protector?"

"He made me promise him," Anya whispers as she looks up, completely shattered as the many years of memories suddenly resurface. "Before he went on his last tour, he told me to protect her, to guard her with my life. Fuck, man, I was a kid too. I wasn't ever Lexa's sister, not in the way normal sisters exist. I was her mother and her sister and her best friend all rolled into one. The more I think about it, the more I realize that I never got the chance to be a child myself."

"Would you change it if you could go back?" Dr Jarod asks, cocking his head. The question makes Anya pause as she frowns.
"I… I don't know. If it meant I had to give up Lexa, no way. I don't care what shit I went through, my sister was the best damned thing I ever had," Anya whispers in a cracked voice as she looks up to the doctor with a pained glance. "I wouldn't change a thing, not even being able to experience a proper childhood. The fact that I was able to give my sister something I never had, well, that's more than enough for me. I… I just wish it'd been enough for her."

"And your service together," Dr Jarod asks as he looks down to his notepad, "how did that go?"

"We had a good run," Anya forces out, no matter how much the words burn her throat. "I mean, until everything that happened on that last tour… it…," she shakes her head and tries to push down the memories. She's not ready to talk about that day, not yet. "I mean, we had fun in our youth. We met a lot of interesting people. When we were younger, it was more so peace-keeping. We went to different villages and picked up the cultures, played with the kids, helped give food and clean water to the others. It felt like we were doing something good, you know?" A small, sad smile tinges at the corner of her lips.

"What changed that?" Dr Jarod prods. "What made your opinion of your job switch directions?"

"Who said it did?" Anya challenges weakly. Dr Jarod remains impassive, simply arching his brow. "Didn't it?"

"You're good, Doc." Anya roughly chuckles out the words as she looks back to her palms. "Well, it got bad once we were moved into special operations. We… we did some things that we didn't do when we were simply on peace-keeping missions. Some things we questioned, but at the end of the day, we were just following orders." Dr Jarod digests her shakily put together answer with a few moments of silence, contemplating her answer as she continues to fit on the couch.

"Ms Woods," Dr Jarod says her name slowly, "have you ever killed someone?"

The question causes Anya’s head to snap upwards, eyes lit with fear.

The gunfire.

The screaming.

The blood.

The death.

It all comes rushing back.

"Ms Woods?" Dr Jarod asks, his voice bordering on concerned. "If it's too deep a question to ask at this time, we can stop."

"No," Anya chokes out as she blinks back tears. Her hands grip onto the armrest of the sofa, her throat bobbing with the effort to swallow the pit lodged in her throat. She looks up to the doctor with misty-eyes, her heart thudding inside the wall of her chest as she struggles to find any other words. "I…," Anya looks down as she struggles with the answer. "You know, I never grew up in an area in which violence was a big thing. My mom was a doctor and my dad was a lieutenant. We had a good, sheltered life. We grew up knowing of what our father did, and I would play war all the time with my friends. We'd joke about it, think of it like a sport. And there are still some guys out there that think it's a fucking game, much like we once did. But then when we got into the ops, it all changed. Things became less like protection and more like survival. We executed orders we shouldn't have
done… **people** we shouldn't have done." Anya's voice cracks on the last part of the sentence, her eyes brimming with tears as she struggles to hold in all of her rising emotions as she speaks.

"You know, my mom always told me to never hurt anyone. No matter what they do to you, you do not ever hurt someone back physically unless it's self-defence and you really have to. She told me that every human life matters, and when you lose a life, you **feel** it. You attach yourself to it," Anya says as she looks down, fiddling with a loose string on her coat as she shivers with the memory of her mother. "She always said that when someone died, there was always someone out there that needed that person, someone that relied on them for some aspect of their life. And by taking that away, you're not hurting the person, but someone innocent. Someone that wasn't a part of the war you're waging." Dr Jarod listens carefully as Anya's voice grows thicker with contempt and self-loathing.

"Lexa and I were twenty-seven, fresh into the field, first time in special operations. We were the runts of the group, the rookies. Even though we were just as qualified as the rest, they'd dote on us like we were their kid siblings or even their kids. We were constantly protected by them. Gustus, especially. He would hover around Lexa and I like we were his own children. He practically took us under his wing when we worked with him. Ryder and Johann, too." Anya remembers the image of Gustus shredded to pieces, blown apart by the explosives. She remembers how she watched as Lincoln closed his eyes and whispered his farewells.

"Lexa and I had seen action working in the forces, but nothing like this. It was grittier, darker, and it was just so… different than what we'd been used to. We'd shot guns, yes, lead regiments yes, but we'd never been in a position to actually kill someone," Anya says as she looks down to her hands again, imagining the blood on them as she speaks. "We were in a small village close to the province of Kandahar, maybe a population of four hundred. It was mostly villagers, farmers, no one radical, no one part of a terrorist organization. We'd been given intel that the village was used as a trading post for military weapons and explosives." She looks to her fingers and grits her teeth, closing her fists and clenching them hard as she looks back up at the doctor, tears straining her eyes.

"We were stationed there for a few days, no one asking questions of us, nor us of them. It all seemed normal, like the intel didn't play out the way it was meant to be," Anya murmurs as she looks down to her trembling knee. "But then… it… we woke up one morning to the sound of Gustus yelling the word ambush." Anya swipes at her eyes and sniffs, clearing the tears from her cheeks as she wills herself to go on in the narrative. "Lexa and I grabbed our guns and ran outside to see a group of Taliban soldiers gunning down a few of the farmers because they didn't pay enough taxation to their cause. We intervened, or we tried to. They were taking women, children, it didn't matter who. If they were in sight and shootable, they were immediately a target. It was a bloodbath."

Anya pauses a moment, trying to hold it all together. "And then I remember I looked to my sister and saw that she was frozen. She was staring at this woman being dragged off by a Taliban soldier, screaming and pleading as her child had been shot four times. Lexa was always a calm person, never started fights. She was the selfless one throughout high school and university. All she ever wanted to do was to help people. And maybe that's why she joined the army. Maybe she thought that she could help people by being out there, by protecting her home and her family." Anya swallows thickly and shakes her head, feeling nervous as she flashes through the memories and remembers the details, even the minor ones that she thought she'd long since forgotten.

"But then, that Lexa disappeared and a new Lexa came up. She was angry, furious that the man could just take what he wanted, as if he didn't value human life whatsoever. And maybe he didn't," Anya says as she looks up to Dr Jarod with a haunting expression. "Lexa shouted at him to let her go and he did, but not without shooting her through the throat. God… I don't think I've ever seen blood spurt out like that. So quickly, so red. He turned to my sister and raised his gun, shouting something
incoherent, but I didn't listen. All I saw is someone raising their weapon against my sister, my family. I heard my dad in my ear, and that was it. All I heard was that promise I made to him before he left. Nothing else mattered in that moment. Nothing but defending the only family I had left."

Anya waits a few moments, composing herself as she struggles to find the next words. She gulps a few times and sighs, trying to ignore the pulsing headache throbbing at the corner of her eyes. She looks back up and sees Lexa's mutilated body standing by Dr Jarod's shoulder, watching in silence. Blood drips from her lips, her gaze glassy and haunted. Her eyes, empty and cold, stare back at Anya like she's some foreign stranger, not the sister she'd once known and loved.

"I shot him," Anya whispers, her voice cracking. Her eyes never leave Lexa's as she continues to croak out, "I shot him and I didn't think twice about it. I just lifted my gun and popped a bullet through his head. That was it. There was no dramatic wheezing or collapsing to the knees like they show in the movies. He fell back and he gurgled for a bit, and that was it. It never occurred to me until it was all over, until we were standing in a sea of bodies and a pool of blood, that the man might have had a family. That maybe, like us, he was just following orders, too. I never saw beyond any of that. I just saw a man trying to hurt my sister. I acted."

"How did Lexa feel?" Dr Jarod asks, cocking his head as he listens intently. Anya shakes her head, letting out a bittersweet chuckle.

"For days, she would look at me like I wasn't her sister," Anya replies as she glances back up to her dead sister's reflection. "She would stare at me like I was the murderer, not that man that attempted to take her life. I thought that she was going to shoot him, I honestly did. I'd never seen my sister that mad before and I was scared, Doc. I thought that she was going to kill him, and that was why she was so angry. I didn't want her to live with the guilt of having to take someone's life. But then she told me her plan, that all she wanted to do was to disarm him, to give us a chance to help the woman. I acted impulsively, and I killed someone. I killed someone's son, someone's husband, someone's father, because I didn't think. I let my reflexes control me and ultimately, that's what cost me her life."

"You didn't know what his intentions were," Dr Jarod says calmly, "you did the right thing."

"Did I?" Anya asks sharply, switching her gaze from Lexa to him. "You weren't there. You didn't see what I saw. You didn't know the situation. For all we could have known, he could have been working undercover. He could have been doing something that wasn't an act of terrorism. But we never know these things. We never know anything besides the bullet and the brain. We try to be pragmatic, and Lexa did a damned good job at it -- she wouldn't have been captain if she didn't possess the ability to think rationally during tough situations. Her decisions were always better than mine, always saved more lives than mine."

"Were you there when Lexa first killed someone?" Dr Jarod asks, throwing Anya off guard. She frowns, gulping hard.

"Why did you assume she's killed someone?"

"You said that she was pragmatic. That kind of logic doesn't come without sacrifice."

"And what would you know of sacrifice?" Anya seethes. "What would you know about any of this? About taking a life? About death?"

"I served in North-West Pakistan in '04," Dr Jarod says simply. "A field medic certainly, but I have seen war and I have seen death, Ms Woods."

"And have you taken a life?" Anya asks, her voice a barely-contained growl. Still, Dr Jarod remains
"I have," he states clearly, "many, actually."

At this, Anya freezes a little. She remembers the last tour, the firefight in the base-camp and the battle at the pass. The lives she'd taken to protect her sister as she'd run towards that convoy come flying through her mind. She looks back down to her hands and she can feel the stickiness of blood on her palms. Her stomach churns and she turns cold from the shiver that passes down her spine. Her body trembles and quakes, her complexion paling as she's lost in the memories of the lives that had been lost. People that she'd known, people she'd loved, people she'd held dearer than anything else on the planet -- all gone.

"Ms Woods," Dr Jarod says as he leans back in his chair with a soft sigh, "war is not an easy thing. It is not a game, as some call it. You understand more than most the severity that comes with protecting your country. I have had to make questionable orders myself. I have had to execute people and refuse medical help to certain people as a result of what I'd been told from my superiors. Your morals and ethics make a clash with what your are expected to do. But it is that interaction, that contradiction, that makes us human. Without that gut feeling, what would differentiate us from RPAS or UAVS? We have control. We have not just a brain, but a mind. We have not just a body, but hearts. We carry compassion and empathy, things that these robots nowadays do not. And that comes at a risk. The mind is a vulnerable place, Ms Woods, but the heart even more so. We carry our guilt and our burdens with us wherever we go. It isn't simple to let go."

"So then why bother with all of this?" Anya demands, shaking her head as she sucks in a deep breath. "Why bother trying to talk about it? Get better?"

"Do you think that is why you are here?" Dr Jarod asks, intrigued. "To get better?"

Anya frowns at this, her brow cocked in confusion. She looks past his shoulder again to where Lexa is waiting, eyes still distant and cold.

"Ms Woods," Dr Jarod sighs as he rubs at his temples, "you are suffering from survivor's guilt and PTSD. It's common in veterans who've lost large quantities of their squad members, or have even lost family members and friends, and it will affect you until the day you die. It's not something you're going to let go."

"Thanks for reassuring me," Anya sarcastically quips back, shaking her head. "This was a waste of time."

"Was it?" Dr Jarod asks, clasping his hands together. Anya swallows, tears burning at her eyes as she tries to deny him an answer.

"Your silence is enough," Dr Jarod says with a soft sigh. "You know it just as much as I do that you won't recover from this."

"Then what do I do?" Anya croaks, looking up to the man with tears in his eyes. "Why bother if I'm going to keep feeling this way? If I keep seeing her every-fucking-place I go? What's the point if the smallest fucking sounds trigger me? Why should I care if I'm not going to wake up one day feeling okay?"

"Because people who go through these things -- people like us," Dr Jarod emphasizes, "are never okay, but we manage and that's enough."

"Then what are we?" Anya asks, her voice defeated and down trodden. Dr Jarod smiles, a sad but
"We are what we are, Ms Woods," Dr Jarod says gently as he leans back, nodding to her. "We are survivors."

Date and Time Unknown
Location Unknown

"You need to start a fire."

Llexa growls as she looks up to the sight of her reflection staring at her like she's a moron. Lexa maneuvers around the narrow entrance of the cave that she'd found while trekking up the mountain, struggling to get her bearings through the obvious infection setting in her injuries.

"Did you hear me?" Her reflection mocks, cocking her head. "You need to get warm, idiot."

"I would if I had the fucking tools," Lexa chides back, shaking her head as she grabs at a sharpened rock and whips out the small dagger from her belt. She pockets the stone and looks out into the winter blizzard, struggling to see if there's any sort of material to make a fire. She explores the cave, relieved to find that there's some brush and shrub she can use. The fire won't last long, but it'll have to do.

As she sets about making her shelter, her reflection comes over and plops down on the ground beside her, stretching out like a cat. "So... what now?"

Llexa grunts as she strikes a flame from the blade against the stone. The embers of the fire speckle upwards and she quickly blows upon the flames to get them to spread. Satisfied with the small fire she'd managed to start, Lexa sighs and leans back, wincing at the pain in her leg and forearm.

"Now we find a way back home to Clarke," Lexa says as she looks to the hastily wrapped bandage around her forearm. She grimaces when she smells the pungent, acidic scent of an infection as the wound is revealed. Her reflection chuckles sadly, shaking her head at the sight of the bullet wound.

"You need to fix that."

"No shit."

"Hey," her reflection says as she reaches out to tip Lexa's chin upwards. "I'm not your enemy."

"You killed my wife and my son."

"I am you," her reflection snarls as she grips at Lexa's jaw tighter. The soldier winces and looks away, tears burning in her eyes as she continues her work with the fire. She tries to push down the guilt and the pain that festers inside of her, but she can't help but feel so downtrodden. Her body aches, her stomach is empty, and her mind is a complete mess. She can't help but hear the chief's
words in her head, but she can't help but sympathize with him and his motives.

"Enough," her reflection growls, "we are not the bad guys here."

"Was he?" Lexa asks, her eyes misting as she gulps. "I mean… he saved me from Cage--"

"He is the reason why Cage did those things to you," her reflection whispers, her ghostly fingers dragging over the surface of her wound. "Oh Captain, do you think for a second that he ever cared about you? He drugged you. He wanted you to feel like he was your saviour." Lexa shakes her head, dipping her head into her chest as she rocks back and forth, struggling to make sense of the haze in her mind. The drug is still in her system, but she's starting the withdrawals.

"I need more," she hisses as she claws into her skin, "I need it… please."

"No, we don't. This isn't our fault. His care was just a ruse, kid. He manipulated you. This is the fault of those sick bastards."

"Aren't we the sick bastards?!" Lexa suddenly snaps, her eyes lit with ire and fury. "We killed them all! We commanded them to kill them!"

"You were dead to them," her reflection replies back in a cold, even tone. "Your own soldiers tried to kill you. Are you going to pin that blame on us, too?"

"I… I don't know!" Lexa screams as she claws into her head, pacing in the cave with rapid, impulsive steps. All she wants to do is just… fucking…

"You want to kill something," her reflection answers as she stands, nodding at the way Lexa's lips curl into a snarl. "Look at what they did to us. And you want to forgive them?" Lexa stops for a moment, trying to simply get air into her mouth without wanting to chew her own arm off. Her lips and gums are burning with the desire to feed. She stops at the wall and launches a kick to the rocky surface, letting out a series of bloodcurdling shrieks and incoherent curses.

"Yelling does nothing for you," her reflection goads like a scolding mother, "you are alone here, Lexa. I'm the only one who can hear you."

"You…," Lexa snarls as she points a finger in her reflection's direction. "You are not… you're not real!"

"Am I not?" Her reflection asks, cocking her head. "If it weren't for me, you would be stuck there. I got you out."

"You made me kill them all!" Lexa screams as she falls to her knees, looking at her hands with a horrified expression. "I killed them all…"

"You surely didn't think that you'd enter the military and get away without a little blood on your hands, did you?" Her reflection asks the question with a pointed expression, cocking her head as she draws closer. Lexa sucks in a deep breath as she looks up and watches as her reflection kneels before her, placing her own hands over her trembling ones. She closes her fingers into a fist and offers her a small, sad smile. Lexa shakes her head, her lips trembling as she starts to sob.

"Ssh," her reflection coos as she draws Lexa into her arms and holds her close, "we're the only people we need now."

Lexa takes a deep breath, struggling as she wraps her arms around her chest and holds herself in the fetal position, her knees curled up to her chest and her head burrowed between them. She closes her
eyes, trying to drown out the incessant pounding in her arteries, the fire flowing through her veins, the screaming of all those villagers as they'd been blown to bits. She gasps and blinks her eyes open in horror, only to find herself in the cage, alone and cold.

Shakily, Lexa reaches for her small pouch that she'd brought with her from the village and opens up the contents. She scurries through until she manages to fish out a few bandages. Noticing that she has nothing to close the wound in her arm with, Lexa realizes that there's only one way to stem the bleeding. Her head is dizzy as she stares at the ripped lines of flesh that string out from the open, gaping hole in her arms. She grits her teeth and fishes out the blade from her pocket, knowing that it's not sterilized but if she is going to find a way to stop the bleeding, this is all she has hope in doing.

With a deep breath, Lexa sticks out the blade into the flame and watches as the metal turns a bright orange. With her other hand, she grabs at an old rag from the pouch and wads it up, placing it between her lips and biting down. With a steady hand, or as steady as she can be, she takes the blade from the fire and holds it above her shaking wrist. Sweat beads down her forehead, despite the biting cold coming in from the breeze at the mouth of the cave.

With one last gulp, Lexa sears the wound shut with an agonizing scream of pain.

She toss the blade down as she cradles her hand to her chest, the towel falling from her lips as she writhes upon the cave floor, gasping and wheezing for breath. The soldier cries and coughs, her lungs working overtime to try and provide her some sort of steady flow of oxygen to no avail. It takes more than a few minutes for the burning pain to subside into something more manageable and less harsh. She lays limp on the floor, covered in sweat and tears.

"Rest," her reflection's voice echoes in the distance, "you're going to need your energy."

"Please," Lexa begs in a soft, almost childish voice, "please I just want to go home. I'm tired. Please… please let me go home."

"Soon," her reflection whispers in a soft coo, "but until then, we need to stay alive."

Lexa's head lifts upwards as she blearily looks up at her reflection with a somber, defeated expression. "How?"

Her reflection nods towards the fire and then to the mouth of the cave, her lips tightened into a straight line.

"By doing what you've been doing for the past four years," she says with a quiet voice, "by fighting."

"I don't have anything left to fight for," Lexa whispers tiredly, letting her eyes slide shut. "I have nothing more to give."

And then, just as she starts to drift into the sweet abyss of sleep, she sees images of Clarke and Aden smiling at her, of Anya and Indra gazing upon her proudly. She watches as Clarke comes to lay beside her, a hopeful expression painted upon her face as she lays down and envelopes her arms around her wife. Lexa nuzzles into the embrace, seeking the warmth that doesn't come because despite how real it feels, she knows this is all just a sick delusion.

"Then find something," Clarke whispers as she cups her cheeks and draws her in for a hug. "Because I need you… we all need you…"

"Clarke," Lexa chokes as she struggles to hang on, to find comfort in her faux-embrace. "Clarke… I…"
"Find something to give," Clarke practically orders the words in a stern tone before pulling away to nod at her. "It's time for you to come home, Lexa."

*Please,* she thinks as she finally succumbs to her slumber, *I just want to go home.*

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Lexa gasps awake, her stomach lurching as she feels bile slide up the base of her throat.

She's barely able to turn onto her side before she vomits all over the cold floor of the cave. She wheezes, clutching at her insides as she shivers and quakes. Cold sweat accumulates upon the brow of her head, but she's not feverish. She's clammy, dry-mouthed, shaky. She gasps and curls into herself, bracing through the random spasms that shudder through her spine and her abdomen. Her head is spinning and she feels like she's free falling.

"Withdrawal," she hears her reflection note in a stern tone. "You're peaking."

"I need more," Lexa gasps, her hands clawing at the rocky surface, "fuck… there's got to be something."

"You need to eat," her reflection tells her as she nods to the cave's entrance. "The storm has passed."

"So?" Lexa wheezes, clutching her side again as she shakes her head. "What does that--"

"You're trained for this," her reflection interrupts as she points towards the knife. "You need to go out there and you need to forage and hunt. *Survive.*"

Lexa sucks in a deep breath and nods, struggling to her feet. She grabs at her knife and limps towards the entrance. Her eyes harden into a glare as she steps out into the snow. She keeps the grip on her knife tight as she kneels in the snow, observing the small paw-print tracks. *Fresh,* she observes as she follows them to the outermost side of the cave. She walks slowly, keeping low and quiet as she stalks through the snow. Her heart is still beating erratically, and her joints are tense with the urge to run and simply rush through the process of finding her next meal. She somehow finds the strength to overcome the impulsivity that courses through her bones. Taking a deep breath, Lexa hones her senses upon the paw prints, gritting her teeth against the cold.

"Stop," her reflection whispers as she points in the distance, "look."

Lexa waits, holding her breath until she watches a small flicker of movement in the distance. She gulps and watches as a small hare darts out from a pile of snow, sniffing around with its back to the soldier. Lexa debates her options. She could simply stalk up and kill it, but with her current state, she doubts she'd be able to hold herself still enough to be stealthy. She looks to the handle of her knife and furrows her brow. Her reflection remains quiet.

With a steadying breath, Lexa flips the blade so that the metal is in her hand and the grip is pointed outwards.

"You have one shot," her reflection whispers as she watches the hare's head look upwards, its nose sniffing. "Don't miss, soldier."

When the hare does a quarter turn, Lexa flicks the blade forward and throws it.

The dagger embeds itself into the heart of the hare, causing it to let out a faint squeak before it falls over, bleeding into the white snow. Lexa quickly darts forward, her mouth watering as she approaches the dead animal. She retrieves her knife and grabs at the hare, stalking back to her cave.
like a predator. She immediately gets to work on building another fire with the remaining shrub in the mouth of the entrance. An ear-splitting grin threatens to break her face as she sets the fire going and then grabs at the hare. She avoids the lifeless glint in the animal's eyes as she skins the creature.

It doesn't occur to her for a second at how routine this feels.

Lexa sets up the rabbit over the fire and waits for the meat to cook. She unwraps and rewraps her wounds with whatever small cloths she has leftover from the pouch, and then, when it's empty, she goes outside to pick up some fresh snow and put it into the pouch. She brings the bag over towards the fire and holds it above the heat until the ice melts. She tips the pouch back and drinks greedily, her fingers clenching and unclenching with the withdrawal symptoms.

The rabbit cooks and as soon as it's done, Lexa absolutely devours it. Her stomach grows and aches as she bites into the tender flesh, moaning with appreciation as her stomach that had been empty for far too many days is finally filled. Her reflection watches in silence as she eats, animalistic and uncivilized.

"Slowly," she tells the soldier, concern dripping into her stern tone. "You'll be sick if you force yourself."

"I don't take orders from you," Lexa snarls over the meat, an angry look in her eye as she stands, snarling at her delusion. "You don't control me."

"Enough, girl. Sit down," her reflection orders, and Lexa obeys with another low growl. "Now eat slowly and rest. You need to work off the withdrawal."

"I'm fine," Lexa mutters, her hand coming up to aggressively scratch at a scab on her face, "always fine. Perky, even."

"Captain," her reflection snarls, getting the woman's attention. "Look at me."

"No."

"Now, Captain."

"I said no!" Lexa roars as she stalks forward, eyes wild and hair scraggly. She looks nothing like a human in this moment, and feels far from it. "Don't talk to me like you know me. You don't exist. You are a fucking figment of my fucked up imagination." Her reflection doesn't react, aside from a cocked head.

"And would that be so bad?" She asks, crossing her arms. "If it weren't for that fucking figment, you'd be starving."

Lexa grumbles something under her breath like a petulant child, shaking her head. "Stop talking."

"I will stop talking when you start listening."

"Fine," Lexa mutters as she sits back down, trying to keep her body from jumping up and charging at her reflection. "I'm listening."

Her reflection takes a breath and sits on the other side of the fire, so they're eye-to-eye. "You need to sleep. The withdrawals are going to get worse. Your wounds are infected. You cannot stay inside of a cave forever. It's time to start thinking about an escape plan. You need to get through the mountain pass. There's a base there, you remember it from the license plates on those humvees. You should be close to an outpost, but getting through the pass will take time. You need all of the strength and
energy you can muster up, alright? You're not thinking clearly. You need to get enough rest or else you'll die."

"And what if I want to die?!" Lexa snarls viciously, snapping her jaws up at her reflection. "What if I've had enough, huh?"

There's a pause, and then her reflection leans in and stares at her in silence. Lexa shudders at the dark look in those haunting green eyes.

"If that's the case," her reflection replies in a low, cold voice as she nods to her gun on the cold floor. "Do it."

Lexa growls and leaps up, snatching her gun off the floor and cocking it, placing it against her head. A sadistic smile spreads across her lips as she feels the cool metal against her forehead. She grips the handle tighter, licking over cracked lips as she stares at her reflection with a challenging glare.

"Well go on then," her reflection tells her as she inches forward, lips pulled back in a snarl. "Kill yourself, Captain. Show me you can do it."

Lexa growls again, cocking the gun as she grits her teeth and breathes through them. Saliva gathers around the corners of her mouth like a foam, making her look even more rabid than before. Her reflection remains unaffected, simply waiting for her to move. Lexa's eyes start to burn as she screams at nothing, her voice cracking as she grips the barrel of the gun tighter. She presses it further against her skin, struggling as it begins to ache against her temple.

"Shoot yourself," her reflection snarls again as she nods to the gun, "prove it. Prove to me that you don't want to live anymore."

Lexa screams again, shaking her head before throwing the gun to the ground and reaching up to tug her hands into her hair. She falls to her knees and shrieks like a banshee, shaking her head and shouting incoherently. She feels mucus slide down the bridge of her lip as her tears mix with the saliva upon her chin. She looks up at her unamused reflection, shaking and trembling under the weight of her glare. It's only once she's calmed down does her reflection move forward.

"That's what I thought," her reflection says as she turns away to sit back by the fire, glancing up at her with cold eyes. "Now, will you just get some sleep?"

Lexa stares at her palms again before she caves and slides onto her side, her eyes blankly staring into the fire as she finds her body starting to shut down.

The cold grip of death is following her, mocking her, but she's too far away to get lost in its embrace. Until it comes, Lexa supposes she may as well listen to the delusions spun by her own mind.

She may as well try to survive, to come back home.
Anya walks into the office, dropping off a file with the secretary before making her way down towards her office. She'd been moved up as one of the head youth counsellors over the months working at the clinic, and now she has her own office and even a secretary. If she'd told herself years ago that this is where she would be once she'd finished her military career, she probably never would have believed herself. She's about to sit down when there's a knock on her door.

"Ms Woods?" Anya snaps her head up to see her secretary, Janice, looking at her worriedly. Anya stands immediately.

"Is something the matter?" She asks as she pushes her chair in. Janice offers a calming smile, but it doesn't give much away.

"I got a call from Clarke. Tris wasn't feeling so well at school. She's a little slammed at work and can't pick her up--"

"Cancel the last two appointments for today," Anya says quickly, reaching for her briefcase and cellphone. "I'll let Clarke know I'll pick her up."

"For sure," Janice says kindly, "have a wonderful day, ma'am, and best of luck."

"Thanks, Jan. Will do," Anya says with a smile, nodding at the older woman as she ducks out of the office. After gathering up the last of her things, she locks her office and heads down to the parking garage. She gets into her car and starts it up, pulling it out of the lot and sets the destination for Tris' school. She turns on the hands-free and dials Clarke's number as she waits in traffic, adjusting her hair in the pull down mirror. The call rings three times before Clarke picks up.

"An," Clarke huffs from the other side, out of breath, "did you--"

"I'm on my way over to pick her up," Anya assures her gently as she takes a left at the first light, "you okay over there?"

"Hospital's on lockdown," Clarke says, her voice edgy and laced with worry. "Some schizophrenic got out of the psych ward and had a weapon."

"Jesus," Anya whispers as she runs a hand through her hair, "are you okay?"

"We're safe. I'm with Mom at paediatrics, eight floors up. Octavia's with us."

"She's still working?"

"No," Clarke reassures her, "she's here for a check up. We're okay. I just can't get to Tris and the teacher said she threw up in class."

"I've got her, C. You stay safe, okay? You call me if you need anything. Anything," Anya repeats firmly, trying not to let the panic seep into her voice. Luckily for her, the sound must have garbled up the weary shaking of her voice because Clarke's response is a faint affirmation before she hangs up the phone.

Anya manages to make it to the school in a matter of minutes, haphazardly parking her car outside before rushing into the main office. She spots Tris sitting on one of the plastic chairs with tear-stained
cheeks and a bucket clasped tightly in her hands. Anya takes a breath and tries to not let the memories of having seen Lexa in a similar position come back to haunt her. She steels herself instead, bracing herself for what sickness has brought the poor girl down.

"T?" Anya calls gently, getting the girl's attention. Her niece visibly brightens at the sight of her, but the sight movement of her head causes her to groan again and clasp the bucket tighter. It's lucky that Anya manages to race over and hold her hair as she vomits again, sobbing as she retches into the bucket.

"Ssh," Anya coos when Tris cries after she's finished, "it's okay, little one. You're okay."

"It hurts," Tris whimpers and tries to wipe away her tears, "Jimmy made fun of me b-because I threw up on h-his shoes."

"Hey," Anya tells her in a soft, firm voice, cupping the other girl's cheeks. She wipes away the tears with the pads of her thumbs and leans in to press a kiss to her clammy forehead. She ignores the acrid smell that wafts up from the bucket and sighs, taking to rubbing her niece's arm and back with her hands.

"I don't care about what Jimmy said," Anya assures her gently, giving her an encouraging smile. "Do you know why?"

Tris shakes her head and sniffls. "No, I don't 'Nya."

"Because Jimmy isn't as amazing as you are," Anya whispers soothingly, "and you are brave and strong. You may be sick, but it's okay. We all get sick."

"Even you?" Tris asks, still sniffling. Anya smiles and nods, chuckling softly.

"Even me, kiddo. Your mama once got so sick with nerves that she threw up on your mother," Anya explains, holding back the crack in her voice as she remembers how Lexa had come back that day, covered in Clarke's vomit but looking happier than she'd ever seen her. "But your moms' ended up getting married, even if they threw up on each other."

"So what he said was wrong?" She asks with a cocked head. And then, a pause, before she asks with a mortified voice, "am I going to marry Jimmy, 'Nya?"

"No," Anya chuckles as she sees the school nurse approach in the distance, "you're not going to marry him. It was just… a bad explanation." Anya's brows furrow into a frown as she contemplates what she'd said to her niece, but luckily Tris thinks it's amusing as she giggles, suddenly forgetting about her sickness.

"Ms Woods," the nurse calmly says, smiling at the interaction between niece and aunt. "I have the forms you need to sign to take her home."

"Sure," Anya says as she stands a quickly signs the sheets before reaching down for Tris' backpack. "Alright kid, let's go home and get some rest."

"Can we nap on the couch again?" Tris asks as she hops off the chair, still holding the bucket close to her chest as she waddles behind her aunt. Anya helps her buckle in and hops into the driver's seat as they make their way home, listening to the smooth jazz pouring over the radio as they return home.

Luckily, Tris' nausea seems to have calmed by time they arrive back to the house. Anya opens up the
door and the girl sludges in, clearly exhausted. Anya gives her a soft, sympathetic smile as she reaches down and carries the little girl in her arms. Tris beams at the embrace, nuzzling closer to Anya's side and closing her eyes. Anya takes her to the bathroom, setting her down on the toilet seat before grabbing a towel and wetting it with some warm water. She cleans up the younger girl softly, like she's done so many times with her own sister. She holds back tears at the way Tris unintentionally acts just how Lexa once would when they'd been younger. By the end of the cleaning, Anya's hands are shaking and she's on the verge of breaking down.

"Mm," Tris murmurs sleepily as she looks back up to her aunt, "I'm tired, 'Nya."

"Okay, munchkin. Let's get you to bed," Anya whispers as she reaches down and picks the little girl back up and takes her to her bedroom.

"'Nya?" Tris whispers, causing Anya to glance down at her affectionately.

"Yes, love?"

"I miss Mom," Tris whimpers into Anya's neck, a pout forming on her lip. "Do you think she misses me?"

Anya's throat closes up at the small admission. She can't find the words, so instead she chooses to respond with a shaky and forced nod. She goes to her niece's room and opens the door with the nudge of her foot. As she goes to set the girl down, she looks over to see that Tris is fast asleep in her arms, curled up into her chest. Sighing, Anya knows that she wouldn't want to wake the sick girl up so instead of tucking her in, she lays herself down upon the bed gently, slowly adjusting them so that they're not too jostled with each other. Tris lets out a tiny snore and moves in closer, tucking her head into Anya's collar as she slumbers.

"Sleep well, little one. I'll be here when you wake up," Anya whispers softly, kissing her niece's hair. "I'll always be there. I promise."

This one Anya knows that she's never going to break.

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Clarke returns home, wiped out after having finally been released from the hospital an hour ago. She'd barely managed a shower at the hospital and grabbed a quick bite to eat before heading home. She kicks off her shoes at the door and locks it behind her, before tossing her keys into the bowl by the door. She deposits the bag of snacks and soup she'd gotten for Tris from the pharmacy on the kitchen counter. She looks to a hastily-scrawled note upon the fridge.

Clarke,

There's leftovers in the fridge if you want some. I made some muffins for the kids, they're in the pantry.

- A

Clarke smiles at the note and sighs, cracking her neck as she makes her way up the stairs towards the bedroom. She sees that Tris' door is open and she peaks inside, her heart melting at the sight of what lays within the dark shadows of her daughter's room.

Tris is sandwiched between Aden and Anya, like the two are forming a protective cocoon around the younger girl. Anya's arm is thrown over both Tris and Aden, cradling them as close as she can to her chest in a protective embrace. Aden shifts upon hearing the sound of her walking into the room, his
head darting upwards. Clarke offers him a soft smile as she pads over, placing her hand upon his shaggy hair and combing through the tangles before leaning down and pressing a kiss to his forehead. Aden mumbles something before he drifts back to sleep, shifting closer towards his sick sibling.

"I got them to eat some food," Anya mumbles tiredly from beside Tris after a few moments, startling Clarke. The younger blonde looks over to see that her sister-in-law still has her eyes closed, dozing lightly. Clarke can't help the smile that fights its way to her lips as Anya begrudgingly lifts a brow.

"You okay?" Anya rasps, though the sound is a bit awkward. It's been awhile since they've talked… especially since that night. Clarke clears her throat and averts her gaze. She nods, picking at a loose thread on the sheets as she hears Anya stir awake, replacing her body with a pillow before coming to sit beside her.

"Did they hurt you?" Anya asks, concerned as she looks Clarke up and down for injury. "Did you--"

"No," Clarke whispers as she turns her head, surprised to see Anya sitting so close to her. She can see Anya's eyes soften with guilt and the older woman shuffles a little until they're a bit of a distance away. Clarke fumbles with her hands as she looks to Tris in worry, but Anya shakes her head, smiling sadly.

"She's alright. I think she might have something bad to eat. She isn't running a fever but she was tired. She was out like a bug after I fed her," Anya tells her gently, her hands reaching out to gently stroke her niece's back. Tris tries to nuzzle closer in her sleep, and Clarke's heart breaks inside of her chest.

"You're not her mother," Clarke whispers, causing Anya's hand to stop and freeze where it hovers above Tris' body. Anya's lip trembles and she pulls her hand back like she'd been burned. Clarke grits her teeth when she sees how much those four words had seemed to wedge a knife inside her sister-in-law's ribs.

"I didn't mean it like that," Clarke murmurs as she rubs the back of her neck. "I just meant that you act like their parent more than their aunt."

"Should I not?" Anya croaks, and Clarke hates how she can hear the vulnerable quiver in her voice. "I never meant to impose… I can go if--"

"No," Clarke sighs as she looks up to where Anya's eyes are welled with tears, her jaw tight and controlled. "Just… don't walk out on them."

"Clarke, you know I would never--"

"I know," Clarke assures her as she reaches over to gently squeeze Anya's knee. "I just need you to know that the kids aren't like us. They need stability. They need someone they can rely on to get them through the days. You and I both know that they see you like that. They love you, An. I would never ask you to back away from that. I wouldn't break my own kids' hearts, nor would I break yours. I care about all of you and love you too much to do that."

"So… we're okay?" Anya asks, her voice still small and timid. For a moment, Clarke's unsure if the woman before her is the fiery blonde that she'd come to both fear and admire from a distance when they'd been younger. The woman before her isn't someone Clarke's ever seen before, and it haunts her.

"We're okay," Clarke hums as she stands up and stretches. "But I need some tea and to unwind from
my eventful day. Would you… um, like a cup?"

Any swallows thickly, trying to bite through the awkward fog that drifts between them. She stands and nods with a shaky sigh. "Yeah, that'd be great."

As Clarke goes to move, she hears a strangled sound leave Anya's throat. Turning her head, Clarke watches as Anya looks to Tris, frozen with a hand over her mouth. Clarke swallows as she watches a few tears straggle down the older woman's cheeks, her hands shaking as she tries to control her sobs. Clarke approaches her slowly, knowing exactly what could have triggered the other blonde's panic attack. She slides her hand around Anya's waist and slowly brings her in for a hug, hushing her with soothing whispers. Clarke barely contains the hiss when Anya's hands grip onto Clarke's shirt.


"I… I…," Anya's practically wheezing now, unable to get air through. The doctor in Clarke activates immediately, no matter how tired she may be. She quietly manages to take Anya out of the room and into the hallway, holding onto sister-in-law as tightly as she can to try and shut down the sensory overload before it gets to be too much. Anya's cries grow louder, but they're muffled by the sound of Clarke's shirt. The older woman tries to wrench away, but she's too shaky.

"On the count of three, I want you to hold your breath for five seconds, okay?" Clarke hums gently, her left palm softly kneading the back of the other woman's ridged neck. Anya gasps as she nods, clutching harder to Clarke's shirt. The doctor sighs, continuing the kneading until Anya is finally relaxed in her arms.

"One, two, three," Clarke counts in a low, soothing rasp. "Breathe in and hold it, An."

Anya does as she's told, and releases when Clarke tells her to do so. And she continues to do it until she's repeated the processes five times. Her breathing stabilizes and the anxious pit in her stomach dissipates after awhile. She slumps in Clarke's arms, tears still steadily leaking from the corner of her eyes.

"What are you feeling?" Clarke whispers as she strokes Anya's unruly hair. "What's going through your mind, Anya?"

"I… just seeing her," Anya chokes out as another round of tears wash over her. "I used to take care of Lexa like that after our mother died."

Clarke doesn't speak. She simply chokes down her tears when Anya sobs out, "I just… I remember spending all those days in bed wishing our mother would come back. I hated Lexa for the first four years of my life because I blamed her for our mother's death. I wouldn't look after until I was eight. I ignored her, Clarke. Every cry and every sickness, I ignored her until I realized that she was never at fault. But I held it to her, to an innocent child, that she was the reason Mom died."

Anya chuckles sadly, ducking her head further into Clarke's shoulder as she continues to cry. "And now… now I realized that Tris could hate me for doing that to her mother. I mean… she told me she missed her mother today. And I know she wasn't talking about you. She missed someone she'd never even met. And she wouldn't have had to unless I had saved her like I was supposed to. And God, you know it's been fucking four years but it still hurts the same."

"I know," Clarke rasps as she nuzzles into Anya's throat, biting back her own tears. "I know it hurts."

"I thought we were getting better," Anya whimpers angrily, shaking her head. "I thought that this
was supposed to help us not make it worse."

"You know what they always say," Clarke sighs as she pulls away from Anya to glance at her thoughtfully. "It's bound to get worse before it gets better."

"What if it just stays worse?" Anya asks, looking to her shaking hands. "What if I never get better? What if I can't function normally without fearing every little fucking sound, or just looking at my niece without having a goddamn panic attack? It's been four years, Clarke, and I feel like I've only gone backwards. Sometimes it feels like I'm caught in this storm, where I'm just rocked from one end to the other with no real place to call home because my home's destroyed."

"Oh An," Clarke croaks as she hears the frustration in Anya's voice. "I…"

"Pity," Anya spits angrily as she looks up to Clarke, heartbroken. "That's all I receive. A 'my condolences' or a 'sorry for your loss'. They're not sorry. I watched my fucking sister get blown to pieces, and I stood there and let it happen. I willingly let her go to into that battlefield and I did nothing to stop her." Anya shakes her head at herself as she claws into her scalp. Clarke stands, unable to figure out the next step to help her sister-in-law, not when she's clearly just as broken.

"We were together for twenty-one years, Anya. We were married for eighteen of those years," Clarke seethes as she steps into Anya's face. "I have had to live with coming home and sleeping in an empty bed, a bed that I think, in a delusional sense, still smells like my wife. I sit in our closet and spray her cologne just to smell that she's there. I wake up every fucking morning thinking my wife is going to come through those doors and that I will be happy again, that I won't have to walk around holding up the broken parts of myself that I lost when she never came home. They couldn't even find a body, Anya. I never got to see her again. If I had known this was going to happen, I would have tried harder. I wouldn't have let her go so willingly. I would have convinced her to retire early."

"Clarke," Anya breathes out, tears in her eyes as Clarke shakes her head and grits her teeth. Her fingers clench into fists as she continues to vent.

"I told myself I needed to hold it together because I had two kids that needed me. I had a sister-in-law that went through the most traumatic time of her life, and for the first few months I hated you, Anya. I blamed you for their death. I blamed you for not taking your own life. How fucked up is that? That I was willing to trade you without a second glance, like you meant nothing to me. God… fuck, Anya. I know how much Lexa meant to you, but I'm begging you to not give up." Anya's eyes jerk upwards at the croaked admission that leaves Clarke's trembling lips. The blonde draws a breath before she continues, "because you're all I have left of her, Anya. You're all the kids have left of their mother. You're not a replacement. You're you. We need you. I need you. We made mistakes and we fucked up but God forbid I lose you I doubt I would be able to live with myself. I can't raise my kids on my own, An. You're not their mother, but you're someone."

Anya gulps as she watches Clarke slowly reach for her hands, intertwining their fingers as they press their foreheads together. "Please… don't leave me."

"I won't," Anya whispers as she holds Clarke tighter, allowing herself to be the pillar upon which Clarke can lean on. She curls her arms around the smaller woman, pulling her tight against her frame to assure her of her presence as Clarke starts to sob into her arms. Anya holds back her tears as she keeps her grip tight and unwavering. She pushes down her own panic because Clarke needs her. All these years, she's needed Clarke, and now, after four of them Clarke is finally reaching out. She kisses the other woman's forehead and murmurs sweet and assuring nothings into her ears until she calms down and breathes again.

"Don't leave me," Clarke begs as she slumps in Anya's arms, "I… I can't lose you, too."
"I won't," Anya tells her gently as she lets Clarke rest her burdens and bare herself for the world to see. "I'm here, Clarke. I'm not leaving."

**Date and Time Unknown**

**Location Unknown**

"There's a village southwest of here. You need more water."

Lexa limps through the shallow blades of grass, holding onto her ribs as she struggles with each step. Her mouth is parched, the autumn air nipping at her skin as she finds her way around the field. She looks up into the sky, trying to angle her location. Her temple beads with sweat as she looks back down at her hands. The withdrawals had ended months ago, but every now and again, she'll have flashes of the hunger and need to consume or destroy anything in her path.

"Did you hear me?" Her reflection goads from behind her. "You need to stay hydrated."

"I'm fucking trying," Lexa snaps, whirling around to see her reflection twirling her knife as she sits against a rock. "Give me a break."

Her reflection only rolls her eyes and snorts, causing Lexa to turn back and face the edge of the mountain. She can see smoke in the distance, signalling the nearby village is but a few klicks away. She shoulders her bag, now fabricated from a mountain lion she'd wrangled a few months -- or what she thinks are months -- ago while hunting a deer. She adjusts the straps and looks down to her knee, still bandaged from the scuffle with the giant beast.

"You've run out of noni and you have no more yarrow," her reflection says, an undertone of worry coating her voice. "You need to find more resources."

"I know," Lexa mutters to herself as she double checks her pistol before sliding it in her waistband, "I know, I know, I know…"

"The villagers are innocent," her reflection says calmly, but it doesn't matter. The words bite at Lexa's heart, causing her to swivel and snarl in her direction. Her eyes grow an animalistic kind of dark. She grits her teeth and stalks forward, but her reflection does nothing but simply stare back at her with a lack of worry.

"I'm not going to kill them, if that's what you think. I'm not a murderer," Lexa says as she grips at her scraggly, knotted hair. "I'm not a fucking killer. They tortured me. I did nothing wrong and they tortured me. If anything, they deserve it. They all deserve to die. Fuck, fuck, fuck!" Lexa screams as she slaps at her head, clenching into the roots of her hair as her delusions start to spin into meaningless noise. "I'm not a murderer, I'm not a murderer, I'm fine, I'm okay…"

Her mantra goes on for a few minutes before she's able to calm down fully. She gets up and swallows, brushing off the few strands of hair that had fallen to her shoulders as a result of her
tugging so harshly. She compartmentalizes her emotions as best she can before setting her jaw and limping back towards the hill. Because of her damaged knee, she half stumbles, half slides down the grassy ridge until she's at the bottom. She rolls into the grass with a huff, her vision starting to cloud with black specks as a result of the lack of hydration. Sliding forward, she pulls herself back to her feet and trudges on.

And then, there's the sound of laughter.

Lexa's head snaps up and she reaches for her gun upon reflex. But she soon lowers it by a marginal amount when she sees that the source is coming from a few women at the lakeside, washing some cloths into the water. They're singing and laughing with each other, looking nothing like they're in the middle of war zone. Lexa's tongue grows heavy in her mouth and she forces herself to put her weapon down. The women don't notice her as she slides on her stomach through the undergrowth, not wanting to be seen. She commando crawls until she gets to a small stream out of the sight of the jovial women.

With an unconstrained movement, Lexa hungrily cups water into her palms and drinks. It's muddy and earthy and probably not at all sanitary, but it's liquid relief. She eagerly slurs down as many mouthfuls as she can before she slides onto her side and reaches for the thick, bloodied bandage wrapped around her leg. She hisses as she undoes the cloth and stares at the bubbled, pus-laced flesh angrily throbbing before her. She reaches into the water and wets a spare cloth from her pack before setting about to clean around the edges of the wound, getting rid of some of the infectious green and clearing away the dried blood.

A crackle in the distance causes Lexa to bolt upwards, her hand reaching for her gun as she holds it out in front of her. She looks up to see the terrified expression of a little girl, her eyes blown wide with fear as she stares at the shaking muzzle of Lexa's gun. The soldier instantly lowers her gun and raises a finger to her lips, trying to get the girl to remain quiet, to not alert the women at the lake in the fear of them alerting the village they belong to. She's been on the run for so long now, but she knows that there's still a chance there are people out to get her, to find her and drug her, to learn her secrets.

So many secrets.

*Just tell them to leave, and I'll let you go.*

"Ssh," she whispers in a low, shaky voice. "Ssh, it's okay. I'm just going now."

The little girl gulps, her eye still trained on the gun. Lexa shakes her head and puts the gun away, before raising her hands in the air to show her surrender. The girl nervously glances between her and the other women, as if contemplating what she should do. Lexa raises her hand to try and get her attention, but the sudden movement causes her to shrink backwards and stumble upon one of the rocks. Lexa watches her open her mouth and leaps forward, clasping her palm over the girl's mouth to prevent her from screaming. The girl thrashes in her arms, trying to kick and get away but Lexa shakes her head, begging for her to be quiet. She tries to keep her tears at bay as she watches the girl keep on struggling, not trying to quieten her cries or submit anytime soon.

*This is what you wanted, right? To kill us all? Go on then, kill me.*

"Please," she begs in a shaky voice to the little girl, "please I don't want to hurt you. Please just don't talk. I'll leave you alone. I'll go."

The little girl's screams only continue, muffled against Lexa's palm as more pressure is applied. Lexa's tears fill her eyes and blind her vision as she feels the girl's motions grow weaker in her grip.
She sees how pale her skin gets and prays that she can pass out soon so that she'll be able to walk away without another death added to her hands. She's lucky, because the body beneath hers slowly grows slack, but breaths still flutter against the skin of her palm. Lexa removes her hand as she watches the girl's eyes roll into the back of her head and her body limply roll out from under her grip. She positions her head so that it's facing the sky, allowing her the access to air, but then she moves back, hissing as she feels something sticky and wet against her palm.

*Your people did this. You killed us.*

*You want nothing but death and destruction.*

Glancing down, Lexa sees the little girl laying there looking dead from afar, and it just brings up all the memories from so long ago. She can't control the sobs that break free from her throat and consume her. She rocks back and forth, gripping her hair as she cries into herself, trying to take away the painful memories that haunt her. Lexa distracts herself with the harsh clenching of her fingers in her hair, trying as she can to use the pain to divert her mind.

"I'm sorry," she whispers to herself and to the unconscious little girl, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry…"

*You think yourself a war-hero, kid?*

"You can't stick around and mope, soldier. It's time to move," her reflection's cold voice snaps her out of her chanting. "Now."

*You're nobody's war-hero.*

Lexa sniffs and nods, her fingers shaking as she hastily does up a new bandage and crawls out of the bushes. She takes one last glance at the sleeping girl and feels her heart shatter inside of her chest. She shakes her head and focuses on trying to steel herself. She needs to be strong. She needs to get home.

"Remember who you're fighting for," her reflection tells her as she limps forward, her body aching with the struggle. "Remember why you are doing this."

"For Clarke," Lexa whispers as she stumbles through the grass. "For Anya, Clarke, and Aden."

"Where are you going, soldier?" Her reflection asks, affirming and stern. Lexa squares her jaw and looks back up into the sun with squinted eyes.

"I'm going home," she tells herself solidly, ignoring the quiver that rakes up her spine. "I'm going back to Clarke."

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**December 11th 2013, 23:09**

Griffin-Woods Residence, New York
"So…," Anya whispers as she sits next to Clarke on the sofa, the two of them watching some old rerun of Friends. "How have the kids been?"

"Aden loves high school," Clarke says as she takes a sip of her wine, "Tris thinks her Kindergarten teacher is annoying and talks with a bird voice."

"She's imaginative," Anya chuckles as she leans back on the couch. "I'll give her that."

"She's also right," Clarke says with a frown, "she does have a really nasally voice. It can be kind of a nuisance."

"Mm," Anya mumbles as she looks to her wine glass. The kids have been asleep for awhile, leaving the adults to their own lives. The past few months have been a lot of awkward re-learning, of Anya trying to open up more and Clarke trying to stop pushing down her own feelings. They'd been going to more therapy sessions, and they make it a pact to not let their issues come up in front of the children. Anya looks over at Clarke, who appears to be deep in thought.

"What?" Anya asks, catching the blonde's attention. "You look like you're caught in space."

"I'm just thinking," Clarke murmurs as she leans back onto the couch, her eyes lazily flitting over to Anya. "How we ended up here."

Anya frowns, cocking her head. "What do you mean?"

"When I fell in love with Lexa, it was so simple. There was Costia, yeah, but that didn't last long. For the longest time, I asked myself how I'd never been able to look at anyone else aside from Lexa," Clarke whispers as she looks to the rim of her glass with a frown. "I mean, I dated Finn, but I never did anything more than a kiss on the cheek. Lexa was my first everything. She was my first love, my first kiss, my first time… she was my first and in a sad sense, she was also my last." Anya licks her lips, gazing down at her lap as Clarke picks at a loose fabric upon her jeans. She turns to face Anya again, her gaze confused and dazed.

"And then she died," Clarke rasps as she takes a deep breath, "and now I'm sitting here, nearly five years later, watching friends like I didn't just lose my best friend, wife, and mother of my children. And it's not even that I'm sad anymore, you know? Like I'm sad that she's gone and fuck, I wish she were here, but I've accepted it. All that therapy, all those talks, those years spent crying and screaming and praying to some non-existent deity, and I'm here."

"And she's not," Anya finishes, nodding solemnly as she looks to her drink. "It doesn't feel the same without her, does it?" Clarke chuckles sadly, shaking her head. The two of them both sit in silence, the droning TV providing some static noise in the background while they simply sit there.

"Hey," Clarke says suddenly as she glances at her watch. "Look, it's eleven-eleven."

Anya raises her brow and sighs. "Don't tell me you're into that shit."

"Make a wish," Clarke whispers in a rough croak as she closes her eyes. Anya watches her, trying to ignore the stab at her heart when she sees a tear sliding down from under Clarke's closed eyelid. She watches as the other woman slowly opens her eyes and reaches up to wipe away at the tear, sniffling lightly.

"What did you wish for?" Anya asks in a low voice, her own eyes stinging when she sees how Clarke still keeps crying. The blonde chuckles sadly, looking over at the older woman with a
heartbroken expression, thought there's undertones of bittersweet amusement in that wistful, cerulean gaze.

"I wished to be happy… to be loved, but you know that if you tell someone then your wish won't come true," Clarke whispers as she looks to the rim of her wine glass. Anya pauses for a moment, before she reaches down and gently holds Clarke's hand in her own, her thumb stroking over the fine hairs of her wrist.

"Not this time," she whispers softly, her gaze softening as she watches Clarke whimper, "not when I wished for the same damned thing."

At this, Clarke's head nods upwards and she stares at Anya in disbelief. There are tears in the older woman's eyes, but she pulls back, removing their hands as she sits on the couch and stares at the TV. They don't talk for a few moments, not until Clarke reaches between them and grabs at Anya's hand softly.

"Do you think that it's possible?" Clarke asks softly, looking down at their intertwined fingers and then back up at Anya. "Is it possible for us to love again?"

"What are you really asking, Clarke?" Anya whispers, her voice cracking as she turns her head. Clarke's free hand comes up and softly angles her jaw in her direction before smiling softly. The two of them stare at each other, gazes flickering to their lips and back up to their eyes as they struggle to find the words.

But sometimes, there are no words, just actions.

Clarke leans in at the same time that Anya does, meeting her sister-in-law in the messiest, most emotional kiss they'd ever shared. Even since their drunken fuck last year, Clarke has never felt like this. She sobs into Anya's mouth, finally allowing herself to seek comfort in someone who might feel the same way about her but is unable to say so just yet. She sinks into Anya's embrace, looping her arms around the other woman's neck in a need of security and safety. Anya's arms wind around her waist as they pull Clarke onto her lap, trying to get them as close as they can so that they can feel less alone for a night.

Their tears mesh against each other's cheeks as they continue to kiss. Their hands find each other, something that they've come to recognize as a source of strength. Whatever vulnerabilities and fears that may plague them soon dissipate once they're tethered to each other. Their hearts lay exposed between them, still beating and raw, but proof of their life and the hope they hold. They sob louder, their cries turning from desolate to cathartic in an instant.

After a few more passionate kisses, Clarke slumps in Anya's arms, tired and exhausted by the conversation and by their impromptu make-out session. She wraps her arms tighter around Anya as the two of them slide down to lay upon the couch, wrapped up in each other's embrace. Anya's head tucks itself in the safety presented in the crook of Clarke's neck, while Clarke's nose is buried in the sweet-scented curls of Anya's hair, breathing in her essence. The two of them remain like that, without the need of words to assure them because the physical touch is enough to be an anchor to their ships as they brace for the incoming storm.

They both fall asleep knowing that no matter what happens, they'll always have each other.
It comes when she's least expecting it.

The bullet carves through the same wound she'd gotten from her initial escape, blowing out any healing flesh that had once been there.

Lena screams as she falls to the ground, clutching her forearm in her other palm as she writhes on the ground. She can hear shouting in the distance, but she knows it's not close enough for her to have to worry about close-combat. Lena scrambles through the snow and rolls behind a tree stump, gritting her teeth as she hears more gunfire in the background, of the shouts calling out to find her, that her head will have a bounty like no other hostage before her.

"Move," her reflection hisses as she looks up into the blizzard, "you need to get past the border. There's a camp not too far from here. Run."

"I can't," Lena wheezes as she shakes her head, "I can't. I'm not--"

"Enough," her reflection snarls as she reaches under for Lena's chin and juts it upwards. "You gotten this far, soldier. You're not going to give up now."

The gunfire and the shouting grows louder, as does the approaching boots crunching in the snow. Lena looks back up to her reflection, watching as her own face transforms into her father's own. His gentle green eyes stare down at her, his hands outstretched as he waits for her to get up. Lena fights through the pain and the tears as she heaves herself to her feet. He turns around to face in the direction of a mountain in the distance.

"The snow will give you cover," her father tells her softly, "the camp is not far from here. This is the time you make your run, kid."

"Dad," Lena wheezes as she continues to cry. Her tears stick to her cheeks and freeze against her chin as she sobs. Her hand is on fire, her legs are nearly numb, and her entire body feels like it's about to dissolve into nothing but a pile of bone and flesh. The essence of life that exists within her is slowly draining out.

"Please," her father whispers as he turns to hold her hand, his grip cold and distant. "Do what I could never do for you and your sister."

"Dad?" Lena croaks, ignoring the blaring light coming from the the soldiers searching for her in the distance. Lena's father simply sighs, giving her a sad smile.

"You cannot leave your family, Lena. I made a mistake by coming here. I made a mistake by not coming back and now you're here, stuck exactly where I had been so many years ago," he says looking to the tree with misty eyes. Lena turns and looks to the tree, not understanding what he's talking about. That is, until, she leans a bit closer and runs her fingers along the grooves of the bark. She stops, her breath hitching as she finds an indentation upon the wood.

L.W., A.W., R.W.,
Lexa's lips tremble and she cries as she recognizes the writing, regardless of the engraving. She looks back up to the misty eyes of her father, knowing what he means to say in the silence that passes between them. She wants to say something, but the sound of a gunshot jolts her from her state of remembrance. She looks back, seeing somewhere between five to ten men with their guns blazing, shouting slurs towards her. She glances back to her father, who stares at her with a mixed amount of pride and strength as he nods, pointing in the direction of the camp that could be her last shot at getting back to her family.

"Go, my child. Run and don't you ever stop running," her father tells her with a bittersweet smile, tears pooling in his eyes. "Run, just like I taught you."

Lexa doesn't need to be told twice before she's driving the rest of her energy into sprinting, just like she used to when she was in university and running track with her sister. She pumps her arms and wills her body to cooperate for this one last, desperate push. She sets aside the memories, the flashbacks, the drugs she still feels coursing through her veins and she runs. She runs, a small smile on her face as the world around her disappears and instead of the ice and snow, all she sees is the green fields of the university's athletic centre. She runs faster as she sees the rival schools around her, sprinting at her side to give her motivation. In front of her, she can see Clarke, Octavia, and Lincoln cheering for her to run faster, that this is the last leg of the championship relay.

As she cocks her head behind her, she sees Anya's proud smile and encouraging screams motivating her to finish the thing for the both of them. Her sister waves her arms and pumps her fists in the air in a typical Anya fashion, an ear-splitting grin nearly breaking her face as she pours all of her energy into cheering on her sister. Lexa sees those hazel eyes, brimming with nothing but admiration and affection, and she finds her heart beating more strongly than ever.

Throwing in a grunt, Lexa turns her head back to the front and she sprints as fast as she can, despite the burning in her lungs and the dizziness in her vision. She can hear the shouting in the distance grow quieter, and soon enough there aren't even any gunshots being fired. The moon bathes her in the only light she needs, and as she looks up to the sky that's littered with stars, she finds herself with an ounce of hope, of motivation, of direction.

Lexa locks her gaze onto the North Star and she lets it guide her way home.

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December 31st 2013, 23:50

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

"Another year, huh?"

Clarke blinks from staring off into the distance at the sound of her mother's voice. She turns and sees
the older woman approaching her with a sad smile upon her face. Clarke fingers over the rim over her glass as she nods, unable to speak. The new year will always be a struggle, no matter how many pass.

"I remember that the first time you brought her over for Christmas," Abby says, chuckling lightly as she reminisces over the memories. "She showed up, a timid-looking thing, all scrawny and lanky, always formal. Your father about had a field day with how mannered she'd been. He knew she was a keeper from the start." Clarke looks up to her mother, tears misting in her eyes as she listens to the older woman talk about her late wife. Abby sighs, looking into her glass.

"I know I never approved of her in the beginning, especially after your father died," Abby's words are remorseful and low as she speaks. "I… I just never wanted to see you get hurt. When you came and told us that she was joining the army, I was concerned more for you than I was for her… I… I didn't want to lose you. I knew that you'd have followed her to the pits of Hell if need be. You looked at her like she was your entire world. All I saw was your career and future, your life that I knew you wanted for yourself, and I saw Lexa as someone standing in the way of that for the longest time. I… I just never was able to accept that Lexa wasn't a roadblock in your life, she was your life. As you were hers." Clarke's eyes wet with tears as her mother looks up and offers another sad smile.

"I know I wasn't there for you enough when your father died, but I hope that you know that I am here for you now. I remember how long I grieved Jake and I remember how it hurt me for years knowing that as a doctor, I couldn't save my own husband. It hurt me knowing that I lost him when my profession revolved around saving people. I felt like I betrayed not only him, but you too. And… I don't think I ever apologized for that," Abby continues to say, her voice trembling slightly as she nods to her daughter. "I know that it's been five years since you lost Lexa, but Clarke, I just want to say that I am so sorry. I am sorry that I never accepted her sooner. I'm sorry that I never told her how happy I was that she came into your life and brightened it. I'm sorry I never loved her like I love you."

Clarke's silent for a moment as Abby bares herself, open and vulnerable. Finally, her mother takes a deep breath and whispers, "I'm sorry, Clarke."

Without a verbal response, Clarke launches herself forward and buries herself in her mother's arms. Abby hugs her tightly, cradling her head into her shoulder as she holds her weeping daughter. She kisses her daughter's ear, whispering her apologies and sweet nothings until she calms in her arms. Clarke relaxes, drinking in the comforting smell of her mother before Abby pulls away and pecks her daughter's forehead before looking at a place over her shoulder. Clarke turns, wiping away her tears to see Anya dancing with Tris in the centre of the room. Her daughter is laughing and giggling as she steps onto her aunt's shoes, letting Anya walk them around like a giraffe. Clarke smiles and watches them in awe, revelling in the sight of her daughter so jovial and excited.

"She'd want you to be happy," Abby whispers, drawing Clarke's attention back to her in confusion. Abby just gives her a warm, knowing look. She nods to Anya again, and Clarke looks over at her sister-in-law again to see Anya staring over at her with a shy, dopey grin as Tris continues to giggle and laugh.

"You think so?" Clarke breathes out, looking back at her mother again. Abby nods, smiling as she gives her a gentle push towards the centre of the room.

"Go," Abby tells her with a soft smile, "and send my granddaughter over here. I think I owe her a dance, no?"

Clarke's face flushes as she nods, taking a breath before heading towards the other woman with a hesitant smile on her face. Anya blushes at the sight of the woman, stammering when Tris asks her a
question and she can't find a coherent response. Clarke giggles as Tris runs up to her, extending her arms.

"Mama!" Her daughter beams, flashing her a toothy grin. "Did you see me dancing?"

"I did, munchkin. You looked gorgeous," Clarke grins as she eskimo-kisses her daughter. "Why don't you go show grandma your dance moves? She's been waiting for a partner for quite some time now." Tris lights up at the mention of Abby, squirming in her mother's arms as she aches to be put down. Clarke chuckles and sets her down, letting her run over to her grandmother. As soon as she's out of sight, Clarke turns back to Anya with a gentle smile.

"You looked just as gorgeous," Clarke hums as Anya extends her hand. "Kiss" by Mélanie Laurent begins to play over the speakers, and Clarke takes Anya's hand as they begin to sway to the music. Anya sighs contently as Clarke rests her head upon her shoulder, her nose tickling the column of her throat.

"You look stunning, Clarke." Anya's voice croaks nervously after sometime. Clarke smiles against Anya's clavicle, pressing closer as the song builds up. Around her, people continue to sway and dance, completely tuning the two blondes out in the middle. The older woman looks down nervously, biting her lip. Anya continues to sway the younger woman, not ever breaking eye contact as they continue their dance. Clarke's eyes mist as she looks up to the older woman.

"Anya, I--"

"Alright everyone!" Someone interrupts the younger woman from her speech as the music quiets down. "Let's get ready to count in the new year!"

The countdown starts at thirty seconds, with the crowd starting to scream out the numbers. Clarke looks around the room, smiling as she sees Aden sitting next to Jackson on the couch, grinning at the other boy as they count with the crowd. Tris and Abby are with Octavia and Lincoln, her daughter perched on her brother-in-law's shoulders as she beams out at the people in the room, shouting in her own numbers. Beside Lincoln stands Indra, holding her own grandchild and smiling for the first time. Lincoln sends her a comforting smile and nod before looking downwards at his newborn daughter wrapped up in his mother's protective arms. Indra, however is warmly staring over in their direction. Clarke turns and follows her stare, her heart stopping at the look in Anya's eyes.

"Clarke," Anya breathes out, reaching down to discreetly tangle their fingers together. "I need you to know that I care about you."

Twenty.

"I just… I know these last years have been rough and I've struggled with my feelings, but I think I'm figuring them out."

Fifteen.

"I never meant to pull away the way I did. I never meant to reject you. I wasn't ever able to tell you how I feel because I was never ready."

Ten.

"I am now. God… it's fucking terrifying, but I'm ready."

Five.
"I want you to know that whatever you decide, I will accept and support you. I won't ever back out on Tris and Aden. I love them, just like I…"

Four.

"Just like…"

Three.

"Clarke, what I'm trying to say… what I'm trying to tell you is…"

Two.

"Is that I… I…"

One.

"I love you."

"Happy New Year!" The crowd screams, all but drowning Anya's confession. But Clarke hears it loud and clear. Instead of responding with words, Clarke simply takes Anya's face in her palms and leans up on her toes before she gently pecks her lips. Anya sighs and closes her eyes, losing herself in the soft touch of Clarke's lips upon her own. As Auld Lang Syne plays in the background, Clarke feels her lover's hands slide against her hips, holding on for dear life as they sway against each other. A smile breaks out between them and Clarke pulls back to see tears tracked down Anya's cheeks, smudging her mascara.

"Happy New Year," Clarke whispers softly, leaning up to peck her cheek. "And, An?"

Anya gulps, still nervous. Clarke leans her head into the taller woman's shoulder and nuzzles her neck, letting out a gentle purr of comfort.

"I love you, too."

===

Clarke moans as Anya carries her up the stairs, her hands flitting through her hair as Anya's mouth presses gently against her own. They grind against each other slowly, tongues eagerly battling and searching for that fire that burns within them. Clarke's hands immediately go down to the hem of Anya's shirt, stripping it off with ease as the older woman sits them down on the edge of the bed. Anya removes Clarke's shirt slowly, leaving them in just their bras.

"God," Anya whimpers as she rests her head against Clarke's collarbones. "I…"

Clarke closes her eyes and presses her lips to the top of Anya's head. "I know. Touch me…"

Slowly, Anya's hands slide up Clarke's back. Her lips continuing peppering kisses to her chest as those deft fingers unhook her bra and let it fall. Clarke fumbles with Anya's sports bra, lifting it above her head before tipping forward so they collapse upon the bed. Their mouthes reattach in a heated mess, their hands wandering and touching, leaving a blazing trail of passion in their path. Clarke breathes a heavy sigh into Anya's lips as she feels the older woman's scarred hands wandering to the button of her jeans. Her fingers shake as she lets the metal slip from the loophole. Clarke smiles into her lips and kisses her gently.

"Slow," Clarke murmurs as she places her hands over Anya's wrists, "we have all the time in the
Somehow, they manage to get Clarke's pants and panties off before the younger blonde is rolling them, pulling Anya on top. The older woman fists a hand into the sheets as she feels Clarke rut her hips upwards, smearing her juices on the bare skin of her torso. Clarke's hands are experienced and steady as she unfastens her lover's belt, pulling it through the loops sensually before casting the leather off to the side. With Anya's help, the two shuck off her jeans and boxers, leaving both of them bare as the day they were born. They both scoot back on the bed, their lips reattaching with a renewed fervour.

"I want you," Anya hums into Clarke's ear as she rocks her hips forward, earning a high-pitched gasp from the woman beneath her. "I need you."

"Take me," Clarke breathes into Anya's lips, canting upwards upon reflex. Her eyes glisten with tears as she pulls Anya closer to her. The two of them tangle with each other, hands searching until they clasp, fingers intertwined as they hold onto each other. They tether themselves, anchoring to the ground while they ride out the storm brewing between their sheets. Anya's teeth graze over Clarke's lip, her shoulders flexing as she holds herself above the woman.

"I love you," Anya whimpers softly, unable to hold back as her hips rock into Clarke's own. "God, I…"

"I know," Clarke assures as she leans up to kiss the older woman, her free hand reaching upwards to gently scrape the pads of her thumbs upon the trailing hands of her cheeks. Her lips follow the path of her fingers as she kisses away the steadily falling tears from the older woman's eyes. Her own eyes burn with the ache of tears, but she chokes them back as she reattaches their lips firmly. Anya gasps into the kiss, the muscles under her skin flexing as Clarke's free hand scrapes down her bare back, leaving red scratches in their wake. The pain only intensifies her lust for the blonde beneath her.

"I love you," Clarke whispers as she tilts her hips up so she can make contact with Anya's quivering muscles again, "I want you and need you, too."

"On three?" Anya breathes harshly as she lowers herself so that she can maneuver her hand to crawl between their bodies, intent on reaching between Clarke's legs. The blonde nods, sucking in a deep breath as she removes her hand from Anya's back and to move it towards Anya's pelvis.

"One," Clarke whispers softly. Their hands slip through each other's wetness, eliciting twin gasps from the two of them.

"Two," Anya gasps as she feels Clarke's finger circle around her stiff clit. Clarke nods, looking up into her lover's eyes as she positions her fingers at her hole. Anya keeps the eye-contact, her expression soft and gentle, but there's still a firm undertone of passion that laces her hazel eyes.

"Three," the two of them say, and with a final breath, they both push inside.

"God," Clarke cries out as she quivers around Anya's fingers. "I forgot how good you feel inside me."

"Fuck, Clarke." Anya's not any better as she squeezes at the slender digits inside of her. She shakily inhales before curling her fingers.

They move at a decent speed, more focused on each other and their connection than the pace of their fingers. Their lips chase and follow like they're playing a game of cat and mouse. Their hips collide
against each other as they struggle to find more skin on skin contact. The two of them cry out and
gasp like they're making the existential transfer from their bodies to another realm. Sweat binds them
together like an adhesive while they grind and dip into each other. Tears stain their cheeks, but for
the first time since they started sleeping together, they're not crying out of guilt or fear.

They're crying because of love.

It takes only a few minutes for them to peak, for their gasps to tumble over into low cries and moans
of pleasure. In each other's release, they find closure and catharsis, acceptance and reassurance. They
find peace in each other's fervour-filled kisses. They find hope in each other's light brushes and sweet
nothings.

Neither of them move afterwards, not for a few seconds, at least.

They allow themselves that time to fall apart and rebuild… with each other.

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Aden grumbles awake as he finds his bladder aching. It must be somewhere early in the morning, he
decides as he reluctantly throws the covers off and rubs at his face. He stumbles into the hallway and
makes his way to the bathroom. Rather than making a mess by standing in his current half-asleep
state, he takes a seat on the toilet and finishes relieving himself. After washing his hands and turning
off his light, the boy returns to his room.

Just as he's about to get to his room, he hears a sharp gasp, followed by a low groan.

"Ma?" Aden asks to himself, confused. He pads towards his mother's door when another similar
sound pierces through the still night air. He's about to call out for his mother in concern when he
finally approaches the door and sees just exactly what's causing Clarke to make those noises in the
first place.

The boy's eyes widen with shock and betrayal as he watches, through the crack, as Anya's bare,
tattooed back grinds up and down in the bed. He watches as a pale arm curls around the small of her
aunt's back, nails scraping down the muscles shifting under the tan skin. Aden's frozen outside the
door, watching as the sheets pool a little down Anya's back, revealing another pale leg sliding up and
down the older woman's side. The gasps and moans are growing louder, causing Aden's chest to
swirl with anger. Just as he's about to turn away, he watches as Clarke rolls atop Anya, and for a
moment he thinks that she'll stop this.

But, the boy is quickly proven wrong.

Clarke's head tips back as her hands slide up Anya's chest, reaching for his aunt's breasts. She grinds
her hips down, her sweat-slicked back glinting in the pale light of the moon. His mother leans her
head down and presses a passionate and lusted kiss to his aunt's lips, her hips grinding in slow circles
on Anya's lap. The sight causes bile to rise in Aden's throat, and not because he's watching his
mother having sex -- no, he's seen his two mothers go at it before when he'd been younger, but he'd
not been old enough to understand what exactly they'd been doing. Now, though? Now, he has a
perfect idea of what's happening.

Clarke is fucking Anya in the very bed that once belonged to both of his mothers.

Aden doesn't know why he remains standing, watching with glazed eyes as Clarke lets out a high-
pitched moan. Anya follows with a low grunt as his aunt lifts himself up, burying her face in her
mother's chest. Clarke's hands smooth down Anya's tangled hair as they both calm down, whispering
incoherently as they recover from their combined orgasms. Aden feels his knees wobble as he watches Clarke gently tilt Anya's head upwards so they can look at each other with loving eyes. The way that Clarke looks at his aunt is the same way she once used to look at his late mother and it makes Aden want to scream and cry.

Instead, he pivots and turns away, trying to keep his tears to himself as he takes in the weight of the situation. He crawls into his bed and stares up at the ceiling, at the stick-on stars that his mother had put up there when he used to get night terrors. Tears track down his cheeks and into his pillow as he yearns for her love and wisdom, her warm embrace and toothy grin. He wants to hear her voice, to see her green eyes sparkling down at him in pride. He wants his mother back so that she can be in love with his mama just like things were supposed to be. He wishes that she could be here so she could fix this mess.

In the last five years, Aden's never missed his mother as much as he's missing her right now.

Date and Time Unknown
Location Unknown

Lexa stumbles through the trees, scrambling over dusty plains and rocks as she approaches a veiled area. Her breathing is haggard and shallow, with black spots creeping up in the corner of her eyes as she attempts to steady herself against a tree trunk. Mist clouds in front of her, the cold hacking through her thin, ripped shirt and burrowing in the marrow of her bones. Her shoulder sags awkwardly as she slumps down and closes her eyes.

When she snaps them back open, she sees Clarke standing in the distance, her blue eyes distant and cold as the snow continues to pelt down around her. Attempting to stand is a fruitless effort, and instead of rocking upright, Lexa finds herself crashing back down to the packed earth. The white dust of ice and snow brushes against her cheek, causing her to flinch from the cold. Her breathing becomes slower, but her gaze remains locked to Clarke's mirage.

"Come on soldier," she hears her father's voice echoing in the back of her mind. When you get smacked down, you get back up.

"I… I can't," Lexa croaks softly, her eyelids drooping with the effort to keep herself awake. "I'm so tired. I… I can't..."

And then, just as she's about to succumb to the fatigue and pain, there is a brush on her cheek. As she looks up, Lexa watches Clarke's face fill her vision. Those blue eyes are warm and encouraging now, filled with love and admiration as she leans down and holds out her hand. Lexa gulps, trying to find the energy to get up and respond, but her limbs are paralyzed. Letting out a low whimper, Lexa closes her eyes again and sighs deeply, her lungs aching with the effort.

Just because you can't walk, doesn't mean you can't move. Don't stop, Lexa. You're almost home.
Lexa snaps her eyes open to see a woman with long, dark blonde hair and hazel eyes staring at her. Golden light radiates from behind her, and her smile beams warmth in her direction. For a moment, Lexa is confused at this mirage, but then she quickly remembers just who this woman looks like.

"Mom?" Lexa breathes out, tears welling in her eyes. "Oh God, Mom…"

Move, Lexa. She hears that soft, feminine voice again. You can do it, my darling. Be strong.

From behind her mother's mirage, she sees her father coming to stand next to his wife. He nods at her, those piercing green eyes willing her to listen. With a breath sucked between her gritted teeth, Lexa swallows and tilts her head upwards, adjusting her body just as more people start to fill her vision.

Clarke, Aden, Anya, Lincoln, Octavia, Gustus, Indra… they all are here to guide her home.

With a pained grunt, Lexa heaves herself up onto all fours. She's only able to keep herself upright for a few moments, however, until her left arm gives out and she collapses back onto her belly. Fire ignites around the hollow point in her forearm where the bullet had cracked straight through the bone. Tears slide out from the corners of Lexa's eyes as she shakes her head, unable to figure out how to move again. Again, her family's voices all call out in unison to her.

Move.

With rallying scream, Lexa claws out with her right hand and grips into the snow, hauling herself forward. She kicks out with her left leg, and soon enough, she finds herself commando crawling towards her delusional visions. She ignores every bite of pain and keeps moving. Snow continues to relentlessly flutter down upon her, but she doesn't let the cold deter her from moving forward. Her lungs burn and her heart pounds with the exerted effort, but she doesn't stop.

Not until she's flooded with bright, fluorescent light.

There's incoherent shouting and gunfire, followed by the sounds of thundering boots upon the snow. A warning shot gets fired to a packet of snow beside her, and it's only then does Lexa roll onto her side and grunt. She's breathing harder now, and her vision is getting blurry. The crunching of footsteps grows louder, as well as the shouting. She keeps her stare pointed ahead, however, her stare blankly trained on the fading images of her family in the distance.

A sharp kick to the side draws her from her visions, but Lexa's not strong enough to fight back this time.

I'm sorry, she thinks in her mind as she hears more shouting and feels another boot to her shoulder, I'm sorry I couldn't make it home.

But then, but some miracle, the abuse stops when a powerful, booming voice roars from behind her attackers.

"Enough!" The man's voice calls out. "Someone give me a light! Now!"

Lexa blinks open her eyes as she sees men and women in uniform surrounding her. The light continues to blare down on her, and then another order is barked out by the man and she feels her body being hoisted upwards, until she is resting upon her knees. Lexa uses the last of her energy to roll her head upwards, knowing that if she is to face death, she will do it looking her killer in the eye. She sucks in a deep breath and squints into the bright light, waiting for the strike.

"Jesus," the man's voice grows softer as she sees a silhouette approach, bathed in the light. "Is it… is
"Colonel?" One of the men besides her asks, confused. The man continues to advance, hold his hand up in a meaning of peace.

"Put your goddamn weapons down," he barks to the men, and immediately the grip around Lexa's arms loosens. Lexa slumps slightly, her stomach churning as she feels increasingly fatigued. Her body slackens and grows heavier in her captor's arms, but this time they hold her up in support, not authority.

And then, the man steps forwards, revealing his face.

When she sees those familiar dark eyes, the eyes that she'd grown up knowing, Lexa's adrenalin finally cuts out.

"Get a stretcher," the man orders, worry seeping into his voice. When no one moves, the man grows furious. "I said get me a stretcher, dammit!"

There's some rushed movement and some mumbling, but Lexa's senses are completely out of whack as she feels herself being lowered back onto the ground. Hands are caressing her face and she's being bombarded with questions, but all she sees are those dark, concerned eyes staring down at her with hope and disbelief. The man kneels beside her and holds her face with his wide, rough hands. Tears slip from his eyes as he parts his mouth, still in shock.

"C-Clarke," Lexa stutters between hiccuped breaths, the blackness taking over her vision once again. "Clarke…"

"Don't worry Lexa," she hears the man say as her body succumbs to its injuries. "We'll bring you home to her. You did good, child. You're safe now."

The last thing Lexa sees and hears before she blacks out is Clarke.

You did it, Lexa, she hears her wife's voice calling to her from the realm of sleep, you made it back to me.

January 1st 2014, 06:43

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

"Mm, Clarke."

Silence answers back to Anya.

"Clarke."

A grunt responds this time.
"Sweetheart, wake up. You have to go to work in an hour."

A sleepy blue eye opens and Anya chuckles with a deep rasp as she watches the blonde stir from beneath the covers. Clarke groans and nuzzles closer to Anya's chest, her nose sliding up the column of the older woman's neck. Anya chuckles and Clarke grins as the vibrations rumble against her cheek. She slides her hands up Anya's abdomen until she reaches her pert breasts, taking each into her palms and kneading them gently as she pecks a soft kiss to her lover's throat. Anya sighs in content as she wraps her arms around Clarke's lower back, humming with delight as she kisses the top of the younger woman's head.

"Good morning?" Clarke asks sleepily as she gazes up at her lover. Anya sighs and nods, her dreamy eyes still glazed with sleep. There's an unbridled amount of love and affection in those hazel eyes, and Clarke can't stop herself from leaning upwards and capturing those petalled lips in a gentle kiss. Anya moans at the pressure, pulling Clarke tighter in her arms and rolling them so that she's on her back and the blonde is splayed out on her front.

"The best," Anya murmurs as soon as their lips detach. She reaches up to curl a strand of blonde hair behind Clarke's ear, smiling widely. "You?"

"Hm," Clarke teases with a low sigh, leaning back down to reattach their lips in a slow-moving kiss. "I think I've had better."

"Oh?" Anya asks, quirking her brow as she feels Clarke's hips start to grind down on the smooth muscles of her torso. "And what can I do to top it?"

"So competitive," Clarke grins cheekily as she nips Anya's bottom lip. "But if you're insisting… there are a few things I could think of, babe."

"Mm, like this?" Anya asks as she rolls their bodies smoothly so she can situation herself atop the younger woman. Upon instinct, Clarke's legs hook around the small of Anya's back, drawing the older woman in closer until her pelvis makes contact with her hips. Anya lets out a low, content sigh as Clarke stares up at her dazedly. Pure, unadulterated happiness radiates in those ocean blue depths, and Anya finds her breath catching in her throat as she stares at them with love.

"You look at me like that and I want to combust," Clarke whispers as she reaches up and cups Anya's cheeks. "You make me feel loved again."

"You are loved," Anya whispers as she leans down and kisses her lover as gently as possible, but still managing to inch in an ounce of passion. "I love you."

The words are not a shocker, but it still makes Clarke's heart skip a beat.

"I love you too," Clarke breathes against her lips, "God… I didn't think I could be loved again. I didn't think I could feel like this."

"But we do," Anya chokes out as tears well in her eyes, her hands shaking as they find purchase in the sheets on either side of Clarke's head. "We do, and it doesn't feel awful anymore. The nights aren't terrifying. The days are easier. The memories don't hold so much pain anymore. You… you helped me heal when I thought I would be broken forever. You gave me company when I thought I'd always be alone. You saved me, Clarke. God… you really fucking saved me."

"As you did with me," Clarke admits back, her own eyes glazing over with emotion. "You mean the world to me, An."

Anya doesn't bother with a verbal response, because she knows she cannot express her gratitude and
affection towards the younger woman in a matter of just words. She kisses her with fervour, their battling tongues causing a show of fireworks between them. Clarke's foot slides up and down her lover's bare thigh and one of Anya's hands comes up to cup the other woman's jaw as they continue to passionately make out, while gently grinding and sliding against each other.

Just as Clarke's free hand is about to slide down Anya's chest and towards the dip between her thighs, the phone rings, jolting them from their state.

"Don't answer," Anya mutters as she continues to grind against her lover, "whoever it is can wait."

Clarke giggles when Anya starts to peck a series of butterfly kisses along her jaw and cheeks. "What if it's something important?"

Anya stops her kisses to pull away and gaze lovingly into Clarke's eyes as her mouth tips up in a small smile.

"Nothing could be more important than me worshipping you, right now. Unless you care to disagree?" Anya answers back with wit and charm lacing her voice. Clarke thinks about it, but then decides that a phone call isn't as important as this moment right now. She shakes her head and pulls the older woman back down for a swooping kiss. Anya chuckles against her lips as Clarke's hand continues its exploration downwards, until her fingers meet that familiar wetness.

"Well then," Clarke mumbles as she bites onto Anya's lower lip, "I suggest we use our time wisely."

Clarke finishes up flipping the last couple of pancakes before she hollers up the stairs for Aden, Tris, and Anya to come down. Her son is the first to arrive, and she greets him with a wide smile and a stack of pancakes lathered in syrup, but her grin soon fades when she sees Aden's glare from over the counter. He stands there with a murderous look in those blue eyes that once held nothing but love and protection over his mother. Clarke nearly drops the pancakes as her son averts his gaze and walks past her and opens the fridge, completely ignoring her presence. Clarke sets down the pancakes and gulps out of worry.

"Ade?" Clarke asks with a soft croak. "Sweetheart, what's wrong?"

When Aden doesn't reply, Clarke reaches out to graze her hand upon his shoulder, but the boy flinches and reels back like he'd been burned.

At this, Clarke's brows furrow in confusion and hurt.

"Aden," she says in a more serious tone, "what's the matter with you?"

Her son just chuckles sarcastically, shaking his head in disgust as he shoves the fridge door closed and steps back from his mother. "What's the matter with me? I think you should be asking what's the matter with you, shouldn't you?" His tone is biting and frigid, nothing like the lovely jovial sound it usually is.

Before Clarke can respond, she hears Anya's booming voice sound from the stairs.

"Are those pancakes, I smell?" Anya asks as she slides into the kitchen with Tris giggling upon her shoulders. Clarke's gaze softens upon seeing her lover and her daughter so happy and carefree. Anya swoops Tris off her shoulders and swings her around, earning more giggles from her daughter. Just as she's about to tease the two of them, another sarcastic chuckle leaves her son's lips. Clarke whips her head back to see Aden glaring over at Anya, and then back at her.
And then four words leave his lips, words that make Clarke's world come to a jarring halt.

"You make me sick."

"Aden!" Clarke exclaims, hurt by his show of defiance. Anya and Tris snap their heads up to glance over at the mother and son, confused at the sudden anger coming off of the blonde-haired boy. Aden shakes his head and looks down, tears welling in his eyes as he simply grabs an apple off the counter and sags over to the couch, kicking his feet up on the table despite knowing how much it irritates his mother. Tris looks both confused and scared at her brother's anger.

"Is Aden okay?" She asks softly, squeezing Anya's hand out of fear. "He looks upset."

"I'm sure it must be something at school," Anya is quick to reassure her, but she sees the glossy look in Clarke's eyes and she knows exactly why the boy is upset. Tris dwells on the explanation but before she can ask anymore questions, Anya reaches for the plate of pancakes and sets it on the counter before placing Tris upon the stool. She offers the younger girl a peck to the head and a wide smile as she reaches for the fork and knife.

"Let's have some breakfast, okay? You want me to cut your pancakes again?" Anya asks in a soft coo, ignoring the low growl that sounds from Aden behind her. Tris still looks unconvinced, but then Anya brightens and points through the kitchen window and towards the falling snow in their backyard.

"How about we build a snowman after we're done?" She proposes, and the thought of playing outside is enough for the little girl's eyes to light up. Sufficiently distracted with her pancake and Anya's devout attention, Clarke makes her way over to the couch where her son is staring at the wall with a hardened glare.

"Aden?" She asks softly, taking a seat beside him. She tries not to cry at how he inches away from her and crosses his arms defensively. "Sweetheart..."

"Don't," Aden growls lowly so his sister and aunt can't hear him. "Don't you dare even try to defend yourself. I know what you did."

"What are you talking about?" Clarke asks, furrowing her brows in confusion. At her question, the boy finally snaps, turning to her in blind rage.

"What am I talking about?!" He snarls at her viciously before pointing over her shoulder to where Tris and Anya stare on in confusion. "I'm talking about you and her fucking in Mom's bed." Clarke gasps at the venom that drips off his every word, and she's too shocked to even call him out on using a swear word. Aden just shakes his head, passing his glare over to a guilty looking Anya. Tris trembles beside them, her eyes wet with tears as she looks ready to cry.

"Did Mom mean anything to you?" Aden asks, his voice lower and tightly clipped now as he turns back to Clarke. "Did you even love her?"

"Of course I did. I still do," Clarke whispers back, shaking her head as tears stream down her cheeks. "But Lexa's gone, Aden."

"So you replaced her with her sister, is that what?"

"Aden!" Clarke gasps again, choking back a sob. "Sweetheart, your mother isn't replaceable."

"That's not what it sounded like last night," Aden says in a cold voice, his stare filled with ire as he jumps up from his seat and clenches his fists at his sides. He's silent for a few moments, his teeth..."
gritted and his nostrils flaring as he tries to get his rage under control. Finally, after a few minutes in tense silence, the boy's shoulders sag and he releases his fingers, letting his hands droop down at his waist. His eyes glaze over as he shakes his head, looking back to Clarke.

"You know she would never do that to you," he whispers, his accusation hitting Clarke like a dagger to the heart. "She would never replace you."

"Aden," Anya sighs as she gets up from her stool, but as soon as she speaks, Aden's glare is back and trained on her rising body.

"You're her sister," Aden growls at her, the tears slipping down his cheeks, his body trembling with anger and betrayal. "She sacrificed herself for you!"

Anya's shoulders tense and her jaw snaps shut. Clarke can make out from the couch that she's on the verge of panicking and falling back into a flashback. Aden, however, is relentless as he steps around the couch and stands up in her face. With his recent growth spurt, the boy is about the same height as his aunt and it makes the older woman flinch. Aden shakes his head and curls his lips back into a tight, fury-filled snarl as he looks at her with pure disgust.

"Just because you're fucking her doesn't make you my mother," Aden spits out ruefully, "you will never be even half the woman my mother was."

"Aden," Clarke snaps from behind him, "that's enough. Go to your room and think about what you've said."

"Fine," Aden chuckles, not bothering to turn around so he can continue to stare his aunt down menacingly. "I'll think about what I've said, and you both can think about what you did." Clarke opens her mouth to argue again, but before she can, Aden takes off up the stairs and enters his room, slamming the door shut behind him in rage. Anya tries to wipe away the tears that are rapidly falling down her cheeks, but she's not fast enough. Her hands shake as she chokes back a sob and looks up to a devastated-looking Clarke. The younger blonde is staring past her, however, at the sight of the little girl sitting beside her.

"Tris?" Anya whispers in a shaky croak as she wipes the tears away and kneels before the girl. "Honey, are you okay?"

"Is Aden going to be mad forever because you guys love each other?" Tris asks softly, her voice trembling as she holds back a cry. "I don't want anyone to fight." Anya takes a deep breath and reaches out to curl a strand of Tris' hair behind her ear. She leans forward and presses a kiss to the girl's forehead gently.

"Hey," she hums softly, getting the girl to focus on her. "Don't worry about Aden. He just needs some time, okay baby?" Tris takes a breath and nods, relaxing a little when Anya offers her a gentle, assuring smile. She extends her arms and Tris leans into her embrace willingly, tucking her small head in the crook of her aunt's neck. Cradling the back of her head, Anya presses another kiss to her ear before looking to the side to see an equally-heartbroken Clarke.

"Come on," Anya whispers into Tris' ear, pulling back to give her another shaky smile, "why don't we go build a snowman?"

Tris sighs, nodding her head as Anya helps her down from the stool and takes her over towards the closet by the front door. Clarke steps forward and helps her daughter get ready, giving her as much encouragement as she can without giving away how broken up she is on the inside by Aden's cutting words. She just watches as Anya takes Tris outside, and soon enough as they're rolling and packing
snow together, the anxiety surrounding her son's insults ease slightly. She stares on from the kitchen window as Anya drops a ball of snow on Tris, causing the girl to squeal and struggle under the snow before pouncing on her aunt. The bond between the two had been strong since her birth, but a part of Clarke feels bittersweetly happy that Tris doesn't harbour the same pain as Aden.

She grabs herself a cup of coffee and sits down at the counter, still keeping an eye on her daughter and lover as she weighs upon going up to talk to her son again. She knows the boy needs space, but she can't help but be concerned about him. She knows that Aden was always very much like his mother when it came to his emotions. He'd rather sort them out on his own than to seek support. She remembers all the times she had fallen out with Lexa because of miscommunication. She thinks about her late wife and grips her coffee cup tighter. Clarke knows she misses Lexa, but she's grieved over her for five long years.

Anya wasn't a replacement, she knows, not by any means. She tries not to dwell on the fact that parts of Anya remind her of Lexa, and how she clings to those parts so desperately. Sometimes its in the way she talks or walks, or how she smells like her late wife. The thought makes her ache when Aden's betrayal sounds again in her ear. She hangs her head, rubbing her face as she tries to push away the lingering guilt that surrounds her mind and blurs her thoughts.

Just as she's about to take another sip of her coffee, the phone rings, stuttering her out of her deep rumination.

Sighing, Clarke lifts herself up from the table and walks over to the cordless phone, picking it up and pressing the green button.

"Hello?"

"Ms Griffin?"

The familiar male voice causes Clarke to pause mid-sip. "Kane?"

"It's good to hear your voice again, ma'am. I hope you have been keeping well."

"Likewise sir," Clarke replies in a soft, confused voice. "But… no disrespect, why are you calling me?"

"Well," Kane says with a sigh before he returns to the phone, "we've got some news… about your wife."

"What?" Clarke asks, her lips trembling. She can see Anya looking into the window with a concerned look on her face. There's some rustling on the other end of the line before Kane clears his throat. Clarke feels her palms swear and her knees wobble with anxiety.

"Sir?" She repeats, not sure if he's still there or if this is all some ruse.

"Clarke," Kane says seriously, "are you sitting down?"

"Why?" Clarke asks, her lips trembling. She can see Anya coming inside now, Tris trailing behind her. "Llexa's been dead for five years, sir."

"Well… that's not true, Clarke," Kane says gently, keeping his voice steady. "Not anymore."

Clarke scoffs, tears welling in her eyes as she bites her lip. "What do you mean not anymore?"
Anya quickly enters the room after having shucked off her coat. She approaches the younger woman with concern on her face, slipping off her gloves as she mouthes the words 'what's wrong' to her lover. Clarke can't focus on the older blonde though, not when Kane speaks the next six words in a low voice.

"We found her," Kane tells her softly, "somehow she survived the attack. She's alive, Clarke."

The instant he's finished the first sentence, Clarke lets the mug drop from her hand and shatter to the ground. The sound has Aden clambering down the steps in worry, only to find her in catatonic shock in the kitchen. He inches forward, noticing that his aunt looks equally as worried. Tris looks ready to cry.

"Mama?" Aden asks cautiously. "Ma, what's happened?"

Clarke doesn't reply, but instead she looks up at Anya, her mouth opening and closing like she's suddenly become mute. Anya protectively reaches out and takes the phone, but Clarke shakes her head and grips it tighter. Silent tears drip down her cheeks as she continues to process what exactly Kane has said.

"When?" Clarke asks with a rasp, unable to form a full sentence. Kane sighs again.

"This morning. She's in bad shape but she's alive. The first thing she asked was for you. She'll be home as soon as she's cleared to fly."

"I... I...," Clarke stumbles as she flicks her gaze from Anya to her son, "I..."

"I know it's a lot to take in Mrs Griffin, but your wife is alive and she's coming home."

"I... thank you," Clarke rasps out as she holds back a sob. Kane grunts into the phone and Clarke swears she can see his cautious smile.

"Don't thank me, Mrs Griffin. We have no idea where she's been in the last five years, but by some miracle of God she's here. Leave your thanks for Him."

Kane says his goodbyes and hangs up, but even minutes after, Clarke doesn't let go of the phone. Lexa is alive.

Her wife, who she thought had been dead for the last five years, her wife who she mourned and grieved and lost herself over, is alive.

"Clarke?" Anya asks gently, reaching out to take the phone from her lover's trembling hand. "Clarke, what happened?"

For a minute, Clarke is silent, still in shock as she processes exactly what Kane had told her. She even pinches herself subtly, but she feels the sting and it makes her shudder. Anya takes her hand, much to the distasteful glare from her son, and squeezes it tightly. She looks into those hazel eyes and suddenly, this morning's events make her sick to her stomach. She barely can squeeze back or even see Anya from the blurring in her eyes.

"Clarke, you're scaring me. What happened, love? Was it Abby? Indra? O or Lincoln?" Anya questions worriedly. "What's going on?"

"It's Lexa," Clarke chokes out, causing Anya to frown and Aden to snap to attention in disbelief and concern. Anya shakes her head to clear it.
"Lexa?" She confusedly asks, her voice dry and cracked as she whispers her sister's name. "Clarke, Lexa's been dead for five years."

"No," Clarke chuckles sadly, more tears streaming down her cheeks, "no, she hasn't."

At this, Anya stiffens.

"What are you talking about?" Anya asks, her voice dropping lower with each word. "Who was on the phone, Clarke?"

"Kane," Clarke replies with a bitter, self-loathing tone. She rips her hands away from Anya and places her palms in them, shaking her head. Anya gulps, still not having processed what Clarke is trying to say. She looks between Clarke and the phone, as if expecting Kane to call back and wake them from this nightmare.

"What did he say, Clarke?" Anya questions, her tone thick with apprehension and guilt. "What did he tell you about Lexa?"

Clarke just looks up, her glassy blue eyes brimming with guilt and sadness. Before she can say anything, Aden speaks up.

"She's still alive, isn't she?" He asks, looking at her with a steady stare. There's hope in his voice, but it's hard to hear it under the hatred and betrayal.

Clarke waits a moment, and then she nods. She glances back up to a shell-shocked Anya and swallows thickly.

"They found her this morning," Clarke whispers hoarsely as Anya's face visibly pales, "she's coming home."

"Clarke," Anya chokes out, tears slipping down her cheeks as she shakes her head in shock. "I don't understand. I… I watched her die, Clarke."

"Then whatever you saw was wrong," Clarke tells her as she feels her stomach knot in anxiety. Suddenly, years of her relationship with Lexa flashback through her mind and she feels sick from the guilt. She can see the same feelings processing in Anya's emotions, but the woman still seems to be in disbelief.

"Anya," Clarke whispers her name as she reaches for her lover's hands, "Lexa's alive and she's coming home. She's alive."

Anya looks down to their hands, before looking up at Clarke with a distraught, horrified expression that curdles Clarke's gut harder. Aden stiffens from behind them and Tris trembles. Slowly, Anya lets go of their hands and leans back against the counter. She stares at her palms before looking up at the blonde. She can see the self-hatred, the loathing they've spent years trying to clear from her system, all return in the flash of a hot minute. Clarke wants nothing more than to walk over and take the older woman in her arms and cradle her against her chest, to protect her from the world that only ever serves to do her wrong.

"Clarke," Anya chokes on her name amidst a sob, "what have we done?"

At that, Clarke suddenly realizes what Anya means. The entire time she's been stressing over betraying Lexa, she's not once felt the happiness she knew she would have felt years ago if she'd been given the news of her wife's survival. She cups a hand over her lips and breaks out in a sob, unable to distinguish between her emotions. She loves Anya, she knows she does, but what about
Lexa? Had Aden been right? Had she completely forgotten about her wife, the woman that gave her own life to protect her family, and replaced her with her sister? Clarke feels disgusted with herself and she feels so torn.

She should be happy. She should be crying tears of joy. She should be rejoicing that her wife is finally coming home.

So why isn't she?

"My wife is alive," Clarke breathes out, looking up with glassy eyes as she croaks in shock. "My wife… my Lexa… she's alive. And I…"

Involuntarily, Anya flinches. Clarke hates that Anya flinches, because this is what they wanted to avoid. They wanted to get away from the dark cloud of their past, to move on, to be at peace with their shared grief. But now, as she looks to her son, who stares back at her with wide, wet eyes, she sees just how happy he is at the notion of his other mother's being alive. All those years of memories with Lexa come crashing back in with full force and Clarke can't take it. She can't stop herself as she falls to her knees in the kitchen, her palms held out in front of her like two foreign objects. She looks to her hands, to the fingers that last night and for the last year and a half have been touching and loving someone else while her wife still was alive. Anya's words from before ring through her head like a broken record, and suddenly, she can't hear anything else. Her vision blurs with her tears and her stomach churns with anxiety and disgust.

What has she done?

Chapter End Notes

ALRIGHT Y'ALL LISTEN UP YEAH.

The whole 'I love you' scene with Clanya is to be taken with a grain of salt for right now. They will be talking about what these words really meant in the future, so don't think that they're legit in love. They're not. People confuse love for a lot of things, and this is the exact case, as we will see when Lexa comes home next chapter.

Clarke's reaction to Lexa's arrival isn't happy for a reason, and not because she doesn't want her wife to be home, but because she instantly thinks of how she betrayed her wife by sleeping with her sister. The initial disgust was the reflexive answer as a result of the self-loathing tendencies she's built up over the years; the same goes for Anya's reaction - they are both in intense levels of shock and that's why their reaction is not what you would expect. The same goes for Aden and Tris. They're in an almost catatonic state.

Lexa is not broken, but she is severely damaged. This fic hasn't really explored the dark sides to PTSD as of yet, and it will (but when it happens, TWs will be posted with cues, as always) except with a little touch into Anya's life and Lexa's delusions. When she comes home next chapter, that's where the real story begins. All of the things that have happened thus far are simply contextual filling-in per say. The drama begins at home.

Thank you guys for the discussions/feedbacks in the comments section. I do read them all and I love reading your opinions! I will get back to you guys when I have time as I barely have any as it is, lol. Just know that I appreciate all the different perspectives, and many thanks especially to those of you who have served or are currently serving in the
military that have left extensive comments on this fic. I will definitely be taking those into account as I go through and write more. If you have any military background, specifically around the treatment of PTSD, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me and let me know if I've cocked something up. I am more than willing to change and accommodate, because the last thing I want to do is be disrespectful.

As always, you guys are fucking amazing people and it brings me a lot of happiness to be able to bring you this fic and go on this journey with you. It's an emotionally-taxing story to write, especially in light of recent personal events, but reading your reactions and commentary is more than enough of a motivator to write more.

Thank you to all of you that have left kudos and comments, or have even just read/re-read this story.

Much love, xx.
Welcome Home

Chapter Summary

Lexa arrives home, Tris meets her other mother, Aden acts out, and Clarke and Anya have to make a decision.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNINGS: THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE, CAPGRAS EPISODE, AND MENTIONS OF TORTURE AND DEATH.

Y'ALL THIS IS SUCH A SPONTANEOUS 4:00AM UPDATE. Not a super long chapter; we're back to regular length.

This is where the story really starts, y'all. All the emotions and sadness that has been felt thus far, take it and throw it out the window. Now the angsting starts and it's gonna get rough before it gets better (and it will get better -- this story has a very lovely and fitting happy ending that's worth sticking around for, I swear). Anyways, there are a few trigger warnings in here, but before I get to that, let me just preface with something.

If you aren't familiar with what Capgras Delusion/Syndrome is, it's important for you to know that it's a neurodegenerative disorder similar to dementia that results in a person thinking that their family members or friends having been "abducted" or "replaced" by impostors. It's something that occurs as a result of damage to the visual pathway to the amygdala and the temporal lobe. As a result, the person can come to a house that is their own and feel like it's a stranger's place, that they don't belong there or other's don't belong there.

In case you haven't already guessed, Lexa has this. And it gets bad. So I'll mark the triggers with "Capgras Episode" so that if you find you can't handle those kinds of scenes, the more graphic ones at least, then that trigger warning will hopefully help you in navigating through the story! Again, please let me know if there's anything that can be tagged as a trigger and I'll happily place it into the chapter notes as a preface! :)

TRIGGER WARNINGS AND CUES:

In the THIRD SECTION there is MENTION OF TORTURE DEATH that start from the beginning of the section to the first ===. Not very graphic, just brief mentions, is all.

In the FOURTH SECTION, there is a CAPGRAS EPISODE that comes after the first === and goes to the end of the chapter, and is mildly graphic.

That's all for the triggers, but overall this is a rather bittersweet chapter. Please read the notes at the end for more information, especially revolving around the Clanya things. It's really important you read them! :D

The song in the quote is, "How to Save a Life" by The Fray.
let him know that you know best
'cause after all you do know best
try to slip past his defense
without granting innocence

lay down a list of what is wrong
the things you've told him all along
pray to god, he hears you
and i pray to god, he hears you

and where did i go wrong, i lost a friend
somewhere along in the bitterness
and i would have stayed up with you all night
had i known how to save a life

January 4th 2014, 09:47
Belda Military Outpost, Afghanistan

Beep.
"How are her levels?"
Beep.
"Stable. Injuries are healing well, too."
Beep.
"Consciousness?"
Beep.
"Expected soon, sir. Her forearm and knee cap will need extended healing, but she seems to be out of the danger zone."

Beep.

"Good. Let me know when she wakes."

Beep.

"With all due respect sir, do you think that she'll be able to even speak?"

Beep.

"Her neurological signs show no major damage. I don't see why not."

Beep.

"It's just, with what she went through... you don't think..."

Beep.

"She'll be fine. She has to be."

Beep... Beep... Beep...

"Wait, her blood pressure is rising. She's coming to, get me a cart ready just in case she crashes again."

Lexa blinks open her eyes, feeling the world spin around her as a bright light invades her vision. She feels her chest shudder and ache with every breath she draws, and for a moment, she wonders if she's even alive. She blinks a few times, trying to clear the haze from her vision, but the bright light remains.

"Pupils are dilating. No signs of a TBI."

"Tracking?"

"Responsive."

Lexa chokes on a breath as she closes her eyes again, trying to reorient herself into the present.

*Referred pain, babe, that's when pain arises somewhere in the body but is felt elsewhere.*

There's some movement, a rustle, and more voices as she feels herself coming back.

*It's explained by the unusual way pain fibres are wired up the dorsal horn... it's a quicker process.*

Her arm is being lifted and probed, but she doesn't feel even the slightest amount of sting.

*Imagine this, right, you have a heart attack -- you'll feel pain in the shoulders and arms instead of the chest.*

The light is gone, replaced by the blurry face of a man in a surgical mask, peering down at her with curious eyes.

*The convergence of afferent fibres onto the spinal from different parts of the body can explain this.*
"Ma'am," the man in the mask says softly, "can you tell me your name?"

Pain makes us who we are. Pain allows us to live. Pain lets us survive. Pain reminds us of how far we can come.

"Ma'am?" The man asks again, concern in his voice as he peers down at her blank stare.

Pain is what brought you back home, babe. Pain is what brought you to me.

"She's not responding, sir."

And guess what, babe?

"Get me the Colonel, tell him to--"

I'm going to take your pain away, love. I promise you that much.

"My wife," Lexa chokes out, her breath fogging up the mask that covers her mouth. "I want to see my wife."

I'll always take your pain away, because I love you and I need you.

"You will," a familiar voice rasps from behind the doctor, causing Lexa to tilt her head slightly. She looks up to see those warm brown eyes misted with tears staring back at her. Lexa's eyes well with tears as the man's hand gently places itself over her own, giving her hand a soft squeeze.

"C-Colonel--"

"No need for formalities, Lexa." Kane's voice is shaky but warm, filled with relief and sorrow. "Not after everything you've been through."

"Clarke…," Lexa breathes out weakly, and Kane nods with a smile.

"She knows, child. Your flight has been booked for a week from now. You're just working off some of the injuries you've sustained. You're lucky."

Lucky.

Lucky is missing getting hit by a car running through a red light.

Lucky is catching cancer early before it spreads.

Lucky is finding a organ donor when you need a transplant.

Lexus? Lexa's not lucky.

Lexa is far from lucky.

"Lexa…," Kane whispers as he draws her attention back over towards him. "You're going home, kid. You're safe now."

Tears silently slide from Lexa's eyelids as she gasps upon the bed, her chest burning with the need for air. One of the doctors goes over to her oxygen tank and adjusts the levels, helping her breathing ease up a little. Lexa's eyes slide close, her eyelids growing heavy with sleep and fatigue. Her body is numb and weary, her mind bogged down with the voices of her past. She feels like she's caught between a state of floating and drowning at the same time.
Contradiction really is a bitch sometimes.

"Rest now, child. We'll have you home soon," Kane assures her softly, slowly squeezing her hand again. "Your fight is over. You can finally rest."

Lexa can't find the energy to say no, not as her eyelids slide shut and her breaths even out.

For the first time, she isn't plagued with nightmares.

Just memories of home.

(But what happens if they're both one in the same?)

===

Lexa stares at the TV screen that's mounted on the wall, running the same news segment over and over again.

"They're calling it the miracle of the decade. They're calling you a hero. The promotion only served to bolster that, Major. Well deserved, nonetheless."

Lexa nods her head up to see Colonel Kane standing in the doorway, nodding towards the TV before walking in. He watches it for a bit and smiles before he sits down at her bedside, his eyes glazing over as he sees the bruising still present all over her body. They stay in silence for awhile before the man clears his throat.

"I called your wife," Kane says with a deep breath, "she's in shock, much like the rest of us, considering the amount of time that's passed."

"Five years of believing someone's dead will do that to you," Lexa answers back in a monotone voice, eyes upon her sheets. "I wonder what else has changed."

"Who says anything has changed?" Kane asks, arching his brow. Lexa scoffs, her eyes flitting back up to stare at him with a heartbreaking expression.

"Time changes everyone," Lexa whispers as she chokes back a cry. "Death changes everyone."

There's a pause, a silence, and then Kane is leaning forward, brown eyes glazed over with worry and sadness. "What happened out there, Lexa?"

"I did what I had to do to protect my people," Lexa replies, though voice cracks. "I survived. There's nothing more to it."

"Isn't there?"

There is.

"No."

"Major Woods, you realize that you will have to debrief as soon as you are settled. I've managed to prolong it for awhile."

"What do you want me to say?"

"The truth."
"The truth?"

"The truth, Major. What happened out there?"

Lexa's eyes harden and she grits her teeth, trying to ward off the agony that courses through her veins. She glances up, seeing her reflection hovering in the doorway. Beside her, stands Costia's mutilated face, her eyes dead and glassy as they emptily stare at her. Lexa gulps and hears the beeping on her monitor increases with her anxiety. Her palms sweat and she averts her gaze from her delusions, but the voices are swarming her mind, breathing down her neck.

Traitor.

Liar.

Murderer.

"Lexa," Kane's voice is soft, his hands slowly reaching for her face and drawing it to the side so they're looking at each other. "Breathe."

Tears cloud in her eyes as she shakes her head, her lips trembling as she struggles to respond but finds no words able to really escape her lips. Her throat bobs with the effort to simply swallow, let alone speak. Kane's eyes pool and he leans forward, wrapping the older woman in his arms and holding her tightly. He remembers the times when she'd been younger, just after her father had died, and how he had comforted her then, practically raising her alongside Titus. He presses his mouth into her hair and holds her as she sobs in his arms. He doesn't need to ask to know, and it breaks his heart in fragmented pieces.

"I should have tried harder to find you," Kane whispers as he kisses her cheek, "oh Lexa, I should have tried harder. It's on me, not you."

Lexa just continues to shake her head, sobbing harder as she clutches onto him. Kane sighs and closes his eyes as soon as Lexa melts against him, exhausted with staying upright. The man knows it's probably against every different military code, but he doesn't give a damn. He lifts himself up on the bed and adjusts Lexa's body so that she can tuck herself into his arms. He holds her securely, pressing a few butterfly kisses to her hair and temple to soothe her into a lull.

"Your father would be so proud of you," Kane tells her gently as Lexa continues her hiccuped cries. "He would be so incredibly proud, sweetheart."

Lexa shakes her head and makes a gurgled sound of discontent, as if to deny his encouragement. Kane grips her tighter, providing her with as much comfort as he can as he continues to whisper sweet, encouraging nothings into her ear until she finally grows limp in his arms. She's not asleep, no, but simply exhausted. Tired from crying, from fighting, from existing… from living. She barely has the energy to slide closer into his grasp and close her eyes, blinking back tears.

"Please," she croaks softly, "please don't leave me."

"I won't," Kane tells her with a strong, assuring voice. "I am right here, Lexa. You're safe with me."

Lexa barely hazards a nod in his direction before she slumps again, glassily staring at nothing in particular. She watches different delusions fade in and out of her view. Sometimes it's herself or Costia, other times is Kareem and the chief. A few times, Clarke and Aden show up, and others after that it's Anya. They watch her in silence, offering nothing but icy gazes and cold stares. Her father slips into her vision when she looks up to Kane occasionally, but his presence provides no comfort. She has no energy to be anxious, to get riled up and to fight back. She has no energy to make an
effort to ward off the hallucinations.

At this point, she's accepted that even though she's back, that she's no longer fighting for survival, she's still not put back together.

Things aren't fine. Things aren't the same.

They never will be.

January 16th 2014, 10:23

JFK International Airport, New York

"Mama," Tris' soft voice peeps from behind Clarke's leg as the family waits in the lobby, "what does she look like? What does Mommy look like?"

"She looks as beautiful as you do," Clarke whispers, eyes tinged with tears as she turns to kneel beside her daughter. "She's got long brown hair and green eyes, just like you. Her lips, just as pouty and cute. You're gonna look at her and you'll see just where you get your good looks from, munchkin. She's tall, almost as tall as your aunt. She's got a smile that lights up the world and a laugh that could warm you up on even the coldest of nights. Your mother is a gem, T, just like you. When you see her, you'll know her, I promise. She's going to love you so much, sweetheart. We worked hard to have you, and now you can finally get to meet her." Tris giggles and smiles, bouncing from foot to foot in excitement. Clarke leans down and pecks her daughter's head, proudly smiling into those brown locks before glancing up at the others in the room.

Anya's standing beside her in the private room, her back rigid and tense, but Clarke can see the anxiety and happiness that brews in those hazel eyes. When the older woman looks down, there's an ounce of fear and guilt, but it washes away the minute her eyes lock onto the eagerly excited Tris, babbling on about how she’s gonna see her mother soon. Clarke notices how Anya’s shoulders tremble from anticipation. From the clenching and unclenching of her fingers, she knows the older woman is anxious but handling it. They'd developed a code-word during their last therapy session in December, and she trusts Anya will use it should she need. As if sensing the younger woman's worry, Anya's head swivels and she glances over, eyes softening as she stares at Clarke. In those swirling hazel depths, Clarke can see the levels of worry and anticipation.

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Shifting her gaze away from her sister-in-law, she looks to the back of the private room. Indra and Abby are standing at the bizarre art piece in the corner of the room, with the older brunette holding onto the frailer, older woman as she sobs in anticipation of seeing her niece. She sees how worked up Indra is over the prospect of Lexa being alive, and she knows how hard it'd been when she had first been told of Lexa's death. If it hadn't been for Anya, Lincoln and Octavia, who were unfortunately out of town and couldn't make Lexa's homecoming, Clarke knows that she wouldn't be standing here about to welcome back her niece. Abby glances up at her and gives her a brave nod, though Clarke can see a flicker of guilt as her mother's gaze switches to Anya's rigid back for a
brief second. The doctor gulps and looks away sadly.

Turning her head again, she finds her son with his back to her. Aden is stood in front of them all, still having not bothered to talk to either his mother or his aunt since their discussion earlier that week. He simply stands with his hands behind his back, just like his other mother. She doesn't have to be in front of him to know that his eyes are set and determined to find the jet that brings his mother home. She just wishes that she could go back and change everything, to stop herself from making those decisions which have somehow managed to drive a wall between her family. Her heart pangs when she sees Aden clench his fists.

Before Clarke can call out to him, the sounds of jet engines drone on in the distance, pulling the entire Griffin-Woods family to their feet in an instant. Tris giggles and walks up to the door, mashing her face against the glass as she watches the private jet touch down upon the tarmac. Clarke looks at her daughter with unbridled affection, because she knows that for Tris, the little girl doesn't understand the sadness or the pain that comes with Lexa's arrival. She doesn't know the sorrow or the grief. She never knew the loss of her mother, not like Aden or Anya or she herself did. Tris grew up without her other mother, and now she'll get to live with her, without that loss to remind her of how things once were. It makes her happy, in a bittersweet sense, because Tris' innocence is a breath of fresh air. To see her child so unconditionally accepting of everyone, including a woman she's never met before, makes her heart beat deeper than a kick drum. Tris' eyes are lit with excitement with the prospect of meeting her mother, of the woman she's only ever heard about through stories.

They're lucky that they've been placed in a secluded area of JFK International Airport, where the traffic is very little and the environment is for private jets and military officials only. Considering Lexa's special case, the airport gave them clearance to reunite with her wife in a quiet area, far from the public. There are a few military officials standing guard outside, arms up in full salutation as the jet parks itself right outside of the door. The two men standing at the entrance of the airport both raise the flags in their hands, their heads held up high.

Clarke's heart pounds inside of her chest as she hears the engines being cut and the plane coming to a full standstill. Her mouth goes dry and suddenly there’s a nervous lump in her throat. Aden moves forward on his own accord, reaching for the handle of the door. He gulps nervously, turning to face his other mother with less venom than before, though his gaze is still rather guarded.

"Can we go out?" He asks in a rasp, eagerly looking towards where there are a few more military officials approaching the powered-off jet. "I want to go out."

"Not yet," Clarke whispers as her voice cracks, a tear sliding down her cheek. She’s trying to hold it together, but the thought that the person inside that plane is her wife is overwhelming. Her nerves are shot and she can barely focus on anything. She gulps. "We have to be patient and wait for them to call us out."

Just then, as Aden is about to respond with a snarky reply, the doors to the jet slide down and make contact with the pavement with a light and soft thud.

"Jesus," Anya croaks out as she holds her breath in anticipation. Her hands come up to cup her mouth in shock. "This is it. She's home, my baby sister..."

Clarke turns to reply to the distraught older woman, but her gaze gets stuck on the image of one of Colonel Marcus Kane stepping down the stairs and heading to stand at the base of the steps. He glances over at them with a warm nod before turning away. He faces forward towards one of the superior officers that had come to greet her wife, and the colonel snaps a sharp salute at him. The older man gruffly nods and Kane lowers his arm, taking his place back at the door after greeting the other men. As a few other military men exit the plane, each of them take a place until there's two
rows leading all the way up to the doors where the flag-bearers are standing. There's a moment of silence, of pure unguided tension, as the entire family waits for that last person to leave the jet.

And then suddenly, the whole world stops moving for a minute.

Clarke nearly falls to her knees when she sees her step out, left arm tightly casted in a sling and pressed against her chest. Her uninjured hand holds a small duffle bag with her belongings. Her heart stutters as she makes out the deep cuts and stitches upon the older woman's face, the mottled, dark bruises around her jaw and throat, as well as her half-swollen right eye, still black and blue. But despite the wounds, despite the splotched, aching bruises and the time that's passed, Clarke would never be able to forget those piercing green eyes.

No, Clarke could never forget her wife.

And then the world is crashing back into orbit, and Clarke has barely enough air to utter the one name she’s spent years trying to grieve and mourn.

“Lexa.”

For a moment, Lexa simply stands there in the doorway of the private jet, staring at nothing in particular, like she’s dazed or lost. It's almost as if she's contemplating whether or not this is real life, and honestly, Clarke knows she's doing the same -- as is everyone else in the room. Lexa takes a deep breath and steadies herself, looking to Colonel Kane. He gives her an encouraging nod and Lexa sighs before she starts her slow, limping descent towards the pavement. The sight of her wife so battered and bruised sends a tidal wave of guilt crashing over Clarke, and it takes everything for her to not cry in shame.

Colonel Kane greets Lexa as she steps foot on the ground, extending his hand as he warmly nods to her with a proud smile. "Welcome home, Major Woods."

There's a pause as Clarke watches Lexa contemplate the offered hand before she takes it in her good one, giving it a tentative shake. "Thank you, Colonel."

God… that voice. How she's missed that voice.

It takes everything in Clarke's self control to not fall to her knees and cry at the sound of her wife's voice, low and raspy, as sweet and soft as it’s always been.

For the first time since she’d received the call, Clarke is finally able to believe it.

Lexa's alive. Lexa's here. Lexa's home.

Lexa is alive. Her wife, the love her life, is alive.

She'd been wrong all these years, Clarke realizes as she watches Lexa's head slowly raises itself upwards and those familiar, homely, beautiful green eyes meet her own in a soft, dreamlike gaze. She'd been so naïve in believing that her wife, the woman who had fought through everything and always came out victorious, wasn't alive. She'd accepted it, but the entire time she was wrong.

Clarke isn't sure if being wrong has ever felt so incredibly right.

But it does… good God it does.

"Mom," Aden chokes out, placing his hands upon the doorknob and gripping it tightly as those green eyes flit down towards their son, "Mom!"
"Aden wait," Clarke says softly as she reaches for his shoulder, "they told us to wait until she was ready, sweetheart. Just hang on."

Aden, ignoring his mother's prior instructions, bolts out from the doors. He runs to his other mother like she's a miracle, and in some ways, she is. Lexa's eyes snap upwards and a soft, bittersweet smile tugs at her lips as she finishes shaking her superior's hand. She limps towards her running son, wrapping her arms around his shoulders as he very nearly collides with her. Aden's head tucks itself into Lexa's neck, his cries quiet and low as he grips onto her, unwilling to let go.

"You've gotten taller," Lexa rasps, her voice cracking as she closes her eyes and sighs into Aden's shoulder. "God… I…"

"I love you, Mom." Aden's first words come as a shock to Lexa, bringing tears to her eyes as he repeats it. "I love you so much. I… I missed you…"

"I missed you, too. I love you, son. I never forgot about you," Lexa whispers into his ear gently, kissing his cheek. "I missed you too, my baby."

Aden pulls away when he hears footsteps sounding from behind him. He wipes his tears and lets go of his mother to look at Clarke behind him, a look of disbelief and relief upon her face as she staggers closer towards Lexa. A growl very nearly rips out of his throat as he goes to protectively stand in front of Lexa, but the look in his other mother's eyes prevents him from making a single sound. Instead, he shifts his gaze to the ground in a conflicted manner. Clarke's jaw drops open as she staggers forwards, unable to believe that this is really happening, that she's staring at her wife after five years of believing she was dead.

"Lexa…," Clarke breathes out as she edges closer, her eyes watering with tears. "Jesus Christ…"

"Clarke," Lexa whispers as she approaches her wife, "I…"

Before Lexa can even reply, Clarke is flinging herself into her wife's arms. All the memories of the twenty two years they'd spent in love with each other suddenly flash through her mind. She feels those strong arms around her waist and she sobs, unable to contain her emotions any longer. Lexa's head is burrowed in the crook of her neck, her nose breathing in her scent. Clarke cries harder when she hears that familiar, husky voice soothing her shuddering body. Nothing else in the world matters except for her wife in her arms, her wife who is alive, battered and bruised and looking far worse than she's ever seen her but fucking alive.

It still feels like a dream.

"Mama?" Tris' soft voice pipes up, drawing Clarke out of the hug with her wife. She wipes her eyes and cups Lexa's face in her hands, trying to ignore how there's a faded expression in Lexa's eyes, like the light had been sucked out of those once bright viridescent irises. She takes a breath and glances down to her daughter. Tris is staring between them with excited nervousness, if that could even be used as a description. Clarke smiles at her, more tears welling in her eyes as she reaches down and picks her small body up in her arms and rubs her arm, positioning them both so that they're facing Lexa.

Only, as she looks to her wife, she notices that Lexa doesn't look happy anymore.

"Who is this?" Lexa asks, her voice going from disbeliefed to guarded in an instant. The tone causes even Aden's head to snap upwards. Clarke blinks back tears as she shifts her daughter in her arms, holding her out for Lexa to get a better look at. Tris squirms, begging to be put down. Clarke obeys, watching with her jaw agape as Tris waddles over to Lexa, her arms outstretched with a broad smile.
on her face. Her eyes have a tint of nervousness in them, but nothing compares to the amount of happiness and excitement that lights up those viridescent eyes. Lexa remains uncertain, however, her good eye hardened with caution.

"Lex," Clarke chokes out as she reaches forward and lightly rubs up and down her wife's rigid arm. "This is Tris. Our daughter."

"We don't have a daughter," Lexa says coldly, her eyes darting back up to Clarke, who looks both confused and scared.

"Tris, honey. Remember how, before you left, I was pregnant? This is our daughter, our miracle baby." Clarke's voice turns pleading as she looks down to her little girl, who still remains undeterred by her mother's abrasive nature. Her arms are still spread open, though she has a bit of a nervous tremble to her body. Lexa looks to the girl with disbelief and confusion still, her fingers twitching absentley at her side as she processes this seemingly new information.

"Mommy?" Tris whispers softly, holding out her arms still as she expectantly looks up at her mother. "'Nya said that you give really good hugs, like you're coming home after being away for so long. Maybe… maybe if you hug me, you will remember me?" Lexa's stare remains blank and guarded as she stares at the little girl. Clarke glances between them, unable to figure out why Lexa can't seem to understand that the girl waiting for an embrace is her own flesh and blood.

"Tris," Lexa tests the name upon her lips, still not convinced. Tris nods happily, getting more excited as Lexa stumbles her way down to her knees to look at the little girl. The two of them stare at each other for a few seconds before Lexa gingerly opens her arms and allows Tris to bury herself inside them.

"'Nya was right," Tris hums happily as she nuzzles into Lexa's good shoulder, "you do give really good hugs."

"'Nya?" Lexa asks, pulling back to cock her brow in confusion. "Who's that?"

Tris leaves the hug and turns, pointing at Anya standing with a shocked expression. Lexa's eyes soften upon seeing her older sister as she rises to her feet stiffly. She slides past her family with a heavy limp and heads towards her catatonic sibling. Anya's eyes are glassy and wide, her mouth slightly open as Lexa approaches quicker. The two of them finally meet, a few feet apart, simply staring at each other silently. Anya's hands glide upwards, but pause in midair.

"Lexa…," Anya breathes out, her voice cracking. Her hands gently graze Lexa's cheeks, causing the tears that had been held at bay in her hazel eyes to pool over and stream down her cheeks. She reaches forward, drawing her baby sister into her arms and breathing her scent in until she can't breathe. She sobs harshly as she feels Lexa's hands tentatively slide up her back and hug her gently. Anya presses herself as close as she can, trying to simply take in the presence of her sibling, to reassure herself that Lexa is alive and real in her arms, that this isn't all some fucked up dream as a result of her inability to grieve.

But then Lexa's pushing off of her, her eyes guarded as they look Anya up and down. She slips past her sister, like she hadn't been gone for five years, like she hadn't been dead while Anya was alive, and she heads over to her adoptive mother. Anya holds back the pang of hurt that stings at her chest as she gives Indra the space to wrap her niece in her arms, holding her close. Indra keeps crying, still unable to believe that the girl she raised since she'd been young.

"Don't cry," Lexa whispers, almost sternly. "I'm here. I'm okay."
"I know," Indra scoffs lightly, her voice raspy and haggard from crying. "You're always okay. My baby, always so strong and brave… oh God…"

Lexa is a bit more gentle with her, soothing her with soft words before she pulls away from her aunt to glance at Abby. The doctor's eyes are red with tears as she reaches out and pulls Lexa in for a hug, gently rubbing up and down her rigid back. Only, Lexa doesn't hold onto for too long. Lexa's frame is stiff, but not unwelcoming as she just as quickly removes Abby from her arms before standing back and turning to face Anya with an unknowing expression.

"Well," Anya whispers as she reaches for the bag that one of the officers brings out, "are you ready to go home?" Lexa stiffens a little at the word, looking around at all the people that are staring at her, and then to her sister. She tenses her jaw, closing her eyes for a moment, before she opens them and relaxes slightly.

"Please," she whispers softly as she nods to her sister, tears in her eyes. "I've been ready for a long time."

Anya looks past Lexa's shoulders to where Clarke is standing, cupping her mouth as she stares on at her wife, still in shock. All Anya wants to do is jump to the younger woman and wrap her in her arms to give her comfort, not even on a romantic level, but to just be there. This is all new for the both of them, to welcome back a ghost they thought they'd buried together. Anya shakes the thought away, especially when she looks over at Lexa, who's now going back to Clarke. Anya takes a deep breath, ignoring the way that Abby is staring a hole into her back in concern. She knows that the older Griffin is aware of what happened, but she prays that no one lets the words slip until she and Clarke can find a way to tell Lexa. They know it needs to happen, but not now.

Soon, she tells herself, it has to be soon.

===

Anya drives them to the house, rolling the car onto the driveway before powering it off.

"Well," she whispers hoarsely as she looks to Lexa in the seat beside her, "this is it."

"Home sweet home," Lexa replies in a distant voice, her tone a little worn and tired. She hasn't bothered to take off her seatbelt yet, but simply takes in her surroundings. It's only as she hears the kids in the back unbuckle their belts and rush out the door, Clarke in tow, does she make a move. The two sisters exit the car together, slowly following the family to the front door. As soon as they get there, Tris is taking Lexa's hand and is eagerly trying to bring her into the home.

"Easy, T. Mommy's been flying for awhile and she's a little hurt," Clarke coos as she rubs her daughter's arm. "Be gentle with her, okay?"

"Sorry Mama," Tris pouts before glancing up to Lexa, "sorry Mommy. I didn't mean to hurt you."

Lexa flinches at the words, and for a moment Clarke believes that she's about to pull the same face and disbelief she'd had back at the airport. Instead, Lexa just grunts and offers a flimsy, but still guarded, smile as she lets Tris and Aden lead her into the house. Clarke and Anya stay outside, silent for a few minutes.

"Are… are you gonna come in?" Clarke asks softly, her gaze anywhere but Anya. The older woman tries to not let it sting that they can't even look at each other right now, but she just sucks it up and shakes her head. Clarke doesn't bother to put up a fight. She doesn't even try to convince her to stay for a coffee.
"You should spend some time with her," Anya croaks as she sniffles, holding back tears. "Lexus… it's… we should probably talk about this… us."

"I know," Clarke whispers as she shakes her head, "but not now."

Then when?

"Yeah," Anya nods as she backs away and heads back to her truck. "Look, I'll come by later. Spend time with your family, now that they're all together."

"Not all of them," Clarke says as she looks up to the older woman, tears misting in her eyes. Anya shrugs, smiling through the pain and tears.

"It's okay," she whispers as she chokes back a sob, "I'm okay. I'll come by when I can. I… I should go."

"An?" Clarke calls out as she watches Anya head back to her car. The older woman's head nods up and she glances at Clarke.

"I'm sorry," Clarke breathes out, but Anya shakes her head and offers a heartbreaking smile.

"I'm not," Anya tells her back, turning her gaze away as she gets into the car. "My baby sister's home. She loves you and you love her. She's happy with you, Clarke, just as you're happy with her. I couldn't ever get in the way of that. I care about Lexa before anyone else. She's all that ever mattered to me, Clarke."

"We'll talk later?" Clarke asks, clutching onto her arms as she watches Anya turn on the engine. The older woman nods half-heartedly, holding back her tears. It takes everything in Clarke to not crumble right then and there, to know that she's looking at a woman she thought she'd come to love, all the while knowing that there's the woman she considers her soulmate, her best friend and better half, only a few metres away in their house with their kids.

She watches Anya drive off into the gently falling snow, before she turns back inside and softly shuts the door behind her.

How could she let it get this far?

===

"Come on, come on, hurry! Do you like it?" Tris babbles as she drags Lexa into the kitchen, her lips curling with a wide smile as she shows her mother around the house. Lexa looks at her completely remodelled kitchen with wary eyes, her spine rigid and guarded as she eyes the new table and stove, alongside the glass cabinets and the stainless steel fridge. She glances around at the photos of her and her family on the wall and the counters, but something feels different.

This doesn't feel like her house.

"Mom?" Tris asks in excitement. "Do you like it?"

"Like what?" Lexa asks, her voice still stern and far away as she looks down.

"The kitchen, duh! Mama showed me pictures of what it used to look like before."

"Before…," Lexa trails off, trying to rack her brain for memories of the word. She frowns and then looks back around at the kitchen. "Who did this?"
"Nya and Johann and Ryder," Tris beams as she starts to open the cabinets and show Lexa where everything now resides. "Mama and Ade helped, too."

Lexa's silent for a minute, digesting the words coming out of the little girl's mouth. She looks down again, a deep sense of discomfort burbling in her chest. She glances up to see her reflection in the mirror that hangs down from the fridge and her mouth goes dry. She looks away instantly, trying to ignore it.

"So…," Tris' voice drifts off, a little more timid and smaller than before. "Do you like it?"

"It's good," Lexa says with a formal nod. "I like it."

"We should have waited for you," Lexa hears Aden's voice softly filter from around the counter. She glances up and sees her son staring at her in concern, as well as guilt. He rubs the back of his head as he stares around at the kitchen sadly. "We made a decision to renovate it for Mama's birthday three years ago. I know that it was our project but we wanted to surprise Ma because she was sad and I… I…"

"It's okay," Lexa whispers as she sees her son struggling. "You didn't know."

Aden just growls at that, shaking his head like he's to blame. He is about to say something when Clarke walks in, her face red from the cold. Aden's eyes darken with mistrust and he puts some space between them, much to Lexa's suspicion. The air in the room becomes tense and loaded, causing Lexa to stand straighter. Clarke notices the movement, but Lexa hides her discomfort with a weak smile, looking back around at the kitchen as if she were totally interested.

Which, she isn't.

She's completely terrified.

"Hey," Clarke says, drawing her out of her thoughts. Lexa looks up at her, losing herself in those beautiful blue eyes she knows so well.

"Hey," Lexa replies gently, still cautious as she takes a step forward. Clarke reaches down for her wife's hand and gently squeezes it.

"You must be tired," Clarke whispers as she draws her wife into her arms for a tight hug. "Why don't we head upstairs to our room?"

There's a scoff from the other end of the kitchen. Clarke flinches in Lexa's arms and the older woman pulls away to glance at Aden, who's simply scowling at the floor. Tris gulps as she looks between the three of them. Lexa's protective instincts kick in and she opens her mouth to question her son, but Clarke's lips graze upon her chin, drawing her away from him. She nearly crumbles at the feather-light sensation of those lips, the lips she'd spent five years dreaming about, as they suddenly graze up her skin until they're kissing her own cracked pair. Lexa's eyes flutter shut and she sighs, feeling her mind start to sway.

Something doesn't feel right.

Lexa pulls away slowly, trying not to be abrupt or show her fear. "Clarke… I'm sorry. I'm tired."

"It's okay," Clarke whimpers as she holds back her tears and nods, pecking her wife's tense jaw before pulling away. "Let's go upstairs."

Tris' hand is clasping Lexa's own as she babbles on again, helping the older woman up the stairs.
Clarke goes to follow when she hears Aden growling again. She turns her head to face her son, who stares at her so murderously, she's left heartbroken and alone. Aden's arms are crossed in defiance as he steps into Clarke's space, and being nearly a few inches taller as a result of his recent growth spurt. He stares down at her, blue eyes brimming with hot, angry tears.

"At least tell me that you changed the sheets," he bites out in a low hiss. Clarke flinches, her lip trembling as she stares up at her son.

"Of course I did," Clarke hoarsely gasps, "Aden, listen--"

"No," Aden says dismissively, stepping back. "I don't want to listen. And before you panic, no, I'm not going to tell her. I didn't make the mistake, you did."

"I know," Clarke rasps as she reaches out to cup her son's cheeks in her palms. "I'm sorry, Ade. I am. I never meant for any of this to happen."

"But it did," Aden replies as he extracts himself from her grasp. "Now you have to deal with it and clean up the mess. You made your bed, now lay in it."

With that, Aden stalks upstairs after his mother and sister, leaving Clarke alone in the middle of the kitchen to gather the pieces of herself back together.

"What are you doing, Clarke?" She asks herself as she holds back her tears. "You need to snap out of it… now."

===

Lexa looks around her bedroom, her body still unable to accept that she's not in a cave somewhere, dying of hunger and withdrawals.

She fingers around the fabric of the comforter, her brows furrowed together as she registers how soft the material is. Had it always been this soft? Has life always been this… soft, gentle… easy? She pulls her hand back in fear, the sensations compiling together and threatening to overwhelm her as she digs herself into the present. She tries to remind herself, to allow herself to recognize that she's not back there anymore. She's home. She's with her family. She's safe.

"Please," Lexa whimpers as she screws her eyes shut and draws a deep breath. "It's okay, I'm alright. I'm home and now I'll be okay."

*Be realistic kid,* she hears her reflection whisper in the background of her mind, *you will never be okay.*

"Mommy?" Tris' voice pops up again, her hand going to her free one and clasping it gently. "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

"Fine," Lexa replies in an involuntarily cold tone. She sighs and opens her eyes, offering a half-hearted smile down at the little girl. "Just tired, is all."

Tris smiles up at her and gently tugs at her to get onto the bed. She lays down tentatively, still so unsure about this little girl who claims to be her daughter. She doesn't remember having a daughter, unless Clarke had somehow moved on. What if this little girl was her daughter? What if she just can't remember?
If so… why can't she remember?

"Tired, Mom?" Aden's soft voice pipes up from the door. His eyes are still misty with tears, but he looks less aggravated than before. She simply nods and pats the space next to her. Aden doesn't hesitate to walk over and crawl onto the bed, pressing himself tight against her side. She kisses the top of her head before gesturing for Tris to join. The young girl beams and gently maneuvers herself on the bed so that she's not suffocating her mother. Lexa stares at the ceiling.

Just as she's about to get lost in thought, Clarke joins them silently, slipping in behind Tris to curl up in her wife's extended reach. Lexa rubs up and down her arm, gently reassuring her that she's not going anywhere, that she's here to stay. She feels Aden stiffen slightly, but then he relaxes as soon as Lexa pecks his dusty blonde mane again. Tris sighs in contentment as she lightly dozes into Lexa's uninjured shoulder, clearly exhausted from the day's events.

"Lexa?" Clarke's soft voice pulls Lexa from her thoughts. The older woman blinks and looks over to her, searching those desolate blue eyes.

"Yes?"

"I love you," Clarke whispers as she leans over to kiss Lexa's forehead, narrowly avoiding her black eye. "I love you and I missed you so much."

At this, Lexa can't help but let her lips curl in a soft, small smile. "I missed you too, Clarke. I promised you I'd come home, didn't I?"

"You did," Clarke chokes as she starts to cry, her palms cupping Lexa's cheeks. "You've never broken a promise before."

"And I don't intend to anytime soon," Lexa whispers as she kisses the inside of both of those palms. "I would've come back sooner but…"

*But I got captured. I got tortured. I killed so many people. I became a monster. I even killed you… or the image of you.*

"Lexa?" Clarke asks, drawing Lexa away from the deprecating thoughts. She looks up to see Clarke staring at her in fear.

"What is it?"

"You just looked… far away. Are you alright?"

"Just tired," Lexa simply replies with a shrug. "Long flight." Clarke nods and glances over at her wounds, flinching slightly.

"What happened?" Clarke asks, her voice tightly wrung with concern and fear. Lexa doesn't reply, but instead shakes her head.

"Later," Lexa whispers as she leans forward to kiss her wife's crown. "I'll talk about it later with you. Right now, can we just exist in the moment?"

"Of course," Clarke breathes out as she smiles at wife. "I'm just happy you're back, Lex. With everything that happened, for the longest time I thought…"

Clarke trails off, her voice cracking as she takes a deep breath. She shakes head, clearing away her tears before nodding back to Lexa.
"Let's rest," she agrees with her wife as she settles back down onto the bed. "We have plenty of time to talk later. I just want to be with you, too."

Lexa nods and stares back up at the ceiling blankly. Aden is already out like a bug beside her, and Tris seems to be equally as deep in slumber. Clarke's watching her from the side, curious and intrigued, but Lexa pays her no attention. Her thoughts are strung together and colliding like a t-bone in an intersection. She tries to dissect each and every feeling but can't seem to do it. She gets lost in the feeling of being outside of herself, despite being back home.

But that's the thing, Lexa doesn't feel like she has come home as a wife or a mother.

This place doesn't even feel like home.

Instead, Lexa realizes as she looks to the three sleeping faces with concerned fear, she feels like a stranger.

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January 16th 2014, 11:45

Grounders Bar, New York

"I thought I'd seen the last of you, Captain."

Anya nods her head upwards to see Colonel Kane walk into the bar, setting down his hat and nodding to Niylah with a smile. The woman reaches for a glass and fills him a pint of the local lager before pushing it his way. She gives them both a smile before tending to the other patrons in the bar. Anya reaches for her beer and takes a long, slow drag of the drink. She sets it down lowly, swallowing with a forced effort. Kane sighs and rubs the back of his head lightly.

"She didn't acknowledge you, did she?"

At this, Anya's head snaps up. She glares at the other man coldly. "She wanted to see Clarke. It's fine."

"She's your sister before she's anyone's wife, Anya."

"So?" Anya scoffs as she looks back to the rim of her glass. "I didn't deserve a welcome, anyways. Not with what I did to her."

"What happened was not your fault, Anya. You didn't know. She's not mad at you."

"Is that supposed to excuse all my actions?" Anya asks dryly as she glances over to her former superior. "Is it supposed to excuse that I left her to die?"

"Anya," Kane sighs, fingerling around the ring of his glass. "No one saw this coming. There was nothing you could've done."
"I could've gone back," Anya spits with venom in her voice. "I could have gone back and checked to see if she was there, if she was still fucking alive. I could have stayed behind and sent Lincoln in my place. I could have taken the shot, have convinced her that she's worth so much more than I'll ever be. I could have just kept my goddamn mouth shut instead of trying to impress you and Jaha with my fucked up plan. I could have saved her so much pain if I had said nothing."

Kane swallows, watching as Anya downs the rest of her drink before slamming the glass onto the table with a low, sad chuckle.

"So yes," she whispers with a defeated voice, "it is my fault. It'll always be my fault."

"Anya," Kane starts slowly, taking his time to piece together what he needs to say. "Lexa… she's… she's not in a good place right now."

At this, Anya stiffens. She glances up to see Kane staring at his drink with a glassy, dazed expression.

"What happened out there?" Anya asks, her voice cracking. "What did they do to my baby sister, Colonel?"

Kane's silent, lips pursed and brows furrowed. He takes a breath and swallows deeply.

"We… don't know. We've had reports…"

"Reports of what?"

"A village was destroyed by the mountainside," Kane starts as he turns to face her. "It was taken out via airstrike. There were almost four hundred bodies, not just of villagers but US Soldiers. Amongst the rubble, they found the body of Private Costia Green. It was nearly unrecognizable, but it was her. She was beat to death." Kane gets the last bit out in a hoarse, almost choking noise as he slides his beer away from him. "We don't know who could have committed such an atrocity, to devalue and dehumanize life that much. There's death, but what they did to her… there was barely anything left to recognize her by, bare her tags."

"Costia…?" Anya whispers, blinking twice as she reels backwards in shock. "I thought… but she was on a different mission. She…"

"We found a pair of Lexa's tags in the same camp," Kane replies, rubbing at the scruff of his beard slowly. "We think that maybe… that Lexa…"

"Spit it out," Anya growls, though she can't keep the shaking that wrecks her voice. "Fucking shit, Kane--"

"Lexa was a POW there," Kane tells her softly, tears in his eyes as he glances up. "For how long, we don't know. She was tortured, Anya. Badly."

"Fuck," Anya snarls as she slams her fist down onto the bar's counter, drawing the attention of a few of the other patrons. The buzzing of chatter dwells to a soft lull as they all come to stare at her. Anya's head slides down until she's able to press her forehead to the cool wood of the bar. She clutches her hair in her hands and sobs, feeling as though she's been sucker punched in the solar plexus and is unable to breathe again. "Fuck, Kane. Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

"Anya," Kane sniffles as he places his hand on her trembling shoulder, "Anya, I'm sorry--"

"I should have been there!" Anya snaps, livid. She stands from the bar, knocking her stool down in
"It should have been me in there!"

"Anya--"

"God, do you know what I've done?!" Anya whirls on him, still slightly drunk and frustrated. A million different emotions are burbled up within her chest that she can't seem to configure. She paces around the bar, uncaring of the scalding glare being sent her way by Niylah. "Do you know what I've done, Kane?!

"Please, just--"

"I fucked her," Anya says in a low, frustrated chuckle. Kane's brows furrow into a frown of confusion. Anya shakes her head. "I fucked Clarke, Kane."

"What are you talking about, Anya?" Kane asks, rising from his seat. "That's… it's impossible."

"No, it really fucking isn't. And it wasn't just once, no, it was fucking twice. I thought that I was in love with her, I thought that I… I could be loved, too. I was so fucking stupid. I was just so desperate, you know? I was desperate to find someone, to fill that void, and no one knew that abyss better than Clarke," Anya rants on, chuckling sadly as tears stream down her face. "I fucked her and I enjoyed it. Tris looks at me like I'm her fucking mother, like I was the apple of her world."

"Anya--"

"And it felt damned good, you know? To be wanted for once. To be picked first. To exist without wanting to put a goddamn gun to your head every minute. It felt fucking good to just be there and to enjoy life again," Anya continues to drunkenly spill the words, pacing back and forth. Her volume's gone down now, which leaves the other patrons off to their own thing, but a few still shift some side-glances over towards her distraught body with concern and intrigue.

"I fucked my sister's wife, Kane. I fucked my sister's wife while my sister was being tortured," Anya gasps as she holds a palm to her forehead. She starts to shake her breathing becoming more laboured. She's spinning now, unsure of what is what aside from colours being melded into blurred images. She barely registers someone dragging her arm and leading her into the cold, winter air. She's gasping then, crumbling to her knees into the snow before she feels queasy.

Kane's weathered hands hold back her hair as she retches into the snow, sobbing and gasping as bile pours out of her mouth. She sobs after she's done, gripping at her head like she's some sort of monster, that there's an evil inside of her that needs to be expelled. She screams into the dead night, ignoring the way Kane pulls her into his arms and holds her close. She ignores the way he wraps his arms around her tightly and coos for her to calm, to breathe, to relax.

But how could she, with what she's done?

"My… my baby sister," Anya croaks as she removes her hands from her hair to stare at them in disbelief. "I betrayed my own sister, Kane."

"You didn't know," Kane whispers sadly as he kisses her temple. "No one knew."

"That doesn't stop me from knowing better, from being better," Anya sobs back, shaking her head. "That doesn't stop me from realizing how stupid I was. I mean, how do I fix this? How do I look at my sister and not see all the pain there, the pain that I helped cause? How do I help her without breaking her again?"

Suddenly, there's a ringing inside of her pocket, causing Anya to shift and reach inside for her
cellphone. She sees the name upon the Caller ID and freezes. She holds the phone in her hands for a few moments before she shakily presses her thumb to the green button upon the device, raising it to her ear as she takes a deep breath. She puts some space between herself and the colonel behind her, stumbling to her feet as she collects her emotions and places on a stoic mask.

"Lexa," Anya chokes out, wiping at her tear-stained cheeks to try and gather up her raging emotions. "Hey."

"Anya," Lexa's voice is cool and collected through the phone. "Are you in bed?"

"No, no, I was just at a bar," Anya says as she runs a hand through her hair. "um, hey, Lexa, can you just give me a second?"

"Sure."

Taking the phone from her ear, she presses the mute button on the microphone as she stumbles to the wall. She presses her forehead to the cool bricks, struggling to count backwards from a thousand in intervals of sevens. She remembers all the breathing techniques Dr Jarod had taught her and she implements them all until one works. She gives herself a minute to recuperate before she takes a deep breath and turns off the mute, raising the phone back to her ear.

"Hey, sorry. I was just paying for my tab," Anya makes up the flimsy excuse, hastily wiping at her eyes still. "What's up, sis?"

"I was taking a walk near Central Park. I figured you might want to join me."

"It's... it's like almost midnight," Anya breathes out worriedly. "What are you doing out?"

"I wanted to take a walk. Would you like to join or no?"

"Yeah," Anya says as she closes her eyes, biting her lip. "Yeah, okay. I'll be there soon. Same spot?"

"What?" Lexa's voice is confused, distant. "Where's that?"

Something in Anya's heart breaks at the question. She barely croaks out, "you know, where Dad used to take us to get ice cream after practice."

"Practice?" Lexa's voice is more confused now and Anya curses herself, not knowing what the damage has been done upon her sister. She shakes her head and tries another tactic. She glances up to see Kane walking over towards her, a concerned frown plastered upon his face as he brushes off his coat.

"The statue by the bond on the west end, do you know where that is?"

"Yes, I'm there right now."

Anya takes a deep breath. She can't tell what's more painful at this point.

"That's... that's the spot, Lex."

"Oh," Lexa replies quietly. There's a pause and each second is a jab at Anya's already aching heart. "Well, I'm here."

"I'll be there soon, sis. Just... wait there."

"Sure."
Anya hears the click of the phone, but she doesn't pocket her mobile just yet. She lets it linger for a while before she lets her hand drop. She turns her head to face Kane. He offers her a water bottle, God knows where he'd managed to grab it from, but she accepts it. She takes a few sips before handing it back and steadying herself. She recuperates quickly, knowing after years of grieving and therapy of how to compartmentalize her emotions and thoughts. Kane watches on in silence as she adjusts her coat around her waist and wipes furiously at the remainder of tears that had streaked down her chin and cheeks.

"Things will get better," Kane tells her gently as he reaches out to squeeze her hands, "we're going to help your sister, Anya."

Anya doesn't have the energy to fight, so she simply nods and thanks him. He offers her a sympathetic look, but she shakes her head.

"I'm here," Kane says as he puts his cap onto his head. "I was relieved of active duty after having found Lexa. If you ever need anything…"

"Thanks," Anya mumbles as she dips her head, eyes glued to the snow beneath her boots. "I should go."

"Remember what I said," Kane says as he steps back to give her room to move past him. "This isn't your fault."

Anya doesn't reply as she walks past him and towards the park, knowing all too well that words mean nothing when you've got no action to back them.

---

Anya finds Lexa in the same spot they always would go to after hockey practice, right down to the same side of the bench.

"Lex?" Anya calls softly, flinching when she sees the way Lexa tenses and instantly whips her head in her direction. She offers her sister a flimsy smile as she gestures to the bench. Noticing it's just her, Lexa nods and wordlessly lets Anya take a seat. The older Woods sibling sits down, trying to fight the ache in her bones as the cold metal meets her jeans. The two of them sit in silence for a few minutes, simply staring at the lake as the moon glitters over the water.

"Couldn't sleep?" Anya finally breaks the tense silence between them, her voice soft and full of concern. Lexa chuckles and leans back, nonchalant.

"Jet lag."

_Bullshit_, Anya thinks, but she doesn't say anything.

"Time difference is a bitch."

"It's interesting though," Lexa ponders slowly, testing the words like she's unsure of each one. "It can be night in one place and day in another."

Anya just nods, not sure of how to reply. Lexa swallows as she looks up to the stars, her daze distant and inquisitive. It's honestly terrifying Anya, considering the woman she'd seen yesterday was a shell of whoever this person may be. Yesterday, Lexa had been cold and guarded, and now she looks perfectly fine.

"It's morbid," Lexa muses as she continues looking up, "all the light we see comes from burnt-
"Light takes a long time to get to us," Anya says with a shrug, her voice slightly nervous. Lexa's
gaze lazily shifts from the stars to her own eyes.

"How does it feel," Lexa asks, her voice a low, almost saccharine murmur, "to be looking at
something that is dead?"

The question makes Anya's heart leap up into her throat and she visibly pales. Her reaction seems to
be of amusement to Lexa, who simply chuckles and cranes her neck back upwards to gaze upon the
stars. Anya's palms grow sweaty as she stares at her sister in concern and worry. Lexa's posture
emulates an air of relaxation, of control and power, but Anya knows her. She was the one who
raised the woman who cracks jokes about her mortality. She hears the real voice.

She hears the insecurity. The fear. The doubt. The sadness.

Anya hears *everything*.

"I think that it's fascinating," Lexa drawls onwards, shifting a little upon the bench. "That we are
thinking that stars are beautiful, that they provide guidance for us to navigate the planet. We study
them and try to cover the entire sky to see if we can plot each and every one. We slap a random
name on it, a series of numbers, and then what? We look at the stars and we see hope, but the reality
is that there's nothing there. Nothing tangible, nothing real. Nothing there."

"Lexa…," Anya croaks as she turns upon the bench and reaches out to place her hand on her
sister's shoulder. "Why are we here?"

"Good question," Lexa chuckles as she glances down and smiles at her sister. "You should ask the
astronomers."

"Lexa," Anya says seriously, reaching out to lightly graze her sister's jaw, tracing a faint bruise there.
"What happened out there?"

"You worry," Lexa assumes, cocking her head in the slightest amount as she avoids answering the
question. Anya nods, blinking back tears.

"I always worry," Anya breathes out, "I never stopped, not even when I thought…"

"I'm fine," Lexa tells her, reaching up to gently squeeze at Anya's wrist. "I'm home now, so I'm
going to be okay."

"Lexa," Anya whispers, voice cracking. "You just got back. It's going to be tough to get back into
the swing of things. It's okay to not be okay."

"Of course," Lexa says as she shifts out of her sister's grasp. "But you know, I didn't call you here
because I was reaching for help."

Anya furrows her brow in confusion, struggling to understand Lexa's mystical wording. "Then…
why did you call me?"

"I haven't seen my sister in five years," Lexa replies like it's nothing. She turns her head again,
cocking her brow. "Am I not allowed to want and see her?"

"You can always see me, Lex. I'm always here for you," Anya says as she reaches out and holds
Lexa's hands in her own. "I'm here, talk to me."
"And if I don't want to talk?" Lexa asks, her voice hardening. Anya offers her a flimsy smile and squeezes her hands.

"Then we don't talk," Anya whispers as she scoots closer and removes one hand so she can drape her arm over her sibling's shoulder. "That's okay."

Lexa's quiet then, as the both of them turn back to gazing upon the stars reflecting off the calm pond water. Somewhere in their silent conversation, Lexa shifts the slightest bit closer, her head slowly laying itself upon her elder sibling's shoulder. She sighs and closes her eyes, smiling against her sister's throat. At the small sensation, Anya wraps her arm around Lexa's body tighter, trying to ignore how bony her sister feels underneath her puffy jacket and layered clothes.

"I missed this," Lexa confesses in a small whisper, "I missed you."

"I missed you, too. I missed you so much," Anya breathes back, pecking the top of Lexa's head. "I love you so much, kid."

Lexa's quiet again, but then she slowly shifts her head and tucks her head back into Anya's shoulder and sighs. "I love you too, An."

They stay like that for awhile until they both acknowledge that they can't sleep overnight in Central Park. Anya walks Lexa back to her apartment and denies the offer of sleeping over. She waits until she sees the light turn on in the master bedroom until she takes a breath and reaches inside of her coat pocket for a stick of weed. She pulls it out and lights up before turning around and walking towards the direction of her own apartment a few blocks away. She breathes in the warm smoke, smiling as it brings life back to the weary, chilled marrow of her bones. She stares up into the sky, watching as it bleeds pink and red.

It's a new day, Anya muses as she takes another drag and shakes her head, trudging forward. Maybe that's the most important lesson in life, after all.

There's always a new day.

January 17th 2014, 04:50

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

Lexa locks the door behind her and checks it thrice before she heads up the stairs, whistling lightly to herself.

It's a strange feeling, but not unfamiliar.

Euphoria.

It's a bizarre sensation, really, feeling like you're flying without boundaries. Without the fear of
falling to your death. She feels like she can do anything in these moments, like walk to Central Park after not having been in nearly five years. She didn't even really need the coat. She's seen through colder winters. She chuckles to herself whenever she remembers how she'd seen so many people shivering as they struggled to get into their cars, as if that's the worst kind of cold. They know nothing of the cold within their hearts, the cold that calls to them to wrap their fingers around the barrel of pistol. They know nothing of cold that comes from taking a life, a cold that leaves you empty and without motivation. They know nothing of the cold that comes from betrayal, from heartbreak and loss.

No, no one here knows anything of the cold.

Lexa steps into the bedroom, shedding her jacket and jeans. She methodically folds them, making sure they're neat and pressed upon the dresser. She wanders back to the bathroom and conducts her business before washing her hands. Only, as she looks down to her palms, she doesn't see the pale complexion.

She sees crimson, and only crimson.

"Blood stains are always the hardest to get off," Lexa mutters to herself, adding a light-hearted chuckle at the end. She grabs the bar of soap and scrubs, soft at first, but then seeing as the blood is still there, that it's not going away, she growls low in her throat and scrubs harder. She keeps going until she watches the maroon liquid starts to drip into the water of the sink. The feeling is cathartic, from the swirling crimson to the sting of her palms against her flesh. She finds that euphoric high build as she scrubs as hard as she can, chuckling every now and again, her body trembling and shivering with every rough scrape of her palm.

Only when the bar of soap is gone does Lexa pull back, proudly admiring the blood that runs from her palms and into the sink. She rinses out the blood on the surface and waits for the cuts to dry before she stares at them, counting each individual one. She smiles as some of them still burble and let out small pockets of blood. She smiles again, before glancing up into the mirror to see her reflection gazing upon her with a proud, but still eerie, expression upon her face.

"Never forget," her reflection tells her, voice cold and stern. "It's always there."

Lexa nods, looking down to her palms before looking back up. "It's always there," she echoes. "I'll never forget."

Satisfied with her seemingly ritualistic behaviour, Lexa flicks off the light of the bathroom and calmly walks into the bedroom where Clarke is snoozing against the sheets, her mouth slightly open and hair falling around to trap her face. She watches for a few minutes, rigid and tall, until the light from dawn starts to spill in from the blinds and causes the blonde to stir. Clarke moans and groans, rolling onto her back before she blinks open an eye and looks up.

Clarke very nearly jumps out of her skin at the sight of Lexa simply standing there, watching her sleep.

"Lex?" Clarke asks in a sleepy rasp, stumbling off the bed. "Baby, are you okay?"

"Perfect," Lexa tells her with a smile. "I was just standing here, remembering how beautiful you are when you're sleeping."

Clarke swallows down the anxiety and smiles back, laying down in the bed and gently patting the empty space next to her. "I am pretty sure you're the more beautiful one when it comes to sleeping. Now come on, don't just stand there. Join me. Please? It's too early to get up yet." Lexa waits a
minute before she slips in beside Clarke, letting the woman gently wrap her arms around her midsection and rest her head upon her chest. Lexa nods her head down and kisses her crown, breathing in the soft, dampened scent of Clarke's perfume from the day before. She smells tantalizingly sweet, just like she'd remembered.

"Sleep," Clarke hums as she kisses over the skin of her pulse point. "You're jet lagged and tired. Rest, love. I'm here."

Lexa sighs and nods, mumbling an incoherent response as she lets her eyelids slide shut and for sleep to finally take over.

===

When she wakes, she feels a shift in the air.

She paws at her wrists, searching for the metal clamps that once tied her to old concrete walls. She flares her nostrils, searching for the scent of weeks-old piss and dirt, of filth and blood, of rotting corpses and death. She looks around the room frantically, unable to understand what hell she's managed to land herself in this time. She leaps off the quilted sheets and finds her clothes folded in the corner. She frowns and rummages through them violently until she finds her combat knife. She grips it tightly in her hand, knowing that she needs to find her gun. She needs to get a proper weapon in order to survive her enemy's force.

You've been through worse, she hears her reflection guiding her steadily, you have killed men with your bare hands.

"Yes," Lexa says to herself as she grips the knife tighter. "Yes."

She hears someone talking downstairs, and music. She twitches. The camp never had music. She grits her teeth and pads out into the hall, her eyes constantly checking every entrance for any signs of movement. She approaches the stairs and walks to the edge, noticing that the music is growing louder. There's no longer any talking and Lexa wonders if her enemy has taken a break.

Stupid girl, they never take breaks. There is always someone watching you. Eyes open, head up.

"Yes," Lexa repeats again, centring herself as she does a sweep of the base of the steps before descending. "Yes."

There's a creak and Lexa tenses, her entire body pivoting in the direction of the sound as she holds herself in a defensive position. She sees the flickering of movement behind a closed door in the kitchen area. She pads forward, eyeing that the kitchen has multiple knives and the frying pan cooking bacon seem to be viable options for back-up weapons. She quickly plans as many strategies as she can to get to them should she need. Deciding that her plan is solid, Lexa continues to stalk forward, her footsteps light and soundless against the hardwood floors as she draws nearer towards the movement.

Just as she's about to draw her knife and go on the offensive, the door swings open and out steps a blonde mop of hair.

"Jesus fuck," the woman gasps sharply as she spots Lexa. She takes a deep breath before calming down and softly asking, "baby, what are you doing?"

Lexa frowns, looking behind her before turning back to the woman. The blonde gulps nervously, furrowing her brows in confusion.
"Lexa?" The woman asks, her voice familiar, but not familiar enough. "Lexa, why are you looking at me like that? What's wrong?"

"How do you know my name?" Lexa asks, gripping the knife tighter. "Who told you my name?!"

"Lexa," the woman's voice is trembling as she says her name, "Lexa, it's me. It's Clarke, your wife."

Clarke.

Clarke is her wife.

But this isn't her Clarke. This isn't her wife.

"Lexa," the blonde steps forward, more concerned, "Lexa, what's happening? What's going on?"

"Who are you?" Lexa asks, taking a few steps back. "You're not my wife. Why are you lying to me? What do you want from me?!

"I am your wife," the woman pleads as she keeps advancing. "Lexa, just look at me. Listen to me. I'm Clarke. I'm your wife, Lexa. I'm not lying."

*She's manipulating you*, she hears her reflection telling her coolly, *do not fall into her trap. Steady your hand, soldier. She is an impostor.*

Lexa gulps and looks up, seeing how the blonde's face remains confused and fearful. Lexa shakes her head and looks to her knife, before glancing back up.

"You're not Clarke," Lexa says with a shake of her head, "you can't be. I know that you're not Clarke."

The blonde's head tilts and she looks confused, her blue eyes pooling with tears as she continues to step forward. "Why not? Lexa, what happened?"

This time, Lexa only chuckles frustratingly, with a tinge of self-loathing as she looks to the knife and then back up to the blonde. Her vision is spinning now, and she's not certain if what she's seeing is a real person or a figment of her imagination. She gulps, trying to orient herself with the oncoming dizziness. Her tongue is heavy and thick in her mouth, making her want to gag and retch or even cut the damn thing out. The air is thin, wispy, unable to get into her burning lungs. There's blackness creeping around the edges of her eyesight and she can feel her body trembling and quaking with the mere effort to simply stay standing.

"Clarke is dead," Lexa tells her in a slurred voice, her eyelids drooping as she feels her body give out. "She is dead because I killed her."

And with that, Lexa feels her body shut down and a blanket of darkness wash over her. The last thing she hears is the scream of someone she once knew in a dream long ago, when her mind hadn't been poisoned by drugs and torture. A dream, that once tasted sweet and pure, now turned into a tainted nightmare.

*Clarke.*

Chapter End Notes
Okay so about Clanya -- these two still need to talk about it, but keep in mind only a day has passed since Lexa's been home so that's why Clarke jumped back with Lexa. It was more for Lexa than herself, as well as her kids. She does have the talk with Anya about what conspired between them, and I promise it gets resolved. Don't worry, it's not just ending like this in this chapter because that's totally not fair and completely unjust.

I hope y'all enjoyed this random update that I managed, lol. I just want to say, the comment section on this fic is more amazing than the fic itself. Seeing everybody's discussions and opinions make my life, honestly. It doesn't matter if it's a negative or positive opinion, the discussions that happen are awesome and I read them all. I've slowly started to go back and reply to y'all so do be patient with me as there are quite a few comments, lol.

Thank you for reading, for the comments, the kudos, and the support. Y'all are amazing.

Much love, xx.
Chapter Summary

Clarke notices something different about her wife, Aden continues to act out, Anya tries to reach out and help her little sister, Abby asks her daughter question, and Lexa meets her physiotherapist.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: MENTIONS OF MILD VIOLENCE.

Oh my gosh, y'all, I am so sorry for the delay on this update. I've been struggling with getting my ass whopped by midterms so I haven't had time to do much writing aside from this week. Because my time is becoming slightly more limited, I've decided to put all fics, bare for Neverland, An Empty Room, and this one, on hold. I need to really focus on my school work above everything else, but I hope the wait times are worth it!

TRIGGER WARNINGS WITH CUES:

In the LAST section, there is a trigger warning for MILD VIOLENCE, that goes from the beginning of the chapter to the second "Ma'am" that's said. This isn't really violent at all, just a mild flashback/PTSD episode.

The song in the quote is, "Iron" by Woodkid.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

a soldier on my own, i don't know the way
i'm riding up the heights of shame
i'm waiting for the call, the hand on the chest
i'm ready for the fight and fate

the sound of iron shocks is stuck in my head
the thunder of the drums dictates
the rhythm of the falls the number of deaths
the rising of the heights ahead
"Lexa."

You did it to yourself. You pushed us all away. I told you I needed you, and you left me.

I had no choice. I had no choice, Clarke, you know that I would if I could.

You didn't have to go back. You could have told Kane that you were done. You had a choice. We all have a choice, Lexa, and you made the wrong one. You don't love me. Something makes me wonder if you ever did.

"Lexa."

I do, Clarke, fuck, I'm alive because I love you. I would die for you.

Then die, because I don't need you anymore. Anya loves me. She came back for me.

"Lexa!"

You're a monster now.

Green eyes slowly blink open to see blonde hair and worried blue eyes staring down into them. Lexa raises her head stoically, not even wincing at the dull ache at the base of her neck or the stabbing pain in her forearm. She stares at the woman in front of her with absolutely no emotion, except a hint of suspicion.

"Clarke," she says calmly, like she's testing the word on her tongue. "What is the matter?"

"What is the matter?" Clarke asks, aghast. She's still trembling as she remains kneeled at Lexa's side. "You… you passed out--"

"It's fine," Lexa mutters, waving her off. You're a soldier. Trust no one. "I was simply sleep deprived."

"You were holding a knife," Clarke whimpers as she shakes her head, eyes pooling with tears. "You looked at me like I was your enemy."
"Are you?" Lexa asks, causing Clarke to freeze mid-cry. There's an ounce of silence before Lexa chuckles almost sadistically.

"Clarke," Lexa says smoothly. "You're overreacting. I was simply caught up in a dream. I'm fine."

"What did they do to you over there?" Clarke barely chokes out as she looks at her wife thoroughly. "You... you aren't the same, Lex."

"It's been five years," Lexa replies coldly, getting back to her feet as she brushes herself off. "People change, Clarke."

"Not like this."

"How would you know?" Lexa snarls in a low, growling tone. Clarke shudders and blinks back tears. "What do you know about anything, Clarke?!

"I'm... I'm sorry."

"For what?" Lexa chuckles again, causing Clarke to shiver once more. "You haven't done anything wrong... have you?"

I love Anya. She came back for me. Not you.

Clarke pauses for a moment, causing Lexa's brows to narrow in suspicion. A second later, the blonde shakes her head.

"I shouldn't have given up on you," Clarke whispers, mostly to herself. "I shouldn't have grieved, I should have demanded they keep looking--"

"And do what?" Lexa asks, puzzled. "You're not a soldier."

"I'm your wife," Clarke whispers, voice cracking as she looks up to the woman who once carried so much life in those green eyes. "I shouldn't have..."

"It's irrelevant," Lexa waves her off and steps past her like nothing had happened. Clarke watches on in astonishment, still unable to comprehend that the woman before her is her wife. Lexa reaches down and picks up her knife before sliding it in its sheath and placing it in the waistband of her pants. Lexa casts a glance over her shoulder, seemingly confused at the look of disbelief and shock upon the blonde woman's face. "Clarke. What are you upset about?"

"Lexa," Clarke breathes out softly, "you..."

I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt you, I never meant to hurt anyone.

"Well?!" Lexa demands in a low snarl, trying to fight off the voices in her head. "Spit out then. What do you want to call me? A freak? Crazy--"

"No," Clarke interjects, blinking back tears. "God no, Lexa. I'm just so worried about you."

"Don't be," Lexa says in a low voice, "I told you. I am fine."

"But you're not!" Clarke blurts out, stepping forward so that she can cradle her wife's face in her hands. "Look at you, Lexa. You're not even here."

But you did, and now you're going to pay for it.
"You say that you're my wife," Lexa replies coldly, "and yet you're looking at me like I'm a stranger."

"Lex…," Clarke whimpers as she pulls her hands back like she'd been stung. "I don't. You're my wife."

"I am going out," Lexa replies in a soft snap, "I need air and I need some space. I need room to breathe and this place is suffocating me right now."

"Lexa," Clarke blurts out, reaching out to tug on her arms. "Please, just stay. We don't have to talk. I just don't want you to go out there while you're…"

"While I'm what?" Lexa asks, her voice sharp with pain. "Unstable?"

Clarke hangs her head, letting go of her wife's arm. Lexa snorts and shakes her head, walking past her to climb up the steps to grab her winter jacket. She slides her knife into the inside pocket, fishing out from the waistband of her pants. After she's done, she descends the steps and slides past her wife, still giving her the cold shoulder. Clarke looks like she's about to say something, but then she pauses and shakes her head again, tears falling from her eyes. Lexa looks on, cold and emotionless, until she finally decides that this silent game is going nowhere. She opens the door and leaves Clarke alone.

As soon as the door slams shut, Clarke crumbles to her knees.

She sobs into herself, completely distraught as she struggles to figure out just what had happened to her wife. She's not even concerned about the fact that Lexa pulled a knife on her, but more so about how she'd looked at Clarke like she was an impostor. The emptiness in those wild, almost _feral_ green eyes had made her shiver. Clarke hugs herself tighter, trying to calm herself down. She quickly remembers that Lexa's on her own and she messily wipes away her tears, standing up. The woman fumbles in her coat pocket for her phone, fishing it out and quickly punching in a familiar number. She holds the phone up and gasps.

As soon as it picks up and the person answers, Clarke's heart plummets.

"It's Lexa," she whispers with a croak. "You have to find her."

The phone goes dead in an instant. She doesn't know where Lexa could have gone, but that doesn't mean anyone else doesn't.

Clarke just prays that Anya can get there in time.

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January 17th 2014, 11:03

Public School 131, New York

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Aden stumbles through the halls, his backpack slung heavily over his shoulder as he manages to get to his English class with just minutes to spare. Mr Blake is waiting at the front, his muscular arms crossed over his chest as he speaks to one of the kids in his class about the upcoming assignment.
Not wanting to draw attention to himself, Aden slinks into the seat near the back, not bothering to pass a glance over at Jackson, who's beaming at him from where he sits.

"Ade," Jackson hums, slightly confused at his off-putting attitude. He'd been gone the first two weeks of school because of another family skiing trip, but he didn't think he'd have missed much. He gently reaches over and prods his best friend's side, flinching when Aden growls at him, blue eyes narrowed in a glare.

"Are you okay?" Jackson asks, cocking his head as he glances over the rigid frame of the boy. "You look like you just saw a ghost or something."

Ironic, Aden wants to snort. *That's exactly what I've seen.*

Before the boy can open his mouth to reply, the bell is ringing and Mr Blake is grabbing at his copy of *King Lear*, flipping it open to the page where they'd last left off. Usually Aden loved English. Mr Blake was easily his favourite teacher and he loved poetry. He was most definitely an artist like his birth mother, engaged in the arts of writing and paint, but right now, he feels disgusted at the very thought of associating anything with his mother.

"Alright class," Mr Blake says with a smile, nodding to the teenagers, "last week we covered a few motifs in *King Lear*. Namely, we talked about betrayal."

Aden growls and snorts again, catching his teacher's attention.

"Aden," Jackson hisses under his breath, still confused. "What are you doing?"

"Mr Griffin-Woods--"

"It's just Woods," Aden snaps back, his icy glare piercing the older man's gaze. Mr Blake, to his credit, is unfazed by the obvious anger in his eyes. Instead, the man smiles and leans against the wooden frame of his desk, causing his biceps to flex and a few of the girls in the front row to swoon.

"Mr Woods," Mr Blake corrects himself, eyeing the boy with warm caution. "Would you care to share your opinion about the passage?"

"No," Aden snorts, rolling his eyes as he leans back in his chair. "I'm fine."

"Surely there is something that stood out in the acts we've read thus far," Mr Blake continues to push, "something that might make you feel strongly about?"

"I feel like this is a waste of time," Aden retorts, earning a few gasps from the students around him. Even Jackson looks completely shocked at his response, the blue-eyed boy staring over at him like he's a stranger. Aden doesn't care, he's far too riled up and angry to be bothered to care. That's one thing he's learned.

*No one cares.*

"Try again," Mr Blake urges, pushing off his desk as he flips through his book. "I want you to elaborate on the topic. Remember, participation matters."

"Fuck you," Aden mutters under his breath. Mr Blake's eyes darken, but he doesn't snap yet. Aden doesn't bother to apologize as he huffs.

"Aden," Jackson pleads softly from beside him, "stop it!"
Aden doesn't reply.

"Alright," Mr Blake says as he adjusts his reading glasses and glances down at his book, his finger running over a few lines. "Let's go back to Act One. In here, we see Cordelia professing her love and loyalty to her father, thus saying, 'I'm sure my loves more ponderous than my tongue', but there's a twist to this. What does this line make you feel, Mr Woods?" Aden twitches, his eyes burning as Mr Blake looks up over his book, a knowing glance passing through his dark eyes.

"Her refusal to compete in her favourable speech can be seen as a display of back-talk or an act of defiance," Aden answers shortly. "Easy."

"Go deeper," Mr Blake pushes. "Think beyond the literal meaning of the passage. Think of her father, don't you pity him?"

"Lear?" Aden snorts. "He threw a tantrum and exiled her. What does he have to do with any of this?"

"I want you to analyze the quote in terms of their relationship," Mr Blake says, his voice steady and calm. "Tell me what you think."

"I think that Lear is a bastard," Aden snaps, head jutting up as he glares at his teacher. "When Cordelia refuses to flatter her father and appease his vanity, Lear betrays his role and responsibilities as her father. He's supposed to love her, to cherish her, and he just turns his back on her. He, with very cruel and hateful words, sends his own daughter away. She is put not only out of her home, but out of her country. She's shamed. And yet, despite everything, she remains loyal to him. She does not stop loving him, and she is the daughter who acts to save him after he is then so horribly betrayed by her sisters."

"Good," Mr Blake says, his voice betraying nothing. "Keep going."

By now, the entire class has turned to watch the seething boy with tears brimming in his eyes as he continues to talk. "Lear deserved to die after everything he did. He betrayed the only daughter that loved him truly, without any reservations. He cast her aside like she was nothing, like she was never there. He disowns her and tells her that he no longer cares for her like his own, nor does he love her. So, to answer your question, no. I don't pity him. He's an asshole."

By the end of his ramble, Aden's fingers are clutching the edge of the desk with such a ferocity that he's surprised the wood hasn't chipped off. The class is silent but it doesn't matter. All that matters is that Mr Blake is looking at him with sympathy and sadness, as if he could possibly understand what's going on. Mr Blake nods once, before turning to another passage and starting his lesson, seemingly satisfied with Aden's response. The boy simply slinks back into his chair, struggling to keep his tears at bay as he drones out the voices of Jackson beside him and instead chooses to glare at a spot on his untouched notebook.

When the bell rings to signal the lunch period, it's no surprise that Mr Blake calls out, "Mr Woods, a moment please."

Aden remains slouched in his chair, glaring at nothing until all the students file out. Each of them pass him a strange look, whispering between themselves as they spill out into the busy hallways, eager to get to their lockers and retrieve their lunches. Jackson waits for a few moments, protectively standing between his best friend and his teacher, but even he seems unsure of what's going on. Mr Blake nods once, before turning to another passage and starting his lesson, seemingly satisfied with Aden's response. The boy simply slinks back into his chair, struggling to keep his tears at bay as he drones out the voices of Jackson beside him and instead chooses to glare at a spot on his untouched notebook.

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"Aden," Mr Blake says softly, taking off his glasses so he can hang them up on his collar. "I heard what happened this week."

"Did you?" Aden chuckles sadly. "Great."

"Aden," Mr Blake sighs as he takes a seat on the desk in front of the boy. "I can't imagine how you must be feeling right now. I know that things are confusing, that grief is a fickle thing. You know that I've known both of your mothers for a long time, and I'm sorry that you ever had to go through that."

Aden remains silent, but the tears still sting at his eyes.

"Listen," Mr Blake tells him gently, "I'm not picking on you in class because I think it's fun. I see that you're bottling up your anger and your grief. I don't know what happened specifically, but I can tell that it's affecting your schoolwork. I don't want you to end up in trouble, Aden. You're my best student, without a doubt. I've spoken to your counsellor and the principle regarding your situation. I figured that instead of being interrogated by them, you'd want to spend time here."

"Like detention?" Aden spits out, still angry. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"Not detention," Mr Blake clarifies, flashing the boy a reassuring smile. "Think of it more like a study period. In that time, I want you to fill out a journal with your feelings for the day. You don't have to share it with anyone, not even with me or your counsellor. It's for your own benefit. But, if you do want to talk, I'm here."

"And what would you know about what I'm going through?" Aden mutters with a growl, crossing his arms. "You don't know anything about my situation."

"No, maybe not your exact situation," Mr Blake says with a sad shrug, "but I've been there, Aden. My father was declared KIA and he came back four years later. My mother had already moved on by then. He... he wasn't the same when he came back, either. War changes people, kid. I can't imagine, from what I've heard about your mother's story from the news, how much it must have rattled you. I just... I want you to know that this classroom? It's a safe place for you."

There's a pause then, a tense moment of silence in which Mr Blake waits for the boy to respond. For a minute, the teacher is hopeful he's gotten through to the stubborn but hurting teen. He sees the shifting in those dull blue eyes, a new fire lighting in his gaze. He looks ready to share something, to open it.

But then the fire tames and Aden shakes his head, stands and gathers his books. He pauses for a moment, his heart clenching in his throat.

"She was my safe place," Aden whispers, and he's not sure if he's talking about Clarke or Lexa. Mr Blake purses his lips, but Aden steadies himself.

Aden grits his teeth and holds back his anger before he stumbles out of the classroom without another word, tears streaming down his cheeks.

January 17th 2014, 12:19
Anya walks through Central Park with a brisk pace, her heart leaping up into her lungs as she darts her gaze around, searching for the slender body of her sister. She clenches her fists and continues walking, ignoring the stares of people watching her in curiosity and confusion as she mutters to herself about being so stupid. She pulls out her phone again and dials her sister's number, swearing when the same answering machine picks up for the fifteenth time.

Anya nearly crumbles with relief as she makes out the sight of her sister's back facing the pond. She jogs over, narrowly missing a patch of snow before she reaches her sister's side. Lexa is staring ahead, her shoulders back and her head held up. She looks rigid, like a machine and nothing like the dork of a sister she once knew. Something in Anya's heart breaks when she realizes that the possibility of her baby sister, the one she'd raised, being gone was far too high.

"So Clarke sent you," Lexa observes, almost as though the entire situation is amusing to her. "Interesting."

"You ran out on her," Anya says bluntly, still in shock. "Lex, you never run out on people."

"But you do," Lexa says in flat tone, her green eyes shifting over to her sister. Anya's lungs collapse with guilt and she looks away. Lexa chuckles.

"I'm joking," Lexa says, though something about her monotone voice suggests otherwise. "You followed orders. I can't blame you for that."

"I wanted to take the shot," Anya croaks as she blinks back her tears. "I wanted to be the one to take it so that you could go home to her."

"But you didn't," Lexa replies shortly. There's no follow up, no further explanation. Just a small and short reply stating the obvious.

Anya sucks air between her teeth and swallows thickly. "Yeah," she whispers hoarsely. "I didn't."

There's a silence that falls between them then, as Lexa turns her gaze back to the pond. Anya gulps, unable to hold back her tears as she reaches out and gently grazes her thumb alongside Lexa's wrist. The younger woman stiffens and her head nods down in a sharp, reflexive state. She seems confused by the touch, which only makes Anya's heart mourn even further. Inching forward, Anya gently takes Lexa's hand in her own and squeezes it softly.

"I'm sorry," Anya croaks as she tries to hold it together. Seeing Lexa is like facing a demon she thought she'd slain. And it's not even Lexa that's the demon, it's the guilt her death had carried. It's the five years she spent hating herself, drowning herself in alcohol and suicidal tendencies. She's got thirty-six tiny little scars on the insides of her wrists to prove the self-loathing she'd been through. Seeing Lexa is like reopening those five years she thought she'd recovered from.

"I'm so sorry," Anya blurs out as her tears obstruct her vision. "I never wanted to leave you. I wanted to fight, to stay. I'm so sorry, Lexa."

Lexa doesn't react, not to her crying, nor her croaking and desperate plea for forgiveness. Instead, Lexa just takes a breath and looks back to their hands. Anya's sobbing harder now, unable to control.
the hiccups as she struggles to contain herself. Lexa cocks her head, chuckling lightly at the scene, almost bemused.

"What do you have to be sorry for?" Lexa asks, her voice dry but not malicious. "Are you sorry that you didn't get taken? That you weren't the one tortured?"

"Jesus," Anya breathes out, more tears streaming down her cheeks as she chokes on another sob. "Lexa--"

"I never would have taken you for a masochist," Lexa jokes, ignoring the distress of her older sibling. Anya's insides twist and she tries to straighten her back, to be brave for her younger sibling as she attempts to pull herself together. Lexa's words are cutting deep, threatening to bleed her out when all she's got is a few measly bandages. Lexa's back remains rigid and straight as she continues to stare forward into nothing. Anya finally finds the strength to speak again.

"What did they do?" She rasps as she turns her younger sister in her arms, her hands shakily cupping those hollowed-out cheeks. She searches those dull, emotionless green eyes for something, for a spark of anything that reminds her of the girl she'd once raised. Lexa doesn't speak, nor does she move.

"What did they do to you?" Anya asks between hiccuped breaths, her forehead leaning closer until she lets it rest against Lexa's own. She tries to hide the disgust in her stomach when she feels the tiny, invisible scars upon the other woman's skin. She draws Lexa in for a tight hug and holds her closer to her chest. "What did they do to you, Lexa?" Her sister, however, remains silent and unwavering, seemingly lost in her own world as she continues to simply stare at nothing. Anya pulls back from the half-embrace and looks deeply into her sibling's eyes. Anya looks into those green eyes and she can't help but feel like she's drowning.

"Maybe…," Anya whispers, voice cracking. "Maybe it's time you talked to someone, Lex."

At this, Lexa's eyes snap up. She cocks her head and chuckles.

"Like a shrink?" The younger woman scoffs. "I already told you. I'm fine."

"You were tortured," Anya seethes between gritted teeth, shaking her head when she remembers what Kane had told her. "No one recovers from that."

"Maybe I'm no one then," Lexa replies just as quick, another low jab that hits Anya with a sucker punch to the gut. "I told you. Fine."

"Trust me, Lex. I mean…," Anya stumbles over her words as she pulls away from her sister slightly. "I… I started seeing Dr Jarod. He helps."

"I didn't think you were interested in men," Lexa jokes again, thinking the entire situation to be a joke. "You're kidding right? You with a shrink?"

Even though she knows that this isn't her Lexa, that this woman is so far from her sister that it's like talking to a stranger, Anya feels her words rip out her heart. She'd struggled for so long with trying to get talking with her therapist, and for Lexa to belittle her so quickly? It hurts more than she could've imagined.

"Lex," Anya chokes out, "I just--"

"Has it been hard for you?" Lexa asks, her voice low and cruel. "Has it been hard coming home to a warm bed, food every night, knowing that you're safe? Has it been hard knowing that you're not
"I--"

"I don't see what you could possibly need to talk about with a shrink," Lexa mutters, angrily shaking her head. "You've been through nothing."

"You died!" Anya blurts out, her voice cracking as she breaks down again. "Lexa, I watched you die. It killed me. I had to come home and tell your wife that I couldn't keep my promise. I lived every single day of every single month of every goddamn year with the ghost of you watching me everywhere I went. I blamed myself this entire time, and I fucking feel it now more than ever because I failed you, Lexa. I made a promise to Dad to protect you and I broke it. I broke you."

Lexa's silent, simply watching as Anya crumbles to her knees, her face held in her palms as she continues to sob. "I've spent years mourning you, Lexa. You were my world, and without you, I was nothing. It's always been us, Lex. It's always been you and me versus the world. You're my partner in crime, my best friend, my sister. I lost all of that the day you took the shot. It's been killing me ever since and I've never managed to get through it. I... I thought I was... I really did..."

"That's nothing compared to what they did to me," Lexa snarls as she kneels down to harshly jerk up her sister's chin. "You know nothing of pain, Anya."

"Then tell me," Anya whispers as she wipes away her tears. "Tell me what happened, Lexa. Let me help you. Please."

For a minute, Lexa looks like she's about to give in and acquiesce to her sister's request, but then her lips tighten into a line and her jaw sets.

"Go home, Anya. I have things I need to do," Lexa states as she stands up, stuffing her hands in her pockets as she turns away. Anya quickly stumbles to her feet and chases after her sister, reaching out pull on her shoulder. As soon as her palm makes contact on Lexa's jacket, the younger woman spins and easily pins her to the tree. Her elbow jabs into her older sister's chest, primed right over her sternum. Her eyes are lit with fury and anger, a look Anya's never seen before.

Honestly?

It's terrifying.

"Lexa," Anya chokes out, tears blurring her vision. "Lexa, what are you doing?"

"I told you not to follow me," Lexa snarls as she shoves her sister again. "Leave me alone, Anya. Go report to Clarke that I'm alive. That's all that matters, right?" Anya shakes her head, wiping at her eyes when she's released from the younger woman's surprisingly strong grip. Anya gulps and eyes her sister sadly.

"Where are you going?" Anya asks, struggling to figure out what the best plan of action would be. "Can I at least know that, Lex? I just want you safe."

"I'm getting help," Lexa replies with a shrug, "just not the kind you think."

"Lexa--"

"Relax," Lexa chuckles, going back to the feigned amusement that chills Anya to the bone. "I told you, I'm fine. I just need some space, okay?"
"But--"

"It's just... a lot," Lexa sighs, her brows furrowing as she looks away. "Being around people. I was on my own for five years. It's overwhelming."

Anyas nods mutely, tears still burning in her eyes as Lexa takes a deep breath and looks up at her, green eyes wide and pleading.

"Just give me a few hours," Lexa whispers softly, her voice cracking. "I need to be by myself for a bit. I'll be okay, An. I promise."

Before Anya can protest, Lexa reaches forward and draws her into a hug, kissing her cheek before pulling away and smiling at her as encouragingly as possible. Anya is stumped as Lexa smiles and nods again before turning her back and walking off in the opposite direction. Anya remains stupefied, struggling to find some sort of strength to go after her sibling. But then she remembers the look on her sister's face, and she wonders in that instant that maybe Lexa's right. Maybe being around too many people is what is causing her to react this way. Maybe she does need some sort of space.

But maybe, just maybe, Anya's wrong.

Maybe it's more than just people, more than just space.

It occurs to her then, in the saddest flash of a moment, that maybe Lexa's not telling the truth.

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Lexa walks into the shop, startled slightly by the ringing of the chimes above the door. She glances up and stares at the metal bells before turning her attention back to the store. She browses up and down the isles slowly. She whistles a tune to herself, running her finger along the glass casing of each aisle.

"Can I help you, Ma'am?"

Lexa nods her head up to see a heavily tattooed man with a white, fluffy beard staring back at her with a kind smile. She eyes him up and down before forces out a smile of her own. She sees her reflection staring at her with her arms crossed from behind the counter. Lexa glances at her for a moment, waiting for an order.

"Ma'am?"

"Sorry," Lexa says in a slow, charming voice. She flashes the man a smile and looks down at the item in the casing. "How much for this one?"

"I'm going to have to see some ID first," the storekeeper says, arching his brow. Lexa smiles and nods, fishing out her wallet to show him her driver's license. He eyes it suspiciously before glancing back up at her. There's a minute of silence before the man purses his lips and raises his finger to point at her.

"You're that lady from the news," he remarks with an undertone of awe in his voice. "You're the one they found from a POW camp, right? Major Woods?"

Lexa almost flinches at the statement, but she holds it together. You're not there anymore, you're safe.
She glances at her reflection again, only to find her gone. She clenches her jaw and fights through another forced smile.

"That's me," she says, hating how her voice is so strangled and raw. "I came to make a purchase."

"I understand that," the man says with a sympathetic expression. "I served in The Gulf War. Artillery. Corporal Lewis Murkin, at your service."

"Sir," Lexa nods, taking his outstretched hand and shaking it. The man smiles at her again, glancing down at the item in the glass casing.

"Most people think of it as a danger, but the way I see it, it provides a sense of security. It's hard to accept that in some cases, the war never really ends," the man says, glancing down at the item before nodding back up the young woman. "And you, ma'am, are a national hero. I know some people only see you for the title, but I know those eyes. I've been in the same place myself, and I know how it must feel to be back in civilization after being away for so long."

The man reaches into his pockets for a key and quickly unlocks the casing to pull out the thing they'd both been looking at for awhile. He reaches inside and holds it out, testing the weight of it in his hands before offering it over to the younger ex-soldier. Lexa takes it gingerly, a part of her already easing with the familiar feeling of the cool metal in her hands. She runs her fingers over the handle and examines the exterior before glancing up at Corporal Murkin.

"It's nothing like the ones we used in the field, but maybe that's not the point. It's a different kind of gun," the ex-soldier says gently, "besides, after the new POTUS passed the laws regarding gun control for vets, it's hard to get at the service weapons we once had. The good thing is that even if you have PTSD, you don't have your second amendment rights stripped from you. It's only if you're whacked in the head do they start messing with your right to bear arms."

"Whacked in the head?" Lexa asks coolly, glancing up from the weapon in her hand. "What do you mean by that?"

"The ones that don't manage to get their head out of the war zone," Corporal Murkin sighs sadly, glancing away. "The ones that don't recover."

"Right," Lexa echoes as she glances back down at the gun. The older soldier glances over at her, eyeing her up and down.

"What about you, kid?" The man asks gently. "You alright?"

"I'm fine," Lexa says as she places the gun on the casing, her head swimming with a million thoughts. "I... I'm getting by."

"That's more than most of us can say," Corporal Murkin hums, before reaching forward to gently squeeze the woman's shoulder. "Besides, I like this one. The Glock 19 is a double action, autoloading, nine millimetre Luger handgun with a standard capacity of fifteen rounds. It's probably the most sold handgun in the States. With a reputation for reliability, it is also accurate, and is generally not picky about what kind of ammunition it will shoot. It's a solid weapon." Lexa looks back to the gun, trying to ignore the screams running through her brain, the memories of death and blood. She shakes them away and smiles slightly at the man.

"I'll take it," she says, "thank you."

The ex-soldier beams at her, letting go of his shoulder so he can gesture to the cash register behind him. "Great. Let me ring you up?"
Lexa nods as she follows him to the register, handing him her credit card and gun licence. He runs her through the system, smiling once he finds that there's nothing for him to be worried about. After running through the other details, he rings the item through and pays off the balance on her credit card.

"There you go," the man says as he slides the gun towards her with the lock, "I hope it helps, Major."

"Thanks," Lexa murmurs as she eyes the lock suspiciously. She shrugs and tucks the gun into the waistband of her jeans, folding her jacket over the back to conceal the weapon. Already, she feels herself at ease, knowing that she's got some level of protection should she need it. Corporal Murkin gives her another sympathetic and understanding glance as she steps back, thanks him once more, and then turns on her heel and heads towards the exit.

She feels better, knowing she has a gun.

But… safer?

Lexa glances up to see her reflection standing on the other side of the road with those dead, cold eyes bearing into her. She gulps and hastily looks away.

No, not safer… not in the slightest bit.

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**January 17th 2014, 13:01**

**Griffin-Woods Residency, New York**

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Clarke sits down on her couch, holding her head in her hands as she softly cries into herself.

"Clarke, honey?"

Clarke's head shoots up when she sees the familiar face of her mother staring back at her. Without saying anything, the two women meet each other in a hug, with Clarke burying her head into Abby's shoulder, seeking comfort from her mother. Abby's hands are maternal and strong as they palm down her quivering back. She kisses Clarke's cheek, her forehead, and then her nose, before wrapping her back into her arms and closing her eyes with a sigh.

"It's like she's a completely different person, Mom." The words shatter the older woman's heart as she grips her daughter tighter. "She's not my wife."

"Oh darling," Abby hums as she settles them down on the couch, "you know that this is still an adjustment for her, right?"

"I know," Clarke breathes out as she snifflies, "I just want to help her, Mom. I want her to know that she's safe, that's she's not fighting anymore."
"Sweetheart," Abby chokes as she holds back her own tears, "you know that--"

"I know," Clarke angrily spits as she nods her head upwards, glaring at her mother as more tears run down her cheeks. "And what have I been doing, Mom? While she was out there, fighting for her life and held captive, I was back home screwing her sister. God, I don't even know how to tell her. It'll break her, Mom."

"Honey, you didn't know--"

"That doesn't excuse anything!" Clarke snaps as she stands up and begins to pace. A moment passes and then Clarke comes to a jarring halt, her hands coming up to cup her mouth as she sobs into herself. She turns her head to the side to give her mother the most heartbroken look Abby thinks is humanely possible.

"I cheated on her, Mom. I cheated on my wife," Clarke cries as she shakes her head in disbelief. "I cheated on Lexa."

Abby stands and wraps her trembling daughter in a hug, easing her harsher cries with smoother rubs of her back. Clarke feels her head spinning as she recalls the morning’s events. Her blood runs cold as she remembers the cold look in Lexa's eyes, the knife primed upwards, the words that she'd uttered.

Clarke is dead. She is dead because I killed her.

"Clarke?" Abby asks, feeling her daughter grip her tighter. "What's wrong?"

Clarke sniffs and tries to push down the memories, to try and figure out what might have propelled Lexa to act that way. She gulps and centres herself, pushing off her mother so that she can run her hands through her hair and tousle out a few kinks that had accumulated over time. Abby waits patiently, taking a seat beside her daughter as they both move back to the couch. Clarke keeps her gaze on her open palms, struggling to piece the last few hours together coherently.

And then, with one harsh gulp and a look of utter dread, Clarke turns to her mother and rasps, "she pulled a knife on me, Mom."

At this, Abby stiffens and a protective gaze takes over her dark eyes. "She was violent with you? Clarke, if she's dangerous, she poses a threat to not just you, but also your children. If she is not in the mental capacity to be aware of her surroundings, she cannot live at home with you. She could hurt you."

"Lexa wouldn't hurt me," Clarke begs as she tries to fool herself out of this morning's events, "she loves me."

"People do a lot of things for love, Clarke." Abby's words are cutting and deep, her voice low with warning. "Not all of them are good things."

"I know, just…," Clarke drifts off, swallowing thickly. "I don't think it was her fault. No, it wasn't her fault."

Abby looks ready to protest her daughter's defence of the soldier. Her lips tighten in a straight line and she looks about ready to explode, but Clarke shakes her head, willing her tears to remain at bay as she takes a deep breath. Abby waits again, but not without shifting on the couch impatiently for Clarke's answer.

"She didn't know who I was," Clarke explains softly, looking to her palms. "She looked at me and
she thought I was a stranger. She told me that she knew Clarke, that she knew who I was but that I couldn't possibly be her because in her mind, the Clarke she knew was dead." Abby frowns in confusion, her anger lifting.

"Mom, I think her PTSD has gotten worse. I... I don't know what they did to her over there," Clarke gasps as she looks back up at her mother. "I don't know what they did, but they hurt her so badly that she doesn't know anything about me. She completely forgot or had no idea about Tris. She must think that I've replaced her with someone, that I've moved on and left her alone. I don't understand what could cause her to act that way. She's never been like this before, Mom."

"She's also never been gone for five years at a time," Abby reminds her gently, reaching out to curl a strand of Clarke's hair behind her ear. "There's a very good chance that she's developed some other kind of mental illness as a result of the isolation and the imprisonment. I don't know what they did to her, either, but I can see if I can get in touch with her doctor from the Afghanistan base and get her medical records. I'll give her a full physical and we'll find out what's wrong."

"What if that's the problem?" Clarke asks, sniffling as she wipes at her nose. "What if whatever's wrong with her can't be fixed? What if she really forgot us?"

"Honey, this is Lexa. This is your wife," Abby says softly, "she loves you more than anything in the world. I don't think she could ever forget you."

"What if love isn't enough?" Clarke asks, her voice hollow and laced with betrayal. "What happens when she finds out what Anya and I did? What about how everyone, including you, told us was okay? What happens when she finds out that all those people she once loved all went behind her back? Then what?"

At this, Abby is silent. Her brows furrow and she purses her lips, struggling to find an appropriate response.

Clarke only snorts sadly. "They may have tortured her, but no one could break her more than me, Mom."

Abby bites her bottom lip, holding back tears as she watches her daughter fold in on herself. In all her years of raising Clarke, of watching her relationship bloom and blossom with Lexa, she's never felt as useless or as much of a failed parent as she does now. She had thought that Anya brought Clarke happiness, that she'd managed to find someone to share that pain with and to move on. She'd always loved both the Woods sisters, but she never would have imagined that anything like this could've happened. She never thought that someone who had died could come back, and someone that shouldn't have been loved, was.

"We'll get Lexa help," Abby whispers as she reaches out and gently holds Clarke's hand. "I'll take her case, baby. I'll fix her up, I promise."

Clarke can't reply in words, so instead she just nods through her violent sobs, her body still trembling with the force of her cries. Abby wraps her daughter in her arms once more, kissing her head and murmuring assurances into her scalp as she runs her brain through the best experts that could help Lexa. She loves the youngest Woods sibling as much as her own daughter, even if it hadn't been the case originally. She knows that Clarke is right, that Lexa's love for Clarke is something that is incomparable to anyone in their family, herself and her late husband included. There's no doubt in the older doctor's mind that the love the soldier carried for her family, for her wife and her children, was what gave her the strength to fight her way back home through every low and inconceivable odd.
Just then, as the two women are lost in their thoughts, the door swings open and Lexa appears in the hallway with a look of confusion on her face.

Clarke separates herself from her mother quickly, wiping away her tears as she glances up at the apprehensive-looking woman in their living room.

"Lexa," Clarke breathes out, trying desperately to keep her voice from cracking. "Baby--"

"Who are you?" Lexa asks, glancing over to Abby with a suspicious glare. "What is this woman doing in our house?"

"Lexa?" Clarke asks as she takes a step forward. "Lexa, that's my mother. Abby. Don't you remember?"

Lexa's eyes flit to the older woman, her frame still stiffened and eyes guarded as Abby takes a gentle step forward. She reaches out and softly places her hand on the younger woman's rigid shoulder. Abby glances up into her dull green gaze, shocked to find the sunken bags under her eyes and the darkened skin surrounding her hollowed cheekbones. Lexa looks more like a shell of the woman she used to be more than anything. The sight is shocking for the older doctor, because while she hasn't worked with many PTSD vets, she's seen how badly some of the things people see in trauma can affect their physical health.

"Lexa," Abby whispers softly, "I'm your mother-in-law, remember?"

"You don't like me," Lexa states hostility, ignoring the sharp gasp of Clarke. "You told me that you didn't want me near Clarke."

"That was years ago," Abby swallows as she feels her voice cracking. "Lexa, honey, I love you."

"Get out of my house," Lexa growls as she steps into the older woman's face. "Get away from my family."

"Lexa, stop!" Clarke pleads as she reaches forward to tug on her wife's arm. "Lexa, please, just calm down. Mom isn't going to hurt you."

Lexa doesn't take her stare off Abby, but she remains wary as she moves past her and reaches for Clarke. The blonde doesn't even have the space to breathe before Lexa is tugging her into her arms, holding her protectively as she continues to stare at Abby with a lethal glare. Clarke buries her face into Lexa's neck, rubbing her hands over the ridges in her wife's spine as she contains her tears and wills herself to be strong. Abby stares over at the two of them in disbelief, having not believed Clarke from earlier about Lexa's mental state. She worries for the safety of her daughter, but she knows that ripping Lexa away and sending her to an institution would only make things worse. The doctor in her knows that she must be pragmatic and approach this as tentatively as possible.

"Lexa," Clarke hums as she presses light kisses to her lover's neck. She tries to ignore the scars that are raised on her skin, the rough bumps around her exposed and boney clavicle. She squeezes the taller woman tighter, assuring her that she is not in danger and that Abby poses no threat to either of them. Lexa's still snarling and growling at the doctor like a rabid animal, but she doesn't look like she's about to attack or harm her by any means.

"That's it," Clarke murmurs as she feels Lexa's tightly strung body begin to relax. "Easy, baby. You're safe. I've got you. I love you, Lexa."

"Tell her to leave," Lexa mutters as she pulls away, giving Abby one last threatening glare. "I don't want her here."
"Mom," Clarke says as she looks to her mother pleadingly. The doctor nods, despite the shimmering tears in her eyes. She hastily wipes them away and heads for the door, trying to dispel the apprehension churning in her gut. Clarke knows from just the way she's walking that her mother is sifting through all the possibilities for Lexa's condition. As much as Lexa doesn't seem to trust Abby at the moment, deep down, Clarke knows that her mother is their best hope.

"Did she hurt you?" Lexa asks as soon as the door closes behind her mother. "What did she do to you, Clarke?"

"Nothing," Clarke whispers in a choked sob as she glances up at her wife. "Mom was just worried about me after this morning."

"Did you tell her that I tried to hurt you?" Lexa asks, her voice steady and calm. "Did you tell her about how you think I've become a monster?"

"Lexa," Clarke gasps, feeling her heart twist even harder at her wife's words. "You're not a monster."

"I could have killed you," Lexa admits nonchalantly. "I was jet-lagged and had a nightmare that felt to real. You caught me at a bad time."

"Maybe," Clarke chokes with a harsh rasp, her voice taut from crying so much. "But maybe you need to talk to someone, Lexa?"

"Oh you too?" Lexa snorts as she slides past Clarke and into the kitchen. "First Anya, and now you? I'm beginning to think there's something more to it."

"We're worried about you," Clarke pleads as she joins Lexa in the kitchen, watching as her wife opens up the fridge and grabs a beer. She uncaps the bottle with her teeth, causing Clarke's eyes to widen with disbelief at the utter carelessness in Lexa's actions. She follows the older woman back to their living room where Lexa plops down with a sigh, kicking her feet up on the table before reaching for the remote and turning the TV on, as if nothing's wrong.

"Lexa?" Clarke asks as she takes a seat beside her wife. "Are you listening to me?"

"I'm always listening," Lexa replies coolly, glancing over at her wife with a blank expression. "I am always watching and I am always listening, Clarke."

"Then talk to somebody," Clarke whispers as she places her hand on Lexa's knee. "Talk to me, Lex."

"I've been home for less than a week, Clarke. Why can't you and everyone else understand that I just need time," Lexa tells her smoothly, her voice containing no emotion. Clarke gulps, glancing at her hand upon Lexa's knee, feeling the subtle vibrations of the muscle twitching underneath. Muscle spasms? Kane hadn't mentioned anything related to a leg injury that could have lead to involuntary spasmimg of her muscles. Furrowing her brow, Clarke thinks harder.

And then it hits her.

Despite the calm exterior and impenetrable facade that Lexa seems to put on, her body can't hide the fact that she's anxious.

"I'm fine," Lexa tells her as she removes Clarke's hand from her knee. "There's nothing to worry about, Clarke. I told you, I am okay. Alright?"
Clarke hesitates, but she can see that in those hollow green eyes, there's a small, pleading spark calling out for her, and it's only saying one thing.

*Help.*

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**January 24th 2014, 20:20**

**Maimonides Medical Centre, New York**

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Of all the places to be on a Friday evening, this was definitely one Anya was not expecting.

"Woods, Anya?" The lady at the front desk calls her name in a monotone voice. Anya gulps and rises from her seat, following the woman in scrubs to the waiting room. The nurse eyes the cloth on her hand, stemming the bleeding for now. Anya tries to force out a smile, but she can't feel her hand right now.

"One of the kids got too excited with a pair of scissors," she explains to the nurse lamely. "I intervened."

The nurse nods and leaves the room, placing her file on the door on her way out. Anya hoists herself up on the bed, ignoring the crinkling of the sheets underneath her bum as she adjusts herself on the cushioned table. She stares around at the objects in the room, at the various posters and such, until the door opens and a familiar woman steps through, pen between her lips and her hair done up in a messy bun as she locks the door behind her.

"Clarke," Anya says softly as the younger woman nods her head up wearily. "I can request someone else."

"We've done this before," Clarke tiredly shrugs, "besides, outpatient is bogged down and everyone is needed there. I'm just here for stitching you up."

"You look exhausted," Anya comments, earning no response from Clarke, who avoids her eye-contact as she reaches for her bloodied hand.

"How did you injure your hand?" Clarke asks instead, ignoring her statement. "This cut is deep."

"Clarke--"

"It's Dr Griffin," Clarke sharply snaps, glancing upwards at the older woman with tears in her eyes. "You're my patient and I'm your doctor."

"I'm worried about you, okay? I haven't heard from you in awhile."

"Did you ever consider that there might be a reason for that?" Clarke asks bitterly, wiping at Anya's hand with a bit more force than necessary. Anya winces, but she takes the pain because she can see that Clarke's emotionally distraught underneath all of her seemingly strong barricade of an exterior.
Not wanting to further upset the blonde, Anya remains silent and keeps her head bowed. Clarke stitches her up in silence, avoiding her gaze at all costs.

"There," Clarke gruffly barks out as she releases Anya's hand, "done."

"We need to talk," Anya tells her, bravely deciding to speak about the elephant in the room. "We can't keep going on like this."

"That's just it," Clarke growls as she crosses her arms over her chest. "There is no we, Anya. You and I, we're nothing."

"Just like that?" Anya replies, aghast at the way Clarke is acting. "Clarke, we need to talk about what to tell Lexa--"

"Nothing," Clarke snarls, shoving Anya against the wall roughly. "We're going to tell her nothing because nothing happened."

"Oh for fuck's sake, Clarke. We slept together," Anya mutters in frustration as she shakes her head, "we have to tell her."

"Have you seen Lexa? Have you spoken to her at all, Anya?" Clarke spits out, releasing the older woman. "She's in no position to handle something like this."

"And what happens if she finds out?" Anya asks, crossing her arms. "What about Aden--"

"Aden wouldn't ever do that to his mother," Clarke warns, her brows furrowing in anger. "He told me that he wouldn't tell her. Lexa doesn't need to know."

"Clarke, just stop talking for a minute and think about this from a logistical point of view," Anya pleads, running a hand through her hair as she paces in the small room. Her anxiety is doubling with each second that passes, and she feels like the entire world is about to cave in on her if she doesn't stop moving. "Lexa's not okay. We both know that. I don't know what those bastards did to her over there, but fucking... if I ever get my hands on them... I'd kill them all. Anya's hands curl up into fists as she growls, glaring into the floor as she remembers the complete lack of emotion on her younger sister's face from the day in the park. "But, Clarke, if we keep this inside, she's going to find out. She's in a fragile state and this news needs to come from us, not from anyone else."

"So what do you suggest we do?" Clarke snorts, shaking her head. "Throw her a surprise party and break it to her then?"

"You're being ridiculous, Clarke."

"No," Clarke replies shortly, "you're being ridiculous. You don't understand just how vulnerable Lexa is, Anya."

"Yes I do," Anya snaps back, livid. "I do, because I've been through it myself. She's trying to close herself off and we can't let her. If we do..."

Both Clarke and Anya fall silent with that, fully aware of what would happen if Lexa succeeded on raising her walls. The two women are silent then, each of them wallowing in their own self-doubts and guilt. They look everywhere but in their eyes, unable to accept that they've committed the ultimate betrayal towards the most important person in their lives. The reason that they'd ever even gotten together in the first place is now the one thing tearing them apart.

"Lexa pulled a knife on me a week ago," Clarke breaks the silence softly, causing Anya's head to
jerk upwards. "That's why I called you to find her. I was scared that she was going to do something reckless. She blamed it on a bad nightmare, but I could see it. I've seen your nightmares and I've seen your flashbacks. Lexa wasn't having a nightmare, An. She looked at me and she had no idea who I was. When Mom came by later, she threatened her into leaving." Anya gulps at the admission, feeling even more guilty than before. But then, Clarke's head is nodding upwards, and those glassy blue eyes are meeting her own hazel depths.

"I found a gun under her pillow this morning," Clarke choked out, causing Anya's heart to clench. "She's always hated guns in the house, An."

At this, Anya's stomach plummets. She knows how much Lexa hated the fact that Titus would walk around with his gun, how much it would scare her when she was younger. She remembers holding her baby sister in her arms and humming lullabies under her breath when Titus would have flashbacks and scream at Indra. She remembers all those nights that Lexa spent curled up into her side when they were younger, trying to drown out the sounds of gunshots as Titus had accidentally pulled the trigger and shot Indra's favourite vase. She remembers his screams and his cries, the crashing and the relentless sirens.

It's sadly ironic, Anya realizes with a twist in her gut, that Lexa has become her greatest fear.

"She's a guard dog more than she's my wife," Clarke rasps, the tears spilling over as she glances back up at Anya. "She's not the Lexa I once loved."

Anya remains quiet, only responding with a bare, flimsy nod as she feels her own eyes glazing over. She leans back against the cushioned bed, closing her eyes and trying to compartmentalize her negative thoughts. She can hear Clarke's cries and it tugs at her heart. She knows that none of this would have happened, that they wouldn't be in this mess, if she had just kept her mouth shut when she was supposed to. There was a damned good reason Lexa was the captain.

And now?

Now, she's paying for it.

"I want my wife back," Clarke pleads, her voice cracking as Anya blinks her eyes open to stare at the fearful woman. "I want my Lexa back, Anya."

"I know," Anya swallows thickly as she reaches out to draw Clarke into her arms. She hugs the younger woman tightly, gripping onto her for dear life as the both of them begin to sob, fully realizing that maybe the Lexa that they keep talking about in the past tense is exactly what she is.

Passed.

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January 30th 2014, 15:30

New York Dynamic Neuromuscular Rehabilitation & Physical Therapy Clinic, New York
"Are you sure you don't want me to come with you?"

Lexa snaps her head to the side to see Clarke staring at her from the driver's seat. Lexa doesn't respond with anything but a slight shake of her head before she exits the car and slams the door behind her. She places her hands in her pockets and ascends the steps, glad to be finally rid of the cast around her forearm. Abby had done all the necessary tests possible on her health, and now they were simply waiting on test results. Her physical health seemed to be relatively okay, and there were no abnormalities in her blood pressure or anything to worry about physically. The older woman had mentioned something about an anomaly in her blood-work that required further testing, and that they would need to wait a few more days until they were fully sure that everything could be ruled out.

After she'd been given the go-ahead from Abby, the next step was setting up a rehabilitation session for her arm, shoulder, and knee. That's what brings her here today, walking into a sterile white room surrounded by other patients with newly-recovered bones and muscles. Lexa notices that a good majority of them are teens, all around Aden's age. Some of them look bored out of their minds, while a few of them look rather anxious. After assessing the exits and recounting the number of people in the room, Lexa analyses the best place to sit. She finds a seat nearest to a window, but also not too far from the door.

"That's a cool scar, where did you get it?" A young male voice pipes up from beside her, causing her to flinch. She looks to the side, only to be shocked.

"Kareem?" Lexa asks, her jaw hinging as she hears everyone in the room suddenly go quiet. The boy from her imprisonment camp is there, staring at her with a knowing, sadistic smirk. Beside him, his mother sits, her arm curled around his shoulder as she stares at her with anger in her dark eyes. Looking up, Lexa notices how they have all turned to stare at her, their eyes blank and cold. As she glances between each person, she watches their faces transform into the villagers from the attack, their bodies mangled and broken from the airstrike. Some of them are missing limbs, others are missing their jaws or eyes.

"Stop," Lexa whispers as she presses herself further into the seat, closing her eyes so that she doesn't have to see them. "Stop, I didn't mean it."

"Ma'am?"

"Stop!" Lexa screams out as she stands abruptly, her chest heaving as she slides her hand to the back of her waist. She opens her eyes and stares at each person with rage. She fishes out her gun and primes her finger over the trigger. She cocks back the gun and keeps it pointed on the woman in front of her, who's face has now transformed into her own reflection. She does nothing, however, but continue to stare at her, as if goading her to do it, to pull the trigger.

Unable to take it anymore, Lexa does exactly that.

"Ma'am!"

Lexa snaps her eyes open to see a worried nurse kneeling at her side. Beside her, Clarke is standing next to Abby. Frowning, Lexa looks around at her surroundings, realizing that she's on a linoleum floor. Her head hurts as she struggles to sit up. The nurse and Clarke help her back into a seat, but Lexa remains to be confused. Abby pulls out a small flashlight and shines it into her eyes, causing Lexa to flinch and turn her head away, growling under her breath.

"You zoned out," Clarke whispers, taking her hand. "You were unresponsive for like
fifteen minutes, Lexa. What happened?"

"Where are we?" Lexa answers her question with one of her own. "Are we at the clinic?"

"No," Abby replies as she stands up. "You're at the hospital. You were about to leave with Clarke for the clinic and you just stopped in the middle of the hall. Next thing we know, you're seizing up and hitting the floor. After your appointment with your therapist, I want to send you in for some CT and PET scans. We've already got your fMRI results, but I want to know if there's some sort of brain damage that might have happened as a result of an untreated or missed injury."

"I'm fine," Lexa growls as she waves the older woman off, "I told you all that I'm fine."

"You collapsed, Lex. Something's not right," Clarke pushes, her voice growing weaker as she clings to her lover. "Please, just listen to Mom."

"I believe that you may have something called Non-Epileptic Attack Disorder, in which you go through events that appear to be seizure-like, but are not technically seizures. It's typically seen in more advanced forms of PTSD and GAD, both of which you suffer from immensely. Your panic attacks and flashbacks take on a completely different form," Abby explains slowly, crossing her arms over her chest as she frowns, before turning to the nurse. "I want a long-term EEG scheduled. Appointments once a week at least." The nurse nods and bounds off down the hall to set up the scheduled time for Abby's patient.

"Ms Woods?" A deep male interrupts them, and Lexa looks over to see a tall, dusty-haired doctor staring at her. "Your physiotherapist is here."

"Ah, good. I was glad she was able to make it," Abby responds for the soldier, flashing the doctor a smile. "Now come on, Lexa. This doctor doesn't like to wait." Lexa scowls as she's nudged towards the other end of the hall where her new doctor awaits. They walk in silence, with Clarke trailing a few steps behind. Lexa keeps looking from side to side, half-expecting to see the faces of the people she passes transforming into the many people that she's killed.

Luckily, her nightmares are kept at bay for a short time.

Abby leads her to a room, nodding for Lexa to take a seat. "Just wait here, I have to talk to Clarke quickly. The doctor will be with you shortly."

"Alright," Lexa says as she takes a seat, her eyes still shifting around the room to get a better look at her surroundings. She glances out through the slits in the window to see Abby talking to a distraught Clarke. They're in the middle of what looks to be a heated discussion when suddenly the two of them stop talking and turn around to see another woman in a white coat approach them. She shakes Abby's hand and then nods to Clarke, who also shakes her hand.

A part of her can't help but flare up with jealousy as she watches Clarke smile and introduce herself.

"She's pretty hot," her reflection chuckles, looking up and down at the curve of the young doctor's ass. "No wonder why Clarke was mystified."
"Lexa," Abby cuts in, drawing the soldier away from her thoughts. "Did you hear anything that I just said?"

"No," Lexa mutters in frustration, eyeing the other woman warily. "Who are you?"

To her credit, the woman just laughs and extends her hand gingerly. "I just so happen to be your physiotherapist."

Lexa eyes the hand and then looks up at the other woman suspiciously. Abby sighs, rubbing her brow as she watches their interaction, or lack thereof.

"No handshake? That’s okay, we’ll get to know each other soon. We have quite a long time planned together considered the trauma you’ve been through, Major Woods.” The woman's voice is polite, her tone indicating that she takes no offence to Lexa's reluctance in shaking her hand and formally introducing herself.

Abby sighs again and nods to Lexa, an encouraging smile splayed out on her face as she palms the doorknob, almost seemingly eager to make her exit and join her daughter in the hall. Lexa tenses, but the doctor shakes her head, indicating that she has no choice. Abby simply nods to the physiotherapist and smiles.

"I’ll let you two carry on,” she says with another curt nod, “best of luck to the both of you."

"Thanks,” Lexa mutters, looking down to her feet. "I guess."

The doctor leaves the two women alone, causing a tense silence to erupt. After a while, Lexa nods her head up and raises her brow at the physiotherapist.

"You still haven’t told me your name,” Lexa grunts out rudely. The woman laughs, grinning.

"How unprofessional of me,” she says, smirking. “I guess we’re not off to a good start, are we?"

Lexa doesn’t laugh at her joke. She simply maintains her icy glare.

Unnerved, the physiotherapist just smiles again, extending her hand once more.

This time, Lexa takes it, however begrudgingly. The other doctor's grip is firm, strong -- professional. She can sense the assertiveness in the firm squeeze that the woman delivers to finish off the greeting. Lexa’s eyes flit downwards and she suddenly notices the metal prosthetic sticking out from under one of the pant-leg of the woman’s slacks. Lexa looks back up to see the therapist grinning at her with a mirthful expression, having noticed that Lexa’s made the connection by the state of her widened green eyes. The physiotherapist keeps the smirk planted on her face, bemused by Lexa's reaction to her prosthetic leg.

“IT’s nice to meet you Major Woods,” the woman says charmingly, “my name is Dr Raven Reyes.”

Chapter End Notes

So now the story is starting to slow down a little in terms of dates and such, because I want to really go in depth in the characterization and everything. There is still a lot left unsaid, but I can assure you that Lexa will be getting proper help, but her family is still adjusting to the idea of her having PTSD and being alive that it's a struggle for them to
figure out what the best course of action is to take in helping Lexa. Keep in mind that this is a new experience/adjustment for everyone, so the balance is way off kilter and it's all going to take time.

I've made a master post for this story, which includes the link to the Spotify playlist as well as the multiple sources that I've used to gather more information about certain topics as they go through. Quite a lot of them are from my abnormal psychology course-pack, but most of them should have accessible links! If you attend a post-secondary institution with a library that can grant you access to the NIMH or to the APA, then you should be able to read all of the articles I've listed in the sources section -- if not, the abstract/summary is free.

Thank you for the wait and for the comments. You guys always make me feel so inspired to write and I'm completely in awe (and forever will be) about the responses you guys leave. The discussions are amazing to me because I love each different opinion and seeing how you guys differ is awesome. It gives me a different perspective that I might have missed before when writing and it makes me want to keep researching and doing my homework onto these topics so that I can provide you guys with more content to discuss! Please don't stop leaving those reviews. You guys are the best and you really have taken this story to a whole other level.

Much love, xx.
Silent Treatment

Chapter Summary

Raven starts therapy, Abby and Clarke discuss Lexa's test results, Anya begins to spiral, and Lexa asks a question.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: ALCOHOLISM, MENTIONS OF SUICIDAL THOUGHTS/SELF-HARM, AND PTSD FLASHBACKS.

Here's a gift during the ever-dark midterm season (that's somehow still on-going). This chapter is sensationally dark and long (I think just over 15K words) but the next one is longer. Things are starting to set into motion. The first section is a little neuroscience heavy, and I apologize for that -- a lot of writing this story actually helps me study so feel free to gloss over the tracer names and the different cortical structures, lol.

Anyways, I hope it's worth the wait! The next chapter has a lot more things going on. This is just the precursor to the shit show, I guess. :)

TRIGGER WARNINGS WITH CUES:

In the THIRD section, there is a MENTION OF SUICIDAL THOUGHTS/SELF-HARM that occurs after Dr Jarod says, "she's dissociating, Anya..." and continues until Anya says, "what if I don't deserve help?" Not severe, but mentioned.

In the SIXTH section there is a PTSD FLASHBACK starting at the beginning of the section and goes until when Lexa says, "I thought I locked the door". This isn't terribly graphic, but it is a bit hard to digest.

In the SEVENTH section there is ALCOHOL ABUSE which goes from the beginning of the chapter up until Kane says, "want to tell me what's going on?" Again, not graphic. Just a forewarning in case it's a trigger for anyone.

The song in the quote is, "Jupiter" by Eden.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

'cos its so hard out on the sidelines
when i just want to blow this ten miles wide
and i cant help but keep on thinking
these thoughts are gonna bury me alive
but this jealousy won't get the best of me
maybe if i just had more patience i could be
so far from here and the stars they'll guide me on
(when i falter…)

and everything comes crumbling down
'cos it does and it will it's not heaven
but we got so close in the aftermath this vacuums' lifeless
the afterglow makes the past so inviting

January 30th 2014, 15:45
Maimonides Medical Centre, New York

"So," Raven says as she takes a look at the clipboard, "you've got quite the file, Major."

"Yes," Lexa replies coolly, not taking her eyes off the clock on the wall. Raven hums as she scribbles something down before glancing back up. She notes the emotionless, dull gaze of the woman before her and sighs. She's seen this look so many times before, herself included. She looks back down to the chart.

"Let's see what I'm working with here," she decides to say. "Broken left radius, torn left-rotator cuff, shattered right knee cap, torn right patella-femoral muscle, fractured sternum, splintered clavicle, dislocated left index and middle fingers, six broken ribs, ripped left-deltoid muscles, ripped left pronator teres and brachioradialis, loose vastus medialis… well I guess I could go on and on considering the length of your chart. You went through the ringer."

"I suppose that's the reward for being tortured," Lexa snorts nonchalantly, eyes hard and cold. Raven doesn't even stutter.

"Gallows humour," Raven muses as she reaches into her pockets for some gloves before nodding at Lexa to take off her shirt. "I understand."

Lexa complies silently, lifting off her shirt to reveal the multiple scars and stitched bubbles from the countless surgeries she'd needed in order to repair the damage from her years away. Raven doesn't bat an eyelash as she steps forward and gets a good look at the different, still-healing bruises scattered among the scars. She steps around the bed to look at the mess of scars and burns on Lexa's back, noting the scar that looks more like a branding mark.

"It's a lot, I know. I can't cover them," Lexa says quietly, almost embarrassed. Raven's brow perks at
"You know," Raven says as she steps around the table and reaches for the clipboard again. "When I was gone, I blamed myself too."

"Excuse me?" Lexa asks, cocking her head. Raven takes the pen in her hand and reaches down to tap it against her prosthetic.

"I was a POW in a Taliban camp decades ago. I was a systems engineer working on some faulty RGM-84 Harpoon Missiles when they attacked our base-camp. Killed my entire squad and captured me because I knew how to build shit." Raven discloses the information like it's nothing to her. She clears her throat and sets the board down, crossing her arms over her chest as she stares at Lexa with a blank expression. "They tortured me for information I didn't have for a year, and then the entire camp was blown to bits by the same missiles I'd been working on, and the rubble crushed my leg. They gave me a medal and an honourable discharge."

"Don't look at me like I'm a charity-case," Raven says as she shrugs, glancing down at her leg. "I got captured, lost my leg, but it didn't kill me."

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, I suppose." Lexa says the words with a bitter scoff, glancing down. Raven shakes her head, chuckling sadly.

"No Major," Raven says as Lexa looks back up, "what doesn't kill you fucks you up mentally."

Lexa stiffness at this, causing Raven to give her a sad smile of understanding. Lexa looks down to her hands, her breaths feeling harsher as she struggles to centre herself. She can still hear the screaming in the back of her head, the sight of blood and body parts spraying everywhere. The images are haunting, and despite wanting to deny it, she knows that there's some truth in her physiotherapist's words. She's just trying to protect herself and everyone else.

But what happens when the thing that she's trying to protect everyone from is herself?

"Listen," Raven says, snapping the soldier from her thoughts. "Why don't we get to work? I think we can get you fixed up in no time."

Lexa just nods, stowing away her emotions and blinking back the tears as she straightens her back so that Raven can examine her. Raven heads over to the windows and shuts the blinds before telling the older soldier to take her pants off. Another mess of scars and an uneven bump protrudes over her right kneecap. Lexa looks down at it with a frown, but Raven just chuckles again, easing some of the tension in the room.

"Yours looks far better than what mine did when I got out," Raven says, flashing Lexa a disarming smile. "You're lucky to be getting Abby to work on you in a few weeks for the reconstruction surgery. She's the best doctor or surgeon anyone could ever ask for, honestly. My last dude fucked up my amputation and I had an infection for a few months. They thought I was gonna die, but Dr Griffin saved my life. You lucked out on your mother-in-law, and your wife." Raven adds a wink at the end, which causes Lexa's insides to curl up slightly. Raven notices the discomfort and quickly adds, "I'm not interested in her, don't worry. I'm not like that. I'm more of a hit it and quit it kinda girl. It's the best way to cover up the whole 'I'm single and ready to mingle' front for the relatives."

After some thought about what she's just said, Lexa nods and glances back down at her knee. She can feel the thrumming in her chest from her blood pumping wildly as she still struggles to adjust to
her surroundings. Her hands are clammy and she's feeling like there's not enough oxygen in the room. She closes her eyes and focuses on small, even breaths, until the wave of anxiety and nausea passes. After opening her eyes, Lexa takes another deeper breath, trying desperately to ignore the way she can see her ribs being pulled taut against her skin with each intake of air. She looks back up to her patient physiotherapist.

"Alright, stand up for me?" Raven says as she sets aside the clipboard again. "I want to test your motor skills and your balance."

Lexa stands, still a little wobbly on her right side from her knee. Raven can see that she's trembling lightly from the exertion and she scribbles something down on her notepad before nodding upwards and gets Lexa set up on a variation of different physical tests in order to gauge her response times. Some of them are difficult, but Raven admires the way Lexa pushes through each and every one of them, despite their difficulty in completion.

"Good," the physiotherapist says after she's done all the necessary tasks. Lexa sits again, trying to not show how exhausted she is. Raven finishes writing something down on her notepad before she gives the older woman the go-ahead to get dressed again. As Lexa slips on her shirt, she parts her mouth.

"How did you end up as a physiotherapist?" She asks the question in a soft voice, gently disturbing the silence. Raven nods her head up and smiles.

"I felt worthless and needed something fulfilling. I was an alcoholic for a long time, and that only made things worse considering my mom was like that. I had barely any support, so I decided to reach out to a Veteran's Hospital. They gave me some guidance and suggested I should go back to school. I breezed through engineering when I was younger, so I decided to do the next best thing. Dr Griffin actually gave me my first residency here," Raven says with a smile, placing her pen inside of her coat pocket. "She saw that I was making a change for myself, and after having seen me in my low moments, supported me even more."

"So it's possible to get better?" Lexa echoes softly, the words raw and shaky as they leave her lips. Raven's gaze softens.

"Of course it is," Raven tells her with a small smile, "it just takes hard work and dedication. That's pretty much the entire soldier-life, though."

Lexa just nods, thinking about what the physiotherapist had said. She continues to digest their conversation as the door knocks and opens to reveal Abby and Clarke. Raven walks over to them and starts talking in a low voice, but Lexa's eyes are trained on Clarke's reactions. She can see how shocked and scared her wife looks, and each time Raven says a new thing, her eyes widen and glisten brighter with tears. After awhile, Abby and Raven nod, before the former woman enters.

"How are you feeling, Lexa?" Abby asks in a maternal tone. Lexa stiffens, her walls going back up in a matter of seconds.

"I'm fine," she replies shortly, hardening her gaze as she watches her reflection step around Clarke and come to stand at Abby's side.

Tell her the truth, her reflection goads in a sick chuckle, you know that you want to. Tell her about me, about how fucked up you are.

"Lexa?"

"What?" Lexa snaps as she blinks up at the older woman. "I said I'm fine."
"I asked if you were ready for your scan," Abby says slowly, trying to not let the confusion drip into her voice. "Lexa, that's the second time you--"

"I was tired," Lexa says with a shrug before stumbling off the bed. "Come on, let's get this over with."

She brushes past both Clarke and Abby, but nods her head up at Raven. The younger woman eyes her with an unreadable expression, but offers her hand regardless. Lexa hesitates for a moment before she extends her hand and shakes it, promptly thanking the physiotherapist and telling her that she'll see her for their next appointment at the clinic instead. Abby then leads them about of the room and down towards the elevators so they can get to radiology.

"Lexa?" Clarke's soft voice peeps out. "How was Raven?"

"Good," Lexa replies with a feigned smile that Clarke easily sees through, "she's good. I feel good. It's all good."

The elevator doors slide open as the three women make their way down the hall towards the imagining ward. Abby speaks to the secretary at the front for a few minutes before leading Lexa to the change rooms so that she can get into a gown and remove her belongings. After prying off her clothes and setting any metal devices in the basket, she follows Abby into the PET scanning room. She gulps as she looks at the machine with the cylindrical opening with hesitance.

"Alright, go lay down on the bed. I'll grab the injection with the tracers," Abby says, moving to the other end. Lexa's brows jerk upwards in surprise.

"Injection?" She hisses in a defensive tone. "I don't want drugs--"

"No, no." Abby is quick to turn and place her hands on the shoulders of the rigid woman. "No drugs, Lexa. It's a radioactive tracer that will map out different neural activation points in your brain. It's straightforward and painless, I assure you. PET scans are completely non-invasive. I can assure you there is nothing to worry about, sweetheart." Lexa's lips are curled up in a snarl, but Abby remains firm. Sighing, Lexa growls and looks away.

"Hurry up," she mutters as she trudges over to the bed and lays down, staring up at the ceiling. "I want this to be over with."

Abby returns in a matter of moments with the injection. Lexa eyes it suspiciously, still tense. "What is it?"

"A radioactive tracer--"

"Specifically," Lexa says in irritation, glaring at the doctor. "I want to know what you're putting in me or else I'm out of here."

Abby frowns at the request and the urgency in Lexa's words, but nods regardless. "Well, there are two tracers. The first is 6-[(18)F]FDOPA, and the other is 6-[(18)F]FMT. Both of these substances will be tracking the dopaminergic activity across your mesolimbic system and your substantia nigra. We just want to make sure that your neurotransmitter levels are equal across the board and that there are no abnormalities to worry about. The CT we will do after will show us the images of your actual cortices and the shapes of the different regions. I just want to clarify that everything is alright. Your chart from Afghanistan didn't show that you had a scan of any sorts due to the lack of resources at the clinic in which you'd been hospitalized." Abby's explanation is slow and patient, but Lexa still looks unconvinced. Before she can protest, there's a slight sting in her arms and Lexa looks down to
see Abby remove the needle from her arm.

"The scans should take around thirty minutes," Abby assures her with a gentle pat to the head, "then we'll do the CT and take a look at your brain."

Lexa just grunts and Abby gives her one last nod before heading over to the glass booth and away from the machine. Once she's inside, her voice comes over the PA, letting the soldier know that they're about to move the bed so that she's inside the tunnel. Lexa sucks in a deep breath, her knuckles gripping the sheet atop her as she's slid into the giant ring. The machine starts to hum and vibrate above her, and she feels her chest concaving with the wave of panic.

"Lexa," Abby's voice comes over the speaker again, "you need to relax, honey."

Lexa wants to talk back, but her voice is strangled. All she can hear from the constant drumming is gunfire, of the village on fire, of the fighter jets flying over head, of the explosions and the mass genocide of an entire town. Lexa flashes her eyes back open to stare at the circular ring surrounding her head, sweat beading down her face as she tries to calm that flight or fight response that is eager to present itself. She counts backwards from a thousand in intervals of sevens, focusing her concentration there than on the hammering sound of the machine working around her.

It feels like forever until the machine is done and she's being pulled out of the circular ring of hell. Abby is there as she trembles upon the sheet, still in a catatonic-like shock as she stares up at the ceiling. Abby calls for her assistant, Jackson, and they help her sit upwards. Lexa trembles harder, her hands and fingers shaking like they're about to fall off. The screams are louder now, and her vision is spotting. Her face goes pale and Abby immediately acts.

Lexa isn't sure where the woman had gotten the pan from, but soon enough, Lexa's lurching up her breakfast into the metal container. Her body continues to convulse uncontrollably as she retches, but she anchors herself to Abby's soothing voice as she rubs her back and eases her vomiting processes. After she's finished ridding herself of her stomach acid, Lexa wipes her mouth and swallows thickly, biting back the bitter and acrid taste in her throat.

"Here," Jackson says as she hands her a cup of water, "rinse and then spit it back out. I'll grab you another glass for you to drink."

Lexa nods and follows his orders before taking the second cup and downing it, shaking her head as a shiver wracks up her spine. Abby soothes her, taking a seat on the bed beside her. Lexa's body is still trembling, but she's not in the same state that she'd been in before. Abby's hands continue to rub up and down in soft, soothing lines until each tremor dissipates and Lexa's left a tired, slumping mess. Lexa leans her head down, placing it in one of her hands.

"Figure out what's wrong with me, yet?" Lexa asks, her voice small and raspy. "Did you find the problem?"

Abby is quiet a moment, before she glances up at Lexa with a small sigh. "Not entirely."

"Not entirely?" Lexa asks, snapping her head upwards to reveal her bloodshot eyes. "You sent me in there and you aren't even sure of what's wrong?!"

"We still need to get further analysis done on the results. It's all very subjective now."

"You just wanted to drug me," Lexa snarls as she stands up, wobbling slightly. "You wanted me to act this way. You did this to me."

"Lexa," Abby says gently, standing in front of her as disarmingly as possible. "Honey, I think that
the noise might have triggered a panic attack--"

"I'm fine!" Lexa snarls as she glares at the doctor. "Why can't anyone just accept that I'm fine!"

"Because you're not," Abby replies sternly, "because you were tortured and left in conditions we can't even begin to imagine. You're not fine, Lexa."

"Fuck this shit," Lexa growls as she palms her forehead again, swallowing down the burbling anxiety. "Just fucking take me to next exam."

Abby sighs, but doesn't bother to argue back with the soldier. She takes Lexa into the other room and sets her up for the CT. Luckily, the anxiety doesn't exacerbate any sort of flash-back like symptoms, but that doesn't really matter. The entire duration, Lexa is dull and lifeless, presenting no emotion whatsoever. She walks out of the exam thirty minutes later with a blank expression and stiffened spine. She makes her way down to the change rooms in silence. After throwing back on her clothes, she joins Clarke and Abby, who are in the midst of a heated conversation, and stares at them with an emotionless expression.

"Am I done?" She asks the doctor calmly, like she'd not just had a fully fledged panic attack an hour early. Abby bites her lip and crosses her arms, nodding to the office space so that they can have a chat. Lexa holds back the urge to roll her eyes as she follows the doctor and her wife into the room, sitting down.

"What is it now?" Lexa spits out the words in annoyance, causing Clarke to flinch.

Abby sighs, pulling out the images of the CT scan and placing them up against the light board on the wall. She takes out a red sharpie from the desk and circles two areas on her brain before putting the pen down. She glances at the soldier with a pitiful expression, one that makes Lexa want to stand up and fight her.

"We've found some abnormality in your mesolimbic pathway, primarily in your thalamus. It seems to be smaller than usual, which could be a result of a TBI. I have no record of an injury on your chart, but it could very well have been a result of them not being able to spot one," Abby explains slowly before glancing at the second red circle. "It also appears that your ventricles, the fluid-filled cavities in your brain, are slightly enlarged, which we aren't sure is a result of inflammation or some form of encephalitis. It could be neither, and it could be both. It's still to early to tell, but from what we've gotten from the PET scan, you've got a lot of dopamine activity in your substantia nigra and not enough in your dorsolateral pre-frontal cortex, which is where it is needed."

"Just tell me what's wrong," Lexa says sharply, ignoring Clarke's wince from beside her. "I don't understand the jargon."

"It means that there could be some sort of neurological disorder that's preventing you functioning properly. It's making you delusional," Clarke says quietly, turning in her chair so that she can reach out and take her wife's hand in her own and squeeze it gently. "It... it could be a result of mental stress and, in your case, a result of extreme and complex PTSD." Lexa tenses, her lip curling upwards as she removes her hand from her wife's grip, shaking her head in disbelief.

"I'm not crazy," Lexa mutters as she stands up, "and I can't believe you will just sit here and tell me that I am delusional. You don't know the shit I've seen."

"This isn't about judgment, Lexa. This is about getting you help so that you aren't hurting," Abby says softly, earning a glare from Lexa as a result.
"I don't need help," Lexa growls at both of them. "I don't need any of this shit. I am home, therefore I'm going to be okay. That's it."

"Lexa, please. Just let us help figure this out," Clarke pleads as she stands up. "I just want you to be okay, baby."

"Then why can't you just trust me?" Lexa demands, stepping into Clarke's space with a low snarl. "Why do you have to question me?"

"Because you're not the same," Clarke whimpers as tears well in her eyes. "You're suffering, Lex. You don't sleep. You hardly eat. You're killing yourself."

"Is that what you want?" Lexa chuckles sadistically, not at all affected by the look of horror that takes over Clarke's expression. "Did you not want me to come back, Clarke? Is that what's the problem here? Is it a problem that I came back when you were so happy believing that I was dead? Is there someone else?"

"Lexa!" Clarke gasps, her voice cracking as tears run down her cheeks. "That's not--"

"Save it," Lexa says sharply, holding up her hand to silence her as she glances over her shoulder to a bewildered and saddened Abby. "Now can I go?"

Silently, Abby just nods and watches as Lexa grunts before brushing past Clarke and exiting to go wait in the lobby. Clarke remains standing, her gaze glued to the floor as she chokes on a sob. Abby rises with a gentle sigh before wrapping her daughter in her arms. She rubs up and down the ridges in her spine, easing out the cries as gently and soothingly as she can. Clarke only sobs harder, shaking her head as she clutches onto her mother with dear-life.

"How do we help her, Mom?" Clarke gasps, crying into her mother's shoulder. "How do I get her to see what's going on with her?"

"I don't know yet, baby. We'll figure it out," Abby coos softly, though her voice is strained. "I promise you, we'll figure it out. I've already sent calls and emails out to a few friends I know in John Hopkins. They've got some expert neurologists that are willing to fly in and take a look at her case. We'll find out what's wrong."

Clarke doesn't reply, bare for a nod. They hug it out for a few more minutes before Clarke pulls away to find Lexa in the waiting room.

Abby is left alone, staring at the images of Lexa's brain with desperation.

She'll take anything at this point.

She just can't stand to see anyone suffering anymore.

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February 1st 2014, 11:14

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York
Clarke and Abby sit in the kitchen, sipping their coffees as they watch Lexa sitting with Tris. The little girl is yapping her mother's ear off, telling her the backstories to all of her dolls, while Lexa continues to stare at her like she's a specimen and not her daughter. The look in the woman's eyes is beyond haunting to Clarke.

"We should talk about those scans," Abby says quietly, out of Lexa's earshot. "There's more to it then what I think meets the eye."

"I don't want to consider it," Clarke sighs as she looks down at her coffee, sniffling. "I mean… could what they did to her have changed her that much?"

"We don't know what they did to her," Abby replies, running a hand through her hair, "but whatever they did, it's messed with her on a neurological level."

"Did you hear back from Dr Matthews?" Clarke asks, glancing back up at her exhausted-looking mother. Abby sighs and nods, placing her coffee aside.

"It's possible that Lexa suffered a head injury -- or multiple head injuries -- that resulted in her developing a TBI. It could explain the shrinking of her thalamus and the enlarged ventricles. She's showing less cortical tissue, which, coupled with the results of the PET scan and the abnormal dopamine levels, it could explain--"

"She's not a schizophrenic," Clarke dismisses with a glare, "Lexa's not--"

"Clarke," Abby sighs again, tiredly looking over at Lexa's direction. "Something isn't right."

"It's not schizophrenia," Clarke says adamantly. "She doesn't display any sort of motor movement or speech impairment. Her eye saccade motions are only slightly elevated. There's no physical evidence of her having the disorder. She's just… it's temporary. I think she must be still adjusting to being back home is all."

"It's been over two and a half weeks," Abby replies calmly, "she's not getting better. In fact, I think she's getting worse. I think you know, too."

"Mom," Clarke pleads, "there must be something that we're missing. What if we're overthinking this?"

"Look at her, Clarke." Abby points to where Lexa is staring at Tris with wide eyes and a slightly cocked brow. Her back is straight and she's sitting in a stiffened position, as if ready to move in any second. Clarke gulps nervously, watching as Lexa's head snaps over in their direction, her green eyes bearing into her own blue gaze.

"Raven suspects that it could be something to do with dissociation," Abby replies as she watches Lexa turn her attention down to Tris tugging on her sleeve. Clarke frowns at this, looking back to her mother with a confused expression.

"Raven is a physiotherapist."

"Raven is also a veteran who's lived through torture in a POW camp and has dealt with her PTSD."

"Is that why you chose her?" Clarke asks, scoffing. "Because she was a soldier once? Lexa deserves the best help."
"Clarke," Abby scolds in a tight, clipped tone. "Raven is a masterful physiotherapist. More importantly, she's a fresh face. From what Raven told me, Lexa opened up to her and felt at ease. Her presence is a positive, despite your judgments on her. If anyone will get through to your wife, it'll be her." Clarke seethes in her seat, feeling an irrational jealousy burn at her heart. She knows it's petty, but Lexa is her wife. She wants to be able to help her, not some random stranger.

"What did Lexa say?"

"Come on, Clarke." Abby chuckles the words almost cynically, shaking her head in disbelief. "Don't make me doubt your knowledge."

"Do you understand how hard this is for me, Mom?" Clarke questions in a scalding whisper. "I ask her to open up and Lexa gives me nothing. I don't know how else to help her and I'm a goddamn doctor, Mom. I am supposed to help people. I'm supposed to save them. What kind of doctor am I if I can't even save my own wife?"

At this, Abby recoils slightly. At the sight of the hurt flashing through her mother's eyes, Clarke sighs and hangs her head, feeling guilt wash over her. She looks to the fridge at the photo of her and her father at one of her art exhibitions in high school. She sees the happiness in his bright blue eyes and she aches for him. As much as she loves her mother, Jake was the only one who knew how to get through to her, until Lexa came along and showed her that there is such thing as hope.

"These things take time," Abby whispers gently, wiping away a trailing tear from under her eye. "We can't just jump head first into this, okay?"

Clarke nods, swallowing down her fears and her self-deprecation. "I'm sorry," she whispers to her mother, looking away. "I didn't mean to snap."

"When was the last time you slept?" Abby asks, her maternal instincts kicking back in. "I see you more at the hospital than I should, you know."

"I know," Clarke replies with a sigh, rubbing at her forehead. "I just… being at home… it's…"

"I understand," Abby hums as she reaches over to tug her daughter in a side hug. "Listen, baby. We'll do everything we can. We've got the best team at Maimonides. A few more neurologists are flying in this weekend. I've already got a presentation made upon their arrival. We'll get to the bottom of this. We've also got a military psychiatrist coming in to have a look at Lexa's case. We've got all the resources. Now we just need the time to figure it all out. You just gotta trust me, sweetheart."

Clarke nods again, sniffling as she wipes at her face. Abby smiles at her, tugging her into her arms and rubbing up and down her back as she kisses her daughter's head. The two of them stay there, wrapped in each other's arms until Tris comes running up to them, wanting to get in on the hug action. Abby beams and goes into grandmother-mode, sweeping the little girl into her arms and blowing raspberries into her stomach, causing Tris to erupt in giggles as she holds on tight. Clarke removes herself from the hug to see Lexa standing by the window, staring outside with her hands behind her back and her fingers clenched.

Leaving Tris with Abby, Clarke walks over and gently approaches her wife. She slides her hands around Lexa's waist, happy that the older woman doesn't push her away. She slowly leans her head forward until it makes contact with the boney edge of her shoulder blade. Lexa flinches, but doesn't move away. Clarke closes her eyes, breathing in the scent of her wife before she nods her head forward slightly, pressing a kiss to Lexa's clothed shoulder, holding her closer against her own body.

"I'm sorry," Clarke murmurs gently into her shirt, her voice muffled by the material. "I didn't mean to
act like I wasn't trusting you. I do, Lex. I trust you."

Lexa stiffens again, her jaw clenching as Clarke's fingers weave through the cotton of her shirt.

"I love you," Clarke whispers as she kisses Lexa's shoulder again, "I love you so much, Lexa."

There's an ounce of quietness before Lexa turns in Clarke's arms and her eyes search Clarke's own. The blonde looks up, tears gathering in her eyes as she glances down at Lexa's lips. She whimpers as Lexa's hand comes up and gently covers her cheek. For a moment, as Clarke closes her eyes, she loses herself in the familiar sensation of Lexa's soft fingers trailing over the gaunt line of her cheekbone. She holds back her sob as she feels Lexa's forehead rest against her own gently.

And then, without a second later, Lexa's lips are on hers and Clarke's pretty sure she's caught fire.

She doesn't hesitate to kiss Lexa back, but their kiss is short, fleeting, because Lexa's pulling away and turning around again so that she can stare at the window. Clarke keeps her eyes closed, trying to keep the taste of her wife upon her tongue. Their kiss was short, but in Clarke's mind, it was bittersweet. It was sweet, because after so many days, it was the first time that Lexa actively showed her affection. But it was bitter because Clarke could feel that something was wrong. It was like a stab at her heart, a wrenching thorn in her side, poison running up and down her veins. Lexa kissed her, yes, but the Lexa she kissed wasn't someone she's ever kissed before.

Clarke painfully realizes, as she continues to tether herself to Lexa's rigid body, maybe that her Lexa no longer exists.

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February 1st 2014, 16:50

Metropolitan Centre for Mental Health, New York

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"You don't seem particularly happy today, Ms Woods."

"You don't call me Ms Woods unless I'm in trouble," Anya chuckles dryly as she wrings her hands together, staring at the floor of the office space. Dr Jarod sits across from her, relaxed on his chair as he assesses her silently. Anya takes a deep breath, running her fingers through her knotted hair. She can't remember the last time she's ever felt this distraught, aside from the first year she'd grieved Lexa's death. Her control is slipping and she can feel it.

"Are you in trouble?"

"I don't know," Anya mocks with a rough snort, "am I?"

Dr Jarod is quiet for a few moments before he leans forward, placing his folder on the table and away from them. "I want to talk about Lexa."

At this, Anya's head snaps up and her eyes water. Dr Jarod seems to note her reaction and presses
"I heard that she's alive," he says softly, leaning forwards in his seat. "How have you been dealing with that?"

"What kind of fucking question is that?" Anya laughs bitterly as she hastily wipes away her tears. "I'm ecstatic. My sister is home. She's home and she's safe and she's not dead. I am fucking grateful. She's going to be okay." Dr Jarod arches his brow slightly, but his eyes betray nothing.

"You didn't answer my question."

"Fucking hell, Doc. I'm not in the mood for games today," Anya snaps as she feels her voice cracking. "I'm fine. My sister's alive. I'm fine."

"And your relationship with Clarke?" Dr Jarod asks. At this, Anya visibly blanches. Her stomach twists and she can't keep a croak from breaking past her lips as she shakes her head, licking over her chapped lips. She looks away, trying to control her shaking as she feels her entire body start to fragment and spiral out of control. She remains silent, not wanting to let anything past her walls. She tries to bite back the memories of herself and Clarke, of the last year they've been with each other, falling into this blind trap they'd dubbed as love. She feels sick and disgusted when she remembers Clarke's face when Kane had phoned them.

"Anya?"

"She's gone," Anya rasps out bitterly, her eyes shifting upwards, bloodshot and bulging from her tears. "She's gone, okay? They're all gone."

"Are they gone or are you pushing them away?"

"Fuck!" Anya snaps as she stands, gripping her head in her hands as she paces around the room. She laughs at the doctor through her tears, bitterly shaking her head as she wipes away the salt water trickling down her cheeks. "You just gotta complicate things, don't you? Reach deep and all that shit? Man, fuck you."

Again, Dr Jarod is quiet. Anya stops her aggressive pacing and slumps back down on the chair, her fingers still tightly wound in her hair as she sighs in exhaustion. "I… I just want to help her, but every single time I see her it's like I'm there again, I'm on that battlefield, and I'm seeing her. I'm watching her as she limps towards me, as she takes my gun and shoves it in my hands, as she tells me to go back to the valley. I'm there, and every single time, I can't stop her."

Anya takes a breath, feeling her hands shake as she glances upwards at the blank-faced doctor. "Do you know how much that hurts? To see her and know that she's alive, to be grateful that I didn't lose her, but to know that I could have prevented her from going through everything she went through? Do you know how much it eats away at me to know that she doesn't even want to talk to me? She hates me, Doc. She doesn't want anything to do with me because I left her. I made her a promise and what did I do? I did with it what I do to everything else: I broke it. And now, she's splintering herself away from me and I deserve it."

"Why do you deserve it?" Dr Jarod asks calmly. Anya shakes her head and scoffs, wiping away more tears.

"Because they tortured her," Anya replies sadly, "because of what they did to my baby sister, she's broken. She's here, but she's not here, you know?"

Dr Jarod nods. "She's dissociating, Anya. It's a normal reaction when people go through extreme
amounts of traumatic stress."

"I just… I don't know what to do," Anya whispers as she looks to her palms. "Every time I look at her face, I'm reminded of the failure I am. I look in the mirror and I hate myself. I… I…" Anya sniffles as she chokes up, unable to finish her statement. Instead of speaking, she gulps and shakily rolls up her sleeves to reveal the small, fresh cuts that line her forearms and her wrists. At this, Dr Jarod's eyes flash worringly, which only makes Anya sob harder as she collapses in on herself.

"I look at myself and I want to die," Anya hiccups between sobs, "and I shouldn't even be like this. I didn't go through shit and yet I'm sitting here, whining and complaining like a child who had their toy taken away. My sister? She had her entire life taken away. I have no right to be acting the way I am."

"Anya," Dr Jarod says seriously, leaning forward. "There's one thing we need to get straight. You and your sister are not the same people."

"I know that," Anya seethes as she looks at her hands again in deprecation. "She's the hero and I'm nothing but a coward."

"You cannot draw comparisons to her experiences. Both of you have been through some traumatic things, but they are not comparable," Dr Jarod begins to say as he leans back in his chair and sighs. "The sooner you stop drawing connections and downplaying your feelings, the sooner you will find help, Anya."

"What if I don't deserve help?" Anya growls back. "What if I should just suffer?"

"To serve what purpose?" Dr Jarod asks back. "To provide some sort of compensation to your sister?"

"No…. I just…," Anya says, shaking her head. "I just… I don't know. After Clarke left and Lexa stopped talking to me, I feel like I deserve the pain."

"Why?"

"Because it was my fault," Anya says as she bows her head and closes her eyes, "it was my fault that I let her go. It was my fault that I came home to Clarke with an empty casket. It was my fault that my sister-in-law was forced to raise two kids on her own. It was my fault that I ended up fucking her. It's all my fault."

"Is Lexa aware of your relationship with Clarke?" Dr Jarod asks in a neutral voice. Anya chuckles bitterly, shaking her head as she glances up.

"It wasn't even a relationship," Anya mumbles as she wipes at her eyes, "and no, Lexa doesn't know. I… God… when she finds out…"

"Anya, can I ask you something?"

"When do you ever do the opposite?"

Dr Jarod ignores the jab and leans forward, brows furrowed together in concentration. "Do you love Clarke?"

At this, Anya pauses. She glances up at the doctor and pales. "I… I… love her as a friend. She's my sister-in-law--"
"That's not what I asked."

"Fuck," Anya swears as she runs a hand through her hair harshly. "I don't know, okay? Even if I did, I can't. She's off limits. I should have known better and instead I ruined everything." There's another moment of silence, a meaningful pause as Anya gathers herself together and looks back up to the doctor with sad eyes.

"You wanna know something, Doc?" Anya croaks, her voice cracking again. "I never wanted to be a soldier."

Dr Jarod arches his brow and purses his lips. "Then what did you want to be, Anya?"

"A doctor, oddly enough." Anya chuckles sadly at her response. "I wanted to help people. I wanted to save lives, not take them. Clarke and I were best friends during college and I would always love listening to her ramble about her medical courses. I would listen to her as she told me about how she couldn't wait to work in surgery, to piece people back together and to give them hope again. I wanted to do that. I wanted to travel the world. I wanted to offer every ounce of love I have to give, even if it wasn't ever enough. I wanted to make people smile, to trust, to believe that there is good in the world. I just wanted to help people, Doc."

Anya chokes on a sob as she closes her eyes. "I just wanted to save everyone. To protect them. And I couldn't do any of it."

"And what do you want now?" Dr Jarod asks tentatively, as if he knows the answer. Anya gulps, opening her eyes to stare at him desolately.

"Honestly?" Anya asks. Dr Jarod nods. Taking a deep breath, Anya glances at her hands and then back up at the doctor, her eyes empty and emotionless.

"I want to die," Anya whispers as she starts to cry again, "I can't do this anymore, Doc. I… I need help."

Dr Jarod sighs, rubbing at his forehead as he looks to clipboard and then back at the younger woman. Anya gulps nervously, unsure.

And then, there's a knock on the door.

"I was afraid that it would get to this point," Dr Jarod says remorsefully. "This is starting to leak out of my jurisdiction."

"What?" Anya asks, shuddering as she watches the doctor rise and head for the door. "What do you mean out of your--"

"Dr Jarod," the man at the door greets as the other doctor opens it. "It's always good to see you."

"Likewise," Dr Jarod says, albeit tersely, as he guides the man inside and closes the door behind him. Anya looks between them, confused.

"Who are you?" Anya asks, her nerves completely going haywire as she feels anxiety sweeping over her. "What's going on, Doc?"

"Ms Woods," the man says as he holds out his hand, "my name is Dr Wallace, but you can call me Dante."

"Dante?" Anya asks, arching her brow as she looks up at the man, skeptical of the hand before her.
Dr Jarod offers a tight-lipped smile as he nods.

"Dr Wallace is a psychiatrist, more specifically, he is your military psychiatrist that specializes in post-combat diagnoses," Dr Jarod says as he looks over at the younger woman with guilt in his eyes. "I've been holding off your appointment for as long as possible, but after our last meeting, I had no choice."

"What is this all about?" Anya asks, still nervous. "Why am I seeing a psychiatrist, Doc?"

"Because your symptoms are outside the range of control that psychotherapy has to offer," Dr Wallace offers to respond. He takes a seat in Dr Jarod's desk and pulls out a prescription paper, before taking the manila folder on the desk with her records and glancing over them. Dr Jarod hovers around him, looking visibly upset at the sudden takeover. Anya shakes her head, still confused as to why this man is suddenly taking over her session.

"Why are you here?" Anya asks again. "Why are you looking through my shit?"

"Because you're exhibiting signs of suicidal tendencies and alcoholism, not to mention the recent development of self-harm. You pose a risk to yourself, and I'm here to make sure that you don't bring harm to yourself or to other people," Dr Wallace explains in an almost monotone voice as he flips through Dr Jarod's notes before scribbling something onto his pad and then tearing it off so that he can hand it over towards Anya. "This should help stabilize your mood and sleep."

"Drugs?" Anya says, shocked at the sight of the scribbled prescription. "Three of them?!"

"Zoloft is a common antidepressant given with patients who suffer from PTSD, Ambien is a sleep aid, and Paxil is a good mood stabilizer," Dr Wallace says with a smile. "They will help you regulate your moods, sleep better, eat better, and basically regulate your functioning. It's a common cocktail for PTSD."

Anya looks to the list with empty eyes, her stomach twisting as she glances up at Dr Jarod, who looks remorseful, but nods regardless. "They'll help?"

"Our sessions only do so much," Dr Jarod tells her solemnly, "Dr Wallace has a point. You need something more."

"Take Zoloft and Paxil once a day, and if you want to make it easier, just take all three at night," Dr Wallace says, nodding to Anya. The younger woman looks flustered and on the verge of tears from the paper that's lightly gripped in her trembling fingers. Dr Wallace sighs and leans forward. "Listen, Ms Woods. I know what you may be thinking, but this is your only option right now if you want to get better. You can still do sessions with Dr Jarod, but this will prevent any immediate harm."

"You don't know a thing about me," Anya says, arching her brow up as she glares at the older man. "You haven't asked a single question about me."

"Believe me," Dr Wallace says as he closes the manila file and stands up, giving her another smile. "I don't need to. Farewell, Ms Woods. Godspeed."

Before Anya can even protest, the man is leaving, closing the door behind him. She looks to Dr Jarod, hoping for some sort of recognition, but the man doesn't say anything as he sits at his desk and stares at the file. Anya swallows, feeling tears break past the dam in her eyes and roll down her cheeks in fat drops.

"You're just going to let this happen?" Anya whispers as she sniffles. "You're going to let him--"
"I did what I had to do," Dr Jarod says, still looking away. "Once you start exhibiting signs that could lead to harm against yourself or others, he has to step in. I had no control over this, Anya. I don't think drugs are the best option, but he's right. At this point, you're relapsing back into self-destructive tendencies that could end up being harmful to others and yourself. Intervention was necessary. You… you were supposed to see him once you got back from active duty, but I was able to convince Kane that you didn't need a psychiatrist. It's only recently that I've been put in a position to make this tough decision."

"So you betrayed me?" Anya asks, her voice empty even as it tremors. "You just let me… you let me believe that you cared?"

"I do care," Dr Jarod tells her as he looks up, "but I can't help you anymore, Anya."

"And the drugs will?" Anya asks, scoffing. "Some doctor you are."

"I'm a psychologist," Dr Jarod says with a sigh. "I can't do anything beyond psychotherapy. I don't have a medical degree, Anya. It's out of my hands."

"Fuck," Anya swears as she stands on wobbly knees, "I should have known better. But fuck that, I'm not taking the drugs."

"He'll keep prescribing you until you do," Dr Jarod says as he rubs his forehead. "And he has a point. The drugs could help."

"Bullshit."

"Anya," Dr Jarod replies softly, glancing up. "You've gotta try."

Anya takes a deep breath, her chest aching as she struggles to contain her emotions. She looks at the prescription and then thinks about her sister. If these drugs are the answer to her being able to be there and to help her sister, then fuck it. Wiping away the last stray tear, Anya sighs and nods, ignoring the anxious pit forming in the bottom of her stomach as she pockets the prescription. She gives Dr Jarod another sad glare before shaking her head and opening the door.

In this moment, as she walks to her care and looks at life around, Anya realizes that she's never felt so alone.

"Fuck this," she mutters as she shoves the prescription into her pocket, "I'll do it my own way."

*Just like I've always done it my own way.*

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February 2nd 2014, 11:45

Public School 131, New York

"How long do I have to stay here?"
Bellamy looks up from his computer to see Aden sitting at his desk, angrily glaring at him from over his journal. He rises and walks over, taking a seat on the top of one of the other desks. He glances down at his watch and then looks back over at the seething boy.

"Did you write something down?"

"Why does it matter?"

"Because you can't go unless you write something."

"Since when are you my psychologist?" Aden spits out with a chuckle. "You think you're so great because you went through something similar?"

"No," Bellamy replies as he places his feet on the chair, letting his hands rest on his kneecaps. "I am not in this for a power trip, Aden. It's my lunch hour too."

"Then why do you keep making me do this?" Aden asks, standing with a growl. "I don't need help."

"You've received two complaints from your math teacher, Mr Pike. A third one will go to your parents and then you'll be forced to see someone professional," Bellamy explains gently, his tone neutral and gentle. "I'm doing my best to keep you out of trouble. The last thing I want is for you to be in trouble with your parents."

"What does it matter?" Aden scoffs, crossing his arms defensively. "They barely notice me anyways."

At this, Bellamy's interest perks slightly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," Aden says as he slumps on the desk, "I got one mom who's fucked up in the head from being tortured, and another who thinks that the answer to all of her problems is in talking it out. And I get it, you know? I know that they're trying to help Mom, but she's not the same. She's not as warm or welcoming. I woke up in the middle of the night and she was in my room, just staring at me. I didn't know what to do, and when I called for her name, she asked me who I was and where she was."

Bellamy frowns. On one hand, he's glad that Aden's sharing things with him, but the things that he's sharing are alarming.

"Did she hurt you?" Bellamy asks, his voice turning serious for a minute. "Has Lexa ever hurt you, Aden?"

"No…," Aden trails off, furrowing his brows together as he looks back to his hands. "She's just… different. Tris doesn't seem to notice, but then again, Tris didn't know Mom like I did. I don't even think Tris is old enough to understand anything anyways. I mean, to her, she's just excited her Mom came home. She doesn't know that Mom doesn't have a clue as to who she is, despite how much she tries to hide it from the rest of us. We all know there's something wrong, but we can't tell what it is."

Aden pauses for a second, swallowing down the lump in his throat before he looks up at Bellamy with a broken expression. "I just miss her, you know?"

Bellamy offers him a soft smile and nods. "Yeah, I know."

Aden looks back down to his hands, and Bellamy can see the anger and sadness brewing inside the boy as he withers in his own dark cloud. He knows that Aden needs counselling, something outside of his reach, but he also knows that sometimes counselling doesn't help. He contemplates his options,
trying to figure out what would most benefit Aden, especially in a time as fragile and hard as this. Before he can suggest anything, however, Aden's head snaps back up and his walls are rebuilt.

"Anyways," Aden mutters with a cracked voice, "can I go now?"

Mutely, Bellamy nods and watches as Aden packs up his things and shoves open the door. The English teacher stays sitting at the desk, thinking long and hard about what to do. He's known Lexa and Clarke since they'd been in high school, having been in the same grade as Anya. He hasn't talked to them in awhile, but he knows that right now is not the best time to make an appearance. He knows that Aden needs help, but he wonders just how much Clarke and Lexa know about his problems.

Shaking his head, Bellamy reaches into his pocket and whips out his phone, dialling an old number he thought he'd never ring again.

"Hey Mom," he says as he swallows thickly. "Can we talk?"

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February 5th 2014, 18:00

Wollman Rink, New York

"Come on," Tris whines as she skates around the rink, chasing Anya. "I wanna see you do it, 'Nya!"

"Kiddo," Anya says as she twirls around Tris on the rink, "I doubt I can. I'm older now. I might drop you."

"Pretty please?" Tris says as she grabs at Anya's hand and points to the seating area of the rink where Lexa is sitting. "I wanna show Mommy!"

Unable to resist the pleading look in her niece's eyes, Anya nods and spins her around before picking her up and tossing her in the air. Tris giggles as Anya catches her and the two of them glide over towards where Lexa is sitting. "I wanna show Mommy!"

"Did you see it, Mommy?" Tris asks with eagerness in her voice. "Did you see what 'Nya and I did?"

"Yes," Lexa says in a monotone voice, giving the girl a nod. "You did a great job."

Tris giggles and wraps her arms around Lexa's arm, babbling on about her favourite things to do when ice skating. Lexa listens, despite the look of suspicion that Tris seems to miss in her excited state. Anya watches them both warily, tearing off her gloves as she looks back to the skating rink where Clarke is with Octavia and Lincoln, as well as their daughter Aurora. Aden is skating aimlessly by himself, so Anya gives Lexa a small nod before darting back off onto the ice.
She manages to catch up to Aden in a matter of seconds, gliding alongside him.

"What are you doing here?" Aden asks in a bitter tone, avoiding her eye contact. Anya sighs, looking down.

"I'm worried for you, kid. I know you're not the only one to notice a difference in Lexa."

"Why are you worried for me?" Aden scoffs, glancing up at Anya with angry, tired eyes. "I'm not your son."

The words sting, like a sharp prick of a needle, but Anya shoves down the pain to give him a half-hearted smile. "I know, Ade. I just... care about you."

"You stopped caring about me the day you screwed my mom," Aden snarls as he juts out his chin. He has a way of looking exactly like Lexa when he's upset. Anya swallows thickly and nods, rubbing her hand behind her neck as she bites back her tears and glances over to where Lexa is still sitting with Tris. Her sister looks mildly uncomfortable in the presence of her daughter, and Anya can't help but think back to what Clarke had told her weeks ago, about how Lexa didn't know who she was.

"I'm sorry," Anya whispers as she glances back down to her nephew, "hurting you or Tris or your mothers was the last thing I wanted to do--"

"Then why did you do it?" Aden asks, suddenly skating to a stop as he glares at her. "You could have dated anyone. You could have slept with anyone. And out of all the people in the world, why did you have to pick my mom? She's your sister's wife. How could you have not thought about that and realized how disgusting it is?"

"Because Clarke understood," Anya growls back, the tears stinging in her eyes now. "Because no one understood what it felt like, Aden. Because your mom was all I ever had when I grew up. We were all we had of each other. Clarke... Clarke was the only one who understood that. No one else would have been able to understand."

Aden is silent, his own eyes growing red and glassy with tears as Anya looks down at her skates with a bitter expression. "I screwed up, kid. I know. It's something that I'm good at doing, but this time I took it too far. I know that you hate me, and I'm not mad at you for it. I... I get it. I betrayed you and your mom. I hate me, too."

Aden takes a deep breath and looks away, chewing on his bottom lip as he thinks about a response. Anya sniffs and blinks back her tears as she watches Aden sigh and kick at a lone patch of ice before glancing back up at the older woman with a sad, frustrated expression laden in his light blue eyes.

"Aden!" Lincoln interrupts their staring contest. Both of them blink over to see the bigger man skating over to them with a warm smile on his face and a hockey stick in his hand. "A few of the kids wanted to know if you're interested in a little three on three?" He points over his shoulder to a few of the kids from Aden's class. Among them, Aden makes out Jackson standing with an understanding expression on his face. Aden sighs and shrugs, gliding forwards to snatch at the stick.

"Sure," he says with a less-than enthused shrug, "I guess I could play."

Lincoln watches him glide off before looking back over to Anya with a sympathetic expression. "You okay?"

"Just fine," Anya says as she looks up, hiding the tremble from her voice as she looks over her
shoulder to where Tris is leaving Lexa alone and stepping back out onto the ice. She watches her niece glide over towards Clarke, begging for more attention from her sister-in-law. Clarke laughs and hoists the little girl up in her arms and twirls her around a few times, enjoying the giggles that erupt from Tris' lips. Octavia skates over with Aurora, grinning as Tris reaches out for her with excitement.

"I know it's hard," Lincoln hums, drawing Anya's attention back to her cousin. "I know that you've been trying your best to give them space."

"Lincoln," Anya warns as she eyes him, "I told you--"

"I didn't just lose Lexa the day she died, you know?" Lincoln ignores her protest as he continues, looking over to his wife and child. "I lost you, too."

"I told you that I'm fine."

"Kane told me that you had to see Dr Wallace."

"What?" Anya asks, her brows shooting upwards in confusion. "How--"

"He's worried about you," Lincoln says gently, turning his head so he can get a good look at his cousin. "We all are, An."

"I'm not taking any fucking drugs," Anya mutters as she shakes her head. "I don't want to get fucked up."

"I'm taking them," Lincoln replies with a shrug, "they seem to keep the nightmares at bay. I get to be a father and husband and I don't feel guilty about it."

At this, Anya's mouth snaps shut. Her and Lincoln stay on the ice, just like that, silently watching the people around them.

"How…," Anya breaks the quiet tranquility between them in a soft whisper, "how long?"

"Four and a half years," Lincoln replies in a quiet hum. "It's not ideal, but it works."

"Maybe for you."

"They could for you, too. You'll never know unless you try," Lincoln tells her, glancing back down at his cousin. "I just… I don't want to lose you."

Anya takes a deep breath and shakes her head, skating away from the confrontation. She glides back over towards the seating area, waddling off the ice and onto the bench next to Lexa. Her sister passes her a nod, scooting over to the side so that Anya has some more room. After that, Lexa's head remains trained ahead, watching her wife and kids as they continue to play upon the ice. Anya finishes unlacing her skates before she reaches into her pocket and pulls out a cigarette, lighting it.

"Want one?" Anya asks, offering her a stick as she draws a puff. Lexa eyes the carton before looking up at Anya.

"When did you start smoking?" Lexa deflects the question with one of her own. Anya shrugs, taking another puff from the nicotine stick. Her body hums with the pleasant warmth. She blows out the smoke and looks down at the cigarette with a small, half-hearted chuckle before placing it back between her lips and taking a drag.

"Maybe last week," Anya replies with a shrug. "I'm not addicted, like a pack a day or some shit. It
just takes the edge off. I'm out of pot, anyways."

Lexa nods, not wanting to dwell further on the topic. Anya watches as Tris skates into Octavia's leg, giggling as the other woman leans down and picks her up, peppering her face with kisses and causing Tris to squeal with joy. Lexa grunts, glancing over at her with a small, seemingly-nice smile tugging at her lips.

"You're good," Lexa comments with a small hum, "the last time I remember you skating, you fell flat on your ass and I had to take you to the hospital."

"Oh God," Anya chuckles as she remembers the day, "and I was trying to show off for--"

"Cindy Rockridge," Lexa finishes as she passes Anya a nod. "I remember shoving her down on the ice when she laughed at you for crying."

"The Wonder Woods," Anya replies with a content sigh, "always causing shit together, the two of us."

"Yeah," Lexa murmurs as she looks back to Clarke and Tris skating together. "But... you're also good with them too."

"It doesn't come easy," Anya says with another drag of the cigarette. "I didn't give you enough credit, kid. Being a parent... I don't think it's in me."

"And yet my children love you," Lexa says, raising her brow. Anya's breath stutters, but Lexa's head is turned back to the ice so she misses it. "You're good."

There's a quiet pause between them before Lexa clears her throat and looks back to her older sister. "Thanks for taking care of them. I didn't expect it from you."

"It just...," Anya says as she rubs at her brow and looks back to her niece and sister-in-law, "I wanted to keep my promise. I hope it was enough."

Lexa hums and nods, digesting her answer. Anya takes another puff from the cigarette and blows out the smoke again, leaning forward on her knees as she looks to the corner of the rink where Aden and Jackson are playing hockey. A small smile tugs at her lips when she sees Aden's face lit with excitement as Jackson hands him the puck and he scores on the opposing team. She's glad, despite Aden's obvious mistrust and hatred towards her, that he's still able to have fun and enjoy himself.

"Clarke is something," Lexa says with a lighthearted drawl to her voice, drawing Anya's attention back to her. "Isn't she?"

Anya loosens up a little at the sight of the lazy smile on Lexa's face. "Yeah, she's great."

Lexa nods, looking back out at the sea of people. Anya's just about to take another hit from the cigarette when Lexa's voice cuts back in, teasing and raspy.

"Did you fuck her?"

At this, the cigarette very nearly falls from Anya's lips. She looks over to Lexa with wide eyes, only to see her sister looking in her direction as nonchalantly as possible. The words leave her mind as she simply stares at how Lexa chuckles, like she didn't just as one of the most triggering questions possible. Noting her silence, Lexa just shrugs, nodding her head back over to where Clarke is skating with Tris, the younger blonde nuzzling her daughter's nose as they continue to skate.
"I'd understand," Lexa says with a shrug, "I was dead a long time. People need company."

Anya splutters, struggling to wrap her mind around the idea that Lexa had them figured out. "Lexa, I--"

"Mommy!" Tris' high pitched voice interrupts them as the little girl skates off the ice and into the seating area. Clarke and Octavia trail behind them, with Aurora placed delicately in Octavia's arms. Tris practically barrels into Lexa's legs, huffing from exertion. Lexa smiles lazily down at the girl and pats the space between them, causing Tris to giggle and leap up and sit next to her mother. "Mommy, do you want to get ice cream after this? 'Nya says that it is a Woods family tradition!"

Anya looks away as Lexa arches her brow and smiles wider. "Is that so?"

"Yeah!" Tris beams as she tugs on Lexa's hand. "I love chocolate chip mint. It's my favourite flavour!"

"Tris," Clarke says with a soft tone, "honey, maybe it's time to go home. We can get ice cream another time."

"No," Lexa says, shooting Clarke a disarming smile that causes the blonde to frown in confusion. "If 'Nya says it's a tradition, then we should do it."

Aden skates in, wiping his forehead from sweat as he glances over to his little sister and his mother. "What's going on, Mom?"

"We're getting ice cream," Lexa tells him with a nod, "want some, kid?"

The adults notice the enunciation and look over at Lexa with concern, but the brunette ignores them as she stands, holding out her hand for Tris to hold. Aden skates in, wiping his forehead from sweat as he glances over to his little sister and his mother. "What's going on, Mom?"

"What's happening?" Clarke asks, suspicion dripping in her voice. "Why is she acting like this?"

"She asked me if I... if we...." Anya choke up, still looking down. Instantly, Clarke grabs at her shoulder, forcing Anya to look up at those stormy blue eyes.

"What did you tell her?" Clarke breathes out between gritted teeth. "What did you do?!"

"I didn't say anything," Anya pleads as her voice cracks, "I didn't say anything, Clarke. She just asked me. I think she suspects something."

"Fucking hell," Clarke spits as she shakes her head, removing her hand from Anya's shoulder. "Why did you fucking talk to her about it?"

"Why are you blaming me?" Anya asks, rising from the bench as she stumbles over to Clarke. "We both slept with each other. This is both our faults."

"She's your sister," Clarke seethes and Anya's eyes flash, the older woman rearing backwards like she'd been burned.

"She's your wife," Anya snarls back with a sad chuckle, "we're both in the blame here, Clarke. We both fucked each other. Stop acting like it's all on me."
"Now is not the time to do this, Anya. You don't know what she's going through."

"Then tell me, goddammit!" Anya nearly screams the words at her sister-in-law. "All you've been doing is telling me how she's not ready, about the state she's in, but you're not telling me anything, Clarke. I've been trying to get through to her, to find out how I can help her, but you both keep pushing me away."

"Maybe because that's the best thing," Clarke snaps back, tears welling in her eyes. Anya's jaw falls open a little and her heart sinks as she watches Clarke thread her fingers through her hair. Anya swallows down the lump in her throat, failing to bite back the straggling tears that drip down her cheeks. Clarke takes a deep breath.

"Lexa needs space," Clarke whispers, closing her eyes as she looks away. "I need space, An."

Anya's jaw works once, twice, and then a third time. She doesn't have words, not even a peep as Clarke turns around and walks towards her car. Anya looks down to her shoes and then at the half-burnt cigarette in her hands. She feels her mind's whirling thoughts starting to collapse on her, and she can't seem to piece together even the smallest of feelings. She hears the car ignition turn on and she looks up to see Clarke driving their truck away. The weight of her sister-in-law's words weigh down on her chest, threatening to drown her in her guilt. She reaches into her pocket and fumbles for her phone, but instead, her fingers wrap around a slip of paper.

Butting out the cigarette, Anya pulls out the small slip of crumpled paper and unfolds it, staring at the scribbles on the pad.

Clenching the paper in her hands, Anya hangs her head and starts to sob until the sun sets and the stars come out.

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**Date and Time Unknown**

**Location Unknown**

Lexa stands alone in the burning village, looking at splattered carcasses that litter the streets.

The smell of acrid smoke is burning her nostrils, filling her lungs with bitterness. She looks to the side to see Clarke standing in a pink dress, hovering over an empty grave. She's got a watering can in her hands, gently pouring the liquid out on to the dirt. Lexa looks down to see herself in the same kind of dress, her body free of scars or blood. She looks back up to see that Anya is at Clarke's side, a hand placed on her wife's shoulder as Clarke continues to pour water onto the dirt beside the grave. Lexa watches as Aden steps out from behind a small ridge, dressed in a flowing white shirt and black pants, with Tris holding onto his hand.

Lexa takes a step forward, feeling her toes squish in the dirt as she makes her way over to her family. Clarke and Anya don't say anything as Clarke finishes pouring water into the grave. Aden's free hand takes Clarke's own and squeezes it tight as they all look into the grave with emotionless
expressions on their face.

And then, Lexa looks inside the grave.

Her reflection's body is laying their, eyes glassy and pointed up towards the ceiling as she remains motionless. Lexa feels her breath catch in her throat as she watches Clarke take a handful of dirt and throw it upon her body. Anya follows, with Aden and Tris mimicking her afterwards. Lexa tries to open her mouth and to call out for them to stop, that she's still alive and that she's here, but she can't seem to move, let alone speak. They just keep throwing in dirt without a single ounce of sadness.

Finally, Anya reaches down, grabbing at a shovel and digging into the earth before she begins to pile on more dirt. Lexa watches as she's buried underneath the dirt and weeds as her sister continues to shovel at the earth. Aden winds his arms around Clarke's waist and buries his face into her dress. Tris is clinging to her wife's leg, her gaze glued to the grave. Anya finishes her shovelling and throws the metal utensil down atop the grave before turning towards Clarke.

Her wife nods and Clarke reaches down for Anya's hand, taking it in her own. Her sister nods and turns them away, leaving the grave and Lexa alone.

She wants to call them, to tell them to wait, but she can't.

Instead, she finds herself turning towards the grave, getting on her hands and knees as she claws at the dirt. She grabs at the shovel and screams, tears sliding down her cheeks as she hastily uncovers the dirt, eager to free herself from the pressure of the earth. She hacks at the earth until she finally feels the outline of her body. She throws the shovel away and gets back to clawing through the weeds and rubble until she manages to see those glassy green eyes, staring into nothingness.

And then, in a jarring second, those eyes flicker to her and a hand juts up, wringing itself around her throat.

Lexa struggles for breath as the body rises from the dirt and flips them so that she's being pushed into the grave. Lexa struggles against the grip, more tears sliding down her cheeks as she fights for control. Her reflection keeps her pinned to the dirt, her hand falling away as she slides to collapse upon the other woman's chest. Lexa screams as she feels the dirt caving down around them, covering both their bodies. It falls into her open mouth and stings at her eyes as she struggles. She's screaming, but there's no coherent words coming out. She shoves upwards with her hands, struggling to get some sort of hold on something.

That's when Lexa sees her.

Anya and Clarke stand at the grave, each of them with a handful of dirt in their hands.

They look at her with a blank expression, even as Lexa struggles for breath.

Like she's a stranger.

Lexa screams for help, choking and pleading under the dead weight of her reflection, but neither woman pays her any attention. Instead, they both look at each other before solemnly nodding and throwing the dirt upon the body. Lexa gasps as she feels her breath be sucked from her lungs and dirt piles down her throat. Clarke and Anya turn their backs on her as more dirt covers Lexa, leaving her with nothing but the stench of death and the sight of darkness.

Lexa's body stops fighting and she grows still until her chest takes one final rise.

And then, nothing.
Lexa wakes up with a gasp, nearly flinging out of the bed with the force of the nightmare. She claw at her chest, struggling to catch her breath as she shakes her head and tries to clear the horror from her mind. She stumbles out of the bed and strips off her sweat-drenched shirt with trembling hands. She flings it to the other side of the table with a heave, choking on her breath as she looks over her shoulder at Clarke sleeping soundly in the bed. Lexa goes back and fumbles under her pillow until she draws out the gun. She slides it into the waistband of her shorts and gulps, still feeling on edge from the dream. She hears a soft creak from outside and stalks towards the door, one of her hands going behind her back to grip the handle of the gun.

Opening the door, Lexa nearly jumps when she pads into a soft, small figure. On instinct, she whips out her gun and holds it in front of her as the shadow approaches her in quick steps.

"Mommy?" A soft, female voice asks as Lexa watches Tris step into the light. "Mommy, are you okay? I heard you screaming."

Lexa lowers the gun as Tris steps in front of her, rubbing her brows and yawning. She eases up her breathing and glances up, only to see her reflection staring at her from the entrance to the hallway's bathroom. The vision ducks inside the room and Lexa feels a shiver go down her spine as more cold sweat gathers on her brow.

"Mommy?"

"Ssh," Lexa whispers softly, glancing back down to the little girl. "Go back to bed. I'm fine."

"But--"

"Go to bed," Lexa says sternly, gently nudging the child forward. "I'm fine. Sleep."

"Are you sure?" Tris asks, fear slipping into her tone as Lexa watches the girl's eyes dart down to her gun. "You don't look fine, Mommy."

"Tris," Lexa nearly snarls her name as she kneels. "I need you to listen to me. Go to your room and close your door. Go to sleep."

This time, Tris just nods. Tears are welled up in her eyes as she darts away, sniffling as she runs back into her room and shuts the door. Lexa rises, growling as she cocks her gun and stalks towards the bathroom's entrance, her eyes sharp and looking for trouble as she constantly checks her surroundings. She hears a brush of the wind against one of the hallway windows and she raises her gun, frowning at the small branch whacking at the sill. She lowers the gun and continues her trek. Once she approaches the bathroom, she flicks on the light and throws the gun back up. She checks the windows and the shower curtain, finding no one. Deciding that it isn't enough, Lexa exits the bathroom and makes her way downstairs, being sure to check every window and door to ensure that everything is locked. Each time there's an ounce of noise, she's whipping around and stalking towards the source. She checks the house five times before she retreats back upstairs, still on edge.

Lexa puts the gun back into her waistband as she walks into the bathroom. She closes the door behind her and takes a deep breath, trying to centre herself. She glances upwards and looks at reflection in the mirror. She looks into those haunting, pale green eyes that are sunken and hollow from the horrors of war. She turns on the sink and lets the water run as she grips the porcelain edge...
tighter. She cups her hand under the cool spray and splashes the water on her face a few times, trying to get herself to calm down and to ease her high heart rate. She pries off her bandeau that she’d been wearing to stabilize her ribs, leaving her totally shirtless.

Just as she goes down to spray some more water on her face and neck, there's a click behind her.

Lexa's gaze flicks up to the mirror, surprised to see Clarke standing there with an expression of pure sadness and shock upon her features.

"I thought I locked the door," Lexa mutters, turning her head over her shoulder to stare at Clarke emotionlessly. Her wife gulps, tears in her eyes.

"The lock's been broken for years," Clarke replies in a stuttered gasp, "Lexa…"

It's then that Lexa realizes that Clarke's never seen her shirtless.

Clarke's never seen her scars.

Clarke's never seen her.

Not wanting to talk about them, Lexa turns back around and turns the tap off. She reaches out for the towel and pats her face. Just as she finishes drying up her cheeks, there's soft fingertips trailing along her back, tracing each and every scar. Lexa stiffens in Clarke's grip, her fingers clawing into the soft cotton of the towel. She freezes as Clarke's forehead comes to rest on the one small area of scarless tissue upon her shoulder. Something wet begins to patter against her skin, and it doesn't take long for Lexa to realize that Clarke is crying. Those soft fingers are trembling harder, especially as they trail up towards the burned insignia that Cage had imprinted on her.

"What did they do to you?" Clarke gasps between sobs as she continues to trace over the scars. "Oh God, Lexa… how could anyone do this?"

Lexa remains silent because in the back of her mind, she's desperate for her own answer. She wants to know how, too.

"How… how long were you in there, Lex?" Clarke asks, her hands descending to Lexa's hips so that she can turn them around. Clarke's eyes are bloodshot and glassy as they rake up and down Lexa's face, searching for something that could give her an accurate answer when the only thing Lexa offers back is silence. "How long did they do this to you? How… how did you get out of there?" At this, Lexa's eyes flash and she instantly thinks back to the day of her escape.

She hears the screams.

She feels the blood.

She sees the death.

Lexa finds herself scoffing on the inside at Clarke's question. Her own emotions are a tumultuous volcano, ready to explode. She wants to shove down the burbling guilt and the fear, but she can't. She knows that if she dares to speak, she'll break through every last chink in her armour and be vulnerable. She doesn't even know if Clarke is real, and if she is, if she's even her wife. After everything she's been through, it's so hard to distinguish between her reality and her dreams. She looks back up at her wife, her eyes glazed over in a blank, dazed expression as she takes a step back, removing herself from those warm, soft hands.

And then she wonders the same thing.
How did she get out?

Lexa glances over Clarke's shoulder to see her reflection standing there with the ghost of Kareem and the village's chief. Behind them are Cage and Emerson, looking at her with bloodied, ear-splitting grins. Their bodies are caked in stringy, exposed flesh and blood. The boy's eyes are pale and there are fingerprints around his neck.

Lexus's stomach lurches.

Those are her fingerprints.

"Tell her what you did," the chief speaks in a low, sickening tone. "Tell her how you really got out of there."

Lexa's mouth parts and her lips tremble as she watches another body step in beside the chief. Its mangled and completely unrecognizable from the grotesque flesh and bone that is exposed, but the minute the person speaks through their half-ripped jaw, with blood gushing to the floor, Lexa feels the world stop moving.

"Go on, then. Tell her," Costia's jeering tone seeps into her bones, "tell her what you did to me, Lexa."

"Lexa?" Clarke's voice is concerned now, her hands coming up to hold those ghastly cheekbones in her slightly clammy hands. She pulls Lexa's face back down to her own, watching as Lexa's eyes grow darker with each passing moment. Lexa gulps, fighting off the voices so that she can look at her wife with a blank expression.

Then, she finally finds the words, however choked and strangled as they leave her throat.

"I did what I had to do," Lexa tells Clarke in a low, emotionless tone. She takes a breath before she repeats again, "I did what I had to do, Clarke."

Clarke goes to press for more information, but Lexa holds up her hand. "Not now. Let's go back to sleep."

"Lexa," Clarke pleads, reaching for her hands. "Please… just let me in. I'm not going to hurt you."

"No," Lexa snarls lowly, snatch her hand out of Clarke's grip. "I don't want to talk about it. That's final. I'm going to bed now."

Ignoring the look of hurt on Clarke's face, Lexa pushes past her wife and into the hall. She leaves Clarke dumbfounded and confused, but she needed to do it. She knows, because the minute she's in the hall and away from her wife, she feels the weight of all those deaths bear down on her. They follow her into the bedroom until she's settled. Each of them take a place in the room, watching her and silently judging as Clarke walks back in, eyes bloodshot and glassy from crying.

Lexa doesn't move, bare from a slight shuffle to give Clarke some more room on the bed. She hears Clarke's muffled sobs and she feels her heart ache deep down. She knows how hard this must be for her wife, to feel shut out and left alone, but Lexa can't seem to reign in her emotions. Everything seems to be holding her under, pinning her beneath the dirt and burying her alive like in her dream. She's barely able to function, so how can she possibly even try to talk about her experiences?

Not wanting to prove Clarke's earlier theories of her supposed insanity, Lexa extends her arm and pulls Clarke into her bare chest.
Clarke clings to her, wrapping her arms around Lexa's torso and sobbing into her shoulder as she presses herself as close as she can to her wife.

"I'm s-sorry," Clarke stutters between hiccuped cries, "I'm so sorry, Lexa. I never wanted this for you. I'm sorry, baby. I just want to help. I'm so sorry…"

Clarke continues to apologize amidst her crying, but Lexa stays silent through each and every muffled word. It doesn't take long for the force of Clarke's whimpers to cause her to pass out. Even in her sleep, her wife mumbles her name through high-pitched whines and whimpers. Lexa just stares up at the ceiling, her eyes focused on the one crack that runs adjacent to the fan. She studies it intently, not wanting to look down in case she has to face the memories of those she's killed.

"You can't let her inside," she hears her reflection say as Lexa closes her eyes. "She'll kill you, kid."

With a deep breath, Lexa thinks about her dream, about Clarke's concern, and about the memories.

"It doesn't matter does it?" Lexa whispers as she starts to drift back off into the realm of her dreams. "Not if I'm already dead."

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February 6th 2014, 03:45

Grounders Bar, New York

"Why are you here?"

Anya looks up over the rim of her beer glass to see Niylah looking down at her sympathetically, sadness in her dark eyes. Anya shrugs, looking back into her glass. She's more than a little drunk at this point, but she's not at the point of spilling her guts, both literally and metaphorically.

"Got nowhere else to be," Anya slurs with a chuckle, "mm, s'that a good answer?"

"Captain--"

"I'm not," Anya hiccups as she sways on the seat, "I'm not a captain." She points her finger up at Niylah as she shakes her head. "Not a captain. Not anymore."

"That's not what I heard."

Anya groans and lets her head slide down onto the counter at the sound of that familiar, deep male voice. Niylah sighs and nods to the man as he takes a seat, laying his cap on the table. Anya shifts her gaze over to him before reaching for her glass and downing its potent contents. The man shakes his head and sighs sadly.

"How much have you had?" Kane asks her softly, glancing up at Niylah for confirmation.

"Ssh," Anya chuckles as she lays back on the counter, "I've only had a little."
"I cut her off after the fourth whiskey," Niylah says gravely, glancing at the drunk ex-soldier. "I haven't seen her like this in years."

Kane nods and reaches into his pocket for a fifty dollar bill before sliding it on the counter. Niylah goes to protest, but Kane shakes his head. He pries Anya's slumping body off the stool and half-carries, half-drags her over towards the exit of the bar. Anya stumbles alongside him, swaying upon her feet as she's suddenly exposed to the cool night air. She feels her stomach flip, and she barely has time to warn Kane before she's retching into the snow. The man rubs her back and holds back her hair as she starts to convulse, trembling with each retching heave. Once she's done, Kane places her in the passenger seat of his car before hopping in beside her.

"Want to tell me what's going on?" Kane asks after awhile of them driving in silence. He looks over to see Anya staring out the window blankly. The woman doesn't respond, and she barely offers anything other than a small grunt. Kane sighs, rolling the car to a stop as he sighs and glances at the blaring red light ahead of them.

"You betrayed me," Anya mutters, her voice no longer slurred. Kane arches his brow and looks in her direction, not surprised at the lack of eye-contact.

"What are you talking about?"

"Dr Wallace," Anya says as she finally turns her head to reveal those angered, bloodshot eyes. "You told Dr Jarod about my condition."

"Is that what this is about?" Kane breathes out. "Anya, you know that I would never try to hurt you--"

"Then why?!" Anya snarls as she clenches her fists and slams her head back against the headrest. "Why did you do it?!"

"Because you need help," Kane replies sternly, "look at you, Anya. You're a drunken mess. You've switched from medicinal pot to cigarettes. What will it be next? Cocaine? Heroin? You may think it to be absurd, but I've seen people walk this road. Too many of them, in fact. I won't let you walk it. I won't let you die."

"Why not?" Anya scoffs bitterly, wiping at her tears. "Everyone else seems to be on board with it."

"I know you feel like the world is against you right now," Kane sighs as he pulls the car forwards before taking a right turn. "You're struggling to just breathe, let alone function in the world. People have expectations that you don't seem to be meeting. You feel like a failure and you expect that everyone hates you. I get it. I was there, too." Anya snorts, shaking her head in anger as Kane drives down her street before bringing the car to a halt outside of her apartment's walkway.

"As if," Anya mutters dismissively, "everyone keeps saying that but no one--"

"I was there," Kane interrupts, his voice hardening as he stares straight ahead. "I… I was there when your father died."

At this, Anya pauses. She feels her blood run cold as she looks over at the man, at the small beads of sweat forming above his brow. "What?"

"I stayed with him as he bled out," Kane tells her softly, his eyes drifting down to the steering wheel. His fingers absently palm over the leather as he holds in a deep breath. "He told me to run back to the base-camp, to get to safety, because he was far too wounded to make the trip and with my injuries, I couldn't carry him."
Anya stays quiet, tears silently dripping down her chin as Kane clears his throat and blinks back his own tears. "I told him that I would never leave him, that he was my brother in arms, my best friend. Jaha ran for the hills, saying that he would get him help and that he would rescue us. I waited with your father, holding in his intestines as he bled out before me. He was in so much pain. He suffered for hours until he asked me to end it for him. I… I refused. I couldn't do it. I thought I could save him."

Anya looks away, feeling her insides churn as she hears Kane choke on his words. She closes her eyes, trying not to picture the image of her father blown to bits, clinging to the last tether of life despite how much it had been killing him. She tries to not imagine his cries, desperate and high pitched as the pain succumbed him to nothingness, until he drew his last breath and died. She tries not to picture his dead body, unrecognizable and mangled, coated in blood and betrayal.

"The thing is," Kane says with a low scoff, "we can't save a lot of people. We think that we hold the power of gods in our hands, but we don't. We tempt fate, we walk the line between life and death, and we're expected to just be okay after we come back from seeing so much death. It doesn't work like that, Anya. You're not impenetrable. You're not invisible. You are here, broken and frayed at the edges, but you are alive. But sometimes, that's not even enough, is it?" Anya grits her teeth at the words.

"I made a promise to your father," Kane tells her softly, his voice raw from holding back tears. "I won't let you lose yourself to the war in your mind. If that means that you have to see someone else, to take something else, then so be it. I just can't stand to lose another person I love. You and your sister, you both mean the world to me. I know things are hard right now. More than hard, even. But I'm here. I'm not leaving you. The world may walk out on you, but I never will. Never forget that."

Anya sniffs and opens the car door, not passing Kane another glance before she shuts the door and heads towards her apartment. She unlocks the door and looks over her shoulder to see Kane in his car with his head in his hands, his body shaking as he cries. Anya bites back her own tears as she darts into her apartment, walking up the narrow stairway until she reaches her door. She unlocks it and throws herself inside, collapsing to the ground as she cries.

She doesn't know who she's crying for at this point.

Her father? Lexa? Clarke? Herself?

Does it even matter anymore?

Shaking off the tears, Anya trudges into her kitchen and pours herself a glass of water. She stands there for a few minutes, glancing at the sun beginning to rise from the window sill. Her fingertips grip onto the counter as she regulates her breathing. Her mind is heavy and her heart feels numb, but she knows what she has to do. With a reluctant grunt, she tears herself away from the counter and walks over to her medicine cabinet. She swings it open and looks at the three orange bottles.

"You do what you gotta do," Anya murmurs as she reaches for the bottles and takes a pill from each of them before filling up her water again. She stares at the white tablets, feeling sadness creep into her lungs and impair her breathing. She closes her eyes and centre herself, pushing away all the self-deprecating thoughts.

"Well," she mumbles as she takes the pills in her hands and opens her eyes again, "let's see if it's enough."

She downs the tablets and shakes her head to ward off the bitter taste. She strips out of her jacket and boots and trudges upstairs to her bed. Sliding the blinds shut, Anya creeps into her bed and grabs at
her phone. She shoots off an email to her superior, letting her know that she's taking a sick day and won't be able to come in for her shift at the clinic. Shutting the device down, Anya draws the covers up to her chin and stares up at the ceiling with glassy eyes.

The whole world rises with the sun and yet, despite everything, Anya can't help but feel like she's falling.

Down.

Down.

Down.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone just needs a million hugs, let's be real.

I am loving these comment sections, y'all. All of your opinions are great and I appreciate them a lot. Just one thing, though, while I respect your desire to "ship", this story isn't one in which the "shipping" is at the forefront. Guest user coll put it quite well, that if you are a hardcore Clexa fan that can't handle them getting together and having the happiest ending possible, this story isn't for you. I've said it before and I'll say it again, this story is a dark and intricate piece of work that won't be suitable for everyone. I am perfectly okay if you decide to drop it and pick it up when it's finished, or not pick it back up at all. Your health and safety comes before any story. I just hope you guys know that I hold no judgement against anyone who chooses to leave this story. It's 100% understandable. Just remember to be respectful and kind to one another when expressing your opinions. It's a sensitive topic for some!

Please also feel free to let me know if there are any trigger warnings that I might have missed (considering it's like 2am over here and I'm a little sleepy) and I will for sure add them to the chapter notes. As previously mentioned, your health and safety comes before any fiction, and if something doesn't sit right, hit me up and I'll tag it! :)

Cheers to all of you that are sticking through with this shit show, it means the world. I hope that the chapters are worth the pain and angst. We'll be getting a break in a chapter or two, and things won't be as dark (but still dark). All of your feedback and responses/asks on tumblr are amazing. I will answer them after I am done my papers and midterms, but feel free to send me asks/messages. I will definitely look at it, but responding might take longer :P

Much love, xx.
Homeostasis

Chapter Summary

Tris is questioned at school, Lexa has her first panic attack, Anya tries to hold it together, Abby tries to make some progress on finding out what's wrong with her daughter-in-law, and Clarke stumbles upon something horrifying.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: ATTEMPTED SUICIDE/SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, PTSD FLASHBACKS, AND ROUGH SEX.

HOLY. This chapter is a doozy, y'all. It's a lot heavier than the last couple not because of content, but because we're now beginning to see the effect Lexa's mental health is having upon the rest of the family. It gets rough, there are arguments and lots of dark themes, but hopefully nothing far too heavy. No more super-heavy neuroscience/medical jargon from here on out -- it was only in that previous chapter, because it was necessary to point out how essentialized Abby and Clarke's perspectives were when it came to getting Lexa help. They wanted to target her illness at the neurobiological level, which isn't necessarily bad because there is some TBI evidence, but it still ignores the psychosocial and environmental factors that attribute to Lexa's abnormal behaviour. That's the only reason why there was a shit ton of stuff regarding the neuroscience behind schizophrenia and Capgras, etc. This chapter delves more into people's perspectives on Lexa, so it's kinda a filler? Idk.

Let the foreshadowing finally unfold. A lot of past hints are starting to make sense now.

TRIGGER WARNINGS (WITH CUES):

In the SECOND section, there is a PTSD FLASHBACK that involves mild violence, blood/gore, suicidal thoughts, and death. It starts from "silence answers back" and goes until Lexa says, "please just make it stop". Not that graphic, but just in case.

In the THIRD section, there is an argument that happens between Clarke and Lexa, which may be uncomfortable for some people to read. It lasts the entire section, so if you feel uncomfortable about domestic yelling, don't read.

In the FIFTH section, there is mentions of BLOOD/GORE and DEATH, and it starts from "Say again?" and goes until Kane saying, "Lexa?" Not that graphic, but again, a warning just in case.

In the EIGTH section, there is a ROUGH SEX scene. This goes from Lexa saying, "I want you, Clarke" to the end of the first ===. THIS SECTION MAY BE UNCOMFORTABLE TO READ SO PROCEED AT YOUR OWN DISCRETION. It's not a rape scene, but the sex is rough and could potentially trigger someone who can't read rougher, dubiously consensual sex (although they do both consent to the act during the section, it may not seem like it to some). This one is graphic.
Tris sits quietly at her desk, drawing on her workbook as the ambient noise of the children around her chattering block out her thoughts. She's sketching random drawings, deciding that she doesn't particularly want to involve herself in communicating with the other kids. She keeps her attention on her books, humming a slow song to herself as she reaches for the colour pencils on the table. She sees something flash out of the corner of her eyes and she jumps involuntarily.

"Tris?" Her preschool teacher, Mrs Michelle, calls out her name sweetly. Tris relaxes and forces a smile, nodding shyly at her.

"Yes, Mrs Michelle?" She replies quietly, using her arm to cover up her drawings. The teacher looks
at her with a frown, and Tris hopes she's not in trouble. She doesn't want her two mommies to fight over another thing. She tries to smile again, but Mrs Michelle looks concerned with her drawing. Did she draw something wrong?

"Tris, honey, can you come with me? I want to talk to you in the hall, please." A few of the other children look over at her in confusion. Tris gulps in fear and prays that she's not in trouble as she slides off her chair and closes her workbook. Her teacher picks it up and puts it under her arm before turning and heading towards the door. Tris follows the older woman with her head bowed, anticipating the punishment immediately. As soon as they're out in the hallway, Mrs Michelle closes the door.

"I want to talk about your drawings," Mrs Michelle says sweetly. Tris perks her head up, hopeful. Maybe she isn't in trouble after all.

"What about them?" Tris asks, her voice wavering slightly. Mrs Michelle kneels before her, taking the book from under her arm and flipping open the page to the most recent drawing. Tris' heart aches as she looks at the sketch, feeling tears well in her eyes as she looks away from Mrs Michelle. She crosses her arms over her chest and pouts. Mrs Michelle only sighs and extends her hand to lightly rub her shoulder. The touch makes Tris flinch and tense up, causing Mrs Michelle to frown again.

"Honey," Mrs Michelle whispers, "can you tell me what this drawing is about?'

Tris looks back down to the drawing of the sad girl, hiding in the closet. She stares at the roughly shaded door that's open to reveal the monster with angry eyes and sharp teeth. There's a scared face on the little girl, and tears running down her cheeks. There's a lot of black, mostly because Tris didn't want to use any other colours. She looks to her teacher and shrugs, feeling her stomach flip and her hands grow sweaty again. She doesn't understand why her body reacts this way. It leaves her feeling icky on the inside. She tries to avoid the older woman's gaze, but she fails as soon as those gentle hazel eyes meet her own water green gaze.

"I drew a girl who's scared of monsters," Tris says simply, shrugging again. "Is it not a good drawing?"

"No, sweetie, it's a wonderful drawing." Mrs Michelle's voice is encouraging, causing Tris to smile slightly. "I was just wondering what kind of monster this is."

"It's a human monster," Tris says as she points to the monster's long brown hair and sharp teeth. "She's like a werewolf. She wants to eat the girl."

"Okay," Mrs Michelle says as she looks at the drawing. "Tris, can I ask you something?"

Tris nods.

"Why did you want to draw this picture?"

Tris scrunches up her brow, confused at the question. "I don't know, Mrs Michelle. I just did."

Mrs Michelle is quiet for a few moments before she looks back up at the little girl. "Honey, are you afraid of something?"

Tris gulps, her hands growing even more sweaty. It takes awhile before she can hazard a small nod.

"What are you afraid of, Tris?" Mrs Michelle asks, her voice softer than a whisper. Tris doesn't say anything, aside from another gulp. She feels her stomach flip again, and for a second she feels sick. She can't seem to find the words to answer her teacher, but luckily Mrs Michelle only gives her a
soft, understanding smile.

Without even knowing it, Tris gives her answer in the form of watery green eyes and trembling hands.

February 7th 2014, 02:10

Clove Lakes Park, New York

She's running.

She doesn't know what from, but she's running, and she's running fast.

The night air is cold and chaffing her skin, but Lexa only continues running quicker and harder. She pumps her arms and ignores the low burn of her muscles as she pushes them to the max. She darts between the snow-covered trees on the trail, her breath misting in the air as she jogs down the riverbank. There's no one there besides her, the park quiet and still in the early morning air. There's the faint sounds of cars driving in the background, but other than that, it's silent.

Lexa hates the silence.

She comes to a slow walk before stopping, hands clasping her knees as she struggles to regulate her breathing. Her lungs are burning with the hard effort of running so hard for so long. Raven had scolded her the other day for running through the progress they'd made. Instead of telling her not to do it, however, Raven simply shot her an understanding look and gave her a few warmup and cool down stretches that could help with the loosening of her muscles. She catches her breath and eases up so that she's standing straight. She stretches her legs, ignoring the aching pain that lances throughout her frame while she holds her knee to her chest and counts to ten.

And then suddenly, there's a snap in the brushes behind her.

Instantly, Lexa releases her knee and spins on her heel, her free hand fishing out her gun. She holds it steady in the direction of the sound, eyes and ears alert for other sounds of movement. Lexa stalks forward, cold sweat beading down the back of her neck as she prods forwards, swallowing thickly as she walks towards the tree. Her hands shake as she presses forward, trying to peer through the darkness. She can't see anything, however, and it's beginning to psych her out a little bit.

"I have a gun," Lexa says coldly to the dark air, "if you're trying to play a prank, you'll sorely regret it."

Silence answers back and Lexa only growls.

She's about to question again when something flicks under her. She whips her gun downwards and almost pulls the trigger when she sees a small rabbit standing before her, grooming its paws in the snow. Instantly, she feels herself being transported back to that mountainside when she'd killed the
hare. Lexa sucks in a deep breath as she tries to steady herself, but there's nothing she can do as she watches her surroundings blur and the trees are replaced for rocky cliff faces.

"No," Lexa pleads as she looks around at the massive drifts of ice and snow, "no, no, no…"

"You can't ever come back from that place, kid."

Lexa snaps her head upwards to see her reflection standing in front of her, one of her hands holding the dead hare. Lexa gulps and shakes her head, desperate to find a way out of the situation. She looks around, but nothing seems to be there except for more ice and snow. She tries to move forward, but her legs are stuck to the ground. She looks up wildly to see that her reflection is no longer holding a hare, but Kareem's head. His dark eyes are glassy and filled with fear, even in death.

"You can't come back from something like this."

Lexa tries to scream but no noise comes out. Instead, she hears a thump from behind her. Frowning, Lexa turns around and gasps when she sees the dead body of the chief laying splayed out on the snow. His blood stains the white a nasty crimson. Another thump comes from the other side and Lexa swivels again, only to see Kareem's mother staring back at her, a hole in his head from when she'd shot her. The thumps keep coming, the bodies raining from the sky as Lexa sees each and every villager that had perished in the explosion. Some are full bodies and others are mangled bits and pieces. When it's all over, the snow is red and she's drowning in death. She tries to claw her way out of the pit of bodies, but she can't move. Blood fills her mouth and lungs, threatening to kill her from the inside out.

"You did this," Lexa hears Costia's voice in the back of her head, "you can't escape your choices, Captain. This is the price of being a hero."

"So…," her reflection says, the mountainside suddenly transforming into the cell room. Lexa looks at herself tied up and feels tears well in her eyes. Her reflection hangs from the chains, her near-nude body covered in a multitude of bruises and cuts from the years of torture and maltreatment. Her reflection stares on, smirking slyly.

"What are you going to do, Lexa?" Her reflection asks, those green eyes looking to the gun in her hands. "What choice will you make this time?"

Lessa shakes her head and whimpers, but she can't control her body as she feels her arm raising and her finger priming over the trigger.

"Come on," her reflection goads, "do it."

The cries of all the dying people filter through her head and Lexa screams, shutting her eyes as she hears the trigger being pulled and the feeling of something warm and wet splattering against her face. Suddenly, she jerks her head up and she scrambles as she finds herself submerged in water. She scrambles for air, her hand still gripping her gun handle tightly. She rises up and swims to the shore, scrambling up the bank as she shivers in the cold night air. She looks around at the trees and greenery and is relieved to find herself back in the real world. She shivers and curls up on the lakeside, holding her head in her hands as she shakes her head.

"Please," Lexa begs as she rocks back and forth, "please just make it stop. I can't do it anymore."

"Then do it," she hears that voice in that back of her head, "there's only one option left, Lexa."

"No," Lexa sniffs as she shakes her head, looking at the gun at her side, "no I won't do it."
"Why?" Her reflection asks, coming to kneel before her. "What's keeping you here? Your wife and kids are dead, you killed them. You have nothing."

"Clarke…," Lexa whimpers as she continues to rock, "Clarke isn't dead, she's still alive. I have my Clarke to come home to."

"Not your Clarke," her reflection chuckles as she reaches forward to tilt Lexa's chin upwards. "Now, c'mon little girl. What are you going to do?"

Lexa remains quiet, looking at the gun on the ground. She holds it in her hand and traces her thumb around the padding of the grip. The sensation has shivers tingling up and down her spine. She struggles to get a few breaths in as her thoughts begin to spin. She wants to grab the gun and place it in her mouth, to pull the trigger and blow her brains out, but she can't find the courage to do it. She shakes her head and struggles to her feet, placing the gun back in the waistband of her joggers.

"Coward," her reflection chuckles, "we'll see how long your so-called strength lasts, Captain. You know you can't escape this."

Lexa doesn't reply.

When she returns home, she places her gun under her pillow, looks at Clarke's peaceful sleeping face and then stares up the ceiling until dawn spills through the windows. The sun doesn't provide any warmth for her cold bones or wounded heart, however. Her thoughts are plagued by the weight of her reflection's words.

The gun under her pillow has never felt heavier.

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February 13th 2014, 15:15

Metropolitan Centre for Mental Health, New York

"I take it things are… difficult, at home."

Clarke rubs her forehead as she glances up at the psychologist. Dr Jarod waits patiently, his hands folded together as he stares at her from over his clipboard. He looks more exhausted than usual, and for a moment Clarke wonders if all of this is worth it. She sees Dr Jarod's back slouch slightly, and she decides to spare him the silence.

"It's… rough."

"I can imagine."

"She's not physical," Clarke quickly corrects when she sees Dr Jarod's worried expression, "she's just… adjusting."

"It's been almost a month."
"She was gone five years."

"Clarke," Dr Jarod sighs, putting his clipboard aside and leaning forwards. "You haven't seen me in a few months. I know you."

"I've got a lot to do," Clarke deflects, "between home and the hospital--"

"You don't know how to help your wife," Dr Jarod interrupts gently, causing Clarke to choke on her breath. "These things are difficult."

"I just..." Clarke trails off as she wipes at her eyes, "I want to give her support. I want her to tell me what's wrong. I want her to be open with me."

"Lexa's file is... intense."

"You have it?" Clarke asks, glancing upwards as she hears the wince in Dr Jarod's voice. The man nods before reaching across his desk for a manila folder that looks to be stuffed to the brim. Clarke shudders at the sight as Dr Jarod flips it open and starts to read, his frown deepening with each line he passes.

"I want you to book an appointment for her to come see me," Dr Jarod hums as he closes the folder and sets it aside, giving Clarke a meaningful look. "I think that maybe having a fresh face could help her out a bit. Dr Griffin told me that Lexa responded well to her physiotherapist, Dr Reyes. I think the same might happen here."

Clarke's heart stings at the words. Deep down, she knows that the doctor is right, however she's in a fragile state. She wants to be the one to help Lexa, just like she'd done when they were in high school. She remembers how she had been there during Lexa's break up with Costia. She remembers the pain Lexa had gone through when her first dog had died. She remembers the numbness when she came to school one day, the kids around them whispering words of an alcoholic step-father who drank himself to death. She remembers every ounce of suffering, but everything they'd gone through when they were younger, they went through together.

But now?

Now, Clarke isn't so sure Lexa even knows who she is.

"Give her some time," Dr Jarod says as he sighs, "book an appointment, Clarke. I'll see what I can do."

Clarke nods, numb as she stands. She shakes the doctor's hand before heading towards the door. She gets to the receptionist and rattles off a date and time in a robotic tone. She walks to her car, replaying Dr Jarod's last words in her head over and over again. She knows that Lexa is her wife, but the way everyone is treating her, it makes it seem more like she's some object. She hardly feels like a person. Even Clarke will admit, she wants to fix Lexa. She remembers her training in medical school, of removing yourself from the person emotionally in order to tend to them. She remembers how vile it had all felt, the dissociation between person and scalpel.

So, what makes this any different?

Clarke shakes her head, clearing her thoughts as she makes the silent drive home. She pulls up to her driveway after a half hour, sitting in her car and simply soaking in the session as she readies herself to go back inside. Mustering up the courage, Clarke opens the door and trudges up the steps until she reaches the front door. She unlocks the door with trembling hands, her teeth chattering from the cold as she finally enters her house.
Warm air greets her as she steps inside, closing the door behind her. In a rush, Clarke peels off her jacket and slips off her boots, tucking them into the closet by the door on habit. She rubs her hands together as she hears the TV blaring from the living room. Clarke enters the room with shuffled steps. She hears Aden and Lexa talking in the living room and Clarke pauses, watching them from the side of the door. For a second, it's like none of the last five years had even occurred.

Lexa is sitting on the couch, Aden curled up at her side as they discuss the basketball game on the TV. Tris is pressed up against her brother's side, dozing lightly. Lexa's eyes are lit with excitement as Aden tells her about how much the Lakers suck now that all the greats have retired. Lexa is simply sitting there, her gaze entirely trained on Aden's excited babble. For a second, Clarke thinks painfully, it all looks so goddamn normal. Like Lexa hadn't been declared dead. Like they hadn't been a mess. Like she hadn't screwed it all up.

"Ma?" Aden asks, his voice low as it snaps Clarke out of her day-dreaming. She blinks and looks to her wife and son with a wavering smile.

"Hey," Clarke says as she forces herself to appear cheerful. She goes to the other end of the couch and slides next to Lexa. There's a moment of awkwardness in which Lexa stares down at her, seemingly confused. Clarke looks into those conflicted green eyes and she just wishes she could reach inside Lexa and draw out those demons. She wants nothing more than to wrap Lexa in her arms and protect her from the cruel reality of life, of war, of survival, and to simply love her and heal her.

"I missed you," Lexa says after some time, her free arm coming to wrap around her shoulder and drawing Clarke into a side hug. "Where were you?"

Clarke closes her eyes and lets her head lightly rest upon Lexa's shoulder. She breathes in the familiar musky scent of her wife and holds herself up. She knows that Lexa won't be happy, especially considering how she's been reacting to most of the clinical jargon her mother throws her way in an effort to figure out the problem.

What if there is no problem?

What if Clarke is the problem?

"Clarke?" Lexa asks, her tone suspicious. "Where were you?"

At this point, Tris has woken up and is staring at the two of them with wide, fearful eyes. Clarke stares up at Lexa and swallows thickly.

"I was talking to my psychologist… about you."

It's as if the words are literally poison, because within an instant, Lexa is jumping from the couch and whirling around to glare at her wife. Clarke holds her stare, trying to ignore the fear that runs cold through her veins, throbbing and aching for release. Aden and Tris stare between them, unsure of what to do. Clarke slowly stands, watching as her wife starts to pace back and forth like an animal. Tris whimpering and Lexa's head snaps up, a smouldering glare shooting her way from those green eyes. Immediately, Clarke jumps between them, blocking Lexa from the sight of their children. She knows Lexa would never hurt them, but this isn't her Lexa.

"Aden," Clarke says gently, though her voice trembles. "Take your sister upstairs."

"Ma--"
"Do it," Clarke says desperately, turning her head to see Tris trembling at her brother's side, her lips pouted and tears in her eyes. Aden catches her gaze and nods, understanding that despite his obvious dislike towards her, this isn't a conversation of which Tris or he need to part. He takes Tris into his arms and stumbles down the hall, towards the stairs. Clarke waits until they're in their room before she turns back to see a fuming Lexa glaring back at her, lips curled up in a snarl.

"Lexa," Clarke reaches out, holding up her hand to comfort her wife, "I was thinking--"

"No!" Lexa growls, swatting away Clarke's hand and stepping into her space. She looms over her wife like a predator, causing a shiver to run down Clarke's spine. Lexa's eyes are wide and black with anger as she presses forward, jabbing a finger into Clarke's sternum. "You don't get to decide what I do. I'm not your experiment."

"It's not that, Lex--"

"Shut up!" Lexa yells, shoving Clarke. "It is an experiment! To you and your fucking mother! All you do is prod and poke at me, scan my brain like I'm a fucking cadaver. News flash, Clarke. I'm not dead." Lexa's words are cutting and vile, and it's taking everything in Clarke to not simply crumble to her knees and sob at Lexa's feet.

"I know," Clarke whispers in soothing tone, "I know, baby. That's not what we're trying to do. We're just trying to help you."

"Who says I need help?!" Lexa snaps again, backing Clarke into a wall. She keeps her hands balled at her sides, knuckles white from the tight hold. For a minute, Clarke genuinely fears that Lexa is about to hit her, but she makes no effort to move. She stays there, staring down Lexa's furious gaze, holding herself together for her wife.

"I want you to sleep at night," Clarke whispers, tears dripping down her cheeks involuntarily. "I want you to feel safe in your home. I want you to recognize me and your family. I want you to be happy, Lexa. I want you to just be okay, baby. That's all I want. I don't know what you went through and you don't want to tell me. That's okay, sweetheart. But I think you should consider talking to Dr Jarod. Maybe he can help you." Clarke's voice is soothing, like she's trying to comfort a child. She hates the tone of voice is being used for her wife, but at this point, Clarke doesn't know what else to do. She's a surgeon, not a psychologist.

"You think I'm crazy," Lexa scoffs, ignoring all that Clarke had said. "Fucking great. I'm glad that you fucking trust me, wife."

"Lexa--"

"Fuck you!" Lexa screams, tearing herself away so that she can thread her hands through her own hair. "Fuck you, Clarke. You don't trust me."

"You're scaring me," Clarke blurts out involuntarily, her voice cracking with the harsh sob that follows. "You're scaring the kids, Lexa."

Lexa doesn't say anything, she simply stands, staring at the floor with her hands still in her hair. They stay like that for a few seconds until Clarke gets her cries under control. The blonde sniffs, wiping away at her tears as she glances up at her wife with a broken, defeated expression. Lexa doesn't look back, she doesn't even move.

"I just want you to be okay," Clarke repeats softly, shaking her head. "I don't know how to help you, Lex. Please... tell me something, Lex. Anything."
Lexa stays quiet, seemingly contemplating what she is saying. For a minute, Clarke blindly hopes that Lexa will realize all that's gone wrong and she'll come around and tell Clarke that she's ready to seek help, but she knows that this isn't a movie. Lexa says nothing, but she moves, turning around to grab her jacket and boots. She throws on the articles quickly before grabbing her eyes and exiting out the door without another word. Clarke's eyes burn with tears as she slides to the ground, her back pressed against the wall. She's struggling to stay strong, to be a pillar of support for Lexa, but how can she when all that Lexa wants to do is push her away?

"M-Mama?" A soft, female voice breaks Clarke from her thoughts. The doctor snaps her head upwards to see Tris and Aden standing at the base of the steps, both of them looking equally concerned and scared. Clarke hastily wipes away her tears as she stands on wobbly knees, trying to muster up a smile for her daughter.

"Come here, baby. It's okay," Clarke soothes as Tris darts forward and buries herself into Clarke's arms. The little girl cries harshly into her shoulder, hiccuping with every other breath. Clarke closes her eyes and holds on tighter, pressing butterfly kisses to her daughter's cheeks while simultaneously rubbing circles on her back. She murmurs sweet nothings into Tris' ear, despite the sadness and fatigue that wears down upon her shoulders. She blinks her eyes open and looks over Tris' shoulder to where Aden stands, his tear-filled eyes glued to the door with a sense of complete confusion. Her heart aches for her son, and despite his behaviour, she hurts for him.

"Aden," Clarke whispers, holding out her other arm, "come here, baby."

Aden turns his head to look at her, eyes bloodshot with tears as he stands rigid, as if contemplating what to do. Clarke can see the need burning in those blue eyes, the child inside of him that is scared and searching for comfort. He tries to mask it with a glare, but Clarke's gaze only softens. It takes a few seconds before Aden is flinging himself at her, wrapping his long arms around her waist before he starts to cry into her chest. Clarke maneuvers her children over to her sofa before hugging them tighter than before. She kisses each of their heads lovingly, rubbing their backs and waiting patiently for them to calm down so that she can speak.

"What's going on with Mommy, Mama?" Tris gulps, sniffling. "Why is she so mad at us? Did we do something wrong?"

"Oh honey," Clarke whispers, feeling her heart crack at her daughter's innocent worry. "No, baby, she's not mad at you. Mommy's just... she has a lot of things going on right now and she just needs some time to figure it out, okay? She isn't angry at you, sweetheart. She loves you both so very much." Aden flinches at her words, and Clarke holds back her tears knowing that the soothing tone isn't going to work for him. Tris' mind is malleable, but Aden is mature enough to figure it all out.

"When is she coming home?" Tris croaks, voice hoarse from crying. "Will she come back?"

"Of course," Clarke says as assuringly as she can, "she's your mother. She'll always come back for you guys."

"What about you?" Tris asks, slumping in Clarke's arms. "Is she going to come back for you too, Mama?"

Clarke stays silent. She nods, knowing that words won't suffice, not right now.

Not when she doesn't know the answer to her daughter's simple question.
February 13th 2014, 21:09
Woods Residency, New York

Anya lays on the couch, a bottle of beer in her hands and some low-rate movie blaring on in the background. Her eyelids are heavy and she feels sleepy, but she doesn't feel like getting up and walking up the stairs to her bedroom. She remains laying there, her back protesting from the slouch, staring into nothingness.

If there was a word to describe her feelings, she knows that it would be numb.

Because that's all she feels lately. Numb.

Sighing, Anya shakes away the thought and raises the bottle to her lips, drowning in another gulp of the malty liquid.

Just as she's about to reach for another bottle from the crate on the coffee table, there's a knock on her door.

Frowning, Anya lazily glances over at her watch to see the time. She's not had a visitor in sometime. It was only a few days ago Lincoln was there to make sure she was still breathing, questioning her about how her new medication was working for her. Anya chuckles dryly as she heaves herself upwards, stumbling over herself as she makes her way towards the door. If only he knew how much it was working. She spends her days working, sleeping, or drinking. There's nothing else she needs.

When she unlocks and opens the door, however, all of that routine goes right out the window.

"Lexa?" Anya breathes out, sobering almost instantly at the sight of her sister standing before her, drenched from the rain outside. Anya feels a shiver go up her spine as she realizes that she never heard the storm. She swallows down the thought and moves aside, gesturing for the younger woman to come inside. Lexa nods her head and walks into the room, her eyes darting to each corner of the room, assessing each window and potential escape route before she relaxes slightly.

"Nice place," Lexa comments, chuckling lightly. "It's cute."

"It does the job," Anya says with a shrug, shutting the door behind them. "Jesus, you're drenched. Wait here, I'll grab a few towels."

Lexa doesn't reply as Anya limps up the stairs to her room. She grabs a few towels and an extra set of clothes before she heads back down to see that Lexa is standing there, having not moved since she'd left her alone. Anya arches her brow in concern, taking a tentative step towards Lexa as to not startle the other woman.

"Here," Anya says with an unsure tone. "I hope they fit."

"Thanks," Lexa says as she towels her hair and pries off the soaked clothing. Anya is about to ask Lexa if she wants to use the bathroom to change when her sister decides to strip without any humility. Anya's breath catches in her throat as she sees the scars and welts on Lexa's upper body as
she flings the drenched shirt off her body. She struggles to hold back her tears as Lexa turns around, setting the towel down on the kitchen counter and exposing her mangled back to the older woman. Anya's eyes drift over the massive scars and a burn wound on her shoulder, until her gaze settles on the ink stretched between the middle bracket of her ribs.

That's all it takes for Anya to crack.

"What are you staring at?" Lexa's voice breaks her thoughts, causing Anya's head to snap upwards to face Lexa's piercing green gaze. "Is it the scars? I can--"

"The tattoo," Anya blurts out, inching closer as she tentatively reaches out to graze the bubbled line that cracks through the words. "It's--"

"I don't know where it's from," Lexa says with a shrug, frowning down at the words with confusion. "I can't remember how I got it. Must've been drunk."

"Lexa," Anya breathes out, choking on a breath as she removes her hand. Lexa cocks her head at her, still confused. Gulping, Anya reaches for the hem of her own shirt before tugging it off her body with a pained breath. Lexa's brows furrow, but before she can say anything, Anya stands next to her so they're side-by-side.

And then, they both look at the words that connect them in permanent ink.

Together forever, never apart, it reads on Anya's skin, before finishing on Lexa's skin, maybe in distance, but never in heart.

"It's… ours?" Lexa asks, her voice hollow as she looks between them. "When… w-when…?"

"When I graduated college," Anya whispers as she reaches back for her shirt and slips it on. "You and I were a bit drunk, but we wanted something to prove that no matter what life threw our way, we'd make it. You and me, the Wonder Woods, the dynamic duo, best friends forever. No one could ever get between us, Lex." Anya's eyes drift down to where there's a cracked line in the word 'heart' on Lexa's skin, and her chest sinks in on itself with guilt. Swallowing thickly, Anya turns and reaches down on the coffee table for two beers. She uncaps both and offers one to Lexa, who looks at it hesitantly before taking it with an appreciative nod.

They both take a seat on the couch, staring at the TV as time passes them by. The silence eats away at them like a festering parasite, until soon enough, nothing will be left but bones. Anya takes a few more sips of her drink, refusing to admit how much her body aches. She just wants to slip away into the night, to become nothing. Pushing down the ludicrous thought, Anya turns to look over at Lexa, who is sitting rigidly and staring into the TV like it's the most important thing in the world.

Just as Anya raises her bottle to her lips again, Lexa finally speaks.

"Clarke wants me to talk to a therapist."

Anya pauses, her fingers curling tighter around the neck of the glass bottle. She gulps before facing her sister. "That could be good, Lex."

Lexa remains quiet, her gaze still set on the TV. Anya waits patiently, feeling sweat bead down the back of her neck.

"She said that I scare her," Lexa whispers the words this time, "and that the kids are scared of me."

Anya growls low in her throat at Clarke's phrasing, but deep down, she knows that the younger
blonde is right. She doesn't have to be in the room with her sister and her family to know that things have changed. They're all constantly on edge, whether it be from worrying over Lexa's next move or trying to figure out how to tell her the truth without risking the safety of everyone around them. Anya mulls over an appropriate answer, not wanting to offend Lexa or make her feel alienated.

"You're scared of me, too." Lexa's words are sharp, but not malicious. " Aren't you, An?"

" Lex," Anya breathes out, looking up to see Lexa's head turned in her direction. "I could never be scared of you."

At this, Lexa chuckles and she leans back into the couch, downing a large sip of her beer. "You don't know that."

" I do."

"You don't know what happened," Lexa says coldly, those dull eyes flitting over to meet her own. "You don't know what I've done."

Anya takes a breath and sets her beer down before shuffling closer to Lexa. She reaches out for Lexa's free hand squeezing her sister's hand as supportively as she can. She stares at the shell of a woman, struggling to figure out how to reach inside of her and pull out the darkness. She'd do anything for Lexa to simply live without the guilt of doing whatever she'd done in order to come back home. She doesn't have a clue as to what happened in those five years, but she just wants the pain to go away. She wants her little sister back, the woman who had infinite love for the world, who always gave second chances and only used violence as a last resort.

"Maybe I don't need to know, and maybe neither does Clarke, but Lex, maybe your wife has a point. Talking about it could help. It doesn't have to be us."

"What good would talking do?" Lexa snorts, prying her hand away from Anya's hold. "I can't change the past."

"But you can change the future," Anya pleads as she reaches back for Lexa's hand in order to draw her attention. "You can control what's happening now."

"Can I?" Lexa asks, her voice low and smooth. "You don't seem to be a good example of it, sis. Look at you, drinking yourself into a stupor. If anyone is gonna ask someone to get help, it should be you, not me." Anya resists the urge to flinch at the cutting words. Instead, she simply releases Lexa's hand and slinks back into the couch. She wants to cry, to scream at Lexa to stop reminding her of what's going on, of how nothing is working anymore and how she's falling apart.

"Why are you here?" Anya asks softly, deciding against the swirling thoughts in her head. "Shouldn't you be at home?"

"I scare my wife and kids, remember?" Lexa chuckles, reaching for another beer before leaning back into the couch. "I figured I would come hang out with someone who is immune to fear and all things monstrous." Anya's eyes well with tears as she glances back up to her sister, a light of hope shining in her dull, hazel eyes.

"You remember that?"

"How could anyone forget?" Lexa laughs again, taking a long sip of her beer. "You were the most insufferable teenager. I still can't believe it worked."

"Yeah... well," Anya sighs as she leans into the couch and turns her attention to the TV. "It's true."
"You wet your pants in the first four minutes of SAW II," Lexa chuckles as she looks over at her sister. "I doubt your immunity is quite strong. You should get it checked out." Despite everything, the odd feeling that lingers in Anya's chest and the dark cloud that floats above her head, Anya can't help but laugh at Lexa's response.

"I guess I should," Anya says with a lazy smile. Lexa nods in her direction, sighing. Anya raises her bottle to her lips and takes a sip before she feels a hazy warmth curling through her stomach. She starts to smile, knowing that her drugs will kick in soon, considering she'd taken them just before Lexa had arrived. Lexa notices her humming and turns to face her. The TV switches from the movie to a re-run of Jeopardy. The two sisters watch the show for awhile, content in their silence.

"Hey Lex?" Anya drawls, feeling that familiar buzz kick in. Lexa grunts, still watching the TV. "Do you remember when we were kids and we watched this with Titus and Indra?" Anya watches the screen with blurry vision, unable to distinguish the various people from each other because of her hazy vision. She slumps on the couch until she rests with her head on Lexa's shoulder and her feet kicked up over the armrest. Lexa stiffens, but doesn't push her away. Instead, she remains sitting still.

"Lincoln was always the worst out of all of us," Anya continues to babble nonsensically, "he would always guess so close but get it wrong. You were always the favourite, though. You were the smartest of all of us. I guess that's why Titus liked you so much over me or Linc. Indra would always say that you had Mom's intelligence and Dad's looks. I... I remember that would always cheer you up even when you would fuck up the final question. God... that was so long ago." Anya doesn't realize she's crying until she reaches the end of the sentence. Lexa's body is still rigid beside her own, and as much as Anya knows she's got to pull herself together, she can't help the breakdown. Lexa's head turns slightly and Anya stares into those green eyes, searching for something, anything, that could convince her that Lexa's still in there.

"What happened to us?" Anya breathes out between hiccuped breaths. "What happened to us, Lex? What happened to 'together forever, never apart'?"

Lexa's quiet for a few moments, before the younger woman leans over and lets her lips slowly press to Anya's forehead. At the soft gesture, Anya collapses in her sister's arms. Lexa wraps herself around her sister, and Anya clings to her like a lifeline. She can't control any of it now, and that's what the drugs do. She hates them because when she takes them, she's a roller coaster of different emotions. The thoughts rushing through her brain are terrifying, but she can't voice any of them.

"What happened?" Anya repeats through her sobs as she clutches onto her sister. "What happened?"

Anya feels Lexa shifting until both women are laying on their sides, with Lexa's arm wrapped loosely over Anya's back. The two women cling to each other, holding each other tightly like they're children again, tuning out the screams and shouts of their step-father arguing with Indra. Anya suddenly feels her mood shift and she wants nothing more than to hold Lexa in her arms and cage her away from the horrors of the world. She adjusts their positions so that Lexa's face is buried in her shoulder. They both continue to lay there, shaking and trembling as the storm rages on outside of their windows.

It doesn't take long for them to fall asleep.

That night, Anya doesn't have a nightmare about leaving Lexa at the campsite. But when she wakes, she's alone and cold.

At that point, Anya finds herself asking just what is real anymore.
February 14th 2014, 16:50
Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

Indra drives down the street to her adopted daughter's house in silence. There's some mindless chatter playing on the radio, but she's not paying much attention to any of it. After the last few weeks, Lexa hadn't been over to visit her so she decided to make the drive down to see how her daughter had been keeping. She knows from Abby and Kane about the atrocities that Lexa possibly faced during her time of captivity in Afghanistan. The sheer mention of those details has her stomach spinning. She remembers her own late husband, about the perils he'd been through and how ultimately, it wasn't the war overseas that killed him, but the war inside him. And damned her if Indra lets it happen again.

Finally, after what seems like forever, she arrives, only to see Lexa working on their truck outside. Indra frowns, pulling up on the curb before powering her engine off and exiting the car. She sighs, the cold settling into her bones as she hobbles forwards after shutting the door. Lexa's head pops up at the noise, her eyes flashing with a fear that is all too familiar to Indra's weathered heart. She pushes down her own pain as she approaches her daughter with a soft, assuring smile. Lexa rises from where she'd been working on installing a heavy-duty military grade grill guard on her truck. Upon seeing her, however, Lexa stops what she's doing and wipes her greasy hands on an old rag, nodding to Indra. The older woman sighs and approaches Lexa with tentative steps, noticing the unease in those once-bright green eyes.

"Hello dear," Indra says softly as she comes to stand before her adopted daughter, "how are you?"

"Good," Lexa replies curtly, nodding to the truck. "Doing some work. Figured I had some down time, may as well pick up a hobby."

Indra nods, licking over her lips as she sighs. She looks at the truck for a few minutes before glancing back at Lexa, who's staring at her inked hands.

"You know," Indra says, clearing her throat. "Your uncle was never a bad man."

Lexa's head snaps upwards and she cocks her head in confusion. "What?"

"Titus," Indra says the name of her late husband, feeling her heartache. "I know that you and Anya never really got to know the real him. He… had troubles coping with what happened in Vietnam. The things he'd seen… the things he'd done… it all caught up to him in the end. For years, he would just shut me out. He used to be so kind, with a heart as pure as gold. He and your father were best friends. Those two were inseparable. Titus loved his younger brother more than he loved the world." Lexa listens, her eyes guarded as she takes in the rest of the story with hesitance. Indra blinks back tears as she looks down to her worn ring on her wrinkled finger.

"Losing your father was what made Titus so angry and distant," Indra explains further, "he shut down after Kane came back with news of your father's passing. Titus never took it well. He thought himself to be a failure, to have not been able to fulfill his one purpose in life, which was to protect his
younger sibling." Lexa flinches at the words, swallowing down the lump in her throat. Indra sighs, rubbing at her forehead as she feels the sadness weigh down on her chest like an elephant.

"I saw what happened to him when he came back," Indra goes on to say, "and what he did is exactly what you're doing right now, Lexa. I know that sometimes in war, there are things you can't talk about, things that you can't bare to revisit out of fear, but you can't shut everyone out. It'll kill you." Lexa doesn't get mad like Indra expects her to. She doesn't move an inch. She simply stands there and takes in each word that leaves Indra's lips. The older woman sighs, feeling her tears start to well in her eyes. She tries to hold back her emotions and be strong for her daughter, but she can't bear to see this same pattern repeat itself over and over again.

"I just… I want you to know that I am here," Indra whispers as she looks up, cheeks wet from the tears that had broken past her eyelids. "I am here, Lexa."

There's nothing said, no response aside from a nod from her adopted daughter. Indra sighs and steps forward, placing her hand on Lexa's shoulder. She gives the woman the chance to pull away, which she doesn't. Taking it as a sign to lean forward, Indra pulls the younger woman into her arms. Lexa pauses a moment, still in her adopted mother's arms, before she allows herself to melt in the embrace. Indra feels more tears slipping down her cheeks as she holds her daughter closer, as if she should let go, there would be nothing left yet again. Lexa's arms wind around her waist and tug her closer, murmuring soft nothings into her mother's ear.

"I love you," Indra tells her gently, "we all love you, Lex. It takes time."

"Thank you," Lexa says softly, leaning more into her mother's embrace. "Sometimes I just… don't feel like me. I don't even know who me is, actually." The last words come out as a sad chuckle, something that makes Indra's heart hurt. She grips her daughter tighter and keeps her closer, assuring her that it's okay to feel how she feels. Lexa takes the nonverbal support with more acceptance than the older woman had anticipated, and for that she's glad. She can feel, under the thick layers of pain and suffering, the small, frizzy-haired girl with innocent eyes and a heart filled with joy still exists. Indra can feel her there, she's not gone yet.

"It's just a matter of how quickly she can be saved from everything that's trying to drown her.

"It's okay to feel unsure of yourself," Indra whispers softly, rubbing her hands down Lexa's back in soothing strokes. "Your feelings are valid, Lexa."

"You…," Lexa trails off, trying to find the words as she pulls away to stare at Indra quizzically. "You don't want to fix me?"

Indra gives her a sad smile, shaking her head as she reaches forward and tucks a strand of that gorgeous chestnut hair behind Lexa's ear. "No, sweetheart. I don't want to fix you because there's nothing to fix. Humans are inherently broken people. Some more so than others. But not all broken things need to be fixed, you know." Lexa digests the words in silence, mulling over Indra's advice. The older woman smiles and sighs again, bringing Lexa in for another tight hug. Lexa grips onto the older woman tightly, and Indra can hear the smallest of cries part her lips as she clings to her. Indra kisses her hair softly, closing her eyes as she loses herself in the warmth of her daughter, a warmth that five years ago, had been stolen from her, ripped right from out under her arms. She holds on tighter with the earth-shaking memory.

"I love you," Indra repeats, because she knows that those three words were never said as much as Titus had once needed it. "I love you so much, my darling."

"I love you too," Lexa replies with a gentle sigh, her head leaning against Indra's shoulder
comfortably. "I love you, too."

They stay like that for a few minutes, simply content with ignoring the world and its many tragedies.

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**February 15th 2014, 14:15**

**VA NY Harbor Healthcare System, New York**

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The cold air bristles against Lexa's skin as she looks around at the people entering and exiting the building. Familiar cargo patterns surround her, causing her to shiver. A few of the soldiers stop to look at her as she walks passed them, most of them staring at her with awe and admiration. Lexa hides her gaze, looking down as she walks through the crowd and into the building. She walks up to the receptionist and rattles out a familiar name, and she gets a floor number and a room to see.

Lexa rides the elevator beside a young man who looks like he's fresh out of training. They both ride up together in silence, before the man speaks.

"You're Major Alexandria Woods, right?" The boy asks, grinning at her. Lexa stiffens, giving him nothing but a curt nod.

"I heard about your story on the news," the soldier rambles admirably, his tone too excited for Lexa's taste. "You're a badass."

Lexa remains silent, her eyes glued to the doors as the elevator dings at each floor it surpasses. The man can't seem to stay quiet, however.

"Did you get a high kill count?" The boy asks, still grinning. Lexa frowns, glancing over at him.

"Say again?" She asks, eyeing his badge. The boy nods, pointing to the gun in his holster.

"You know," he says with a beaming smirk, "kills."

"What's your name?" Lexa asks, turning to face the boy with a stoney expression. The man shivers, but doesn't balk under her gaze.

"Cadet Jones, Ma'am." The man extends his hand for her to shake, but Lexa ignores it.

"What's this about kills?" Lexa asks, cocking her head to the side. Jones lowers his hand and beams at her again.

"I want to get into infantry as soon as I can. Maybe Rangers, maybe Delta, the best of the best," Jones says as he puts his hands on his hips proudly. "I want to get out there on the battlefield and protect our country from those savages. I want to bag as many as I can. You know, to keep ourselves safe and all."

"So that's all this is to you then, counting kills?" Lexa asks, arching her brow as she looms closer.
"Like it's a game. Like it's a fucking game to see how many people you can kill." The soldier flinches at the icy tone of her voice, but doesn't crumble just yet. His lips start to tremble as Lexa snorts and shakes her head in disgust.

"You know," Lexa chuckles as she continues to eye him with a seething expression, "I remember one, particularly fun day. I was with another two of my squad mates after we'd been separated by a firefight. I lost eight good men that day. Only two remained, and guess what, Cadet Jones? He had his stomach blasted open from a nearby VBIED. He spent three hours holding his own guts inside his body while his buddy carried him on her back to the next outpost in an effort to see if there was a way to save the fucking idiot. But, by the time we got there, the son of a bitch bled out. Do you know why he died, Cadet?" Jones shivers at the tone.

"He wanted to get some kills," Lexa snarls as she leans away from him. "He wanted to bag 'em and tag 'em as people like you often say. War is not a game, Cadet. People die. With your recklessness, you don't just serve as a danger to yourself, but your entire squad." Jones trembles under the glare of the older woman, his hands nervously playing with the loose thread of his uniform as he continues to cower under her gaze. Lexa stares him down, waiting for him to respond, but he never does.

"Any other questions, Cadet?" Lexa asks, her voice low and growly. Jones shakes his head, looking away as the elevator dings and indicates that Lexa's reached her floor. The woman shakes her head and turns her back, stalking out of the elevator and towards the room the receptionist had told her Marcus Kane was stationed. She finds the office and is pleased to see her former superior officer sitting inside going over some paperwork. She smiles and knocks on the door, getting his attention.

"Lexa?" Kane says as he looks up at her, pleased to see that she's called a meeting at last. "Do come in."

"It's good to see you, sir." Lexa's greeting is formal and bright as she slides down to sit on the seat. "How are you?"

"No need for formalities, Lexa. I've retired, remember? I'm here because I wanted to help out with the VA office in the hospital. I'm not your boss, anymore. But that aside, I'm doing well," Kane says with a light-hearted tone, causing Lexa to smile again. "How have you been adjusting to civilian life?"

"That's what I'm here to talk to you about," Lexa says as she places her hands on the desk, "I want to be reinstated, sir."

Kane nearly does a double-take at her response. He frowns, setting down his pen before staring up at her seriously. "You want… what?"

"I want to get back out there," Lexa says, joyful and excited. "I need to see my squadron again. I need to feel the sun on my face."

"Lexa…" Kane sighs, trailing off. "I… I understand that coming back can be an adjustment. It's not easy to be on your own for so long and then have to settle into a somewhat mundane life, but I think that you need to spend time with your family. They need you here." Lexa's smile is wiped clean off her face, but she doesn't snarl or snap. Instead, she forces a smile as she leans forward and looks up at the man with a serious expression.

"With all due respect, sir, my family doesn't understand what I need right now," Lexa explains slowly, "they don't get what I'm feeling. I need to go back."

"Lexa," Kane says sternly, "I can't let you. Not only do I no longer have the power to re-enlist you,
but you've also been honourably discharged with complete benefits. You're just going through a level of culture shock, and paired with your experiences, you need to have some time to recover. I'm worried about your mental health."

"Oh come on," Lexa chuckles in exasperation, leaning back against the chair with a shake of her head, "why does everyone think there's something wrong?"

Kane decides to ignore her statement and instead sighs, leaning forward. "I called you here for a reason, Lexa."

"And what's that?" Lexa drawls, suddenly not interested in anything the man has to say. Kane sighs, but before he can speak, there's a knock at the door. Lexa frowns and turns around to see an older man with white hair and a cheery smile standing at the door. Kane smiles forcibly and stands, beckoning him in.

"Ah," Kane says as he nods to Lexa, "this is Dr Wallace, your psychiatrist."

Upon hearing the man's last name, Lexa's mind immediately transports itself back to when she'd been in captivity. She sees Cage's face, his manic expression as he'd beat her relentlessly. She looks to the older man's briefcase and thinks about the one Cage had used to transport the drugs they'd used on her. She stands and steps away from the man, her hand going to the back of her pants where her gun lies. She hears Kane's shocked gasp, but she ignores it. All her senses are focused on the psychiatrist with the eerily similar smile to the man who had tortured her for four gruelling years. She growls at the man, staring him down in fury.

"Hello Lexa," the man tells her in a soft voice, "I'm Dr Dante Wallace."

"Don't," Lexa says as he attempts to step forward, "don't you dare come near me, you fucker."

"Lexa!" Kane exclaims in shock, unsure of how to handle her outburst. "Dr Wallace isn't here to hurt me."

"Bullshit," Lexa snarls, eyeing him up and down as she grips her gun's barrel tighter, minutes away from whipping it out. "Get him away from me."

"I'm here to help," Dr Wallace says calmly, completely unaffected by her reaction. "I understand that this situation may be hard. I lost my son two years ago in the same camp you'd been held captive. He was captured by those men and tortured just like you were. I'm guessing by your reaction that you knew him." Lexa chuckles, shaking her head as she snarls at the man each time he attempts to take a step forward. She backs herself into a corner, her shoulders stiffened.

"You have no idea," Lexa growls as she shifts her gaze between Kane and Dr Wallace. "You don't know what happened there. You don't know what he did."

"Lexa--"

"You don't know what he did," Lexa repeats, her voice cracking as the pitch increases. She's feeling so many things at once, but she can't figure out what each emotion is. They're all flowing through her brain at once, and she can't hold back as she lets out a scream, her fingers threading in her hair as she shakes her head in a feral manner. The two men watch her as she manically repeats, "you have no idea what he did… what he did to me!" Dr Wallace flinches, but keeps quiet.

"I believe that your year on your own has made you delusional," Dr Wallace says gravely as he takes out his prescription pad. "I'm worried for you."
"I'm not fucking delusional," Lexa snaps as she takes a step closer to the psychiatrist. She's about to get up in his face when Kane steps between them, holding Lexa back from doing something violent. Dr Wallace remains stoic as he scribbles down something down on the pad before ripping the paper off and handing it to her.

"I believe that you have Complex PTSD, Major Depression, and Schizoid-Personality Disorder. Here are a list of medications you should take to feel better," Dr Wallace says calmly, his voice no longer light or joyful as it had been when they'd first met. Lexa growls at him, pushing against Kane's hand furiously.

"You're fucking nuts if you think I'm gonna take that shit," Lexa snaps as she backs off with a glare, "I'm not taking anymore drugs, not after what he did."

"My son was not like that--"

"Your son was a murderer," Lexa snarls as she clenches her fists tightly. "He was a murderer and a liar and a fucking rapist. He tortured me, Doc. He drugged me."

"Lexa," Kane says in a low, soothing voice. "Cage Wallace is a technology mogul. He has no background in pharmaceuticals. I think that your memories must have gotten mixed up when you came back. He was shot dead in the village. We found his body next to the Director of Human Resources, Carl Emerson." Lexa stops and stares at Kane in disbelief. She shakes her head at him, continuing to glare up at her former superior with ire in her deep green eyes. Dr Wallace hands her the note again, his eyes misting with angered tears as she rips the paper slip out of his hands and looks at the list of medication in her hand with a disbelieving snort.

"I'm not falling for this shit," she says as she looks up at them, "I won't take them."

"You will," Dr Wallace says, "because I'm pulling rank, soldier. You serve as a danger to the public and yourself and will be detained if you refuse."

"This is bullshit," Lexa gasps, looking over at Kane. "He's fucking out to get me because of his son and--"

"Major Woods," Kane says sternly, "you will listen to the psychiatrist. I don't know what you're thinking about Cage Wallace, but it isn't true. There isn't any evidence to prove your allegations. Dr Wallace is right. You are in a dangerous state, and as your former superior, I am telling that I don't want to see you detained for something you could have prevented long ago. No one here is out to get you. We don't want to hurt you. We're both just trying to help you." Lexa scowls and shakes her head, tears burning in her eyes as she looks down at the seven different medications listed on the pad. Three antidepressants, two antipsychotics, a painkiller, an anti-anxiety pill, a medicated version of MDMA, and a sleep aid that doubles as a sedative. She stares at the cocktail, reading their levels of dosage. Her brows shoot up when she sees most of them are above a hundred. She goes to question the doctor, but before she can, she looks to see him gone and instead Kane is staring back at her sadly.

"Sir," Lexa chokes as she glances over at Kane, "please don't make me do this. I am okay. I swear, I have bad days sometimes, but I'm okay."

"You're not in a good place right now," Kane whispers softly, his hand coming up to grip her shoulder. "This is what is best for you."

Lexa stares at him, her mouth hinging open slightly as she lets his words sink in. Kane lets his hand drop and he sighs, holding back tears.
"Fuck you," Lexa breathes out as she crumples the paper in her hands, shaking her head as she wipes away her tears. "I can't believe you take his word over mine."

"With everything that's happened," Kane explains slowly, flinching at his own words, "I don't know if I can believe you, Lexa."

Lexa doesn't even bother replying. She simply scoffs and shakes her head again, piercing her stare to the floor.

"Fine," Lexa says with an angry shrug, "I'll take the damned pills. Anything else, sir?"

Kane opens his mouth to speak, to try and comfort her, but Lexa doesn't want any of it. He simply sighs and shakes his head guiltily. "No, that's all."

"Goodbye then," Lexa promptly says as she turns around and dashes out the door. She opts for the stairs, despite her knee screaming at her to stop the strain on her leg. She bolts out of the building, her lungs heaving for breath as she feels the panic start to settle around her. It suffocates her, killing her from the inside out.

She reaches into her pocket and fishes out the crumpled paper, staring at it in disbelief and sadness.

"Here we go again," Lexa relents with defeat, "I guess it never ends, does it?"

Her reflection stands across from her, leaning on a tree and giving her a sympathetic shake of the head. Lexa sighs and looks back down at the prescription before walking across the street to get to the pharmacy. She shoves the prescription in the hands of the pharmacist and waits in the store for her medications to be ready. The entire time, she sits there numbly, her hands folded tightly in her lap as she stares at nothing, her thoughts swimming with memories that have forever scarred her.

"What if they help?" She hears her reflection ask from the seat across from her. "They could make your pain go away, you know."

"And what happens if they do take away my pain?" Lexa asks back, her eyes brimming with tears. "Without my pain, what do I have left?"

At that, her reflection's lips quirk up in a sad, understanding smile.

"Nothing, kid. You've got nothing."

February 18th 2014, 11:35

Central Park, New York

Aden sits on the park bench next to Clarke, the two of them watching Lexa and Tris playing in the snow. His younger sister is piling a bunch of snow into a ball in an effort to show their mother how to build a snowman. Aden feels his heartache when he remembers the last time Lexa had built a
snowman with him. She stares at her now, a stranger in the body of the woman he'd once looked up to and admired. He still loves his mother, but he knows something is different and it hurts so much.

"Is Mom going to be okay?" Aden asks, looking over at his other mother. Clarke stares back at him, haggard and weary as she nods. It's not a convincing response, but Aden allows himself to believe in it for the sake of giving himself a false sense of hope. He looks back at Tris and Lexa, who are now tousling in the snow before he takes a breath and gets up to join them. He forces a smile on his face for his younger sister, who beams as soon as he approaches them with a hesitant smile. She runs up to him and wraps her small arms around his waist. Lexa stands, sending him a soft smile before reaching out and tugging him into her arms.

Lately, his mother had been acting slightly strangely. There would be days in which she would be happy and euphoric, in which she would play with both him and his sister. She would act in every way that she used to, but it just seemed... off. Other days she would be emotionless and numb to the world, doing nothing but sitting on the armchair and staring into nothing for hours on end, only ever getting up to use the bathroom. She wouldn't say a word to anyone, not even Clarke.

To be honest?

Aden is terrified.

All he wants to do is help Lexa. He doesn't know how, but he wants to help her, to get her back to the woman that he once knew. He doesn't like this shell of a person, and there are days in which he wonders if Lexa can even feel anything beyond basic touch. Aden shakes away the thoughts as he burrows into his mother's embrace, nuzzling his face into her shoulder gently, taking in her familiar scent. Tris giggles between them, eager for more attention. Aden smiles down at her and swoops her up into his arms, reaching into his coat pocket for a small carrot to place on the snowman's face. Tris takes it eagerly and tugs on Lexa's sleeve, drawing her attention.

"Look Mommy!" She squeals in delight. "Look at the nose!"

"Good work," Lexa says in affirmation, nodding at her daughter as she shoves the carrot into the snow. Aden smiles as he looks at her before pressing a kiss to the side of her head. Tris beams and snuggles closer to her, wrapping her small arms over his shoulders. One of Lexa's hands come to rest on Aden's shoulder as they look at the creation. There's crunching of snow beneath boots behind them and Aden turns to see Clarke sheepishly approaching them. Aden looks away, still pissed that his mother hasn't told the truth about her infidelity. He knows that it will come out eventually, but he knows that Clarke is partially correct. Now is not the time for it.

But then when is the right time?

He hasn't seen much of Anya in weeks, and he can only assume that Clarke had told her to stay away in order to figure out her own thoughts. He doesn't understand what's gone wrong, and how everything had managed to go to shit when they'd been doing so well in recovering, but he doesn't question it anymore. He can't seem to figure out his own feelings about the situation. In a sense, he does feel guilty for the way he's been acting. He knows that it isn't easy for Clarke to take Lexa back into her life. He tries to block out their screaming matches, but fails miserably. He hears Lexa most of the time, screaming at Clarke to back off or stop pushing her to talk. He's always hated the sound of Clarke's voice cracking when she cries, and it seems that he's hearing more of that lately than the sound of his mother's laughter.

God, how he wishes things could be normal again.

"Should we get some pizza for dinner?" Clarke asks, her voice hoarse from lack of sleep and fatigue.
Aden looks up at her haggard expression as she forces a smile for the entire family. A part of his heart breaks for her, and knowing that he's exacerbating her pain only makes him feel guiltier. But Aden can't help it. He looks at Clarke and he sees betrayal. He wonders if Lexa's coming home would be as bad if Clarke hadn't slept with Anya. He wonders if they'd be a happy family again, just like they used to be. Instead of asking the questions that burn from deeply within him, Aden decides to stay quiet and simply nod, shooting her a small, forced smile in return.

"I want ham and pineapple!" Tris blurts out, glancing over at Lexa with wide eyes. "That's your favourite right, Mommy?"

Leda gulps and swallows, cocking her head in confusion before smiling and nodding. "Of course."

"Then it's settled," Clarke chuckles with a soft rasp, "let's get some pizza."

Aden catches Lexa looking at Clarke with a blank expression before the older woman reaches out and opens up her palm. Aden feels his breath catch in his lungs as he watches Clarke's eyes water before she quickly accepts her hand, holding it tightly. Lexa sighs and gently tugs Clarke into her side, pressing a kiss to the top of Clarke's frazzled blonde hair. His birth mother barely suppresses the whimper that leaves her lips as she nuzzles closer to Lexa's side. Lexa simply looks down at him and extends her other arm, eager for Aden to get the hint. He walks over to her and lets her arm wind around his waist before all four of them make their way to the car.

Yeah, things aren't perfect. Far from it, really.

But Aden can pretend that everything's alright, even if only for a moment.

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February 20th 2014, 17:55

Maimonides Medical Centre, New York

"Dr Griffin! Dr Griffin!"

Abby looks up from a chart to see her assistant, Jackson, jogging down the infirmary ward with a file in his hand. Putting down her clipboard, she takes the file from his hands and opens it up quickly, glancing inside to see what reports he'd retrieved for her. She scans over the words and frowns, confused at the results.

"Normal?" She questions, looking up at her assistant. "Are you sure this is the right report?"

"Yes," Jackson breathes as he straightens his back, "Dr Harris concluded that she rules out any sort of complications. Aside from the brain regions being marginally different, there's nothing really wrong with her." Abby frowns as she walks past him and into her office. Jackson follows closely, taking a seat on one of the chairs as Abby reaches for one of the CT scans and puts it up against the white board. She stares at the image in confusion, furrowing her brow as she assesses the image.
"What about functional topography in her striatal regions?"

"It doesn't make a difference, Dr Griffin. Her blood levels indicate nothing other than iron deficiency and lack of B12 vitamins," Jackson sighs, "I think you have a dead end case with her. I highly doubt that we have any jurisdiction now, anyways." Abby's eyes flash as she looks down at Jackson in a confused expression.

"What do you mean by that?" Abby questions, taking a seat at her desk. "Lexa is my patient."

"But you're a surgeon, not a psychiatrist," Jackson says slowly, testing the words on his lips, "and besides, I don't think that this is in your expertise."

"I am the head neurosurgeon here," Abby growls, rising from her seat as she towers over her assistant with a snarl tugging at her lips. "I've hired a team of the most esteemed neurologists from across the country to look at this case. Out of all thirteen of them, only one thinks that we are overplaying this situation. There is something neurobiologically wrong with Lexa, and we will get to the bottom of it. It doesn't take a CT scan to know that something is wrong." Jackson gulps under Abby's furious glare. She slides the file back to him and backs off to look back at the board and peer at the brain slices that she's marked out.

Jackson takes the file and looks at it in confusion. "What do you want me to do with this?"

Abby sighs and pinches the bridge of her nose, before turning to her assistant. "Fax the information to the team. I want a meeting scheduled for Friday."

Jackson nods and bounds off, looking sheepish as he runs down the hall towards the office staff. Once alone, Abby sighs and slumps back in her seat and stares at the results of Lexa's blood test. She knows that something doesn't add up. Even with the stress and the physical torture, her behaviour shouldn't be as alarming as it is right now. She struggles with figuring out just what is causing Lexa's abnormal behaviour. Frowning, she goes over to her cabinet and pulls out the files of research she'd dug up a few days ago that relate to Lexa's case. She sits back down and flips through the various case studies, searching for some sort of correlation.

She's about to flip through another case study when there's a knock at her door. Abby sighs, not taking her eyes off the paper. "Not now, Jackson."

"It's not Jackson," a deep male voice replies, causing Abby's head to jerk upwards. She relaxes slightly when she sees Marcus Kane staring back at her. The man hovers in the door of her office, waiting for her to give him an instruction. Abby stands and beckons him in, giving him a smile, one that Kane forcibly returns.

"Is something the matter?" Abby asks as they both sit down. Kane sighs, looking down at his hands.

"I'm here about Lexa," he says softly, glancing back up with a guilty expression. Abby stands and beckons him in, giving him a smile, one that Kane forcibly returns.

"I'm here about Lexa," he says softly, glancing back up with a guilty expression. Abby cocks her head, confused.

"I'm doing the best I can, but at the moment, it's a little difficult considering--"

"She's already been prescribed drugs," Kane interrupts, causing Abby to stiffen and frown. "She met with Dr Wallace this week."

"Marcus," Abby says with a concerned tone, "we still don't know enough about her neurotransmitter levels, let alone the shrunken hippocampus which could be a causation of her memory impairments or even the abnormal size of her thalamus or the lack of oxytocin--"
"Abby," Kane interrupts, a sad expression taking over his features. "Lexa's file is being taken care of by her psychiatrist. The board has advised that no further evaluation is necessary." Abby snorts in disbelief, unable to comprehend just what the corporal is telling her. Kane looks just as distraught, but he remains quiet.

"They gave her a diagnosis?" Abby asks, her voice quiet. "After what? Fifteen minutes of looking at her? Just like that?"

"Abby--"

"What did they diagnose her with?" Abby cuts him off angrily, feeling her stomach churn. "What did Dr Wallace say, Marcus?"

Kane sighs and looks down, his shoulders slumping sadly. "Complex PTSD, Major Depression, and Schizoid-Personality Disorder."

"What did they give her?" Abby asks, reaching for a pen as she scribbles the items down. Kane looks up, tears in his eyes as he parts his mouth. Abby pauses in her writing, her heart breaking in her chest as she watches Kane reach upwards and palm at the scruff that lines his chin. It's only now that she sees just how tired the man looks. Abby knows of the history between Kane and the two Woods sisters, but she's never seen the soldier so tightly wound and distraught. Kane sighs, shaking his head as he takes a deep breath, wiping away the tears that had been collecting at the corner of his eyes.

"I don't even know," Kane says, sniffling. "I've been in this career for years and I've never seen that many drugs being prescribed to one person."

"It's crucial that I know what she was given," Abby tells him seriously, "some of those drugs could do worse than their intent."

"They all will," Kane snaps in frustration, looking up at Abby with bloodshot eyes. "That's the whole thing, Abby. These drugs are just going to tranquilize whatever is happening. I want you to help her, but the psychiatrist has more experience and more authority than either of us. He gets to make the call on what Lexa takes."

"But Lexa doesn't have to take the drugs," Abby pushes, "it's in her constitutional rights. She can refuse them."

"And she tried," Kane snorts, shaking his head again. "So did Anya. But these doctors are relentless, Abs."

"Wait," Abby frowns, "when was Anya prescribed medication? Is she alright?"

"Honestly, is anyone alright at the moment?" Kane asks in a distant voice. "They gave Anya some anti-depressants and a sleeping aid."

"Look," Abby says, pushing Anya's case aside for a minute so she can focus back in on Lexa. "I don't want Lexa to take anything until I clear her. Technically, Dr Wallace has the final call, but that doesn't mean I can't pull rank with my status. He may be able to give her a diagnosis, but I can give her the most affective treatment. This isn't just some psychosocial thing, Marcus. She's showing so many different brain abnormalities and each can mean a completely different thing. I need more time."

"You don't have time," Kane says, standing up as he rubs at the back of his head. "I can't get you anymore time. The military has a code of conduct and right now, Lexa isn't capable of upholding it.
She came into my office asking to be reinstated Abby. I know something isn't right just as much as you do, but there's nothing I can do."

"Then let me figure it out," Abby says as she stands with the older man, walking around her desk so that she can open her arms and give him a hug. Kane leans into her touch with a sad sigh, his head slumping against her shoulder as Abby holds him tightly. "I'll get her help, Marcus. I promise I won't let us lose her. I can do this."

"Please," Kane whispers, his voice muffled as he cries into Abby's shoulder. "I can't stand seeing her like this, Abby. It's like she's a whole different person."

"We'll get her back," Abby hums as she uses her free hand to curl through the man's hair, "I'll bring her back to us, Marc."

"I can't lose her," Kane sobs as he clings to her, "I can't lose her again, Abby." Abby swallows thickly, pulling away from the hug so that she can help wipe the tears from his eyes. He avoids her eye contact once its over, his stare glued to the ground. Abby can sense the defeat rolling off of him in waves and finds herself breaking at the sight of the man so broken and distraught. She's had this question on her mind for quite sometime, but she's never known if it was ever appropriate to ask the man. She draws in a breath of courage and brings Kane back down to sit.

"Abby?" Kane asks tiredly, confused by the action. Abby pulls up her chair before reaching between them for his hands, holding them gently in her own palms.

"Marcus," Abby says quietly, staring up at him with a serious expression. "I need you to tell me what you found at that camp."

Kane's eyes flicker with doubt as he looks to their hands and then back up at the doctor. "Okay," he says softly, "what do you want to know?"

Abby sighs, steadying herself before replying, "everything."

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February 24th 2014, 22:00

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

Clarke tousles her hair, sighing as she enters the bathroom. She'd just set Tris to bed and Aden was already fast asleep. She closes the door behind her and plops down on the toilet, quickly getting through with her business before flushing and washing her hands. She opens up the cabinet for her toothbrush when she sees eight small pill bottles decorated on the inside of the cabinet. Frowning, Clarke reaches inside and grabs at each other them, reading the labels with raised brows and shock.

"Zoloft, 300mg. Seroquel, 250mg. Klonopin, 1.5mg…,“ Clarke reads off the labels, her voice cracking as the bottles tremble in her hands. "What the…"
"Clarke," Lexa's voice sounds from behind her, causing the older blonde to jump. Clarke turns
around to face Lexa, a concerned expression pulling her lips into a tight line. She walks up to Lexa
and holds out the pill bottles, her mouth hanging open as tears glisten in her eyes. Lexa looks at her
and then down at the bottles.

"What are these?" Clarke asks in a rough croak. "Lexa, when did you get this?"

"I was prescribed to take them a few days ago," Lexa replies with a horrifying smile, "the doc says
that they're my happy pills."

A small chuckle follows her response as she reaches out and takes each of the seven bottles into her
hand. Clarke watches in complete shock as Lexa uncaps the lids and picks a single tablet into her
palm. She grabs a glass and fills it up with tap water before downing pill after pill. Clarke can't even
find the words to question Lexa's behaviour as she watches her wife continue to knock back each pill
until she's done. Setting the empty glass aside, Lexa flashes another smile in Clarke's direction.

"This cocktail…," Clarke splutters as she takes the pill bottles in her hands, "these dosages… Lexa,
this is going to kill you."

"It's okay," Lexa chuckles as she places her hand on Clarke's shoulder, squeezing gently. "I've got
this, Clarke. They're gonna fix me, just like you wanted."

"Lexa no…," Clarke trails off as she watches Lexa brush past her, stalking down their hall until she
reaches the bedroom. Clarke follows helplessly, still dumbfounded at the cocktail of medication she'd
found in medicine cabinet. She hastily switches off the light and follows Lexa. She opens her
bedroom door to see Lexa stripping off her shirt and carelessly tossing it to the side. Clarke's eyes
gaze over the welts and scars, her body trembling as she watches each sinewy muscle tense with
every move.

"Lexa, just stop for a minute, will you?" Clarke reaches out, her voice shaking as she places her hand
on Lexa's forearm. Her eyes gaze down to the line of ink on the brackets of her wife's ribs. Clarke's
other hand involuntarily reaches out, her fingertips grazing over the torn, scarred lines that break
through the words on her sides. Tears well in her eyes as she looks back up to see Lexa's distant,
hardened gaze staring back at her with an emotionless expression. Clarke gulps, using the same hand
to reach upwards and trace the hard line of her jaw. Lexa takes a deep breath, stiffening at first, but
as soon as Clarke's hand covers her cheek, she relaxes slightly.

"What's going on in your mind, Lex?" Clarke whispers softly, trying to keep her voice from
cracking. "What are you thinking?"

After a moment, one of Lexa's hands come up to cover Clarke's own with a larger palm.

"I'm thinking," Lexa hums as she leans forward to press their foreheads together, "I want to touch
you. I want you, Clarke."

Clarke knows it's wrong. She knows how wrong it is on so many levels, but the minute Lexa's lips
gaze her own, all those thoughts fly out the window. Lexa's grinning against her lips and for a
minute, Clarke feels like she's eighteen all over again, kissing Lexa for the first time. She can't help
the desperate gasp that leaves her lips as she runs her hand down Lexa's bare chest, her fingers
marking the countless scars. She traces each prominent rib bracket and she sobs into Lexa's mouth
when she realizes just how much of a toll the war had taken upon her wife. She feels Lexa roughly
prying off her own top before reconnecting their lips in a heated kiss.

L nexa spins them so that Clarke's back is to the bed, before walking them backwards. The backs of
Clarke's knees catch in the frame, sending them tumbling backwards. Clarke feels like she's on fire at the way Lexa is nipping down her neck, her hips grinding into Clarke's jeans. Her hands are rougher than what she remembers as they fumble with her bra. Clarke reaches up and brings Lexa's head back down to her own, not wanting to be away from those lips for any longer. Lexa grinds harder, grunting with each thrust like an animal in heat. They've had rough sex before, and at a point in college, even dabbled in some BDSM. But this? This isn't anything like what they used to do, and Clarke knows it. She can feel it. She can hear it in the way Lexa is basically growling into her ear, all nonsense syllables and hisses.

"Lexa," Clarke whimpers between fervent kisses, "Lexa slow down."

Lexa growls and thrusts harder, nearly feral in her movements as she opens her eyes to stare down at Clarke. Her lips are curled in a smirk, her eyes completely black from lust. Clarke shivers in arousal and in fear as she reaches upwards, tugging Lexa back down, while running her hands back over Lexa's body. Her hands go to Lexa's jeans, unbuckling the belt as quickly as she can before ripping it off. Lexa yanks down her own jeans while Clarke helps her slip out of her own. It takes some time, and some fumbling on both their parts, before they are both naked and writhing with each other. Clarke's hands wrap around Lexa's middle and her neck, drawing her in for a hug. Lexa stops her agitated movements as Clarke drinks her in, her frame trembling. Clarke presses open mouth kisses along the scars that make up Lexa's collar, despite how her heart aches at the feel of each bump and raised line. Lexa shudders again, gripping the sheets underneath with a low growl.

"What do you need?" Clarke asks softly, her voice cracking. "Lexa?"

Lexa doesn't respond with words. Before Clarke can ask another question, she feels two long and slender fingers slipping past her walls. A low, keeling moan rips from her throat as she feels Lexa's smirk against the side of her neck. Her wife's teeth latch onto her neck as those deft fingers pump in and out of her at a steady pace. Lexa thrusts her hips with each intrusion, her grip on her throat growing tighter with each thrust. Clarke hides her head in Lexa's neck, crying out in agony as she feels her climax approaching. A bead of sweat trickles down her forehead and slips into the sheet, her eyelids slipping shut as she feels the familiar burn creep up behind her.

"Oh God," Clarke moans as Lexa picks up the pace, "Lexa… fuck…"

Lexa's teeth pierce the skin of her neck, drawing out an ample amount of blood. Clarke yelps at the sensation and tries to wiggle away, but Lexa's weight keeps her pinned down. The sharp sting, coupled with the curling of Lexa's fingers, has Clarke into overdrive. She can't help the keeling, low wail that erupts from her lips as tides of pleasure and pain wave over her. She writhes underneath the erratic thrashing of Lexa's hips into her own. The slapping of their skin is animalistic and harsh. Clarke's orgasm is short-lived, but not entirely dissatisfying. She comes down from her high, only to realize that Lexa is still rigid and tense above her.

"Was that good?" Lexa asks in a slick purr. "Do you like when I fuck you like this?"

"Lexa…," Clarke breathes out, twitching as she feels Lexa's fingers curl again. Her wife chuckles almost sadistically, her tone starting to scare Clarke.

"How may people have fucked you like this, Clarke?" Lexa hums, her lips curling up in a smirk as she stares down at the blonde, specks of blood lining the underside of her teeth. Clarke shudders, whimpering as she sees the near-predatory look that adorns Lexa's gaze. Clarke gulps nervously, her eyes welling with tears.

"I haven't… I…"
"It's okay," Lexa purrs again, her voice sickeningly sweet. "I was gone a long time. There had to have been someone to take care of you."

"Lexa--"

"Someone to make you feel warm and loved--"

"Lex--"

"Someone that fucked you raw," Lexa growls with a rough curl of her fingers upwards. "Hmm? Was there anyone? Tell me, Clarke. I won't be mad."

It's not even Lexa's actions that are throwing Clarke off as much as the tone of her voice. Clarke cannot ever think of a time where Lexa has sounded so… dissociated from herself. It's like the woman above her is an entirely different person. Any love or respect that Lexa once carried in those bright green eyes has vanished. Instead, it's been replaced by the vicious, dripping black jealousy and fury that swims in her sunken gaze. Clarke gulps again, her body trembling out of fear and guilt.

"Please," Clarke begs as Lexa curls her fingers again, "please, I swear--"

"Was it Bellamy?" Lexa chuckles as she leans her head down and slowly kisses her wife. "Did he fuck you with his cock? Did you scream his name as you came?"

"Lexa stop," Clarke whimpers as she tries to pull away, "please, I didn't--"

"Or was it Anya?" Lexa asks, causing Clarke to stiffen immediately. "Did you fuck my sister, Clarke? I wouldn't be mad. Anya's always had a thing for you. She tries so painfully hard to hide it, but I can always see right through her. I wonder if that's why she decided to let me die in that village, so she could come home to you."

"Lexa no," Clarke painfully whimpers as she feels Lexa's fingers recede from her centre and wipe themselves on the sheets. Lexa bursts into a loud laugh at the petrified expression on Clarke's face before she rolls off of her wife. Clarke gathers the sheets up to her chest and blinks back tears at the way Lexa continues to chuckle. Clarke clutches the sheets tighter as Lexa rolls onto her side and looks at her with a blank expression, the tease and laughter wiped clean off of her face.

"C'mon Clarke," Lexa prods as she reaches up and tangles their fingers together. "If you're my wife, you'd know that we tell each other everything."

Clarke looks down at those fingers, trying to keep the wave of nausea down as Lexa inches closer until their lips are millimetres apart.

"You can tell me," Lexa hums again, placing a few butterfly kisses down the column of Clarke's neck. "I'm your wife, remember?"

Clarke is about to open her mouth and reply when Lexa's suddenly kissing her. One of Lexa's hands, the one that is tangled with her own fingers, suddenly glides down her bare, scarred stomach until it reaches the apex of her thighs. Clarke shivers as she feels the thick, curly strands of pubic hair. She feels Lexa guiding her down until she's slipping both their fingers between her folds. Clarke's eyes close upon impact and she draws a sharp breath, inhaling Lexa's musky, dominant scent.

But there's a catch.

Lexa's not wet.
"Lexa," Clarke interrupts Lexa's kisses with a concerned tone, "Lexa, you need lube. I could hurt you. Maybe we should stop--"

"No," Lexa growls roughly as she rolls atop Clarke and pins their hips together again. "I haven't been fucked in five years, Clarke. Just do it."

"Lexa--"

"I said no," Lexa snarls down at her, the grip on her other hand tighter than before, "please, Clarke. Just make me feel something."

This makes Clarke's heart stop.

She wants to question Lexa's confession, but she's distracted by Lexa's lips back on hers, desperate and needy. She knows that they need to talk, but right now, with Lexa's body quivering and aching for more, she can't help herself. She slowly rubs circles on Lexa's clit, trying to work Lexa up and get her wet enough for penetration. Noticing the trembling in her wife's arms, Clarke quickly flips them so that she's on top and Lexa is beneath her. She layers a series of kisses to Lexa's chest, trying to make peace with the scars that lay there. But yet, all she feels as she grazes her lips upwards and meets Lexa in a slow, but equally heartbreaking kiss.

"Please," Lexa whispers, her voice cracking as she squeezes Clarke's wrist with her fingers, "please Clarke, make me come."

Clarke sucks in a breath as she traces over Lexa's entrance. Not feeling comfortable with penetrating her wife dry, Clarke pulls her fingers up and sucks them into her mouth, getting them wet before reaching back down to finger at Lexa's core. Her wife lets out a low-groan as Clarke slowly pushes past her entrance. Immediately, Lexa's eyelids fly open and a high-pitched snarl leaves her lips. Clarke's eyes widen in fear as Lexa twitches and thrashes beneath her, and not out of pleasure.

"Baby," Clarke whimpers as she feels tears burn at her eyes, "please, we should stop. You're not wet--"

"Keep going," Lexa hisses through gritted teeth, glaring up at Clarke. "It's good. It feels good."

"Lex, you're in pain--"

"That's the point," Lexa growls as she looks away. "That's all I want. I want to feel something… anything. Please just make me feel, Clarke."

Clarke's eyes mist as she curls her fingers, feeling something wet dribble down them. She looks down in horror to see small rivulets of blood glide into her palm. Horrified, Clarke goes to pull out when Lexa's hand reaches down to stops her again. Nodding her head back upwards, Clarke makes out the painful, pleading expression laden in Lexa's eyes. There's so much agony and suffering, but Clarke can feel it through the pounding walls that threaten to suffocate her fingers, that this is what Lexa wants. She carries on, despite the aching tug in her heart and the voice in her head yelling at her to stop and just think about this for a second. This is Lexa reaching out for her, this is Lexa attempting to communicate with her, and despite how harsh it is and how uncomfortable she feels, she can't deny Lexa.

They go at it for a few minutes, with Lexa desperately thrashing and writhing in agony before Lexa finally cries out for her to stop. Clarke pulls away instantly and rolls off Lexa. The two of them lay side by side, staring up at the ceiling blankly as they recover their breaths. Silent tears are slipping down Clarke's cheeks as she thinks about what she had just done. Lexa doesn't say a word, and for a
moment, Clarke thinks that she's asleep, but when she turns over, she sees Lexa staring at nothing. "Lexa?" Clarke asks, her voice soft and unsure. "I'm sorry--"

"I'm going to sleep," Lexa replies emotionlessly, eyes wet with unshed tears. "Goodnight, Clarke."

With that, Lexa turns over and Clarke is left feeling more empty than ever.

===

It's the same nightmare.


It's the same nightmare and Lexa just wants to wake up.

And so she does.

===

Clarke wakes up to an empty, cold bed.

She glances over at her clock, noting the early hours of the day. She's got a shift in four hours, but she's exhausted. Between last night and its events, coupled with everything that Lexa had said, Clarke can't find the energy to even lift her arms. She looks around the room to see if Lexa's gone out again, but is surprised to see a strip of light bleeding out from the hallway. Confused, Clarke pries off the sheets and throws on some clothes before venturing out into the hall. The light is coming from the bathroom, and she can hear the low muttering voices from behind the door. Clarke frowns in confusion, recognizing her wife's voice in the silent air.

She knocks first, but she gets no answer.

"Lexa?" Clarke knocks again, her voice getting shrill with worry. "Lexa, are you okay in there?"

Silence.

Not wanting to take any chances, Clarke jimmys the handle and opens the door, bursting inside the bathroom.

The next image she sees is something she's sure she'll never forget.

There, standing with a pair of scissors in her hand and clumps of chestnut hair on the floor, is her wife.

"Lexa?" Clarke gasps in horror as she takes in the sight of the uneven tufts of hair that adorn Lexa's near-shaved scalp. "Oh my God…"

"Clarke," Lexa says with a stoic expression, turning to face her wife. "What's wrong?"

"Your hair…," Clarke trails off in disbelief, shaking her head. "What… what…?"

Clarke doesn't know what to say, not when she looks up into those empty green eyes and sees no resemblance of her wife. She splutters still struggling to piece together the image before her. She stammers upon nothing, her eyes blurred from tears as she stares at Lexa, silently begging for an answer of some sort. Clarke reaches out, but her hand pauses in mid-air as Lexa simply gives her
another distant, emotionless smile before glancing back at the mirror blankly.

"It was getting too long." Lexa replies simply, staring at Clarke through the glass. "I needed to cut it."

Clarke chokes on air as Lexa turns around again before brushing past her wife and leaves the room. Clarke hears the distinct sound of Lexa loading her gun and cocking it before shuffling downstairs for early-morning routine check of the house. Clarke stays in the bathroom, her gaze glued to the clumps of hair on the floor.

There's only one question that runs through her mind.

What happened?

Chapter End Notes

This is the full list of Lexa’s medications:

Zoloft -- antidepressant
Seroquel -- antidepressant
Clorazil -- antipsychotic
Paxil -- antidepressant
MDMA -- amphetamine (yes, this is used in assisted psychotherapy treatment for PTSD)
Klonopin -- off-label anti-anxiety med (FDA-approved for seizures)
Ambien -- sleep aid/sedative
Oxycodone -- pain reliever (highly addictive)

And the scary part about this? It's a common cocktail for PTSD vets. Some see four drugs, and others can see up to twenty-something at a single time. There is a drug epidemic, especially when it comes to the pharmaceutical industry getting involved in military personnel. I highly recommend watching "Psychiatry in the Military" by CCHR, because it really hits the nail on the head on how corrupt the system is when it comes to treating vets with drugs.

Now, for the comments. I love you guys and I love the discussions, but I remind you again, please be mindful of other people's opinions. The things discussed in this story are highly-sensitive topics for some, and so keep that in mind when having discussions! I love reading everything y'all write, and I appreciate all criticisms possible! Things are a little hard now, but there are only a few more chapters (maybe one or two) before the big break down. Things are building up now, but they're about to cascade into an entire shit show, and soon after, things will get better.

Thank you for all the support and again, if you are looking for resources, check out the master-post on my tumblr that gets reblogged after a chapter update! You’ll find academic readings and other links for more information! :) Also, feel free to send me some links to help further my research in these topics. I encourage all and any readings/documentaries you guys send, so long as it relates to the story. Feel free to send it in the comment section or shoot me a message on tumblr! I apologize for the long wait on the asks, I just got out of the midterm hell week.
Much love, xx.
Out of Sight (Not Out of Mind)

Chapter Summary

Abby learns new information about Lexa's condition, Aden gets picked on by bullies, Clarke struggles to hold her family together, Anya hits rock bottom, Raven receives a chilling phone call, and Lexa visits her past.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: SELF HARM, ATTEMPTED SUICIDE/THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE, VIOLENCE, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, ALCOHOLISM, MILD DOMESTIC ABUSE, AND GRAPHICALLY MENTIONED CHILD ABUSE.

Ooh boy, this one is a doozy. Lots of stuff happening here. The next chapter or the one after that will be the mental breakdown scene. After that is done, everything past it is focused on recovery. So good news is that the pain and heartbreak will be coming to a slow close. It'll still be there, but there will be a higher emphasis of recovery rather than pain. There are also quite a few triggers in this one, so do be careful. This chapter is as dark, if not more, as the last one. Do be careful, y'all.

The first section is slightly neuroscience-y so if you don't understand a lot of it, it's perfectly fine. Abby has to explain everything to Marcus in laymen terms and she'll do that in later chapters so it's more clear! :)

TRIGGER WARNINGS WITH CUES:

In the THIRD section, there are mentions of ALCOHOLISM and GRAPHIC CHILD ABUSE. It spans the entire section, and the flashback is in italics. The scene is graphic, so do be careful if this triggers you.

In the FOURTH section, there is MILD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE and a MILD PTSD FLASHBACK. The first is more of an accidental violence thing, but just incase people are worried, I'll tag it. It goes from "...and Lexa's suddenly screaming", and goes until the end of the first ===. Be warned, it's quite rough, but it's not as graphic as the one above.

In the SIXTH section, there is HOMOPHOBIA. Mentions of derogatory words and threats, which start from "...a sympathetic nod of agreement", and goes until Jackson says, "I'm sorry". Not graphic.

In the SEVENTH section, there are mentions of ALCOHOLISM, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, AND THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE. Spans the entire section and mildly graphic.

In the NINTH section, there are mentions of ATTEMPTED SUICIDE, SELF-HARM, ALCOHOLISM, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, and PTSD FLASHBACK. *THIS
Abby rubs her forehead as she walks into the room with her head bowed. The past few weeks have taken a toll on her physical and mental health and have left her feeling drained. Jackson is walking beside her, flipping through his reports as they make their way down the hall and towards the
"You alright, Abby?" Jackson asks as they enter the conference room and begin to set up the material needed for the presentation. "You've been kinda… off, ever since you talked with Colonel Kane."

"Fine," Abby mumbles as she looks up to him with a tired gaze. "It's just a lot to deal with right now."

"Fully understandable," Jackson says with a nod. "Ms Woods has a rather novel case."

"This isn't some race to find a cure," Abby growls out, towering over her assistant. "Lexa isn't some specimen that you can just run experiments on or whom with which you fill up a chart. She's a human being. Our goal is not discover a rare condition or solve this mystery, but to make sure that she is living her life in the best, least physically and mentally compromising way possible. Or have you forgotten about the Hippocratic Oath?" Abby grits her teeth and shakes her head, turning back to her computer so that she can load the powerpoint presentation and set it up onto the projector. Jackson remains silent.

"I just… the possible publications of your findings, Abby--"

"Mean nothing," Abby says back as she straightens her spine. "I don't care about the grant money or the publishing rights. I care about my daughter-in-law because she is my family and she deserves better."

Jackson nods, hanging his head with the decency at looking even slightly sheepish. Abby growls something under her breath as she reaches for her coffee and downs it in a long gulp before plucking at the collar of her shirt and adjusting her lab coat. She's about to scold Jackson again when her research team walks into the conference room, each of them taking their respective spaces at the wooden table.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Abby greets as the last member sits down, "welcome back. Thank you for joining me this morning. I'd like to start our presentation with the functional topography scan we did-"

"Pardon me, Dr Griffin," one of the neurologists interrupts sympathetically. "We all appreciate the effort and lengths you are going through, but don't you think that maybe we're overthinking all of this?"

Abby is taken aback. She cocks her head and resists the urge to grind her teeth. "Continue, Dr Harris."

"Well," Dr Harris says as he stands and walks over to her computer and skips a few slides over to the PET and CT scan results of Lexa's brain. He takes out his laser pointer and circles around her hippocampus.

"This shrinkage is common in PTSD patients, often those with more complex and serious cases. The thalamus is smaller and her ventricles are bigger, which, when taking into consideration of her excess dopamine levels, makes the acute diagnosis of schizo-personality disorder to be accurate." Dr Harris turns back to face Abby with a sad smile. "I know that Lexa's case is disturbing, but it could just be a severe version of schizophrenia." Abby shakes her head, seemingly furious as she looks up at him.

"If that was the case, then how do you explain her viewing her wife and family as impostors?"

"Dissociation," Dr Harris sighs, "Abby, with all due respect, you've got a dead case here."
"No," Abby refuses with a shake of her head. "I am not giving up. There is something beyond just the preliminary diagnosis. I don't think that it is schizophrenia. She doesn't show any signs of impaired motor movement or thought disorder. The only positive 'symptoms' are the hallucinations and delusions, which are too specific to be associated with schizophrenia. I mean, just look at this region right here." Abby grabs the laser pointer out of Dr Harris' hand and points to the area near the cerebellum.

"Look at this," Abby says as she looks to the doctors. "Her auditory streams are seemingly intact, but this here, the ventral visual stream? It's smaller and the BOLD signals from the fMRI are far less active. I strongly believe that this, alongside everything else, is something that is causing the 'impostor' effect."

"Alright, let's say that you're right," Dr Harris says as he flips through the slide, "then how can you explain how she manages to flip from being in reality to being in another world of some sort? I understand that you have found an abnormality, but I highly doubt that dysconnectivity in her temporal lobe could relate to some sort of memory impairment. The hippocampal shrinkage has more value, to be honest."

"Actually," a soft, smaller voice peeps up from the other end of the table. "I think Dr Griffin is right." Abby turns her head to see a young woman with hazel eyes standing up, a thick folder of papers in her hands. Abby looks to her curiously as the young doctor clears her throat and points at the pictures.

"I did some research about the ventral visual stream," the woman says with a nod, "and Dr Griffin may have a point. I don't think this is schizophrenia, either. I think that the symptoms are similar, but I don't think that it's a mental illness, but rather a memory disorder. Specifically, Capgras Delusion."

"What is that?" Dr Harris asks, bewildered. "Who are you, anyways? Aren't you a bit young, miss?"

"I'm twenty-eight," the woman says with a snide response. "And my name is Dr Jill Smith, sir."

"What's Capgras?" Abby asks, ignoring Dr Harris' snort of disapproval. Dr Smith opens the manila file and hands Abby a stack of papers. The older doctor skims through a few of the reports as Dr Smith talks.

"It's a type of delusional misidentification syndrome," Dr Smith continues, "and effects all the places in the brain that you've mentioned. It usually presents similar symptoms as someone with dementia or schizophrenia, but is more common in older adults because it can be a result of a neurodegenerative disease. However, in the case of Ms Woods, I think that it could be drug-induced." Abby's head jerks up and her brows shoot upwards as she stares at Dr Smith. Dr Harris only shakes his head and scoffs again.

"Listen, lady. Whatever that condition is, I highly doubt that it's the cause," he says in a condescending manner. "Besides, we've done blood-work and Ms Woods has no abnormalities of any sort. She checks out as a relatively healthy person, aside from the physical injuries she endured." Abby holds up a hand.

"What do you mean drug-induced, Dr Smith?" Abby asks. Dr Harris rolls his eyes.

"Come on, Abby, you're smarter than--"

"Ketamine," Dr Smith interrupts as she slides a few scans towards Abby. "These are two previous cases of rats in studies that unintentionally developed temporary Capgras as a result of inducing high
levels of ketamine intracranially. Rats that had the drug instantly rejected their mates and pups, and left them to die, even after they'd been bonded. Human trials recently discovered that ketamine has the ability to alter the cognitive and behavioural functioning in people who have prior memory problems or childhood trauma. Those exposed to stress and have a smaller hippocampus have the highest susceptibility."

"So what?" Dr Harris asks, crossing his arms. "This isn't a psychology seminar. Get to the point."

Dr Smith holds back the urge to roll her eyes as she hands him a specific study. "They also found that women are three times more likely than men to develop the disorder. Although ketamine antagonizes NMDA receptors, it also increases AMPA receptor stimulation, which leads to the misidentification. There is far too much glutamatory stimulation going on in the medial prefrontal cortex and her basal ganglia, of which the latter plays a major role in geographical memory. It's possible that she'd been injected with some sort of cocktail that exacerbates the symptoms of ketamine exposure in psychotic patients."

"Ketamine is a sedative," Dr Harris counters. "And, it's been proven to treat PTSD. What is your case?"

Abby looks between the two doctors, watching as Dr Smith reigns in her anger and frustration at the older man's prodding before she takes a deep breath and continues her explanation behind her theory.

"It's not that Ms Woods doesn't know who her family is, she just doesn't think that these people are her family. That's what we've found on her scan," Dr Smith says as she extends her hand and gives both senior doctors a picture of the brain scan. "Her auditory channel is intact, which means she can hear their voices on the phone and be fine, but her visual stream is impaired. This means that she cannot make the association between her family and her memories. It's a theory that is closer than the ones you propose, Dr Harris. I don't doubt that you are wrong. It looks like a characteristic case of schizophrenia from a neurological level, but I think that it's far more than that. I think that it's beyond neuroanatomy."

"And ketamine plays into this how, exactly?" Dr Harris asks, arching his brow skeptically. Dr Smith sighs.

"Ketamine is a dissociative anaesthetic," Dr Smith says slowly, "and I think that it's possible that perhaps when she had been captured, there might have been long term psychobiological warfare that was conducted. While her body shows signs of physical abuse, I think we shouldn't rule out mental torture. I strongly believe that, while the results came back clean, she must have been injected with some sort of drug cocktail that induced these hallucinatory visions that then later became permanent after repeated exposure, much like classical conditioning." Dr Harris crosses his arms and scoffs at her in ridicule.

"You're kidding right?" He asks as he looks to Abby. "You can't be taking this kid seriously."

"Listen Dr Harris," Dr Smith says, trying to keep the agitation out of her voice. "While I understand that you have experience and age over me, I'll have you know that I've got the most experience in the field of cognitive and abnormal neuropsychology. You may think that this is all absurd, but we can't keep limiting our scope to mental illnesses and psychotic disorders. Everything has a cause, and I think this is a lead."

Dr Harris and Abby remain speechless as Dr Smith puts down her files and shrugs. "I just think that we shouldn't be looking at this so broadly. Dr Griffin is right, this is something more than a simple case."
There's a silent moment between the doctors before Abby clears her throat. "Dr Smith?"

The younger woman gulps slightly, her face paling. "Yes, Dr Griffin?"

Abby takes the manila folder from her hands and nods to her. "I want you to get me more information on Capgras Delusion, especially in regards to those ketamine trials. I want to know more about the drug induction and its impact on the different receptors. I am promoting you to my senior advisor. You'll be given access to any equipment and research you may need, so long as I see the results. Is that clear?"

Dr Smith's face lights up at the same time Dr Harris furrows his brows in confusion.

"Of course," Dr Smith says as she grabs for her clipboard and scribbles something down. "I'll get in contact with my old neurology professor at John Hopkins. I think that he has connections to Dr Brenda Milner in Montreal and Dr Vilayanur Ramachandran in San Diego. They're the experts on these cases."

"Good," Abby says with a smile as the young doctor bounds off, phone in her hand.

"You can't be serious," Dr Harris scoffs as he turns to face her. "What could she know? She's just a kid."

"So was I when I made my first big case," Abby says as she continues to watch Dr Smith bound down the hall. "I made more history when I was her age then when you were mine. She has given me actual evidence, while the rest of you have simply pandered about the same central hypothesis. Granted, she could be wrong, but we need to look at this from every single angle." Dr Harris' face falls at the comment and Abby hides her smirk when she hears the muffled chuckles coming from around the table.

Abby looks to the rest of the team, who appear to be a mix between astonished and hesitant. "I want the rest of you to be continuing your individual investigations. I want every theory brought to me, no matter how far fetched. I want something beyond this simple diagnosis. That's all. Meeting dismissed."

The doctors start talking amongst themselves as the file out of the room, eager to get to work on the case now that a new idea has been proposed. Even Dr Harris begrudgingly leaves, stalking off towards the elevators and towards his lab to conduct more research. Abby watches them leave and only when the last person has gone, does she finally take a seat on one of the leather chairs. Jackson watches her with a sympathetic expression as he takes her things and packs them up quickly and quietly.

Just as Abby is about to stand up and take a break in the call lounge, her phone rings. She sighs, reaching down to fish it out before looking at the caller identification. Frowning, she picks it up.

"Clarke?"

"Mom!" Clarke's voice is fully of worry and fear. "Mom, it's Lexa!"

"Clarke?" Abby asks, rising as she feels the fatigue wipe clear from her body. "What happened, baby? Is she okay? Are you okay? Where are you guys right now?" There's some shuffling on the other end before Clarke returns to the phone, still sobbing and crying harshly into the receiver.

"Lexa... she cut her hair off, Mom. She just... it's all gone," Clarke sobs relentlessly. "I don't know what's wrong but they gave her these drugs which are all at nearly max, if not max dosages, and I'm worried that they're doing more harm than they are doing good for her. Please, Mom... please..."
"Clarke," Abby says as she looks at the time, "are you at home?"

"Yes."

"Is Lexa with you?"

"Yes… but she's just staring at nothing. Oh God, Mom--"

"Stay there, I'm on the way. Hang in there, baby girl. I'm coming."

Clarke gives her verbal assent before Abby hangs up and charges towards her office to pick up her coat and her belongings, Jackson following closely behind as they walk down the hall. Jackson lets her know that he'll cancel her other appointments and take care of her other items of the day that he can. Abby gives his shoulder an appreciative squeeze before she jets down the stairs and exits the hospital.

It takes a matter of ten or fifteen minutes before she makes it to her daughters' house. She parks the car on the driveway hastily before she opens the door, walking into the living room to see a horrifying sight.

Lexa is sitting there, her hair shaved with uneven tufts, staring at no one. She is about to walk over to the rigid woman when she hears the source of Clarke sobbing coming from the other room. Abby tears her gaze away from Lexa to see Clarke keeled over in the kitchen, hugging her chest as she sobs.

"Oh sweetheart," Abby whispers as she drops her purse and makes her way over to Clarke. She swoops her trembling daughter into her arms and holds onto her tightly, kissing her hair as Clarke continues to cry. The younger woman's knees buckle and soon the both of them are curled on the floor together.

"We… last night… we…," Clarke hiccups incoherently, "… and then this morning, she just… she…"

"Honey," Abby whispers, trying to mask her fear. "I need you to match my breathing. You're not getting any air right now. Watch me, baby. Breathe with me, okay?" Clarke nods her head up and matches Abby's breathing as she begins to calm down. Abby continues to hold her tightly to limit the sensory overload.

"There we go," Abby hums encouragingly as Clarke begins to calm, "that's my girl."

Once Clarke has calmed down, Abby helps her up and sits her down by the kitchen table. Clarke rests her head in her hands as Abby grabs a glass and fills it up with water before returning to her daughter. She casts a glance over the island counter to the living room, gulping apprehensively when she notices that Lexa is staring at her with an empty expression, her green eyes bearing into her own dark gaze.

It's… chilling.

"Mom," Clarke rasps as soon as she's gotten some of the water down. "There's something wrong with Lexa. It's not just PTSD anymore. She… last night…" Clarke chokes on a sob and Abby's heart freezes over when she makes the connection as she glances to the hickeys dotting along Clarke's neck. The more she inspects her daughter, the more she sees the evidence of their previous nights' activities.

"Clarke," Abby says sternly as she tears her gaze away from a still-staring Lexa, "this has gone on
long enough. You know what needs to happen. This can't carry on anymore. You're right, this isn't her."

"She wouldn't try to intentionally hurt me," Clarke pleads as she looks up, teary-eyed. "Last night…"

"Last night," Abby says in a low voice, "she wasn't herself, was she?"

Clarke chokes on another cry as she pauses. Abby grits her teeth. "Clarke."

"No!" Clarke interrupts with a whimper. "No, okay? She wasn't. But how could she be, Mom?"

Abby is silent at Clarke's outburst, her eyes glazing over as she sees the pain and sadness in those beautiful blue eyes.

"I want to help her," Clarke admits defeatedly, "but I don't know how. I don't even know if she can be helped, Mom. She's… she's just empty. She doesn't talk. She doesn't sleep. She is… she's not herself."

"We're working on helping her," Abby says, though her voice remains stern. "But Clarke, I know you want to help her, but right now, based on what you've told me and what I can see is going on, I don't think being at home is the safest option for Lexa at the moment. She needs to be in an institution where she can be cared for in a safer, more controlled environment with doctors who specialize in her cases."

"She's not an animal," Clarke glares as she growls out her response. "She's my wife, Mom. I love her."

"I know baby," Abby says gently, "but she needs help. She needs real, medical help."

"Medical help?" Clarke responds, aghast. "They gave her 300mg of Zoloft, Mom. That's the starting dosage. You know how it works. If that's her starting dosage, where is she going to end up? She's on eight different medications, Mom. If the memories don't kill her, the pills will. She can't take it."

Abby is about to answer when there's a clearing of a throat from behind them. Both doctors turn to see Lexa staring at them blankly, her head cocked to the side as she glances between the two of them.

"I have a physiotherapy appointment at noon," Lexa says in a monotone voice. "We're going to be late."

Clarke rises to her feet on wobbly knees as she offers Lexa a soft nod and a warm smile. "Of course, baby. Let me just grab my keys and change real quick, okay?" Lexa doesn't respond as Clarke brushes past her mother and stumbles up the steps, leaving Abby and Lexa alone in the kitchen.

It's quiet for a few moments before Lexa turns to pierce Abby with her stare.

"Stay away from her," Lexa says in a low snarl. "I don't know who you are or what you want with my wife, but stay the fuck away from her." Abby's brows raise as she goes to stand, but when she does, Lexa steps forward and snarls, her hands clenched into fists at her sides. "I've been watching you. I know what you want. You want to take my wife and you want to kill her again, don't you? Well, guess what? If you even lay a finger on her, I will break every goddamn bone in your body."

Abby shudders at the venom dripping off of every word that Lexa spits her way. Abby goes to put her hands up in a show of non-confrontation, but Lexa looks at the movement and her green eyes flare with an unbridled rage.

Before she can lunge forward, Clarke's voice rings out from the stairs. "Lexa, stop!"
Lexa's head turns as she's midway through reaching for Abby, her back stiffening at the horror in Clarke's voice. She glances back at Abby and reluctantly lowers her arm, clenching her fists at her side as she looks away in anger. Abby takes a deep breath and steps back, tears welling in her eyes as any semblance of the quiet, scrawny girl that Clarke had fallen for all those years ago suddenly disappears.

"Let's go," Clarke whispers to her wife as she approaches the tense woman, "come on, baby."

"Is she coming?" Lexa snarls out as she glowers at Abby. Clarke shakes her head and pulls Lexa into her arms for an embrace. It takes sometime before Lexa relaxes and slowly winds her arms around Clarke. The younger woman continues murmuring soothing assurances into her wife's neck as Lexa begins to calm down again. It takes sometime before Lexa removes herself and heads to the garage, but not without another side-glare to a terrified Abby. Finally, Clarke turns to Abby with bloodshot eyes.

"She cannot be at home with you," Abby says with a low, stern voice. "She's too dangerous, Clarke."

"She needs me, Mom. I have to be there for her," Clarke whimpers softly. "I can take the pain."

"But you shouldn't have to," Abby replies with a disgruntled sigh. "Clarke, she's a risk to you and the kids. If you just stopped working your mind for a minute you would see how bad of an idea this is."

"You're not her wife," Clarke argues back, "she's my responsibility, Mom. I owe her this."

"Why?"

"Because she's my wife--"

"No," Abby shakes her head, "why do you owe her this?"

"Because I betrayed her," Clarke whimpers sadly, looking to the ground with a dejected gaze. "I let her down when I stopped thinking about her. I betrayed her when I moved on. I betrayed her when I slept with Anya. I don't know how to make it up, but if this is helping her, then I will do it. I don't care if it hurts me, Mom. I love her. I love her so much and I owe everything to her. I'll give her anything."

Abby sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Clarke…"

"Look," Clarke shortly interrupts, "I have to go to drop her off. When I come back, you have to be gone."

"This isn't safe--"

"This isn't your choice," Clarke says as she looks at her mother sternly. "It's mine, Mom."

With that, Clarke spins on her heels and goes to find Lexa, leaving Abby all alone.

February 25th 2014, 12:30
"Alright, now do the ten repetitions of the ones from before."

Raven watches as Lexa completes the exercises with a wince. She's struggling a little more than usual, and it doesn't take a genius to figure out that Lexa's mental and physical health is steadily declining. Raven sighs, putting down her clipboard after Lexa finishes the therapy exercises for her shoulder. After she's done, she turns to face Raven with a blank face, her eyes dull and lifeless as she awaits the next command. Raven takes a deep breath and looks at her, leaning back on one of the muscle bars.

"What?" Lexa asks as she stares at Raven. "What now?"

"You know, I appreciate the pop culture reference, but I don't understand why you chose Britney Spears."

Lexa frowns. "What?"

Raven chuckles as she leans forward and gently plays with a tuft of hair that is sticking out from Lexa's scalp. The older woman recoils slightly, but she doesn't push her away. Raven sighs and gets up from where she had been leaning. She walks over to her drawer before rummaging through its contents.

"What are you doing?" Lexa asks, her voice cautious and guarded. Raven grins as she retrieves the item she'd been seeking before walking over towards Lexa. She holds out the item and Lexa frowns again.

"You did a shit job," Raven says with a wink as she snaps the scissors. "I'm doing damage control."

Lexa doesn't protest as Raven gently runs her fingers through the random tufts, her touching soft and soothing. She watches Lexa's eyes for any sort of discomfort or lack of consent. But, to her surprise, the woman remains rigidly still but accepting of the touch. Sighing, Raven slowly gets to work in evening out the tufts in order to make it look more even. It takes a few moments before she's finally finished.

"There," Raven says proudly, "now you look like Natalie Portman from V for Vendetta."

Lexa looks into the mirror across the hall and her gaze softens slightly. Raven knows exactly what's running through her mind and it breaks her heart because she's been there before, feeling what Lexa's feeling. Dissociation is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome when adjusting to home life.

"You know," Raven says softly as she sets the scissors down, "you don't have to hold it all inside and feel like you have to close yourself off. I know that there are somethings that we cannot talk about, but sometimes you don't even have to talk. Sometimes… sometimes silence is enough, too."

Raven ends the small pep talk on a light, musing note as she glances over at the older woman with a soft smile.

"It's… hard," Lexa admits with a bit of a hesitant croak. She looks at her palms and furrows her brow. "I just… I don't really know what to do or say. Everything I want to say gets stuck in here."

She points to her chest, and Raven gulps sadly. She hates knowing how difficult it is. It took her so
long to get to where she is now, and even then, she still has her moments of uncertainty and mistrust with the world.

Taking a deep breath, Raven turns and grabs at Lexa's shirt that had been discarded when they were doing their electrotherapy on her lower back and shoulders. Lexa accepts it and throws it on, looking down at her shoes when she's finished. They sit there in silence for awhile before Raven clears her throat. Lexa's head snaps up and she looks to see Raven giving her a soft, encouraging smile and a nod.

"Things are rough right now," Raven says with a shrug, "but all rough things smooth out eventually. Or dissipate to erosion if we want to talk Earth Science. What I'm trying to say is that you'll get through this."

"It doesn't feel like it," Lexa says with a sad chuckle, "I feel like I'm still back there."

"And you will. For awhile, actually. But one day you won't feel like that," Raven assures her. "That day doesn't have to be today, or tomorrow. It might be five months or five years from now. It depends on how long you need to heal and to work through the shit flying through your brain." Lexa nods, digesting her words silently. Smiling, Raven gently pats her shoulder and helps her up from where she'd been sitting.

"Come on," Raven says as she opens the door and looks across the hall to see Clarke waiting with her hands clasped tightly in her lap. "Your wife looks like she could use some good news. Luckily, we have some." Lexa nods, but the smile she receives is tight-lipped and strained. The two of them walk over, instantly getting the attention of the younger woman. Clarke nearly jumps up as she looks between them.

"Lexa?" Clarke asks softly. "How did it go, baby?"

When Lexa doesn't reply, Raven clears her throat and smiles at the doctor. "Lexa has regained seventy-percent mobility in her knee, but her shoulder still needs a bit of work. We're miles ahead of when we started, both on a physical and emotional level, wouldn't you say so, Lex?" Raven nudges the soldier, smiling wider when Lexa nods and softly smiles back. Clarke, however, doesn't look entirely pleased.

"What do you mean emotionally?" Clarke asks, her voice tight and low. Raven furrows her brows in confusion, but it doesn't take her long to figure out that Clarke is acting out of jealousy. She looks over at Lexa and whispers for her to give her a moment with Clarke, and in the mean time she should go back to the room and grab her stuff. Lexa looks between them suspiciously before she nods and walks away.

"Listen," both of them say at the same time. Raven puts her hands up and smiles disarmingly.

"I know it's tough," Raven tells her gently, "but you just gotta be patient, Clarke."

"You don't get to tell me what to do. I'm her wife," Clarke seethes, stepping up into Raven's face. "She's going through more than you'll ever know. I don't care if you're a vet, but you don't know Lexa."

"I don't have to," Raven refutes as she narrows her brows. "Look, Clarke, I'm not trying to steal your girl or something. I'm just trying to help her and give her some sort of foundation to the real world. She doesn't know me. That's why she feels comfortable around me. She doesn't think of it any other way."
"And how would I know you're being honest?" Clarke asks, arching her brow. "Who's to say that you're using your time to get 'physically and emotionally connected', as you so claim." Raven rolls her eyes.

"Get over yourself, Clarke. You're looking at this like it's all about you. Newsflash, you didn't get captured and tortured for four years, and then spent a year in isolation in the fucking middle of nowhere," Raven snaps back, her lips pulled into a tight snarl. "You want her to trust you? Stop pushing her for answers. She's not going to tell you anything until she's ready. You need to realize that this isn't a clinical thing."

At this, Clarke's angry demeanour collapses and a look of utter defeat plasters upon her face. She hangs her head in shame and Raven sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose as she hears Clarke's quiet sobs.

"I'm sorry," Clarke whispers as she hastily wipes away her eyes. "I'm just… I can't accept that this is happening to her, you know? My Lexa was so happy and carefree and such a soft and gentle soul. This person that I live with now, she's none of that. I just don't know how to accept that I've lost my wife."

"You haven't," Raven says in a frustrated growl. She takes a breath and shakes off the fury running through her mind. "Listen, Clarke, and listen well. You acting like she's a totally different person is only making things worse. You need to accept that Lexa has changed, but she's not a different person. You're isolating and alienating her because she's no longer the woman you once fell in love with. Guess what? That's the fucking harsh reality of war. It changes people. It makes us do things we don't want to do. It makes us think things we don't want to think. It makes us hate ourselves until we've pushed everyone away. So you want to help her? Don't let her push you away, no matter what she does. Be there for her."

Clarke opens her mouth to reply, but before she can, Lexa appears at their side, her bag slung over her good shoulder as she approaches the two women with a suspicious glance. Clarke gulps nervously but Raven remains stoic as she continues to stare down the younger woman. Lexa looks between them again.

"Is everything alright?" She asks, but not out of concern for their health. Both Raven and Clarke nod, and both of them notice the flare of distrust in those dull green eyes. Raven is the first to break the awkward feeling as she leans forward and places her hand on Lexa's shoulder, squeezing lightly.

"You did great today," she says as she smiles at Lexa, "we'll work more on your shoulder next week."

"Okay," Lexa says, glancing to Clarke. "What were you talking about, then?"

"Just how much you've improved and how the at home exercises seem to be helping," Raven is quick to respond, saving Clarke the trouble of having to piece something together. To her credit, Clarke goes along with the rouse and nods, gently placing her palm on Lexa's chin and stroking her thumb over her chiseled cheekbone in a soothing manner. Lexa instinctively stiffens, but then leans into the touch.

"I'm so proud of you," Clarke whispers in a croak, "you've done such a great job, Lex."

Lexa nods and smiles tightly before shuffling closer to her wife. "Can we leave now?"

"Of course," Clarke hums as she leans up and pecks Lexa's cheek, before turning to Raven. "I believe we're done here, anyways. Dr Reyes and I had a good chat. I'm sure she has other patients to
"Yeah," Raven says as she eyes Clarke, who offers an apologetic glance. "We'll see each other soon."

"Bye Raven," Lexa says as she follows Clarke towards the end of the hall. Raven waves to both of them, watching them walk out before sighing. She looks over at her next patient and smirks at the man.

"Well don't just sit there and stare at my ass, Carl. Let's get to it, shall we?"

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**February 28th 2014, 00:59**

**Woods Residence, New York**

Drugs. Alcohol. Cigarettes.

It's her new diet, as of the last couple of weeks. Anya knows that there's nothing else she really needs. She definitely doesn't need company. Kids. Family. No, who has time for any of that?

Definitely not her.

She's currently draped on the couch, smoking the last half of her pack and downing some Jack Daniel's Tennessee Honey. She laughs as she dribbles a bit of it out of the corner of her mouth. She lolls on the couch, her hands feeling tingly and numb as the effects of the drugs start to kick in. This is the usual routine, to down her pills, smoke some cigarettes, and get drunk off of whatever is in her liquor cabinet.

Anya isn't sure how she manages to get through the day. She doesn't even remembers the majority of her days anymore. Most of them are compressed into fragments of small habits -- filing papers or flipping through reports. She doesn't do much with the kids anymore, mostly because her boss has told her to take some time away from one-on-one work and to go back to pencil pushing. It infuriates her.

Even her boss thinks she's useless.

Just as she is about to stumble off the couch and head for the cabinet for some more alcohol, there's a slam of a door and some shouting that erupts from outside of her apartment door. She turns, but when she does, she finds herself no longer in her own apartment, but looking at her bedroom door from when she'd been younger and they'd lived with Titus and Indra, merely months after their father passed away.

She's not an adult either, but a teenager.

*Lexa is in the bed beside her, crying softly as Titus' screams become louder. She can hear crashing*
and shouting, followed by a loud thump. She remains frozen, tears wet upon her face as the door slams open and the drunk, bald man saunters into the room. There’s blood on his fist and a glazed look in his eyes. His other hand holds a half-empty bottle of rum. Behind him, she can hear the muffled whimpers of Indra pleading for him to stop and to break out of whatever memory he’s currently trapped inside.

Lexa cries louder as the man approaches, the stink of alcohol permeating through the room.

“Shut her up,” Titus slurs as he grabs at the collar of her shirt, "you little piece of shit, shut her up!"

Anya works her jaw, unable to form words. When she doesn't respond, Titus shoves her to the ground and kicks her ribs, sending her rolling a few feet away. Anya curls into herself and cries, but she rises up again, holding her sides. Titus advances, now forgotten about Lexa hiding under her covers in fear.

"You do nothing all day," Titus snarls as he smashes his bottle against the wall, sending glass shattering everywhere. Anya shudders at the sight of a large shard of glass in her uncle's hand, glistening in the dark. She whimpers, but stands her ground as bravely as she can, glaring at her uncle as he grunts.

"You're not my dad!" She yells back at him. "You don't get to do anything to her!"

"You're a worthless piece of shit, just like your whore mother," Titus snarls with a curl of her lip. "No wonder why she died. Your father married her out of pity, I'm sure. I would never want to elope with one of them' Vietnamese sluts. The things those Asian bastards did to me... God, and to have to look at you every single day and remind myself of what they did. Your father should have gotten rid of you."

Anya whimpers as Titus reaches down and hoists her smaller body up before shoving her harshly against the wall. He takes the glass and digs it into her collarbone, making her scream in agony as small beads of blood burble up under the indentation. Titus growls harder at the noise, before raking the makeshift blade downwards. Anya squirms and cries harder, her finger nails scrabbling at his wrists to let her go.

"Hold still," Titus snarls as he continues his tormenting abuse. "This is for not shutting up your sister."

"Stop it!" She hears Lexa scream from behind her. "Stop hurting her!"

Titus whirls around and glares at Lexa, ready to lash out at her. Anya's eyes go wide and she thinks fast to distract him again. She balls up enough saliva in her mouth before spitting it out on her uncle.

"You bitch," Titus snarls as he whips his head back around to face her. "I'll fuck you up."

And with that, he continues his war path without abandon.

Once he's done, he throws her to the ground and gives her a few more kicks for good measure. He throws the glass shard aside before walking back outside. Anya sobs into herself, clutching her bleeding chest as she looks up to see Indra laying still, her mouth and nose a gruesome mess of bruises and cuts. She crawls over towards her aunt, whimpering and wincing with each slip of her knees on the wood.

Indra coughs up some blood as she shakily reaches out for Anya, her eyes watering as she looks to the blood flowing down from the cut on her collarbone. She gently squeezes Anya's hand, her mouth slurring together an incoherent apology as she struggles to regain her bearings. Anya cries as she
follows her aunt's gaze to where Lexa has stopped crying and is now whimpering.

Anya sucks in the pain and stumbles to her feet, clutching her ribs until she manages to get to Lexa's side. She slides down into the mattress and curls her bloodied hand around Lexa's chest. The toddler whimpers again, her bright green eyes glancing up at her sister with fear and worry. Anya shakes her head, pulling Lexa closer to her chest and kissing the top of her head as she strokes her back.

"I won't let anyone hurt you," Anya tells her softly, "I promise, sweet girl, no one will hurt you."

No one... no one... no one...

The next time Anya blinks, she finds herself on the floor of her living room, her hands covered in sticky alcohol and pricking with glass shards. She stares at it, drawing her hand upwards to stare at the blood that runs down her wrists and dribbles into her sleeve. Tears prickle in her eyes as she gasps, a sob wrenching its way from her throat as she closes her eyes and thinks of the memory again.

No one hurts Lexa.

No one, bare for the person who made the promise.

"Fuck," Anya wheezes as she rolls onto her side and stumbles to her feet. "Fuck, I can't…"

The sadness is a weight upon her chest, one that causes her to implode with grief. She slams her hand against the wall and wails, tears streaming down her face as she writhes on the ground. She growls and eases off the wall before stumbling over towards the front door. She swipes her keys from the bowl at the door and opens it. She nearly trips down the steps as she gets into her car and powers on the engine.

"Don't drive drunk," she slurs with a chuckle, shaking her head, "don't drink drunk. Don't… drink…"

She pulls out of the driveway and drives down the street, giggling euphorically at the blurring of the lights. She lets her body make the moves as she drives down a familiar road. Luckily the streets seem to be mostly empty tonight. She hastily parks her car on a driveway before she powers off the engine. She exits with a stumble, slamming the door loudly before she makes her way up the front steps.

She knocks over and over again, louder each time.

"Wake up!" She shouts through the door. "Wake up, I'm here! Wake up!"

The door opens minutes later, revealing a shocked-looking Indra staring back at her.

"Anya, good God. What is the matter with you? It's the middle of the night and you smell like the inside of a bar," Indra scolds, though her voice is laced more with concern than anger. Anya chuckles and shakes her head, wavering slightly as she starts to feel dizzy from the combination of the pills and the alcohol. She goes to open her mouth and tell Indra what's wrong, but all that leaves her lips is a broken sob.

"I'm… I'm so sorry."

Indra has to catch her as her legs give out and she falls to the floor in a heaving mess. Indra is saying something, but Anya can't hear a single word of it. She's too busy focusing on the swirling mess that
resides inside of her head, the mess that causes her entire world to crumble at the seams. Indra's arms wrap around her tightly, her lips kissing her frazzled hair as she's pulled into the warmth of the house.

"Love," Indra whispers once Anya's calmed down a bit, "what happened?"

Anya just shakes her head, sliding way from her aunt to rest against the wall. Everywhere she looks inside the house she can see Titus. She can see all the places she's bled, all the places his fist struck down upon her. She can hear the shouting, the alcohol-filled nights in which she would cover Lexa's ears and hold her tight while Indra was thrown around the floor below. She places her head in her palm and groans.

"Honey," Indra says as she reaches out to lightly smooth down her adopted daughter's hair. "Tell me."

Anya is silent for a few moments before she speaks, her voice a low, defeated croak.

"I made a mistake."

Indra frowns, cocking her head in confusion. "What do you mean, dear?"

"I mean," Anya says with a bit of bite to her voice a she glares up at her aunt, "I screwed up, Ma."

Indra swallows harshly, her eyes darting over to the dried blood in Anya's hand. "How, Anya?"

At the question, Anya can't help but burst into a sad laugh. She curls into herself, her eyes closing as she flashes back to how only two months ago, she was wrapped in warm arms. How she was kissing lips and feeling skin, and for once in her miserable life, feeling safe and protected by someone other than herself.

"I fucked her, Ma."

"Anya! Watch your language," Indra scolds with a shake of her head. "Now, what were you talking about?"

Anya blinks open her eyes and stares at Indra with a desolate, defeated look. Indra's eyes widen, and Anya can see in those dark eyes that she's made the connection. Her lip trembles and her fingers tremble as she curls into herself even more. More tears escape down her cheeks as she shakes her head sadly.

"I fucked Clarke," Anya whispers as she closes her eyes, "we thought… Lexa was… she was… and I--"

"How dare you?!" Indra hisses as she walks over and reaches for the scruff of her collar and forces Anya to her feet. She grips onto the cotton material tightly, her teeth clenched in barely-controlled fury.

"She is your sister," Indra spits into her face harshly. "After everything she's been through, and this is how you treat her? How dare you! How dare you come into my house and seek my support after everything you've done!" Indra's neck veins strain with the force of her scolding, but Anya doesn't shy away. Instead, she keeps her eyes closed and listens to the berating of her adoptive mother, knowing she's being honest. She relaxes her body and waits for the slap that she knows should be coming.

But it never does.
Anya opens her eyes to stare at a shocked Indra, who looks at her with such disgust it makes her own stomach curdle. She starts to cry, even though she knows she shouldn't be crying. She doesn't deserve any kind of pity for what she's done. She doesn't deserve anything but the sweet, slow pain of death.

"I'm sorry," Anya croaks as she whimpers, "I never meant to hurt her, Ma, I swear."

"Get out of my house," Indra says in a cold voice, releasing her from her iron grip. "Get out. Now."

Anya nods, not fighting as she stumbles to the door. Her back slouches and she's never felt more distraught or alone in her life. She opens the door and doesn't look back, because she knows what she'd see. She opens her car door and sits there, staring at nothing. She looks back up to the front door where she sees Indra standing, staring at her with glassy eyes that are filled with sadness and distrust.

And beside her, Anya sees the scowling face of Titus, staring daggers into her soul.

_I told you_, she can hear his voice in her ear, _you brought this on yourself._

Anya closes her eyes, letting the last of her tears trail down her face before she drives back home.

March 1st 2014, 19:19

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

"Mama?"

Clarke blinks as she looks down to see Tris grinning up at her with the bag of uncooked spaghetti in her hands. She forces down her fatigue to beam at her daughter before taking the bag from her small hands.

"Thanks munchkin," Clarke tells her, pressing a kiss to her daughter's head. Tris giggles and grins even wider at the the positive response. Clarke's heart aches when she realizes how distant she's been with her kids as of late, mostly because of her concern for Lexa's safety and well-being. She hasn't even talked to Anya since she'd gotten angry at her at the skating rink, and despite the sinking guilt in her stomach that knows that her outburst against the older woman was severely uncalled for, she still can't seem to face her sister-in-law. Every time she thinks of Anya, she's reminded of what she's done to Lexa.

"Mama?" Tris asks again, clambering up onto the dinner stool. "Can I help make the sauce?" Clarke smiles and nods, setting the pasta aside to wrap her arms around her daughter. Tris snuggles into her embrace, her small hands coming up to tangle in her shirt. Clarke kisses the side of her head and sighs tiredly.

"I love you, baby. Of course you can help with the sauce," Clarke tells her, pulling away so that she
can peck the top of her forehead. "But I know that you've been playing outside, so why don't you go wash up first and then you can come by and help me. How does that sound?" Tris pouts at the idea of having to go wash up, but when Clarke puts her hands on her hips, she groans and reluctantly obeys.

"Fine," she mutters with an exasperated eye-roll for added effect, "but don't start without me, Mama!"

"I won't," Clarke smiles as she pats her daughter, watching her run off to the bathroom. She sighs and looks up to see Lexa walking over to her, eyes slightly glazed. Clarke frowns when she notices that Lexa's hands are trembling slightly, but before Clarke can question it, Tris comes running in with a grin on her face. Lexa looks down at her, cocking her head in confusion as she stares down at her daughter.

"Tris, honey?" Clarke says, not taking her eyes off of Lexa. "Can you go to my bedroom and grab my apron? I think I forgot to bring it down after putting it into the wash." Tris groans again, but bounds off, eager to do anything in order to get the cooking portion started. As she leaves, Clarke steps towards Lexa. The older woman flinches slightly, before she looks up to give Clarke a hesitant smile.

"Baby?" Clarke asks hesitantly, reaching out to gently cup Lexa's face. "You okay?"

"Good," Lexa replies with a nod. "I'm just… tired."

"Okay," Clarke says, though it's clear she doesn't believe a word that Lexa's saying. She doesn't want to push Lexa, so she turns and reaches for the pasta sauce. She covers the lid with a towel before twisting.

It all happens so quickly, Clarke doesn't have time to register each event.

The sound causes Clarke to drop the jar, causing it to shatter and for Lexa to clutch her shaved-head in despair. Clarke watches, dumbfounded, as Lexa starts to fit even more. She breaks from her daze and reaches out, trying to hold Lexa in her arms, but her wife violently shoves her away, screaming louder.

"Get away from me!" Lexa shouts at her, lips curled up in a vile snarl. "Get away!"

"Lexa, it's me!" Clarke pleads as reaches out for her distressed wife. "You're safe, it's me, Clarke."

"No," Lexa shakes her head, her eyes watering as she shifts her gaze from her to the door and then the window. Clarke's heart breaks as whimpers leave her wife's lips and her hands shake even harder. Clarke reaches out, her hand grazing the side of Lexa's shoulder, but that only makes things worse.

Lexa's eyes flash open, and Clarke's breath gets caught in her throat when she sees the dark fury built up in those green eyes. Lexa starts to shudder and shake uncontrollably, her speech slurring and becoming more and more incoherent as the flashback starts to take over her mind. Clarke watches as Lexa's fingernails start to claw into the soft spot of her scalp, causing small rivulets of blood to pebble at the surface. Unable to take Lexa starting to hurt herself, Clarke ignores every medical instinct and leaps forward. She wraps her fingers around Lexa's wrists, pulling them away from her hands and to her sides. Lexa continues to scream incoherently as Clarke tries to soothe her, and soon begins to thrash violently.
“Lexa,” Clarke pleads again as she struggles against Lexa's efforts, "Lexa, you're safe. You're not there anymore. No one can hurt you, baby. You're safe here, please, Lexa, you're safe. Come back to me."

Lexa shakes her head, her pupils blown wide as she rapidly shifts her glances around the room. Clarke whimpers and presses herself closer, trying to provide Lexa with some sort of comfort. She grips Lexa's wrists tighter in her struggle to keep them away from her head, but that only further enragés her wife.

With a seething growl, Lexa jabs her elbow out, hitting Clarke in the nose. The sharp pain throws the younger woman for a loop, causing her to let go of her wife's wrists. Instantly, Lexa turns on her heel and shoves Clarke against the wall, her forearm trapping Clarke in a hold. Clarke gasps, hot blood running over her lips and down her chin as she stares at the feral look in Lexa's eyes. She scrabbles against Lexa's hold, struggling to wrench herself free as Lexa's grip grows tighter with an additional shove.

"You don't fucking own me," Lexa snarls as she claws into Clarke's shirt, her nails leaving small crescent-shaped indents on Clarke's pale skin and causing the younger woman to wince. "Don't you dare--"

"Mom!" Aden's cry pierces the room, causing both women to snap their heads around. Clarke's eyes widen in fear as Lexa lets her go, causing her to fall to her knees and gasp for breath. Lexa stalks over, still furious, but Aden doesn't move. Clarke stumbles to her knees and tells Aden to go to his room, but he doesn't listen. His eyes are focused on Lexa, those blue depths watery with fear and bravery.

"Mom," Aden says in a soft voice, blocking Lexa's path to the stairs. "Mom, stop it. Please!"

"Get out of my way, Kareem." Lexa's voice is a low snarl as she glares down at him. "I need my gun."

"Mom… no, no I won't let you go," Aden says bravely, standing his ground as he stares down his mother. He puts aside the name difference, though he knows that it's alarming that Lexa is so lost in her flashback. Clarke rises to her feet and walks over to them slowly, trying to keep herself calming in Lexa's peripheral. Her wife remains at the foot of the steps, glaring at her son with a foreign look in her eyes.

"Get out of the way," Lexa growls again. "You don't control me. I know what you're doing." Aden shakes his head again and holds his ground, causing Lexa to nearly roar in fury. She charges forward, but before she can make contact with Aden, Clarke reaches forward and wraps her arms around Lexa's waist. The older woman fights and screams some more, trying to wrench free from her grasp, but she can't. This time, the angry yelling reduces down to painful, bloodcurdling sobs as Lexa collapses in Clarke's arms.

"That's it, sweetheart. Come back to me," Clarke soothes, though her voice trembles. "You're safe here."

"I didn't mean to," Lexa sobs as she shakes her head and cries harder, "I didn't mean to do it."

"I know," Clarke hums softly, reaching up to gently stroke Lexa's head, "I know, baby. It's okay."

"I… I didn't… I hurt them… I never wanted it…," Lexa continues to hiccup through her sobs. Clarke shushes her soothingly, her eyes flickering up to where she sees Aden still standing at the foot of the steps, watching the scene unfold with terrified bright blue eyes. Her stomach curdles at the
utter desolation in his expression as he watches his role model, his inspiration, sobbing like a banshee.

"Go find your sister," Clarke whispers as she continues to rock a crying Lexa. "Go, Ade. We're okay."

Aden's gaze flickers up from Lexa to Clarke's nose, where the blood has begun to stem and dry upon her face. Clarke shakes her head and smiles at him as reassuringly as she can. Aden shivers and trembles as he hastily nods, turning away to go find Tris and ensure that she was okay throughout their screaming match. Once he's out of sight, Clarke looks down to Lexa, who looks thoroughly exhausted from the flashback. She rocks them both for a few minutes, trying to piece together how it all fell apart so quickly.

After sometime, Clarke rises upwards and pulls Lexa with her to the couch. They both settle, with Clarke wrapping her arms around her wife as tightly as she can to try and assure her that she's protected. Luckily, Lexa sinks into the embrace and rests her head in Clarke's chest, her hands lightly trembling.

"I'm sorry," Lexa whispers in a croak, "I am so sorry, Clarke. There's something wrong with me. I'm sick."

"No, baby. There's nothing wrong with you," Clarke assures her gently, pecking her forehead. "You just need to get through this. We're going to do it, okay? It's going to take sometime but we'll get better."

"I don't think I can get better," Lexa whispers defeatedly, "I think I'm broken, Clarke."

Clarke's eyes water with tears when she hears Lexa continue to sob against her chest, repeating the last statement over and over again. She tries to rub Lexa's back, but her own hands are shaking so hard that she can barely manage little circles. She holds Lexa closer to her, closing her eyes as she tries to imagine how hard this is for her wife, to not know a damned thing about herself or her family after so long. She feels Lexa curl up into her side, her knees tucked up to her chest in the fetal position, allowing herself a moment of vulnerability that she'd never once shown since coming home almost two months ago.

Clarke desperately wants to find the words to try and make it better, but she can't. She doesn't know if anything can make it better.

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Aden stumbles through the hall until he reaches Tris' room. He knocks lightly, and when he doesn't receive a response, he opens the door and walks into his little sister's room slowly.

Something in his heart shatters as he sees Tris curled up in the corner of the room, her knees drawn up to her chest as she sobs into her hands. Aden sighs and walks over, sliding down the wall until he's sitting next to her. He wraps his arm around his little sister and Tris sobs louder, wailing into his shoulder as she allows herself to be swept up in his lithe arms. He holds her tightly, closing his eyes.

"It's okay, Tris. Everything is okay," Aden lies in an effort to soothe his sister. "We're okay, T."

"Mommy…," Tris hiccups between breaths, "Mommy… she made Mama bleed."

The word comes out as a hoarse croak, and Aden grips Tris tighter as the statement causes the girl to crumple further into her brother's arms. She sniffs and sobs into Aden's chest, heaving to breathe
properly. Aden kisses his head and rubs her back, easing her breathing until it's back to normal.

"She didn't mean it," Aden says softly, "it was an accident, T. Mom apologized to Mama."

Lie.

"It's okay, she's not going to do it again."

Lie.

"She's okay. We're all okay."

How many lies can he tell?

Tris simply slumps in his arms, unable to contest anything that he's said. She simply takes a deep breath and nods mournfully. She soon passes out in her arms from fatigue, and only when Aden knows that his baby sister is asleep, does he allow the tears that had been held back to finally fall. He cries silently, holding his sister to his chest as he struggles to find some semblance of hope in his blatant lies.

Even after hours pass, he finds none.

March 3rd 2014, 13:04

Maimonides Medical Clinic, New York

"Alright," Clarke says as she finishes the final stitch, "take her down to recovery."

She steps back from her patient that she'd just finished operating on and snaps off her gloves. She walks towards the scrub room, discarding the bloody gloves as she goes. She peels off her mask with a wince. She looks into the mirror to see her bruised nose and dark circles under her eyes. She sighs and throws away the mask before washing her hands excessively. They shake with each rough scrub of her fingers over each other, but she doesn't let the tension out, not even when the skin chaffs and she bleeds.

"That was longer than usual," Monty's chipper voice sounds from behind her, "you're slacking."

"Yeah, well, I've got more things to worry about right now than my timing," Clarke snips back, her eyes glancing up as she glares over at the younger surgeon. The happy smile on Monty's face soon slides off when he sees the bruising around her face. She shakes her head and brushes past him to head outside.

"Clarke, wait!" Monty calls for her as he jogs after the woman. "Just listen--"

"No!" Clarke snarls as she whirls around on her feet to glare at the man. "I don't want to listen."
"Was this Lexa's doing?" Monty asks, suspicious at Clarke's defensiveness. "Did she--"

"Stay out of it," Clarke growls as she points a finger under his nose, "this is none of your business."

"I'm worried about you, okay?" Monty says in desperation. "You're not eating, you're irritable, you're slow on your times and quality, and now you're showing up to work like you've been mauled." Clarke shakes her head, gritting her teeth as she seethes at his words. Deep down, she knows it's true. Ever since Lexa had come home, she's been under immense levels of stress, and she can't seem to hold it together well.

"It's not like that," Clarke protests weakly, trying to keep the fatigue from filtering into her voice. "I just… it's been rough, okay? But I'm dealing with it." Monty snorts in disbelief, shaking his head in distrust.

"Yes, because a black eye is 'dealing with it', right?"

"Oh for fuck's sake," Clarke snaps, "I don't need this from you."

She turns on her heel and is about to charge down the hall when she smashes into another body. Pain immediately lances down her bruised nose, causing her to hiss in pain. She's about the scold the person she'd run into to watch where they were going, but when she looks up, her mouth drops open in fear.

"Clarke?" Abby's voice sounds as she rubs her chest where Clarke had collided with it. "What have I told you about running around in hospitals?" Abby's gaze is on the stack of papers that are on the floor, and she hasn't seen Clarke's face as of yet. Just as the last paper is picked up, Abby's gaze finally meets hers.

"Clarke," Abby gasps, almost dropping the files again as she reaches forwards, "what…"

And then, it clicks.

Abby goes from worried to infuriated.

"This has to end, now." There's a chilling commanding tone that laces Abby's voice. Clarke quickly juts her hands out, wrapping her fingers around her mother's wrists to prevent her from leaving.

"Mom, no!" Clarke yelps out pathetically. "It's not what you think. Lexa would never hurt me."

"Then you did what? Walk into a wall? I'm not dumb, Clarke," Abby scornfully eyes her. "You told me that you had it under control and look at this. What happens if she hits the kids? Then what? Do you want to get CPS involved, Clarke, because legally if Lexa does anything to them we have every right to--"

"For God's sake!" Clarke yells, catching the attention of a few people passing by. She holds her head in her hands and takes a breath as they all continue on their path before looking up at her mother and growling, "Lexa didn't do this on purpose. It was an accident, Mom. She had a flashback she couldn't control and things got out of hand." Abby shakes her head, still livid at her daughter's insolence.

"So it's an accident first," Abby says in a cold voice, "and then what? Does she accidentally take out her gun and shoot you? Does she accidentally put everyone in her family, and maybe her community, in danger? Because she couldn't control something? I told you, Clarke. You can't fix this. You aren't in control. Lexa needs real help. She doesn't need you right now. She needs doctors and professionals."
"Right," Clarke scoffs as she shakes her head, "because that worked so well. The drugs are making Lexa act this way, Mom. Those drugs aren't meant to be taken together, they're going to kill her. The dosages make her more paranoid and they are causing her to dissociate far more often than she did before them."

"You're not a psychiatrist, Clarke--"

"Neither are you!" Clarke argues back. "But I don't see you doing anything to help her, Mom."

"Clarke," Abby sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. "My team and I are working hard, but Lexa's case is hard because it is so unique. We don't know the magnitude of what we're dealing with. It's better if Lexa isn't at home. You are a doctor, Clarke, but you're not someone with the training to deal with Lexa."

"She's not insane--"

"But she's not sane either!" Abby snaps back, her lips tightening into a line. "Clarke, stop deluding yourself. This isn't working, not for you, not for Lexa, and definitely not for your family. It's enough."

"I love her," Clarke whimpers as she hangs her head, tears burning in her eyes, "I love her, Mom."

"Oh baby, I know," Abby hums as Clarke breaks down into a sob, "but sometimes love isn't enough."

"Alright class, let's talk more about King Lear. Your unit tests are coming up this week, so I want everyone to prepare for the exam by doing a project," Mr Blake says to the class as he walks up and down the aisles, handing out the pamphlets containing the instructions for their projects on their desks. "I've already assigned you partners and they're on your paper. I want you all to create a modern version of a scene in King Lear and then present it to the class, either through video or a live skit."

Aden looks down at his package blankly, his eyelids nearly drooping shut from fatigue. He hasn't gotten much sleep in the past few days, mostly because each night he wakes up to either Tris or Lexa screaming from a nightmare. He loves his mother to death, but he doesn't know how to help her and it's killing him.

"Mr Woods," Mr Blake says, causing Aden to blink and snap his head upwards. He didn't realize that he had been dozing on his desk. A few kids snicker around him and the fury inside of him grows.
"I agree that we're nearly at the end of the day and that you are exhausted, but do try to stay awake," Mr Blake tells him, though there's no scorn in his voice, only sympathy. Aden rolls his eyes and looks to his page, noticing that he's been paired up with Jackson. He sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"Alright," Mr Blake says as he claps his hands together, "everyone has ten minutes to talk to their partners and discuss your plans. Do not use this period to socialize. I want everyone working. Go ahead." As soon as Mr Blake has finished talking, the class erupts into a ruckus of noisy shouting and chaos.

"Quietly!" Mr Blake sternly announces, glaring at the table of jocks behind Aden. "Go on."

The noise is reduced as people go to find their partners. Aden sighs again as Jackson comes to sit at the table beside him, putting the paper down as he looks at the other boy. Aden rubs the back of his head and looks over at his friend, a guilty wave of nausea rolling over him when he sees those bloodshot eyes.

"Hey," Jackson croaks first, his head dipping. "Are... are you gonna be okay for the project?"

"What makes you think that I wouldn't be?" Aden snaps back, his fingers clenching into the wood of his desk. Jackson flinches, but doesn't get angry. Instead, he shoots Aden a sympathetic nod of agreement.

"Looks like spazz-boy is back," a low voice chuckles behind him. Aden tries to ignore the jeering calls, but Jackson's head snaps up and he stands, glaring at the group of jocks that are tossing paper balls at Aden's head. The jocks all look over at Jackson, laughing as Aden's shoulders tense.

"What are you doing, Jacky-boy?" The ringleader, Dawson, sneers. "Gonna spazz out like the freak?"

"Shut the fuck up," Jackson says in a low growl, "don't talk to him like that."

"What's up with you?" Dawson asks with an aloof tone. "Don't tell me you're defending this faggot."

"Fuck you," Jackson snarls as he whips out of his seat and walks over to the other boy. Dawson stands, kicking his seat out as he towers over the soccer player. Even at six foot three, Jackson pales compared the massive quarterback. Mr Blake shouts at them to stop as he walks over, fury and concern in his eyes.

"He's a faggot," Dawson sneers as he prods Jackson's shoulder, "and you probably are too. I bet you love getting down on your knees and sucking his cock like a fucking twink, right Jacky?" One of the jocks makes a lewd gesture with his cheek and his fist, and Jackson visibly pales. Dawson makes note of it.

"You fucking disgust me," he growls as he leans his head down, "you're a fucking perv', faggot!"

"Enough!" Mr Blake announces as he steps between the boys. "Detention, for both of you."

Dawson rolls his eyes and slumps back into his seat, a pleased smirk adorning his face. Jackson's eyes are burning with tears as he goes back to where he had been sitting. He blinks them back and looks over at Aden, noticing the tears that are streaming down the other boy's face. Instantly, Jackson reaches out and places his hand on Aden's shoulder in a form of comfort, all the while glaring over his shoulder to Dawson and his gang of misfits. He's about to say something to Aden when suddenly his hand is ripped away from the gangly shoulder. Aden shoves him away, glaring at him through his tear-stained gaze.
"Don't touch me," Aden growls, his voice cracking. Jackson gulps, reeling his hand back as he tries to hide the flash of pain that crawls across his face. "We're project partners and that's it. Got it?"

Jackson only nods numbly, his gaze falling to the blank sheet of paper on the desk. Aden takes a deep breath before he starts scribbling down ideas. Jackson follows his stead, narrowing down a list of scenes they could do for the class. Before they know it, the ten minutes are up and the bell is ringing, signalling the end of class. Aden gathers up his books and shoves them into his backpack as the kids file out.

"I'm sorry," Jackson says as he watches Dawson leave from the corner of his eyes. "I never meant to put you in a position that made you feel uncomfortable, Aden. I... I know we haven't talked lately, but I'm worried about you. I just... I want you to be okay, and if I'm getting in the way of that, please, let me know. I don't mind stepping back if I'm causing more harm than I am doing good."

Aden stays quiet, his gaze pierced to the desk as tears burn in his eyes. Jackson's breath hitches in his throat at the sight, and he looks away in shame and defeat. He rubs the back of his head and sniffles. "I'm sorry, Aden... I never meant to hurt you," Jackson whispers as he goes to leave. "I'll get out of your hair. I can go talk to Mr Blake about getting new partners or working alone or maybe--"

"Thank you," Aden says quietly, interrupting Jackson's ramble. The other boy stops, blinking like a deer caught in the headlights. Aden sighs and looks up at Jackson, trying to give him a feeble smile.

"Thank you for defending me against those jerks," Aden says as he looks back down, "and I'm the one who should be sorry. I've been giving you the cold shoulder ever since my mom came home. I'm an asshole who doesn't deserve your forgiveness, especially after how I acted in class, but I just am so--"

Before he can finish his sentence, long, strong arms are wrapped around his sides and the taller boy's body is engulfing him in a hug. Aden stiffens instantly, but he relishes the contact. It's been too long since he was last hugged, and so he doesn't hesitate when Jackson's grip tightens. He burrows into his best friend's chest and he sobs, letting out the last two months of sadness and pain out as much as he can. Jackson simply hums, rubbing his back and soothing him as more choked cries leave his lips.

"I've always got your back," Jackson assures him softly, "I'm not leaving you, A. You're my best friend."

"You're my best friend, too." Aden's words are muffled, but they're still audible. Jackson smiles against the top of Aden's head, gripping him tighter and pecking his hair amicably. Aden slumps into his embrace as he continues to cry. Over his shoulder, Jackson sees Mr Blake staring at them with a fond, but equally sympathetic expression in his gaze. He nods to Jackson before sitting back down at his desk.

And there, in his English classroom, Aden allows himself some solace in the arms of his best friend.

March 6th 2014, 21:30
Woods Residency, New York
Anya meanders around her apartment, drinking up the remainder of her hard liquor. She's been in a state recently, whether it be from the medication or from the drinking, but she can't stop feeling like she shouldn't be here. She does everything she can to relieve the pressure of ending her own life, including taking to scratching those little lines into the scarred skin of her thighs and her wrists, but it's not working. Nothing seems to be working anymore, so it seems. She just keeps sinking lower and lower.

And the worst part?

No one cares.

In the past month, no one has called. Not even her own sister since she'd shown up on Anya's front door soaked to the bone from the rain. No body has texted, aside from her boss asking if she's taking another shift off, to ask about her wellbeing. Anya tries to rise above it, to convince herself that she deserves the radio silence from her family and friends, but she can't keep ignoring the festering pit of loneliness.

She's miserable.

But it's not like she's miserable in a way that she's had a bad day. No, it's more like she's had a successive train of bad days, in which the following one always seems to be worse. She wallows in her own depressive state, trying to fight off the voices in her head that scream at her to end it because, like she's solidified so well from the lack of communication from others, nobody gives a damn if she lives or dies.

So… why should she?

But, here's the thing.

Anya's a coward.

Anya knows that she can't find the strength to end her life. Not while she still has a promise to fulfill, even if that promise has been broken time and time again. She chuckles at the thought of it as slams her rum bottle down on the counter and stalks over to the medicine cabinet. She grabs at the painkiller she'd been prescribed, a mild dosage of oxycontin to deal with her headaches and her chronic injuries. She rolls out a pill and then grabs at her bottle. She crushes the tablet into a powder before reaching into her pocket to fish out her wallet. She pulls out a crisp dollar note and rolls it before placing it in her nostril.

She snorts the powder and grins as she drowns it in a kick of alcohol. She shakes her head and laughs, stumbling around her apartment as the euphoric high begins to wash over her body. She smiles dopily, and even though the pain is still there, like a parasite clinging to her skin, it's muted and Anya can deal with it. A coward, she thinks as she laughs and chugs more hard alcohol, such a fucking coward.

She walks through her cramped apartment, picking up a picture of her, Lexa, and Clarke on the latter half's convocation day. She stares at the happiness in all of their eyes as they're squished in a hug. Anya takes the picture back to the couch and plops down, placing the bottle on the coffee table so that she can hold the frame with both of her trembling hands. She looks at their faces, a sob building in her throat.

How could she have let it get this far?
Without thinking, Anya's hand fishes into her pocket and she dials the most recent number. She holds the phone to her ear and holds back more sobs as her vision blurs with more tears. The phone rings and rings until finally, the beeping stops and someone picks up, their voice beyond exhausted.

"Anya?" Clarke's gravelly voice answers her. "What are you calling me for?"

"I... I...," Anya chokes as she fails at wiping away her tears, "I just... I..."

"Anya, I don't have time for this." Clarke's voice is snappy and rough with agitation. "What is it?"

"I'm just... I miss you," Anya whispers in a croak, "not in a romantic way, just... I miss my friend."

"I told you I needed space," Clarke growls, "and we're not friends, Anya. You're my sister-in-law."

"Yeah," Anya says, nodding as she feels her heart being crushed under the weight of Clarke's words. "Yeah, I get it. I... I'm sorry I called. I'm sorry, Clarke. I didn't mean for any of this."

There's a pause and some shuffling on the line before Clarke sighs, "I have to go, Anya. Take care."

Before Anya can say anything, the line goes dead and she's once again left alone to her thoughts. Only this time, she doesn't have the strength to hold them back.

So, Anya lets them consume her until there's absolutely nothing left.

March 6th 2014 02:53

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

The clock keeps ticking, but with each second that passes, Lexa still can't seem to fall asleep.

It's a common problem now, the insomnia. She thought that it would eventually fade, but she now has begun to realize that maybe she's been wrong all along. It wouldn't matter if she slept, anyways, especially considering that she's not exactly in a place to consider her sleep a safe place. The nightmares are always the same, and each time, she wakes up in a pool of her own sweat and tears, utterly dazed.

This time, however, Lexa refuses to stare at nothing in order to ward off lack of sleep.

She throws her blankets off and puts on some sweats and a hoodie. She looks over shoulder to where Clarke's spot is empty. Her wife was on call tonight, so she would be sleeping at the hospital until her shift started. Sighing, Lexa walks down the hall and then descends the steps. She steps into the living room, deciding that she's not in the mood to go running, especially since her last physio session left her rather sore. She settles on the couch and picks up the remote before powering on the TV. She flips through the channels, not paying attention to anything in particular as she skims through the shows.
Once she realizes that she's not interested in anything on the television, Lexa lets her eyes flicker south towards the stack of DVDs that had piled up near the game station that Aden would sometimes play. She cocks her head at them, her fingers hesitantly tapping at the fabric of her jeans as she contemplates walking over there and investigating them. Deciding that the TV is pointless she rises and walks over. She looks at a few of the blank discs and then chooses one at random. She inserts into the DVD player and hits play. She walks back to the couch and settles down as she watches the contents of the disc.

It's nothing that she could have ever expected.

A pregnant Clarke is standing next to Octavia, both of them watching a soccer match between Lincoln and Anya as well as herself and her son, Aden. She watches as she power slides through a muddy patch to score a goal in Lincoln's net, causing Aden to cheer in joy. Lexa watches, silent tears trekking down her cheeks, as Aden runs up to her and collides into her on the ground as they celebrate their victory. Anya yells at Lincoln for messing up while Clarke scolds them from the sideline about getting dirty.

Anya is calling for a foul and asking for Octavia to make a judgement call. When she's given nothing in return, Anya tackles Lexa to the ground, causing Aden and Lincoln to burst out laughing. Lexa watches as she wrestles her sister in the mud until Anya sits on her back and pins her down, her chest puffed out in pride as she declares herself the winner. Aden tackles her then, causing all three of them to slide about in the mood and for Clarke to roll her eyes and groan about how childish they all are.

It seems so domestic. So normal.

There's only one problem.

Lexa doesn't remember any of it.

The people in the video, they look exactly like her family, but she feels like the video is a trap. Her brain short-circuits and Lexa has to rewind the video and play it all over again, trying to see if maybe it was the shock of seeing her looking so happy after so long that made it seem fake. But, even as the video plays frame for frame, the feeling of being so outside of everything never seems to leave Lexa's side.

Why can't she remember any of this?

Before she can go to answer, however, there's a crack that startles her. She whips around and stands, drawing her gun from her waistband and holds it in front of her, vision still blurred by tears as she stands. Her hand shakes as she holds the gun out, waiting for the person in the shadow to come out.

"Hi Mom," Aden says softly, his hands raised disarmingly as he steps forward. Lexa stiffens, lowering her gun and looking away guiltily. Aden, to his credit, doesn't say anything as he walks forward and looks to the couch. He doesn't say anything else to her as he approaches her, plopping down on the couch.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" Lexa asks him as she takes a hesitant seat. Aden simply shrugs.

"Couldn't sleep."

"Did I disturb you?"

"Nah," Aden says as he lays back on the couch, "I just had to pee and now I can't go to sleep."
Lexa doesn't know what to say, so she simply nods and turns back to face the television. She's about to rewind again, when Aden's voice peeps up. "I have a good one," he says as he walks to the stack of DVDs. He turns around to ask for silent consent, to which Lexa nods her head and waits for him to pop in a new disc. He rejoins his mother on the couch as Lexa presses play again, before leaning back and tuning in.

This clip is of Aden and Lexa after his first soccer tryout. The two of them are sitting at a street curb eating ice cream, when suddenly a part of Lexa's scoop falls down and lands in the space between her breasts, causing her to yelp and the sudden cold feeling. The sight causes Aden to laugh, but in the process, he ends up spilling his own ice cream all over his face from rocking back. Lexa teases him through her miserable hopping and squirming as he struggles to wipe the cold cream off his face.

"There's nothing much going on," Aden says softly as they continue to watch as Clarke comes in and smirks at how it serves them right for not listening to her about ruining their dinner with ice cream. Aden clears his throat, blinking back his own tears as he looks over to a blank-looking Lexa. "It was just a family moment, you know? This is what we used to be like. We would plan pranks together, play soccer together, sing together, wrestle together, build Lego spaceships together, and that was our life."

Lexa's bottom lip trembles as she watches the scenes again. "I can't remember it."

Aden takes a deep breath and looks back to the screen, letting a few tears fall. "Maybe that's not the point." Lexa arches her brow and looks to her son, who sniffs as he sneakily wipes away a few tears.

"How so?" Lexa asks, her voice raw from holding back her own tears. Aden shrugs again.

"Maybe these videos are just memories. But just because you can't remember it doesn't mean it never happened," Aden hums as he glances to Lexa with a sad smile. "And just because you don't remember it doesn't mean I've forgotten it, Mom. I never forgot you, no matter how long you were away." Lexa feels her heart seize up in her throat at his confession. Aden takes a deep breath before rising to his feet.

"I should sleep," Aden tells her tiredly, "I've got to meet with Jackson before school." Lexa nods and rises to her feet. Aden looks at her in concern, silently asking if she needs some company. Lexa offers him a sad smile and a shake of her head before she holds out her arms. Aden sighs and slinks forwards, burrowing himself into his mother's grasp. Lexa lets out a shuddering breath as she runs her hands from his back to the base of his scalp. She kisses the top of his head and breathes in his scent.

"I love you, Mom. I'll always love you," Aden confesses into her hoodie, "I won't ever give up on you."

Lexa has no words as she clutches onto him, trying to make a connection that just doesn't seem to be there. The embrace is short lived and Lexa immediately finds herself breaking when Aden parts away from her. He gives her another flimsy, half-hearted smile before he nods towards the steps. Lexa smiles and gives him some space to walk past her. He mumbles a quiet good night before he ascends the steps.

Lexa stands there until dawn comes in, just wondering where her life had gone.
March 6th 2014, 04:40

Canandaigua VA Suicide Crisis Centre, New York

Raven rubs at her brows, working off the last of her caffeine crash. She types up the last of her report from the previous day before clicking save. Looking around the room, she realizes that tonight is a pretty calm one, with only a handful of calls dispersed over the period of the few hours. This is somewhat of a lull period, and for that, Raven is grateful. She glances at the clock on the computer and smiles dully. Her shift will be up soon and then she can go home and rest. She's about to pull up her browser when there's a knock on the side of her cubicle. She turns her head to find her mentor, Sinclair, looking back at her with a sympathetic smile and an empty mug in his hands.

"Going for a refill," he tells her with a nod to her own mug, "want some?"

"I think I'm good," Raven says, smiling at him. "I'll be over soon, anyways."

"Get some rest soon," Sinclair says, a little bit of a stern undertone to his voice. "You look exhausted, Reyes. I know that you want to do your best and work hard, but don't overwork yourself, alright?" Raven nods and watches as he walks away with a slight limp to his step. Sighing, Raven turns back to the computer, ready to start a new report. She pulls up the document and begins to type, but she's quickly interrupted.

The ringing is low, and Raven is quick to answer the call.

"Veteran's Affairs Suicide Crisis Centre," Raven speaks clearly, "what is your emergency?"

"I… there's blood," the frantic whimpering of a female voice comes through the phone, "I was asleep a second ago and I just woke up and there's blood on my shirt."

"Okay," Raven says as she types the information down, "where's the blood coming from?"

"I… I don't know, oh God, I don't know," the woman says through more sobs, "I… I think it's my nose. I… it's my wrist. There's… oh God… I cut myself. Please help."

"Okay, I need your address, Ma'am. Can you tell it to me?"

"I… I don't know," the woman replies in a slurred cry, "I can't remember… I am in a house… near Central Park. Please… please I… I have a gun and I'm bleeding."

The tone of her voice sends chills down Raven's spine. "Where is your gun, Ma'am?"

"I'm holding it. Oh God I'm holding it and I can't put it down. Please…"

"Just stay on the line," Raven says as she quickly relays the information to the 911 operators she has on the other line, "okay, I have police on the way. Is your door unlocked?"

"I don't know, please, I have the gun pointed at me and I can't put it away."

"Okay, can you tell me your name?"
"Anya," the woman cries back, "oh God please I just want to die. I can't do this anymore. I can't do it anymore, please, please, please, let me pull the trigger and die."

"Anya," Raven says in a gentle voice, "I need you to tell me why you are feeling like this."

"Because... because I fucked it all up," Anya replies as she sniffles into the phone. "I have blood on my arms because I think I cut them but I can't remember. There's blood in my bathroom too." Raven gulps, a cold sweat running down her back as she checks in with dispatcher from emergency services. They still have ten minutes before they can get to Anya and help her out. Raven knows she needs to act fast.

"Oh God," Anya continues to sob, "I can't... I need to die... please... I fucked it up. It wasn't meant to be me that came back but I did. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean to let her die, oh God. I fucked it all up. I deserve this pain. I deserve more. " Raven continues typing, noticing her fingers beginning to shake.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Ma'am, but I doubt it was your fault. I know how hard it can be to deal with traumas like these, but there are still so many good things that are still there that you can look forward to." Raven swallows down her fears as she continues to speak, her gaze shifting nervously to the GPS location on her screen. There's more garbled nonsense from the other end of the line. "Anya?"

"There's blood everywhere and there's words on the wall. I'm so scared. I... did I do this? I can't remember doing this. I can't... I can't... oh God," Anya is huffing out through strangled breaths. "My head hurts... my head hurts and there's blood everywhere. I can't... I just... my finger is so close to the trigger and I just... I want to pull it so bad. Like my entire body is burning. It's screaming at me to pull it. I need it."

"The police and paramedics will be there in a few minutes, okay?" Raven says as soothingly as she can, but her voice is trembling as she furiously types away at the keyboard. "I need you to stay on the line and I need you to keep talking. Tell me about yourself. Do you have someone that you can call that we can create a three-way call with that might make you feel more comfortable?"

"No one wants me," Anya keeps sobbing, "they all want me dead. I should just--"

"Anya," Raven interrupts the thought. "Do you have any family?"

There's a pause, followed by a small click. The breathing becomes heavier and Raven clenches her jaw, trying to process how this call is going. She tries to imagine what the woman on the other end looks like, where the gun is pointed, if she's in real danger.

"I have a sister," Anya breathes out in a low, shallow rasp. "And I killed her."

"What do you mean you killed your sister?"

"I left her to die on that battlefield," Anya says as her voice cracks. "It's my fault. I should have died. It should have been me. I need to pay for her death. I need to pay for the crimes I've committed."

"Anya, listen to me. Whatever happened there is of the past, and whatever you did, you cannot change," Raven urges as she grips the edge of the desk tightly, "can you do that for me? Can you tell yourself that whatever happened cannot be undone?"

"I fucked her wife," Anya cries out in a harsh voice, ignoring Raven's attempts at encouragement. "I fucked her wife while she was dead and I betrayed her. I didn't mean for it to happen but it did, and I don't know what to do. I am so sorry. I didn't mean for any of this to happen. I just... I need to die.
The walls say it too. It's my blood. It's written in my blood so I must have written it. I need to die.”

"Any please just listen,” Raven pleads desperately, "you do not need to die."

"You don't know what I've done," Anya whispers in a cold voice. "You don't know."

"Anya--"

"I killed her. I killed her. I fucking killed her. And I'm gonna fucking kill myself."

"Any please, the police are right outside. They can help you," Raven urges as she holds back tears. "I know that you're frustrated and scared and hurt, but let them help."

There's more silence, and Raven is biting her lip just anticipating the loud bang.

But then, after a raspy gasp and a loud thud, Anya's voice returns. "Okay."

"You're doing a great job,” Raven says with a bit of a quiver to her voice, "you're doing a really great job, Anya. The police just notified me that they're at your house. You need to unlock your door. Can you do that for me please?" There's another sobbing cry and Raven bows her head, swallowing down the lump in her throat as she hears another click. There's some muffled voices on the other line before someone returns to the call.

"This is Officer Blake," another woman's voice pipes up, her voice more distraught than formal. Raven gulps and nods, even though she know it won't be seen.

"Is everything all right?"

"We're taking Anya to the ER to get her cuts looked at and to get a psych eval," Officer Blake says into the phone, "thank you for staying on the line and saving her life."

Raven blinks back tears, her throat raw as she nods again. "Yeah."

Officer Blake thanks her and is about to put down the phone when Raven suddenly lurches forward in her seat and asks, "which hospital will she be taken to?"

"Maimonides most likely," the officer responds, "we will get her the best care, Ma'am."

"Thank you for getting there quickly," Raven says back, "she needed it."

"Of course," Officer Blake replies, "good day to you, operator."

And with a small click, the line goes dead.

Raven sits in her desk for a full forty-five minutes after her shift is over, simply staring at nothing but the transcript on her desktop, wondering just how close she'd been to losing the woman on the other line. Her heart aches and she wants to cry, but she holds it together as she looks at the time. She has a few hours to catch some sleep before she has to get to the clinic for her appointment with a few other small cases.

The feeling of dread stays with her, even when she arrives back to her apartment.

And when she sleeps, Raven dreams of blood and screams for the first time in years.
Abby walks down the hall towards the ER, ready to start her last shift before she's allowed back home. She makes her way through the minor accidents ward, doing her rounds efficiently. She's running on coffee with two or so espresso shots, but she's starting to hit the tail end of her energy high. She's about to finish up with the last patient when she sees Octavia walk in with a sobbing Indra. Abby sucks in a worried breath, instantly letting her mind jump to Lexa. She hands her file over to another resident doctor before rushing towards the crying woman. Indra spots her and cries harder, unable to breathe.

"Indra," Abby greets her with a concerned voice, "are you alright? What are you doing here?"

As she's busy trying to see if Indra is in grave danger, Octavia speaks up. "It's not her. It's Anya."

"Anya?" Abby asks, snapping her head upwards in confusion. "What's the matter with Anya?"

Octavia sighs, rubbing the back of her head. It's then that Abby notices that she's still in her uniform. There's some dried blood on the corner of her sleeves, and she looks both haggard and disturbed.

"She tried to kill herself."

The words are like a katana to her chest, splitting her open and leaving her vulnerable and bare to the world. Abby takes a step back, tears pooling in her eyes as she sees Octavia hang her head in shame. "None of us knew, Abby. We've been so focused on Clarke and Lexa that we've cut her out. I... I should have been there more. I should have known she wasn't okay," Octavia sobs, shaking her head. "God, when we got the call, I'd never been more afraid in my life. She had a gun in her mouth, Abby."

"Where is she?" Abby asks softly, reaching out to squeeze Octavia's shoulder in support. The younger woman points over towards the psych ward, where Abby immediately recognizes Dr Wallace walking around and observing the patients. Her brows narrow and a rage burbles inside of her chest.

"I don't think it was just the isolation," Abby mutters, glancing back at the two women. "Excuse me."

Both of them nod as Abby bounds off towards the ward. She finds Anya's room easily, and is pleased to see that Dr Wallace has not visited her yet. She grabs the file off the hook and enters the room, closing the door behind her with a soft click. She turns around, bracing herself for what she's about to see.

It's not enough.

Anya sits, her head bowed and her shoulders slumped in defeat. There are bandages covering her forearm and her wrists, each of them dotted with blood. Her entire body looks ready to slide into the floor and become one with the ghastly linoleum. Abby makes a harsh gasping noise, causing Anya's
head to snap upwards. Upon seeing the doctor, the younger woman immediately shrinks upon herself. Tears well in Anya's eyes and Abby hates how she can see the guilt and shame festering in those hazel eyes.

The first words are predictable, but it doesn't ease the ache in Abby's heart by any means.

"I'm sorry," Anya croaks as tears spill down her cheeks, "Abby, I'm so sorry, I'm so sor--"

"No," Abby whispers, her hands letting go of the file to let it thud to the floor. She doesn't say anything else as she steps forwards and draws Anya into her chest. The contact is enough to break through the weak walls Anya had thrown up. She quivers and sobs into Abby's chest, her body trembling with the force of her cries. Abby's eyes mist and she swallows thickly, struggling to keep her fears down.

"I love you," Abby whispers as she gently strokes through Anya's hair. "I love you and I am sorry that none of us were there for you. I am so sorry, Anya. This is not on you, this is on the rest of us, okay? God, I'm so sorry, baby girl." Anya only continues to cry harder at the admission, and it makes the guilt on Abby's heart weigh even heavier than before. She kisses the side of Anya's head and rubs her back some more.

"Those… those pills made me feel this way," Anya cries harder, "I can't do it, Abby. They make me feel like I can't control anything. They make me feel numb and dead on the inside. They make me… do things that I wouldn't ever do. I'm so scared, Abby. I don't know what to do but I don't want the pills. Please."

"It's okay, sweetheart. I know. The pills are not happening," Abby says as she pulls herself away for a brief second so that she can grab the file off the floor. She reaches into her coat pocket and pulls out her pen. She scribbles something on the pages Anya remains slumped on the examination table, still crying.

"I've got you on a weaning program now," Abby tells her softly, putting aside the file so she can wrap the younger woman back in her arms and hold her tightly. "We're going to get you off those meds and try something else to help you, okay? I know some really good mindfulness programs that will help better than any of these pills ever could. If that doesn't work, Dr Jarod has an interpersonal psychotherapy program that works well, especially when it comes to sole-survivor types of PTSD." Anya simply nods, unable to get words out between each laboured, sobbing breath. The older woman hums, trying to ease her down from her fallout. Anya grows tired and slumps against Abby, her breathing starting to even.

"What about Dr Wallace?" Anya slurs out in a tired drawl. "He's… he doesn't seem very nice."

"I'll take care of Dr Wallace," Abby says with a determined tone, "you don't have to worry about him anymore, okay? We're going to take care of you, sweet girl. You're going to be okay, love. I promise." Anya sighs and nods once more, spending a few more moments in the embrace before Abby goes to retrieve Indra and Octavia. They follow her quickly to the room, eager to see the devastated woman.

Abby watches as Indra enters first, and without any words, reaches out to draw Anya into her arms. She's sobbing apologies into Anya's shoulder as the two women reconcile with each other. Octavia remains at Abby's side, her hand covering her mouth as she watches the scene unfold. Abby sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose as she struggles to figure out how all of this had gone wrong so quickly. Octavia gets paged to report back to her station, so she gives Anya and Indra both a hug before ducking out.
Deciding that Indra and Anya could use some time alone, Abby turns around and heads outside. Just as she looks up, however, she sees Dante Wallace staring at her from across the hall, an unreadable expression on his face. Abby stiffens but does not wilt under his scrutinizing gaze. He looks at her for a few moments longer before he walks off in the direction of another patient. Abby watches him leave with a suspicious glance, her file growing tighter in her hands. She takes a breath and thinks of her options.

Clenching her teeth, she reaches into her pocket and grabs her phone to dial a number.

When the person picks up, Abby only has five words to say.

"Marcus, we need to talk."

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March 7th 2014, 02:20

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

Lexa sits at the couch in the dark, watching the television playing a news segment. She listens numbly as the reporter talks about the village in which she’d been held captive, of the colossal death toll from all villagers that had perished in the fire. She watches as her face comes up on the television. They call her a war hero, a survivor that beat all the odds, and that she had been promoted upon her return home. The reporter transitions into those who had been lost, and among Cage and Dante, Lexa sees Costia's face.

Tears well in Lexa's eyes as she watches Costia's husband, Michael, talking to a reporter. He stands with his hands behind his back and a stoic expression on his face as he talks about the bravery of his late wife. He talks about how much Costia loved her country, how she's resting in peace, how he sends his regards and kind thoughts to Lexa and her recover because he knew how close Costia had been with her.

And yet, all Lexa can hear are Costia's screams as she beat her ex-girlfriend to death.

"Lexa?"

Lexa blinks, turning her head to the side to see Clarke looking back at her with sad eyes. Lexa sees that Clarke's eyes aren't entirely focused on her, but have drifted slightly lower to her cheeks. Reaching up, Lexa palms at them and gasps when she feels wet tracks of tears dripping off of her chin. When she had started crying, she doesn't even know. She hastily swipes at the tears, trying to calm her shuddering breaths. Clarke walks forward calmly before she takes a seat beside her on the couch, watching the TV.

"Was she there?" Clarke asks quietly, one of her hands coming to rest on the small of Lexa's back. The older woman looks up and glances over at her with an empty gaze. Over Clarke's shoulder, Lexa sees the mangled form of Costia staring back at her, Kareem and his mother at her side, watching her despondently. Lexa swallows thickly as she looks to her palms, seeing the blood that
"I broke her heart," Lexa whispers, not answering Clarke's question. She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes, remembering when they'd been in high school and how close she and Costia used to be. "I left her for you. I never meant to hurt her, Clarke. I never meant to hurt any of them, but I did." The last few words come out as strangled sobs as Lexa leans forwards, cupping her head in her shaking hands.

"Hey," Clarke hums soothingly, trailing her hand up her back so that she can gently stroke through the older woman's shaven scalp until Lexa calms a bit. "Costia loved you, and I know that you loved her once, but she moved on. I know that she was one of your best friends, and having to move away and live apart must've hurt, but that's not your fault, Lexa. None of this is your fault." Lexa tenses, her eyes blinking open and looking back to her palms, only to see the bloody pipe laying bent out of shape in her hands.

If only Clarke knew how wrong she was.

"Lexa?" Clarke asks, pulling the older woman away from the dark sides of her thoughts once more. "Babe, are you okay? Did I say something wrong?" Lexa shakes her head, unable to respond.

What would she say, anyways?

What could she say?

"It's getting late," Lexa says instead. She blindly reaches for the remote and powers off the TV before reaching for Clarke's hand and tugging her upwards. Clarke gives her an encouraging smile and reaches forward to sweep Lexa into her arms and hold her tightly. Lexa sighs tiredly as Clarke's head comes to rest against her chest, her ear pressed up against the exposed skin of her collarbone as they stand silently. The two of them hold each other as the light of the moon spills over them from the window.

"I'm sorry," Clarke whispers into her skin, "I never wanted any of this for you. I wish I could take your pain away, Lexa. I wish I could fix this. I wish that I knew how to help you and support you properly."

Lexa doesn't say anything. Instead, she offers a soft grunt before pulling away and heading for the steps. She feels heavier than usual, her back slouching with the invisible force of her burdens as they threaten to bury her in guilt and haunting memories. Clarke follows her in silence, breaking off to go to the bedroom while Lexa ducks into the bathroom to wash up and get ready to sleep.

As she's washing her hands, she can't get rid of the swirling nausea in the pit of her stomach. She slides the tap shut and closes her eyes, struggling to get her breathing under control. She avoids looking at the mirror as she dries her hands, but eventually, she can't help it. She looks up to see her reflection staring back at her, eyes sunken in and dull from the lack of sleep. Her cheeks are gaunt and her jaw chiselled so definitively from the malnutrition. Her entire body has shrunken considerably, and she looks like a stranger. She clutches the sides of the sink as she stares at herself in disbelief, wondering how she let it get this far. She thought she'd been strong. She thought that she'd fought and survived.

She was so wrong.

Lexa shakes her head and powers off the light before walking down the hall to her bedroom. Clarke
is in bed, staring up at the ceiling blankly as she crawls in beside her wife. Lexa follows her stare and gazes up at the ceiling, too. She tries to not let the thoughts of death and blood get to her, but she's always vulnerable at night. The demons in her mind aren't distracted right now. Everything is lain bare.

And what can she do to stop them?

Nothing.

"Will you ever tell me what's going on?" Clarke asks softly, not looking at her. Lexa tenses.

"Clarke."

"Do you trust me?" Clarke asks, her voice but a small whisper. "I get if you don't, Lex. I'm not mad."

"I want to," Lexa chokes out as she clenches the sheets in her hands. "I just don't know how."

"Why?"

"Clarke," Lexa whispers softly, her voice cracking. "We should sleep."

Clarke doesn't reply, aside from a small sniffle. Lexa closes her eyes again and ignores the soft sound of her wife crying beside her. She knows that these past few months have turned into more of a partnership, or even less than that, if Lexa's completely honest. She thought that this feeling of numbness, of not understanding where she is or the woman beside her, would all go away and she'd be happy and move on. She fought through four years of torture and a year of isolation to come home to this. The meds make her feel low and heavy, and all they do is fail to block out the problems that she's constantly facing.

Instead, Lexa feels more alone here than she ever has.

And that is what scares her the most.

===

She's screaming, buried in dirt and being drowned beside the very thing that keeps her alive.

Clarke, Anya, Aden, and Tris watch on, eyes blank and smiles on their faces.

No one helps.

She dies alone.

Again, and again, and again.

===

Lexa wakes with a gasp, her hand clutching her chest as she looks around the dark room. She sees the body beside her roll and a mumble breaks the silence in the darkness. Unable to face Clarke, or whoever else may be under the covers, Lexa rolls out of bed and clumsily reaches for her clothes. She throws everything on in a rush before grabbing her gun from under her pillow and shoving it into her waistband.

"Mm," the body mumbles again, "where you goin', babe?"
"Go to sleep," Lexa says sternly as she throws on her jacket, "I'll be back soon."

She receives an exhausted grunt in return as she exits the bedroom. She walks down the stairs and heads to the garage. She flips on the light and maneuvers around the junk until she gets to the gardening tools. She fishes out the shovel and throws it into the boot of her truck. She gets inside and powers on the car before pulling out of the garage and heading down the street. She turns off the radio, preferring silence.

She arrives at her destination in no time as she parks the car in the gravel lot. She powers off the engine and sits there for a few moments, staring at the establishment with tears in her eyes. A part of her can't believe that she's here and about to do this, but the other part knows that this is the only way this will make her deal with her dreams. She takes a deep breath and exits the truck before going to the boot and retrieving the shovel. Lexa throws on her hood and walks into the lot, cocking her head as she hears each crackle and snap of the wind in the distance. She grips the shovel tighter as she gets where she wants.

Lessa comes to a halt before the stone erected in the dirt, her heart stopping in her chest.

*Annacostia Marie Green.*

*May 4th 1973 - Unknown Date, 2013.*

*Beloved wife, sister, daughter, and friend.*

*May her soul rest in peace.*

Lessa hangs her head and closes her eyes. She hears the storm thundering overhead and she knows that it'll start raining soon. It doesn't matter to her, however. She looks back at the grave and takes a deep breath, steadying herself. She grips the shovel in her hands and focuses her attention into the metal.

"I'm sorry," she breathes out to no one in particular, "I never meant for it to get this far."

She stays a few more minutes, simply staring at Costia's grave, before she turns away and heads down the plots. Her boots squelch under the wet mud as rain begins to fall from the night sky. Lexa feels the droplets run down her face and drop off her chin as she watches the letters of the last names start to go down until she finally hits the section that contains her name. As she grows nearer to her place, she feels the knot in her throat expand and her breath become more strained. She growls through the pain and walks until she finally finds what has been tormenting her for the last two and a half months.

Lessa wants to laugh, honestly, but she can't.

They buried her next to her parents.

She looks at their graves, *Alexander and Rachel Woods*, then over to her own grave.

*Alexandria Grace Woods.*

*September 14th, 1973 - July 14th 2009.*

*Beloved mother, wife, sister, daughter, and friend.*

But that's not what catches her eye, however. It's what underneath that makes her heart stop.
In peace, may you leave the shore.

In love, may you find the next.

Safe travels on your journey.

May we meet again.

Lexa chokes up at the sight of the Traveller's Blessing inscribed on her tombstone. She remembers when her father would say it to her before each tour, until one day, he didn't say it. She grips the shovel in her hands and she screams, her voice cracking from the force of the sobs now making their way out of her throat. She falls to her knees, the rain pelting down on her scrawny body as she shakes her head. She throws the shovel down and rocks back and forth atop her grave, unable to accept the words burn themselves into her mind. She was dead. They all thought that she was dead. They mourned her.

Just like in her nightmares, they buried her.

They forgot about her.

With another raging scream, Lexa reaches for the shovel and stands. She manically begins to dig at the dirt, ignoring the fire that laces through her arms with the exertion. She digs and digs until she can no longer hack at the earth with the shovel because she makes contact with a wooden container. Lexa stops, her eyes wild and wide as she stares down at the casket with an American flag covering it. Growling, she tosses the shovel aside and gets down on her knees and claws at the dirt to clear out the coffin. She looks like a feral animal as she continues to dig and plough through the earth, every so often releasing a growl or a shout of fury and betrayal. She finally clears it and slides back a bit, shaking from the cold.

She grabs at the shovel and flips it upside down, using the round end of the handle to smash against the lock on the casket. She continues to hack at it until the metal cracks free and the coffin unlocks. Lexa shoves aside the shovel and glares at the wooden casket, her dirt-stained hands going back up to grip at her scalp. She can't bite back the tears as they stream down her face, rolling off of her chin and dripping onto the torn flag that once covered the wooden coffin. She wipes at her face, smearing mud everywhere.

And then, with a deep breath, Lexa reaches down and heaves at the lid.

She looks inside to see a few of her personal items. There's a soccer ball, a guitar pick, and her uniform wrapped in another flag. But none of that really matters, to Lexa, because she only has eyes for one thing. There's a photo, the same photo that had been with her in the containment camp in Afghanistan. Lexa's hands shake as she reaches down and picks it up, holding it in her hands as she slides to sit in the pit she'd dug. She looks at the picture of Clarke and Aden after her son's piano recital. She reaches up, tracing her finger over Aden's face and then Clarke's own. She stares at it for a few moments in silence.

And then, just as the first clap of lighting appears overhead, Lexa breaks.

She's back in that cell, with Cage leaning over her with the needle. The chief is watching her being tortured by Emerson. She's back in the village, watching her own soldiers terrorizing a village of innocent people for a kill count. She's there again, her hands wrung around Kareem's throat, his dead, fear-filled eyes glassily staring up at her. She's in that cave, a gun to her head and screaming for it to end.
In one second, she's back again.

"I should have stayed dead," she sobs as she clenches the photo in her hand. She rocks back and forth again, gripping the photo to her chest before she nods her head upwards to glare at the clouds.

"Why didn't you let me die?!" She screams at the rain. "Why can't I just die?!

She cries incoherently for a few more moments until she's beat down and defeated. She simply lays there, the rain sliding down her face and soaking her weary bones. She stares distantly at the empty coffin that's now filled with some of the rainwater. She sits there for God knows how long, until she's interrupted.

"Never would have taken you for a grave robber, Woods."

Lexa's head snaps upwards to see Raven standing at the top of the grave pit, her hands in her pockets and her hair matted to her face. Cocking her brow in confusion, she looks at the coffin and then back up at the other woman. Raven chuckles and motions to the pit. "Can I join you or is this a private service?"

"Uh," Lexa stammers, still taken aback, "yeah, you can come down."

"Great," Raven says cheerily as she slides down and comes to sit beside Lexa, staring at the coffin. "Oh, that's cute. Mine just had my uniform in it." Lexa nods, but then does a double take in surprise.

"Wait," she says in disbelief, "what do you mean yours?"

Raven nods up at the top of the plot. "I'm a few spots over. Right next to some dude name Ronald."

Lexa is silent, brewing in her astonishment as she sees Raven's nonchalant attitude. The physiotherapist takes pity on her silence and shrugs, a half-hearted smile plastering her face. "They thought I was dead a few days after I'd been captured. They never really went out of their way to find me, either."

"But…," Lexa trails off, still confused. "How?"

"How?" Raven chuckles dryly. "I didn't really have anyone to mourn me, so it wasn't that hard to hold a memorial service. Even though I didn't have a real family, it still sucked to feel forgotten." Lexa nods silently, feeling her heart ache as she looks back to the contents of her coffin, and then the photo. Raven peeks over her shoulder and hums in content before glancing up at the unrelenting storm above them.

"You've got a good family, Woods. You may think that they've forgotten about you because you've been gone so long, but they haven't. They love you a lot, especially your wife. I know how you feel right now. Things don't make sense and you feel like the world is against you despite all your hard work. You've escaped the battlefield, only to realize that the real war is in your mind," Raven goes onto say wistfully, her eyes clouding with pain and grief as she glances back over to Lexa. "But listen, your life isn't over. It's different now, but take it like a fresh start. You won't ever be the old Lexa, the one before all this shit happened, but that doesn't mean you don't get your own happy ending." Lexa sighs miserably.

"I just don't know who I am anymore."

"Do any of us?" Raven muses, looking back to the sky as the storm begins to taper off. "You know, Woods, the things you've seen, the torture, the death, the flashbacks, and the nightmares, they're not what makes you who you are." Lexa's shoulders slump as she looks over to Raven with a defeated
"Then who am I?" Lexa asks, her voice cracking. Raven turns her head, sending her a lazy smile.

"Now that's something you've gotta figure out," Raven replies with a nod, "and once you do, I swear to you, all of this," she says as she points to the graveyard around them, "it won't control you anymore."

Lexa digests the words slowly, before she nods and sighs. Raven places her hand on Lexa's kneecap and rubs gently at the skin, flashing the older woman a toothy smile before rising to her feet. "Alright, come on. My leg is gonna rust if we sit in this mud pit any longer. Besides, I'm sure Clarke won't appreciate you having a cold when you come home." Lexa chuckles slightly, accepting Raven's outstretched hand before heaving herself to her feet. The two of them make their way out of the pit after Lexa places all the items, the photo included, back into the coffin. She grabs the shovel and piles in the dirt until the mound is recreated. Raven waits with her the entire time, giving her the space to complete her task independently.

"How did you know that I was here?" Lexa asks when they're walking back towards their cars. Raven shoves her hands into her pockets and gives Lexa a sad, almost lonely smile that pains Lexa's heart.

"It's a routine for me to come once a month," Raven says as she looks back to the ground, "it gives me a sort of closure, you know? Like I'm reminding myself that the old me died, but I'm okay with the new me."

Lexa nods as she approaches her truck. She tosses the shovel in the back before looking at Raven, who is about to get into her own vehicle. She looks back down to her hands, grimacing at the dirt and muck.

"You should probably clean yourself up before crawling back into bed with Clarke," Raven says with a chuckle. "I don't know about your wife, but I highly doubt that she married you for your mud-pit kink."

"Goodnight, Raven." Lexa rolls her eyes good-naturedly at the other woman as she opens the door to her car before sliding into the seat. Raven gives her a toothy grin and a salute before getting into her own car. The two of them drive away, splitting off at an intersection, each heading towards their home.

Lexa drives in silence, thinking about the events of the night. She pulls into the driveway silently, turning off the car before sitting in it for a minute, simply absorbing the bubble of safety. She looks to the house and she struggles to pin together the memories that she'd once created in those videos she'd seen with Aden. She stares at the brick face, the burgundy door, and the rusted mailbox. She sits there and simply stares at all of it, taking it in and letting the visuals sink deep into her bones. And then, she moves.

She locks up the house and washes up in the downstairs bathroom before heading upstairs. She pauses before heading towards her own bedroom as she turns. She opens the door of Aden's room and peers inside to see her son sleeping in his bed, his arm curled around a pillow as he snores. She lingers in the hallway for a minute before she drags her feet forward and walks up to his sleeping form.

"You're the light of my life," Lexa whispers as she leans down to kiss his forehead. One of her hands comes up to gently brush aside some stray hair. "I'm in a bad place right now, Ade, but I love you. I've always loved you and I always will love you. I hope that you know that, despite how messed up
I am.” She chokes on a cry as Aden shifts and mumbles something, nuzzling closer to her hand in unconscious affection. Lexa can't help but reach down and peck his cheek and his forehead once more.

"I hope you can forgive me, my sweet boy. I love you,” Lexa murmurs before tucks the blankets further up his chin. She waits a few moments before she rises stiffly, the cold now having settled in her bones.

She makes her way down the hall to Tris' room. She opens the door and looks inside to see her daughter curled up with a teddy bear. Something in Lexa's heart tears apart when she hears the muffled whimpers coming from the little girl's lips. Padding forward, Lexa reaches the toddler's side in an instant. She reaches out and strokes Tris' hair, her chest rumbling as she feels affection running through her veins. She knows that she's scared Tris, and that the source of the girl's nightmares are her flashbacks, but she can't help but gaze down at her now, to admire in her beauty and see the miracle that is her child.

When Tris' whimpers grow louder, Lexa only knows one way to help.

"Hush little baby, don't say a word," she hums soothingly, stroking Tris' hair. "Mama's gonna buy you a mocking bird. And if that mocking bird don't sing, Mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring…”

Once she's finished singing the entire lullaby, Tris visibly relaxes and starts to fall asleep. Lexa watches her for a few minutes, tears in her eyes before she pecks Tris' forehead and gets up, unable to take another moment in the room, suffocating in the dichotomy between her mind and her heart. She sighs, stumbling tiredly down the hall until she reaches her own bedroom. She opens the door and smiles sadly.

Clarke is splayed out on the bed, snoring loudly with her face half-pressed into her own pillow. She feels a twinge of nostalgia, and for a second, everything that ever went wrong suddenly doesn't exist. She looks to Clarke and she feels like she's young again, like she's free from the guilt and the burden of death. She feels free and alive as she looks to her wife. Her heart leaps up into her throat and she can't hold back the sob that comes out of her throat as she stands in the doorway.

The sound is enough to wake Clarke from her slumber. The blonde shakes her head and blearily looks over to the door, but Lexa can't seem to stop crying or hold it together.

"Lex…?" Clarke slurs the word together as she blinks again. "Baby, what's wrong?"

Lexa opens her mouth to try and answer, but no words come out. Only more cries come out from her throat, threatening to drown her in sadness. Clarke immediately wakes up and sobers instantly as she pads over to her. Lexa doesn't fight it when Clarke's hands touch her cheeks and her arms draw her cold, shivering body into her arms. She doesn't block out the soothing tone of Clarke's voice as she is brought back to the bed. She doesn't protest as she's swaddled in blankets and spooned by her wife.

"You don't have to say anything," Clarke tells her, as if reading her mind. "I'm here. I'm always here. I know I don't always have the right words, and I'm sorry about that. But if one thing is for sure, I'm here."

Lexa just nods and cries harder, feeling her chest ache with the force of her sobs. Clarke's trying to hold back her whimpers as they both lay there, nearly drowning in their own tears. Lexa turns onto her other side, burying into Clarke's side and resting her face against the younger woman's chest. She seeks out the strong, steady beat of Clarke's heart. The soothing rhythm calms the crashing tides in her stomach, easing her anxiety as the racing thoughts in her mind begin to slow down and dissipate.
"I love you," Clarke whispers, "I love you and everything you are feeling is valid."

Lexa slumps into Clarke's arms, remembering Raven's words from the graveyard. She nods slowly against Clarke's chest, just praying that she can have one night in which she is free from the pain of the past.

"I love you," Clarke whispers again, gripping her slightly tighter, "I love you so much, Lexa."

It takes a few minutes, but before Lexa succumbs to the pull of sleep, she breathes out, "I love you, too."

When she finally allows herself to tumble down the dark abyss of sleep, the nightmares stay at bay.

Just this once, she dreams in peace.

Chapter End Notes

It may seem like it's getting better, but it's all about to tumble downhill soon. Things are only just getting started right now. Strap in, guys.

As a side note, I am loving the discourses on the comment sections. I read each and every one of your comments, and I love them all. One thing, though, and this is really important, please try to be mindful of others who are commentating. Please feel free to share your opinions, positive or negative, but make sure they are respectful to others around you. I still haven't gotten around to getting through to replying, but I have read all that most of you have had to say (and have replied to a few important or problematic ones), so keep them coming.

As always, thank you all for the love and support on this story. It helps so much, especially when writing the tough parts, especially like Anya's call. I watched a lot of 911 calls and read transcripts from hotlines, so it was definitely a really deep experience for me. It hit all kinds of home that I never thought I could hit. It was truly eye-opening.

Much love, xx.
We All Fall Down [Part One: Tension]

Chapter Summary

Anya and Clarke finally get to have their much-needed talk, Jackson and Aden grow closer, Lexa fights her nightmares, Abby deals with hospital politics, and Raven makes a startling discovery about her patient.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: DRUG ABUSE, MILD DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY, SUICIDE IDEATION, MENTIONS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE, AND FLASHBACKS.

Hey all!! So sorry for the long wait on this chapter. I hope that the length makes up for it. I have literally the most jam packed semester possible this year so I'm gonna be tight on updates. I'll do my best, but the wait times will be a lot longer! Again, sorry!

TRIGGER WARNINGS AND CUES:

In the SECOND section, there is mention of DRUG/ALCOHOL ABUSE, SUICIDE IDEATION, and a BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SUICIDE. Not that violent or gory or anything, though.

In the THIRD section, there is some VIOLENCE, DEROGATORY SLURS, MENTIONS OF ALLUDED DOMESTIC ABUSE, HOMOPHOBIA, and BLOOD/GORE. This is a mild scene, but there is some fighting at the end.

That's all! Nothing much too violent in this chapter. It's somewhat of a filler because all the shit goes down in the next part and then it's nothing but recovery from there. We're almost at the light, y'all, just hang in there!! I'm sorry for the wait times again.

The song in the quote is, "PTSD" by Yoe Mase.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

_____________________

post-traumatic stress disorder

when she loves to goodbye

and my heart was for sale

(and i'll never know why)

post-traumatic stress disorder
No one ever said it was supposed to be like this.

She shouldn't be here, in this feeling, thinking like this.

Swarming thoughts. Spinning gut. Roaring headache.

When does it end?

She doesn't know, and she loses hope after the fifteenth tear slides down her cheek, she turns on her side and reaches under her bed for the half-empty bottle of Jack. Her hands itch to scratch beneath the taped up gauze on her forearms, but she keeps her nails dug into the sheets, instead. After taking a few more much-needed swigs, she finally drifts off to sleep.

===

"And what do you do if you ever get lost?"

Anya blinks up at her father, gap-toothed and cocked head, beaming from ear-to-ear. In her arms, Lexa slumbers, snoring away into the cotton fabric of her shirt. Her father kneels before them, looking at the two of them with pride in his eyes.

"Follow the Southern Cross," Anya says with a nod. "Find the North Star and let it lead us back home."

Their father, Alexander, gives a small, tight-lipped smile as he nods. "Good girl."

He gets up, straightening out his uniform as Indra and Titus arrive in the distance. Anya's smile slowly slides off her face when she watches her aunt and uncle pull up in their driveway. She inches
closer to her father, ducking her head behind his leg. He glances down at her pitifully, like he
understands that the last thing she wants is to spend another couple of months with her aunt and
uncle while he's shipped back off to the Middle East. Anya holds onto Lexa tighter, clutching her
close to her chest.

"Remember to do your homework," her father jests lightly, "and don't feed your broccoli to Jarvis."

Anya has the decency to pout. "But I hate broccoli."

"If you want to be big and strong like me, you have to. I know, sweetie. If you eat them, Indra will be
happy and so will Titus. I'm sure they'd be willing to give you both something special for braving
through the storm," Alexander chuckles, his voice wavering as he holds back tears. He reaches
down and lightly tousles her hair before leaning down to peck her crown.

"Daddy?" Anya says as Indra gets out of the car, but Titus stays inside of it, glaring at nothing in
particular. "When will you come home next?" Alexander stiffens at the question, tears glazing his
eyes. He takes a breath before kneeling again, holding her close. Anya clutches Lexa closer as he
wraps his arms around the both of them protective, nuzzling the side of her neck.

"Soon, baby girl. I promise," he whispers softly, kissing her temple. "It won't be long until we're
together again."

"Pinky-promise?" Anya asks as Lexa starts to fit and wake up, her green eyes blinking up at them
curiously. Alexander gently pats his daughter's back and kisses her soft tufts of chestnut hair before
turning towards his eldest daughter with a nod.

"I pinky-promise you," he murmurs, smiling bittersweetly. "I will always come home to you."

The last thing Anya remembers is her father's soft, knowing smile as he got into the car and drove
away for the last time.

It's that day, she realized that promises mean nothing.

When she looks down at a sleepy Lexa in her arms, her eyes water and she holds her sister tighter.
Indra comes up to them and kneels down. Her arms circle around the both of them, but Anya knows
that the comfort of her embrace will never compare to the one of her father or mother's. In the back
of her head, she can't help but ask why her, why she was left the protector and not the protected. She
asks herself why her mother left and now her father. She asks and asks but never manages to find an
answer. She holds the fear inside of her chest, knowing that if there's anything she can do, it's to keep
Lexa from feeling the same. She looks down at her sister again, watching as her sister grins and
beams at her, giggling as she smiles.

"It's you and me, kid. Until the end," Anya murmurs, leaning down to peck her cheek. Indra smiles
at their interaction before getting up to go into the house, nodding for Anya to follow with Lexa.
Now that she's awake, Anya sets her down and lets Lexa grasp at her hand. Her little sister glances
upwards and smiles at her, gap-toothed and full of life.

"Together forever, never apart," Anya whispers as Lexa squeezes her hand. She looks up to the
street where the car is long gone and nothing waits except a long stretch of pavement. She takes a
breath and looks back down, only to see that the child version of her sister is gone. Instead, an adult
Lexa, dressed in the same outfit she'd been in before she'd lost her in Tagab. Anya's eyes water as
she reaches out with her hand, cupping Lexa's cheek with trembling fingers. Lexa leans into the
touch, smiling.
"Maybe in distance," Lexa tells her softly, "never in heart."

===

Anya wakes slowly, the tears streaming down her face silently and softly. She reaches under the blanket and fingers over the tattoo that stretches across her ribs. She can't help the sobs now, and she shakily reaches up to cup her mouth with her free hand. She can't quell the noises that leave her lips as she chokes for breath. She holds onto herself as she loses herself in the crashing tides of her depression. She knows that's an effect of switching medications, from the attempt, from everything.

But wasn't she supposed to get better?

A keeling whine bursts past her lips and she closes her eyes. But when she does, all she sees is that image of Lexa stumbling backwards from shot after shot until she's crumpled to her knees. She sees Lexa's last, final bloodied smile before she'd pulled the trigger on the gas tanks of the trucks. She feels the flames licking up and down the expanse of her skin, the screams that had torn from her throat as she'd tried to lurch forward and get to her sister, at the resistance behind Lincoln holding her back. She hears the ringing in her ear as she finally came to and saw nothing but flames and debris and blood.

All the time, there's only one thing she could think.

*It should have been me.*

The thought sends her spiralling out of control. She heaves herself out of the bed and stumbles through the room until she makes it to the door. She's gasping now, her chest heaving with the effort to get air through to the rest of her body. She clutches at her sweat-drenched night shirt and grits her teeth as she feels a spell of nausea spin through her stomach. She barely makes it to the hallway before she falls to her knees, heaving harder. She lets her forehead slide against the cool wood.

"Anya?" She hears someone calling her name in the distance. "Oh God, Anya!"

Anya looks up and sees Lexa standing over her, bright and innocent in her six year old body, with her hand outstretched. Anya doesn't feel the arms that curl around her, or the hand on her cheek, or the panicked voice calling for her to breathe. She just sees Lexa smiling at her like she's the apple of her world, just like how it once had been for the both of them. Anya's breath gets sucked into her chest as she struggles to figure out just how it all went wrong. Lexa's eyes are soft and kind, vividly green.

"Anya!" Lexa's childish voice calls to her. "Don't break your promise now."

Anya chokes on her sob as more tears stream down her face, her body growing colder, number. Her teeth chatter as she tries to form the question, but the words never leave her lips. Lexa simply kneels before her and cups her cheeks in her small hands.

"Breathe," Lexa whispers as darkness specks around the corners of her eyes, "just breathe, 'Nya. It'll be over soon."

And with that, Anya lets her eyelids slide shut and her body relax into that familiar state of numbness.

===

The next time she wakes up, she's back in the hospital.
Anya blearily gazed to her side to see herself hooked up to heart monitors and an IV. Her hands tremble as she grits her teeth in frustration. She'd just left. She'd been cleared. She'd been told that everything would be okay now. How could she be back?

"Oh, sweetheart, you're awake!" Anya turns to see Indra, eyes bloodshot and teary, glancing at her from the chair beside her bed. "I was so worried after you passed out. I didn't know what to do so I called the ambulance." Anya struggles to sit up, but Indra quickly rises and places her hand on her shoulder, giving it a light squeeze. Anya's eyes blur with tears and she tries to form an apology, but Indra shakes her head and leans down to place a soft kiss on her crown.

"It's okay," Indra murmurs gently, "you're okay now."

"No," Anya rasps as her voice cracks, turning her head away, "I'm not okay. Why does everyone keep saying that?"

At the blow, Indra reels back and flinches, more tears streaming down her face. Anya bitterly looks at her hands, trying to erase the blood that coats them in her mind. She clenches her fists and swallows down a sob. Her insides are twisting and clenching, and she feels so damned frustrated that she can't seem to figure out what keeps pulling her down. She never got captured. She was never tortured. She was given a gift, for God's sake, and yet she seems to be feeling like the world is coming to an end. She was spared when her sister wasn't, and yet, here she is laying in a hospital bed wishing for her death.

*Maybe Titus was right,* she thinks sadly, *maybe I am just weak.*

"That's not true," Indra breathes out, and Anya blinks upwards in surprise when she realizes that she had said the words out loud. Indra comes forward and reaches for her hand, giving it a soft squeeze. "We weren't there for you, Anya. We put you on the back burner and it wasn't because we didn't care, but because we all were focused on Lexa. I... the way I reacted was horrible and completely out of line. I never should have made that judgement on you and I'm so terribly sorry I did what I did."

Indra is crying by the end of her apology, but Anya can't seem to feel anything other than the heavy weight upon her chest.

"It doesn't matter," Anya mumbles bitterly, closing her eyes, "I didn't deserve support. Not after what I did."

That's enough for Indra to quieten, and soon enough, the two of them slip into a tense silence.

But even the silence isn't enough to erase the guilt that boils deep within the both of them.

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March 12th 2014, 04:15

Maimonides Medical Clinic, New York
Clarke isn't entirely sure how she managed to get roped into the early shift at the hospital, but she wasn't complaining. She’s out of the house and back in a familiar, routine environment. She'd been taking a lot of time off recently and she figured that it might be time to get back into the swing of things.

Even if she's getting back into the swing of those things with less than four hours of sleep hanging on her shoulders. It’s a sacrifice she’s willing to make.

"Griffin?" Monty's voice rings out, snapping her from her thoughts. She hazily looks up from her clipboard, blinking away the signs of fatigue from her face. Monty stares at her worriedly, but she glares at him to back off. She can see him hesitate, but with another pointed glare, he sighs, shaking his head.

"We have a quiet night tonight," he tells her, reaching for her clipboard, "why don't you go home? I'm sure that you’re not needed around here right now. We don't have that many patients to deal with and the ER is quiet. I think you should rest."

She says, "I'm here because I need to get back on top of my work schedule."

She doesn't say, because my life is a mess and my home isn't a home anymore.

She says, "I'm here because I haven't been in lately, either."

She doesn't say, because I don't know who I am inside.

She says, "I'm here because I miss fixing people and helping them get better."

She doesn't say, because I'm scared I can't save my wife from herself.

Monty mulls over her responses and hums discontentedly, but before either of them can say anything further, an aching cry interrupts them. Clarke's head snaps up reflexively as she spots a familiar figure in the distance. Indra is sobbing outside of a room, her hands cupping her mouth. Frowning, Clarke moves forward before she’s consciously aware of her footfalls. Monty is yelling something behind her but Clarke's already running towards a distressed Indra. Worry spikes in her chest, and she struggles to remember how she’d left Lexa at home that morning. At the sound of her heavy footsteps approaching, Indra's head snaps upwards and her eyes cloud with grief at the sight of the blonde.

"Indra, what happened? Why are you here? Is it Lexa?" Clarke breathes out, looking at the door frantically. Indra shakes her head, her bottom lip quivering.

Before she can even speak, Clarke rushes past her and opens the door and quickly bursts inside without waiting for Indra to explain the current situation.

But as soon as she sees who’s on the bed, her heart thuds to a standstill inside her chest.

And then, her world crumbles at the sound of her defeated, soft voice.

"I told you, I don't want to see anyone right now, Ma."

Clarke can't breathe, nor can she see through the blurring of her vision because of the tears that are steadily sliding down her cheeks. She drops the clipboard that had been in her hand as the door closes automatically behind her. The sound of the door slamming shut raises the irritated head of the patient on the bed.
"I said…"

And just like that, all those weeks that had passed between them, all those days of no communication, suddenly break within the matter of one word.

"Anya…," Clarke breathes out, unable to fathom that the thin, defeated, hopeless, sickly-looking woman before her is Lexa's once strong and brave sister. She stumbles forward and sits down on the chair, trying to hold back the hurt when Anya's stare hardens into a stiff glare and she angrily turns away.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Anya's voice is low and cutting, dripping with well-deserved venom, but Clarke can't hold back the flinch that shudders up her spine. "I kept my word, Griffin. I left you alone. What else do you want?"

"I… I…," Clarke can't form the words as she keeps looking up and down her sister-in-law's body in complete disbelief. "What happened?"

Anya scoffs, shaking her head and keeping her head turned the other way. Clarke reaches forward and tries to hold her hand, but Anya snatches it away just as quickly. The older woman snaps her head back and the fierce growl that leaves her lips is enough to make Clarke cringe and look away in shame. She pulls back and folds her hands in her lap instead. Anya grits her teeth and Clarke can see that it is taking everything inside of her to hold back her anger. Clarke sucks in a deep breath and turns her head, looking down in guilt.

"You're upset," Clarke whispers softly, "I get it."

She expected Anya to scream, to shout, to yell at her about how she's angry, but that's not what she gets. Instead, Anya surprises her completely.

What she gets in response is a quiet, barely there, "you're upset?"

Clarke looks back to Anya's watery eyes. She waits, watching as Anya swallows thickly, tears welling in her hazel eyes. She shakes her head disgustedly, seemingly unable to come up with any other spiteful words to say.

"What happened to you, Anya?" Clarke asks, figuring that Anya's not going to speak. She can't tell if she's grateful or sad for that. "Why are you here?"

"What do you want me to say?" Anya whispers again. "Why do you think I owe you an explanation? After everything you did to me, what more do you want?"

"Because I want to help!" Clarke cries out, unable to hold her tears back anymore. "I… I care about you, Anya! And seeing you like this has me--"

"Really?" Anya rolls her eyes and laughs bitterly. "Now you want to help me? Why? Because I'm laying in a hospital bed looking like shit? And you care? Since when do you fucking give a damned shit about me, Clarke? Because blaming me for our fling and telling me to fuck off is care, right? Bullshit."

"Anya, it wasn't like that, I was just stressed because--"

"Because what, Clarke?!" Anya snarls, her fingers clenching in the sheets. "Because it got inconvenient? Because as soon as Lexa walked through those doors, you forgot about everything we had?! Jesus fuck, Clarke, I wasn't asking you to bed and wed me. I didn't even want to continue what we had because I know how much you love each other. All I wanted was my friend back! I didn't
want to be alone again, and somehow, you decided that even friendship wasn’t worth it. You saw nothing but Lexa, and suddenly I went from the woman holding you in bed at night to the fucking thorn in your side. You left, Clarke. And I understood. I got it. I knew why you needed time, but you cut me down like I was nothing. You left me for the dogs."

"I'm here now!" Clarke tells her, voice cracking as she shakily swipes at the trailing tears. "Please, God, I'm sorry about how I acted and what I did but it was never my intention to leave like that because--"\

"Sorry?!" Anya roars, her own tears sliding down her cheeks. "You don't know what it means to be sorry, Clarke. You know I would never have done that to you. I never would have left you, no matter how dire and complicated it would have gotten. Because unlike you, Clarke, I don’t fucking give up on people. I would have stuck by you, because we made a mistake together. It wasn't just me, Clarke. It takes two people to sleep with each other, and reality check, we did it. Own up to it."

That hits both of them. Clarke sobs out a cry, her shoulders shaking as Anya looks away, still seemingly enraged at the younger blonde’s appearance. She knows that Anya has every right to her anger. When she thinks about it, she knows about how long it had taken Anya to get back to a stable point in her life. Before they'd seen Dr Jarod, she remembers how much of a mess Anya had been, to the point where she couldn't even function in society or in her home without the help or dependency upon Clarke. That's when it hits her, like a bullet to the chest, that when she left, when she told Anya to fuck off, she had taken those years of trust and support with her, leaving Anya to the dust like all those five years meant nothing.

Despite trying to aid Lexa, she couldn't get away without hurting someone else.

So it strains her voice, like raking a heated blade down her esophagus and leaving her to choke on her blood, when Clarke croaks the burning question.

"Anya," she whispers, her tone more worried and hesitant than before. She watches Anya’s frame grow rigid and tense as she asks, "what happened to you?"

This time, Anya stares at her, cold and unwavering, and Clarke doesn't have to hear her answer to know the truth. And it hurts like hell to know that she knows.

"What do you think?" Anya asks, her voice soft and sad, no longer carrying the same spite. "You left me. I… there was nothing else I thought I could do, okay?"

And fuck does it hurt when Clarke hears the defeat in Anya's voice. It’s the absolute desolation and accepting tone, the sheer guilt as Anya looks down to her wrists, the wrists upon which Clarke can see bandages wrapped tightly around. What makes her stomach flip harder is the fact that they’re fresh, and it pulls upon the already damaged strings in Clarke's heart when she realizes that Anya had been struggling for the entire time since Lexa's arrival. Months had passed, and where had she been the entire time? Alone? Scared? Ashamed? Clarke has to look away, unable to deal with the fact that she cut Anya out exactly how the older blonde had accused her of doing. She suddenly thinks back to the muddled phone call she’d gotten a few days ago, in which Anya had been incoherent and sobbing over the static and she'd just hung up.

It didn't hit her then, but it hits her now.

Anya was trying to reach for help and she wasn't there.

*I promise*, she hears herself from five years ago, back on that couch after she’d picked Anya up from that bar at three in the morning, *I promise I'm not leaving.*
I promise, I promise, I promise…

Clarke wasn't there, when she'd promised Anya that they were in this together. That no matter what, they had each other's backs. It was their pact. They were a family, and family stuck together no matter the dire circumstances. She remembers Dr Jarod's prognosis after their first or second meeting; *Survivor's Guilt*, he had told her grimly, *she needs social support if psychotherapy is going to work in any fashion. She needs your support, Clarke. Only you know her pain.*

It was true both ways, though, because no one knew her grief quite like Anya.

It scares her to think that she was so close to losing her best friend and sister-in-law, and it would've been her fault. All because she acted rashly. Stupidly. *Im maturely.*

"I'm sorry," Clarke hoarsely chokes out, her eyes welling with fresh tears, "I… I never… I swear, Anya, I would've come…"

Anya grits her teeth again, looking away and fixing her gaze on the door instead. "Yeah? You would've come for me? Then why the fuck didn't you?"

Clarke can't seem to reply with the knife in her side, but Anya decides to push the blade deeper as she angrily growls, “where were you when I needed you?”

Clarke's heart thuds in her chest and she keels back in hurt. She tries to fix together some sort of deeper apology, something that would change the mistakes she'd made in the past, but nothing seemed to work. She knew that no words, no actions, could ever undo what she'd done that day at the ice skating rink where she’d told Anya to stay away from them. She clenches her fingers in her hand and snifflies, looking down in shame. She doesn't want to think about what Anya must've felt after Clarke coldly hung up on her that day, but she imagines the pain the older woman must have endured. She knows of Anya's loneliness, of her neglected childhood from her abusive uncle and her abused aunt. She remembers Anya sitting up with her head in her hands, screaming from the war inside her mind. She remembers cradling that head and holding it to her chest, to assure Anya that she had a place to lift her burdens.

And what had she done? She'd taken it all away. For what?

For peace of mind?

For emotional distance?

For the right choice?

Or was it for the right person?

"I don't want your pity," Anya growls sadly, trying to hide her falling tears from Clarke. "You weren't there when I needed you, so why the fuck would you want to be here now? I'm alive somehow. I got through it like I get through everything: *by my fucking self*. I don't need you, but you need *me*, right? I don't give a fuck what you want to say, Clarke. You left me. I accept it. Just… stop trying to pull me along a rope that's tied to nothing but my own death. I am so tired of believing that there’s someone who would stay and mean it." The words bite deep past her skin and into the cracked shell of heart. Clarke tries again to reach out, but Anya shakes her head, her shoulders trembling with anxiety.

"Stop it," Anya weakly pushes her away, "stop trying to fucking come back like what you didn't
break me! Stop trying to get me to fall for it again! I won't do it! I can't do it, Clarke. I'm sorry. I can't do it anymore and I don't want to do it anymore."

"Anya--"

"Fuck. Off!" Anya shouts, turning her head so that Clarke can see her bloodshot and glassy eyes. "You want to know what happened? You want to know what fucking happened? I smoked pot, cigarettes, drank my body weight in alcohol. And then, and then they fucking gave me the drugs and they just numbed me. I snorted them, crushed them up and drank them in copious amounts of liquor. I walked around, day after day, lost inside the fucking memories that I'd been working for years to overcome. I walked around like a shell of myself and not even fucking once did you show your face. I didn't even deserve a fucking phone call, did I? You wanted space, I gave it to you. But the minute I tried to have a conversation with you, the moment I needed my friend back to help me find solid ground, you turned around and spat in my face. You told me that my presence was making things worse. You… made me feel worthless. And the worst part? I believed it. I embodied it. I cut the words into my skin because I needed to bleed it." Anya's heaving, out of breath by the end of her rant. Clarke's eyes worriedly flash to her heart monitor, which had begun to madly beep over the course of her explosion.

"An, I think you should calm down--"

"No!" Anya snarls, her fingers tearing through the sheets with the force of her grip. "You threw me away like I was nothing! You looked at me like I was a monster, and God, Clarke, I fucking believed you. I believed all the lies and thoughts I'd spun. I believed it all. I just… I needed you, Clarke! I needed you and you left me just like… just like…" Anya's voice tapers off as she starts to cry, her hands leaving the sheets to grip her scalp and clench into the skin painfully tight. Clarke tries to reach forward, to stop it from happening, but the next words that leave Anya's lips cause Clarke to remain frozen in her seat.

"You left," Anya lets the words slip like they'd been hanging on by a threat. Clarke's heart shatters as the softest whisper utters, "just like everyone else."

"Anya," Clarke breathes out, shaking her head as tears pool in her eyes. "That's not true… I was just… I was trying to… look, I know I… just, I didn't mean--"

"Your intentions mean nothing," Anya sighs defeatedly, "nothing means anything anymore. I don't want to be here. I don't deserve to be here anymore. I betrayed my sister. I broke my father's promise. I should've died that day but I didn't because I'm not even strong enough to kill myself, apparently. Titus was right. I'm weak. Pathetic. Worthless." The last word cracks upon leaving Anya's lips. Clarke's head nods up and she watches Anya's face turn in her direction, the anger wiped from her face, only to be replaced by a heart-wrenching amount of sadness and pain. The tears silently side down her cheeks in waves.

"I'm… I'm unloveable aren't I?" Anya's voice cracks as she chokes out the question. "I just… when we were together… for a second, I felt loved and it broke me. It broke me to think that there's such a thing as love. For a moment, in that bed right after the new year, I woke up believing that I could be loved. And it wasn't even in the romantic sense. It was just the idea that someone out there finally asked me if I was okay, someone finally held me when I fell apart. Someone was there for me."

*And now she's gone,* Clarke mournfully hears her say in the silent gaps. *You took it away just as quickly as you gave it to me.* It makes her stomach flip and her mouth go dry.

But it's nothing compared to how her lungs collapse as Anya defeatedly hangs her head and asks,
"who was I kidding to think that I could be loved, anyways?"

Clarke's jaw works, hinging and unhinging, but no words come out. She looks to the woman on the bed, sickly and pale, looking nothing like the stoic and brave sister-in-law that she'd grown fond of in the last five years. She looks to the woman on the bed and she remembers every time Anya came for her, no matter what time she would call, just to hold her in her arms and rock her to sleep. She remembers Anya pulling the knife out of her hand on one desperate night before hugging her so tightly she couldn't barely breathe for a few minutes. Clarke looks to the woman on the bed, to Anya, and she can't hold back her tears. She reaches forward, her hands tentatively reaching again for Anya's own trembling pair in desperation and worry.

"Clarke," Anya croaks, too weak to push her away again, "please don't. Don't give me hope like there's something there. I get it, okay? Lexa needs you and I... I can't be in the picture anymore. I get it. Just... please... spare me the pain of dragging me along. I... I don't think that I'm capable of living like that anymore. Hell, I don't think I'm capable of living at all. I mean, just look at me." The defeat in her voice is evident as Clarke watches her sister-in-law's head hang downwards in utter shame.

"No," Clarke whispers softly, reaching forward to tangle their hands together, "I'm not leaving this time."

Anya's head doesn't move as she quietly replies, "please stop, Clarke."

"No," Clarke shakes her head as she climbs onto the bed, causing Anya's body to tense and her head to snap upwards in shock. Clarke gently maneuvers herself on the bed before she opens her arms, waiting on Anya to make the next move. She can see the doubt and fear in the older woman's gaze, which on exacerbates her own guilt. She swallows harshly, anticipating rejection.

"What if you leave again?" Anya croaks, her voice cracking. "What if... I can't keep doing this, Clarke?"

"I'm not leaving," Clarke adamantly tells her, inching closer slightly. "I mean it, An. I made a mistake and I'm sorry. I was overwhelmed and that's no excuse by any means, but I love you. You're my best friend and we made a pact to stick through this together. I... I don't want you to be on your own anymore. I know we both made a mistake and that I fucked up the way I dealt with it. But, I love you so much, and I can't bear to give you up again. I fucked up, An. I fucked up thinking that I could pin the blame of what we both did on you, and it wasn't fair. What I did was fucked up, Anya. I'm not asking for your forgiveness for the pain I've caused you. I'm just... I just don't want you to give up because I can't lose you." Anya sobs at Clarke's words, and Clarke herself can't hold back her own waterworks as the guilt bleeds through her pleading cries.

"I'm not leaving," Clarke replies with a shaky voice, "because I love you, Anya. I told you. You're my best friend."

"And Lexa?" Anya bitterly scoffs, still not having moved. "What about her? What happens when she finds out about us?"

"Then we'll deal with it," Clarke says strongly, giving Anya an assuring nod. "I'm not abandoning you again."

"We have to tell her," Anya says, finally looking up to stare at Clarke. "I can't keep lying to my sister."

Clarke's breath gets caught in her lungs as she stares at the dejected, fearful gaze in Anya's eyes. She remembers the look on Lexa's face that night they'd had sex, the mania and the sickening acceptance.
She remembers the harsh swipe of her fingers, the low growl of her voice as she'd asked those chilling questions. She can't help but retreat into herself, pulling her arms around her shoulders and holding herself tightly as she remembers the way Lexa'd ground down upon her, biting and scratching and clawing at her like some animal. She remembers how she'd breathed those words down her spine like hot coal, each letter burning her alive until there was nothing left but ash. She remembers the agonized grunts, the tears, the blood.

"Clarke?" Anya's voice brings her back to the present. "Clarke, where did you just go?"

That's when it hits Clarke. Anya doesn't know.

She doesn't know about the flashbacks, the hyper-vigilance, the dubiously consensual sex.

She doesn't know that the Lexa that lives with her isn't the same Lexa that left for her final tour with her sister.

"What did she do?" Anya asks, eyeing her up and down, the panic burbling in her voice. Clarke hates it, hates knowing that Anya understands that panic because of the things Titus would do to them when they'd been children. Anya inches closer, and Clarke hates that despite all the heart-wrenching pain she's caused the older woman, Anya comes for her and comforts her like always.

"Lexa…," Clarke chokes out, tears welling in her eyes as more memories come crashing in, "she's not okay, An."

"What do you mean?" Anya whispers, but they both know that she already knows the answer. "What… what's wrong?"

Clarke's voice turns cold, thick with desperation and guilt as she looks up and barely breathes out, "everything."

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March 15th 2014, 15:41

Public School 131, New York

"Have you decided on a scene that you want to do?"

Aden blinks sleepily up from where his head had been resting upon his desk. Jackson's bright blue eyes beam down at him with mischief, mirth in his voice as he asks, "still with me, Space Cadet Griffin-Woods?"

"Shut up," Aden begrudgingly mutters as he shoves the older boy away. "I get it. I zoned out."

"More like napped and then drooled all over your chemistry books," Jackson notes, nodding down to the sodden page that he'd flipped to. Groaning, Aden rubs at his face before leaning back in his chair. His gaze softens as he notices the gentle upturn of Jackson's lips at the sight of him. Something in his stomach flips and he can't explain the feeling, but it just feels… right.
"Listen," Jackson says, flushing a little as he breaks them both out of their somehow comfortable staring competition. "I was thinking that maybe we could do Act IV, scene seven." Aden furrows his brows and shrugs, nodding despite not knowing the scene at all. He knows that he's been behind on his readings so he figures he'll trust Jackson to pick an adequate scene to reenact. He is about to reply when something smacks him in the side of the head, causing him to look to the side.

Dawson and his goons are laughing from their corner, causing Jackson to tense in his seat beside him. Aden fiercely shakes his head, letting him know to stand down and that fighting the idiot jocks isn't worth it. Sighing, Jackson resorts to glaring at the football players with enough ice to chill the deserts of the Sahara. Aden feels that beating in his heart again, but he swallows down the funny feeling. He scratches at the back of his head before looking down at his hastily-scrabbled notes.

"How are things going over here?" Mr Blake's voice interrupts them from their silence, causing both boys to look up at their English teacher. There are a few more snickers from behind them, but Aden grits his teeth and decides to ignore them. Mr Blake, having noticed the odd noises from his students, turns around and fixes them with a stern expression and the threat of yet another detention. His deep voice, coupled with the threat of being cut from the football team, immediately shuts them up.

"You let me know if they cause you anymore problems, yeah?" Mr Blake says softly, so only Aden can hear. "I know how school can be, and I want to make sure that you feel safe. Don't let bullies get the best of you, Aden." The boy only grunts, feeling more embarrassed that Mr Blake doesn't think that he can hold his own against Dawson and his group of punk-ass jocks.

"Anyways," Mr Blake says, straightening his back as he gazes down at their work, or lack thereof. "I see you've made progress."

Jackson chuckles a little at the sarcasm and mirth dripping from their teacher's voice. Aden rolls his eyes, but can't help but also chuckle along and agree that he's been a bit lazy this semester. Mr Blake simply claps their shoulders gently before moving on to check on the other students, taking equal interest in their progress as he had with their own project. After he's gone, Aden turns back to Jackson, huffing teasingly as he reaches for his torn-up copy of King Lear. With another sigh, he opens up and begins to read the play. Occasionally, he'll jot down a few notes or doodle in the index, but that's not what distracts him.

As Aden looks up, he sees Jackson's face screwed up in concentration. His tongue pokes out between his teeth as he scribbles down some notes in his coiled notebook. Aden's eyes follow the motion, holding back a chuckle as he sees the basic incoherency of his writing, and how it literally resembles chicken-scratch. Something about the way the writing is, and the way that Jackson furiously scribbles down each note before chewing on the lid of his pen has Aden flushing and swallowing hard.

Before he can question the feeling, the bell rings and jolts him from his seat.

The other kids in the class start to file out, talking loudly about their plans for the weekend. Aden sighs and rubs the back of his head, ignoring the snickers of Dawson and his crew as they purposefully pass by his desk and hip-check him. Aden watches them leave with a glare. Luckily, however, Jackson once again comes to his rescue and steps in front of him, his eyes gentle and calming as he nods to Aden. Getting the hint that he should let the jerks' behaviour go to the back of his head. The two boys pack up their things and say a quick goodbye to Mr Blake. Aden tags alongside Jackson as they make their way to the back field where they walk home together. They're side by side, hands brushing ever so lightly, as they talk about mindless school things.

"So," Jackson says after awhile of some silence, "how are you?"
Aden blinks up at him confusedly, not understanding the question. Jackson sighs and stops, turning to face the shorter boy.

"I just…," Jackson stammers over his words, "I can't imagine how it must be at home for you right now, with everything that's happened. I just… I wanted to know how you're holding up? You haven't said much since we last spoke. Or made up, I guess."

Aden is quiet for a moment, trying to think about everything that had gone down since Lexa came home from God-knows-where she'd been in the early hours of the morning. She knew that her mother must have gone through some serious shit in Tagab to have returned as dysfunctional and out of touch with society as she had been. He still hears the screams that'll tear from her throat in the middle of the night from a particularly horrible nightmare. It always sends Tris waddling into his room, cowering under his covers and clinging to his chest as she sobs out of fear for their mother's wellbeing.

"Aden?"

The boy looks up, noticing Jackson's gaze, now serious and sympathetic as it remains glued to his cheeks.

His wet cheeks.

When he had started crying, he doesn't know. He opens his mouth to respond, but all the comes out is a choked cry. Jackson is there in a flash, wrapping his long and lean arms around his shoulders. Aden doesn't hesitate to burrow his head into his best friend's shoulder, letting the warmth and comfort surround him. Jackson murmurs sweet nothings in his ear as they stand there on the field, simply hugging each other without any other care for the world. Jackson's lips are so close to Aden's ear, and something in the pit of him wants his best friend closer; Aden needs him closer, needs him to move those lips--

Wait. What?

Aden pulls away quickly, gasping and red as he furiously avoids Jackson's concerned gaze. Aden blinks away those confusing thoughts and turns back to Jackson, an apology ready on his lips. Only, just as he's about to let it slip, something hard collides with the back of his head. Wincing, Aden turns around to face the direction of the projectile, which, as he'd glanced down for a split second, had been a football. The object in question belonged to no one other than fucking Dawson.

"Sorry," the taller, leaner boy grins unapologetically, "I was aiming for the twink -- oh wait, I got him."

"Back off Dawson," Jackson grumbles, stepping up beside Aden protectively. "Mind your own damn business."

"You see," Dawson says, ignoring Jackson's threat. "I understand Aden over here being a faggot and all, but what I don't seem to be getting is how you're one too. I mean, you're one of us, Jackson. We're not lanky good-for-nothings like this prick here."

"It's 2014, dick-head," Jackson growls lowly, "besides, I never said I was gay. Even if I was, that's not something you can say."

"Are you?" Dawson asks, perking his brow. "It would make sense, you know. As a defender you probably spend a lot of time down on your knees--"

Before Dawson can finish his sentence, Aden reaches out and decks him across the face. Dawson
stumbles back, surprised with the amount of force that came out of the boy's punch. Even Jackson looks shocked, but there's a hint of awe in his gaze. Enraged, Dawson pulls himself together before he straightens his back, clenching his jaw before smiling slyly at the boys.

"Nice punch, Woods. I wonder where you get it from?" Dawson asks, prodding into dangerous territory. He inches closer, looming over Aden as the boy trembles and tries to hold back from tilting his head downwards in submission. Dawson growls, flexing his fingers as he slowly begins to close them into a tight fist. From behind him, Aden can see some of his goons walking down the pitch, obviously having seen their leader punched by a lowly member of the middle school hierarchy.

"Huh?" Dawson asks again, his lips spreading into a smirk. "It couldn't possibly be from your mother, right?"

At that, Aden's eyes flash with fear and devastation. Dawson, having seen the effect of his words, lingers closer.

"They called her a war hero, didn't they?" Dawson chuckles darkly. "It's funny, you know, that they call her a hero."

"No," Aden says, but his voice quivers, "stop--"

"I heard that she murdered four hundred people in a ring of fire," Dawson laughs sickly, "my dad told me that she killed them without any mercy. That she even killed children and her own officers. She killed and came back and she's no hero--"

"Dawson," Jackson steps in, his eyes going wide as he notices Aden start to tremble harder beside him, "stop it."

"She's not a hero," Dawson growls, now fully looming over Aden with a menacing snarl at his lips, "she's a murderer."

"No!" Aden screams as he launches forward, tackling Dawson to the ground. Before anyone can react, Aden raises his fists and rains them down on the helpless boy. There's commotion all around them, but Aden can see nothing but blood. He hears his mother's screams, her desperate cries. He sees her holding Clarke against the wall, an arm pinned to her throat as she yells incoherently about whatever time period she was currently trapped in. He sees her staring at Tris like she's an outsider, at how she follows his sister sometimes, like she's a predator stalking its prey. He feels the fear, the same fear that had been instilled in him since the day he had received the news of her death, and it consumes him until all that is left is rage.

It takes two strong pairs of arms to pull him off the bloody and beaten footballer. Even then, he's screaming, almost foaming at the mouth rabidly. At the same time, however, tears streak down his cheeks as he struggles in their grip. Eventually, the rage tapers off and he slumps, feeling his head being cradled by large hands, until his cheeks are pressed up against someone's chest. He blinks away the tears and calms down, only to look up to see a bloody-nosed Jackson staring back down at him, his gaze comforting and sympathetic. His blue eyes hold no judgement, only concern for the boy in his arms.

Beside him, Aden sees Mr Blake leaning over a bloody Dawson, trying to talk him back into consciousness. Aden struggles in Jackson's arms, but the taller boy holds him back and calmly whispers soothing assurances back to him. He hears the familiar sounds of ambulance sirens approaching in the distance, and that's when it hits him. Mr Blake turns around to look at him, his dark eyes filled with an unrecognizable emotion, but Aden can't seem to even think of an apology.
Aden just shakes his head, his eyes welling with tears, and croaks out in despair.

"Jackson," Mr Blake says calmly, though his voice cracks slightly, "take him to the principal's office. Now."

"But--"

"Now," Mr Blake says, his eyes drifting back to Aden. "His parents should be there soon."

As Jackson's heaving him up, Aden's gut sinks into the ground. He moves numbly, like he's in comatose.

As they near the front of the school, and he sees his mother's car pull up in the lot, he realizes something terrifying.

He looks to Lexa and then back down to his bloodied hands.

He's become his own worst nightmare.

"Aden!" Clarke calls from the other side of the car, "Aden, what happened? Are you alright? Oh baby, your hands!"

Aden can't even process his doting doctor mother, because he stares at Lexa and he sees the fear and the anger in his mother's eyes. Lexa is still standing by the car, but her eyes are directly looking at his hands, the hands which he know are covered in the blood of the boy from the football field, the boy he doesn't even know is still alive. Aden's tears cloud his vision as he sees Lexa look away, almost ashamed of the situation. Clarke's hands find his face and she tugs him into her chest.

"Oh baby, I'm so glad that you're okay. When they called--"

"Stop," Aden mutters as he pushes himself away from her, much to Clarke's confusion. "I… I don't deserve to be comforted."

"Aden?" Clarke asks, her voice trembling as she looks from her son to his best friend. "I don't understand."

Aden looks up, that familiar sweltering rage building inside of him again. Only this time, it's not a rage for Dawson and his mindless threats and insults, but for himself. It's a rage at his inability to control his emotions. He remembers something Lexa would say at night to Clarke, when they both thought he was sleeping, that he'd not heard the screaming and the shouting, the clashing and the crashing of pots and pans, of memories that were once things that brought him joy but now bring him pain. Lexa, he remembers, had turned to his other mother and blatantly whispered, feeling is weakness.

"I do," Lexa's voice pipes up, cold and hard as she finally moves from her spot. "You beat him bloody, didn't you?"

"Lexa!" Clarke gasps, not liking the tone of her wife's voice. Aden doesn't even flinch.

"I did," he admits instead, his voice just as cold. Even Jacksons shudders beside him. "And I enjoyed it."

Lena snarls, the same anger that had been within him only moments ago now lighting her green eyes.
"You what?"

"I said I enjoyed it!" Aden shouts, stepping up to his mother defiantly. "I mean, don't you when you throw Ma around? When you scream at her for no reason? Don't you enjoy it when you pull your gun on us, because you don't know who the fuck we are?" The question jars everyone to a screeching halt. Lexa's eyes flash, but not with rage this time.

But sadness.

A sadness that Aden knows well. A sadness that he's seen grown and spread like a parasite in his mother's lungs, to the point where every breath Clarke had drawn was built upon grief and longing. Of knowing that a future with her wife, regardless of her status of life or death, is not longer attainable. Lexa may have come back alive, yes, but not the Lexa that was his mother.

No, the person who came back is a stranger.

"Aden," Clarke gasps, finally having caught her breath from the shocking accusation from her son, "apologize, now!"

"No," Aden says bitterly, clenching his sore, bloody fists. "Because I am tired of pretending that everything is okay. I'm tired of pretending that what you did," he says, glaring at Clarke with a bloodcurdling snarl, "didn't happen and that it didn't change us. Look at our family, Ma. We're all kinds of fucked up. Tris can't sleep on her own anymore. You spend half your time accepting all the aggression and the violence that Mom has. You don't care about yourself and you think you're so selfless."

"Aden--"

"No!" Aden snaps, his voice cracking. Tears well in his eyes and he trembles with grief. "I'm tired of pretending we're okay." He looks away, trying to will his throat to stop closing up or for the tears to leave his eyes, but he can't. Instead, he lets his shoulders slump and his tears fall. The next noise to come out of his mouth is a desperate sob.

"I'm tired, okay?" Aden whimpers as he looks up, devastated and distraught. "I'm tired of coming home and seeing the two of you fight. I'm tired of being mad and angry and resentful at you for what you did. I'm tired of pretending that what's happening to Mom isn't some phase. I'm tired of pretending that things are going to be okay when they haven't been in five years. I'm tired of it all. I just… I want to go home, to back when things were good and we were happy, but it's all gone."

No one speaks after that. Clarke is sobbing alongside her son, and Lexa is looking to the ground, her shoulders slumped in defeat. Both parents look incredibly stressed, but for entirely different reasons. Aden knows that what he's said must've hurt, but he's been carrying his inside of him for too long now, and he needed to release some of that pent-up rage. He looks to the side to see that Jackson is still standing there, and his jaw drops slightly as he realizes that his best friend heard everything. He goes to try and apologize, but Jackson shakes his head and softly tugs him into a hug before rubbing his back.

"I'm sorry," Aden sobs into his best friend's shirt, "I'm sorry I'm so fucked up…"

"You're not fucked up," Jackson hums gently, kissing his forehead. "You're my best friend, Ade. You and your moms have some stuff to work out, and I know that it's something that you guys need to do on your own. Just… text me when you're home and we'll talk then, okay?" Aden pulls away and sniffs, though his hands still cling to Jackson shirt as he nods.
"Okay," Aden says, still looking down. Jackson reaches over and tips his chin up slightly.

"Listen," Jackson murmurs, "you are strong, Aden. A lot stronger than you think. I know things are rough right now. I know you feel like you're falling apart. But remember, you're not alone in this. You've got me, always. I'm only a text away, Ade."

Aden nods, unable to respond. Jackson gives his shoulder a gentle squeeze before looking up at his parents.

"I'm sorry you had to hear all of this," Clarke apologizes as she wipes her eyes, "I'm sure you must think we're--"

"I don't think anything, Mrs Griffin-Woods," Jackson says politely, nodding his head. "Aden loves you guys a lot. Both of you. Just like you love him. I don't know what's going on in your family, and it's not my place to know. I just hope it all works out."

"Thank you," Clarke replies, and Aden can hear the sincere gratitude in her voice. Jackson nods again before flashing Aden another assuring smile. He then jogs off to where he'd left their bags on the football field, of which Aden notices is completely empty. Sighing, he turns back to Clarke and Lexa, remorse and regret bouncing in his blue eyes as he stares at them.

"I do love you," Aden croaks as he looks at them, "I love you so much. I'm sorry I'm so angry. I'm sorry I said all those things. I… I just didn't know how to tell you that… that…" he chokes on the words before looking back at them, "that I'm scared."

"Of what, sweetheart?" Clarke asks, inching closer. Aden glances at her before looking at a devastated Lexa.

"That this is it," Aden says solemnly, bowing his head with distress. "That this is the end of us as a family."

"Oh honey," Clarke tells him gently, reaching out to lightly stroke his hair, "we're never going to end."

Aden doesn't reply to her, nor does he respond to her arms winding around him, because his eyes are trained on Lexa.

His other mother nonverbally gives another answer, and it's one that absolutely terrifies him.

March 17th 2014, 12:20

New York Neuromuscular Rehabilitation & Physical Therapy, New York

"Good," Raven says as she observes Lexa balance on her right ankle for a few more seconds, "alright, that's enough."
Lexa lets out a pant as she sits down on the padded table and holds her head in her hands. Raven jots something down on her clipboard before she glances in the direction of the other woman. It's only then that she sees the way Lexa's fingers tremble and jerk involuntarily as she lowers her hand. Lexa's staring at the motion, her eyes struggling to focus on the motion. Raven sighs, knowing exactly what's going on. She'd noticed in Lexa's gait, at the shuffling quality and the jerking.

"Which antipsychotic do they have you on?" Raven asks softly, setting her clipboard down. Lexa looks up, glassy-eyed and confused at her question. Raven takes a seat beside her, pointing to the trembling hand with a concerned expression.

"Antipsychotics bring on Parkinsonism," Raven says gently, nodding to her trembling hands. "It's a common side-effect. For the longest time, there was a psychiatrist, I can't remember her name, said that she could identify every schizophrenic just by watching them walk. That shuffling gait, it's the most common side effect of taking an antipsychotic. And by association, most people taking antipsychotics, and all schizophrenics that should be taking antipsychotics, can be easily identified." Lexa frowns at Raven's answer before glaring back down at her hand. She swallows thickly before getting up, trying to steady herself. Raven sighs and rises with the other woman, knowing that Lexa's thinking about how she wants to respond.

"I don't know what to do anymore," Lexa whispers, and it's quiet. Defeated. Soft.

"About what?" Raven asks back, her tone just as gentle and smooth. Lexa scrunches her brows together before sighing.

"I'm ruining them," Lexa breathes, looking up at Raven with watery eyes. "I'm a monster. I've broken my family."

"That wasn't you," Raven tries to assure her, but Lexa growls and snaps furiously.

"Then who goddamn was it?!" Lexa snarls, stepping forwards as she raises her voice. "Who is the one that can't control themselves?! The one that cries themselves to sleep every night, who can't distinguish between a nightmare and reality? What kind of person have I become that my own son has embodied my rage, that has learned from the dastardly things I've done?"

Raven frowns, not having expected the outburst from Lexa at all. "What are you talking about, Lexa?"

"I…," Lexa chokes out, running a shaky hand through her hair. "Aden got into a fight."

"And let me guess, he blamed you?"

"I…." Lexa chokes out, running a shaky hand through her hair. "Aden got into a fight."

Raven nods, not displaying any kind of surprise. "And let me guess, he blamed you?"

Lexa's brow furrows as she looks up, but Raven just offers her a sympathetic nod. "I figured. Children are malleable, Lexa. Teens especially learn to pick up traits of their parents in maladaptive ways. I know that things are rough at home with you right now, and considering all that's happened in the last few months with your flashbacks and efforts towards getting better, tensions are running high. Kids pick up on that. I wouldn't be surprised if your daughter has, either. Of course, the behaviour isn't anywhere near acceptable, but it's understandable. You can only hold things inside for so long before it spills out."

"And what am I supposed to do?" Lexa asks through clenched teeth. "I am trying. I… I am fucking trying, Raven!"

There's a pause, and then an aching sob bursts from the brunette's throat as she looks away.

"I'm trying… but I'm not enough."
"No," Raven says, causing Lexa's head to whip up and to stare at her in confusion. Raven clears her throat and walks forward, crossing her arms. "You're not enough yet, Lexa. You're trying, it's true. But right now, what your family needs, what you need, you can't give. It's not your fault. You're adjusting to civilian life and it's tough, especially having been gone all those years. To be tortured day after day and then come back here like nothing ever happened? That's like trying to adjust to life on earth after having lived in space for your entire life. It's not easy. You need to relearn certain things, things that to people like your wife and son, are a matter of habit and instinct. You're wired for survival still, but you haven't realized you don't need to survive anymore. You're safe here, but your body hasn't caught up to that. It's going to take some time. Maybe days, maybe weeks, maybe even months or years. It's a process, Lexa, and the sooner you realize that, the quicker you can move forward."

Lexa looks dumbfounded, so much so that she leans up against the table, looking back down at her hands. Raven sighs, because she's been there. Maybe not to the same extent as Lexa, but she remembers the dissociation, the feeling-out-of-place in a world that you'd once belonged to. She remembers the culture shock and the adapting and how long it took for her to really come home and to not just exist in a modern world. She remembers how her scars never stopped hurting, how they never stopped burning, and how she never stopped trying to claw at them until she herself was on the brink of death, too.

And that's why it pains her to see Lexa this way, to know that she's hurting, but to know there's nothing anyone can do.

"You have to talk about what happened," Raven whispers softly, coming to stand next to Lexa. "You have to let it go."

Lexa shakes her head, her cries starting to grow louder. "I can't. I can't do that."

"Why not?" Raven asks, though she doesn't see the point. It's a rhetorical question. And Lexa knows it, as she looks up at her with so much desolation and sorrow that Raven's heart threatens to leap right outside of the confines of her chest.

"Because that's all I have to remind me of me," Lexa tells her in a croak, "because without it, I don't know who I am."

There's a break, a tense silence, before Lexa summons the courage to say, "because I can't remember who I was before."

Before I was tortured.

Before I was captured.

Before I was rebranded.

Before I was killed.

Raven closes her eyes, willing herself to keep her own scarring memories away. She pins the screams and the blood and the death to the walls of the safe house inside her mind. She sees the moment when they'd cut away at her leg to save her from trapped debris, the high-pitched whirring of the bone saw mixed with incoherent shouting, followed by more blood. She sees how she returned home to no family, no meaning to her name but a grave with an empty casket six feet below.

She remembers it all, and even through the years, the weight never got any lighter.
Sighing, Raven opens her eyes after having regained her composure to offer Lexa a flimsy smile. “Sometimes, Lexa, it's not about being enough. Sometimes it's just about... being. Existing. Sometimes you need to be in that in-between state. You can't force yourself to suddenly see them as your family again, just like you can't force them to understand what you're going through. Your wife is a doctor, and a damned good one at that, but she doesn't see you like I do. She doesn't feel what you feel. And granted, I can't feel what you feel or know your pain, but I damn well understand the feeling of being away from yourself in the one place you're supposed to feel the opposite. But, I couldn't get better until I talked about it. Acknowledged the demons that were inside of my mind and to draw them out to address them. I couldn't get better until I faced my fears.”

Raven watches as Lexa's body goes rigid at the last sentence, and she frowns, wondering what could've triggered the response. It takes a brief second, between observing the way Lexa's hands clench and then reopen, and then to way those defeated green eyes look to her cracked and scarred palms like they've carried a travesty between the tattered lines etched into the hard exterior of her skin. Raven's heart sinks as she watches Lexa's eyes gaze upwards before staring at her sadly.

"What if," Lexa chokes on the words, "what if my greatest fear is me?"

Raven swallows harshly before she reaches forward and tugs her patient into her arms. She knows that she's blurring the lines between patient and doctor boundaries, but she can't help it. No one ever showed her compassion or empathy when she'd come home a wreck and unaware of her surroundings. No one ever catered to her need and showed her there was a life outside of alcohol and drugs. No one ever told her that she deserved the years of self-mutilation and harm because of the fact that her mind wasn't ready to cope with being safe and secure. No one told her anything. No one cared.

And it nearly killed her, so goddammit if she won't do something for Lexa.

"Then you do what you gotta do," Raven says as she squeezes Lexa tighter to her chest, "you gotta face yourself."

"I don't know if I can," Lexa sobs into Raven's shoulder, "I don't know if I'm strong enough."

Raven closes her eyes and sighs, giving Lexa another tight squeeze before whispering, "believe me, Lexa, you are."

March 18th 2014, 02:09

Griffin-Woods Residence, New York

Aden lays back on his bed, staring up at the ceiling with misty eyes. After his mother had come home from her physiotherapy session, she'd been quiet and reserved. In fact, ever since his fight and suspension from school, Lexa had been distant. She avoided him and Clarke, and even Tris. Aden
hated the fact that every time she saw her, he thought of what he'd said.

Rubbing at his bloodshot eyes, Aden turns onto his side and stares at the window outside. There's a full moon, one that bathes light into the room and keeps him awake and alert. He stares at it for a few moments, wondering how something full of craters and scars could be so beautiful. A few more tears slip from his eyes as he tries to close his eyes and sleep.

But, just like clock work, the sounds of screams and shouting sound through the hallway. Aden blinks open his eyes again and blearily stares at the stick-on stars on his ceiling. He blocks out the noise of Lexa sobbing and begging Clarke for forgiveness. He ignores Clarke's own loud, hassling cries. There's more pounding, followed by more shouting. Soon enough, Aden manages to put the sounds into the distance as he simply lays there, trying to find a memory that was happy. Something that could assure him that things would work out and they could return to the happy family they'd once been.

And then, the door is creaking open and there's the patter of small feet.

"Aden," Tris croaks with a snifflle, "c-can… can I come in?"

"Come here," Aden whispers soothingly, offering her the slightest smile. He thanks the darkness for not betraying the level of fear in his face as he opens his arms and allows Tris to burrow into his embrace. His little sister nuzzles up to him, her tears staining the front of his nightshirt. It's then that he wonders if there was any shirt that hadn't been stained with their tears.

"When will they stop fighting?" Tris asks, her voice muffled against his shirt. Aden closes his eyes, holding back the heart breaking noise that bubbles up in his throat. There's another shout, followed by more sobbing, and then finally silence.

"One day," Aden tells her softly, squeezing her closer to her front. "One day, they'll stop. We'll be okay."

Tris nods subtly, clenching his shirt softly before she settles closer to his front. There's a moment of silence before there's rustling on the other end of the hall and footsteps going the way towards the stairs. Aden doesn't have to leave the bed to know that Lexa's going out for a run or wherever she goes to relieve the stress of her nightmares. The front door opens and closes before the house dissolves back into that peaceful silence. Aden sighs and looks down at a wide-eyed and fearful Tris.

"It's gonna be okay," Aden promises her softly, laying a kiss on her crown, "one day, it'll get better."

His bedroom door opens and the two kids glance up to see a haggard and weary-looking Clarke peering into their room. She stumbles forwards, tired but still smiling for the sake of her children. Aden hates himself, deep down, because he knows that he's the root for a lot of her pain. Yes, Clarke fucked up by sleeping with Anya, but the amount of blame he's laid upon her was unnecessary. He looks at her now, trying to balance the weight of the world on two shoulders that was meant to save lives, not take them. Clarke stumbles into the room and takes a seat their bedside with a soft sigh.

"Mama," Tris cries out as she moves away from Aden to tumble into Clarke's lap. Aden's eyes mist as he notices the way Tris clings to her, the way that she fists her pudgy hands into Clarke's nightshirt. His mother does her best to lift her into her arms, but Aden can see that the fatigue has taken over and she's exhausted. He gulps, leaning up before wrapping his arms around the two of them. Tris hums in approval, letting the events of the previous ten minutes slip aside for familial comfort.

Thank you, Clarke mouthes in the darkness, and Aden hates seeing the tears welling in her eyes.
What does she have to thank him for? Keeping his mouth shut about her secret affair with Anya? For basically calling them out on breaking apart their family with their dysfunctional dynamics? Aden's heart screams at him to tear it out and offer it to her, because nothing makes sense. All he's done and has been doing is hurting her, hurting the both of them, and Clarke thanks him. He can't seem to understand why, after everything he's done and said, Clarke looks at him with such gentle reverence.

"I don't get it," Aden tells her after Tris falls into a slumber, "you should hate me for what I've done to you."

He tries to hide the croak in his voice or the tear that slips down his cheek. Clarke rubs Tris' back from where she sits, her gaze glued to a picture on his desk of the three of them -- Lexa, Clarke, and herself -- at his very first piano recital. Aden waits as Clarke takes a deep breath before turning to face him with a soft, forgiving smile. She leans forward and kisses his hair, some of her silent tears dripping into the ruffled blonde locks atop his head, before she leans back and sighs tiredly.

"I could never hate you," Clarke says softly, "I gave birth you, Aden. I carried you in my womb for nine months. Each time you kicked me, made me eat weird concoctions of food, or made me pee like a whale, I never hated you. I didn't hate you when you accidentally bit my finger when I fed you carrots while you were young. I didn't hate you when you threw a fit in the store when you couldn't get your favourite toy. I didn't hate you when you told me how much I betrayed your mother with what I did with Anya. I… I could never hate you, Aden. No matter what you do in life, a mother could never hate their child."

Aden sniffles as he looks away guiltily, more tears dripping from his eyes. Clarke sighs before reaching over and ruffling his hair tiredly. She pulls him in and presses another shakier kiss to his crown with a barely muffled whimper.

"I could never hate you, my boy. Not when you are one of the greatest gifts of my life," Clarke chokes against his skin. "Before you, I was so lonely. I had your mother, but we weren't a family yet. And when you came along, all of that changed. I became a mother, and I never felt more connected to Lexa, as she did to me. Your life was what brought us together. You've always been the glue to our relationship, Aden, and for that, in my eyes, you could never do no wrong. Even with what's going on right now, with your mother, it's not your fault, sweetheart. I know you feel guilty, especially after what happened with that fight, but this is something bigger than that. Your mother, she's… she's not doing great. She's struggling, and I know how much it hurts for the both of you to have to watch that. Just… we need to be patient with her, okay? She's trying her best."

"Still," Aden whispers in a desolate voice, "I was a jerk. I said some really stupid things to you and Mom. Really hurtful things."

"Oh Aden," Clarke hums as she offers him a sad smile, "we all say and do stupid things. It's part of being human. Your mother knows that too, even if she doesn't show it. She loves you, my boy, and she loves your sister too. She loves all of us. She just needs time to figure out that she's safe now. They… they hurt her badly over there, Aden. More than anyone knows."

Aden's heart twists again, and this time he can't hold back a sobbing cry.

"I'm sorry," he whimpers, and suddenly he feels like he's ten again, pleading to a God he never believed in to bring his mother back, that he was sorry for all the bad things he'd done in his life, but that no punishment was worth losing his mother. "Ma, I'm sorry I said what I said. I never meant… I… oh God, I didn't mean to hurt either of you, I was just so angry. And Dawson said… what he said about Mom, I just… I lost it. I didn't even think because all I could feel was this uncontrollable rage."
Clarke looks on mournfully, her hand reaching out to rub his back as he sobs. Aden gasps as the air gets harder to choke down and the force of his cries cause him to shake. Clarke quietly and quickly sets Tris down in his bed before she reaches for him, tugging him upwards and pulling him towards the door. Aden follows on shaky knees as he's led into the bathroom. Before he can even register the feeling, a wave of nausea overcomes him and he keels over the toilet, retching harshly.

"Easy," Clarke soothes, gently rubbing his back as he vomits forcefully, "you're okay, baby. I've got you."

The statement only makes him more sick. But just as the retching gets worse, Clarke's soothing increases. Aden dry heaves a few more times before he slumps against the toilet seat. Clarke flushes it before reaching for his toothbrush. She places some toothpaste upon the bristles before kneeling before him, gently swiping her thumb over his gaunt cheekbone.

"Open," his mother says softly, "let me help you."

Like a pathetic child, Aden opens his mouth as he lets Clarke clean his teeth. After a few minutes, two rinses, and a few more cries, Clarke hoists him upwards and holds him closer to his chest. Even though he's taller than her now, he can't help but let himself get swallowed up in his mother's loving embrace. He feels selfish, for seeking this comfort when he'd denied it of Clarke for so many months after he'd found Anya and her in bed together. While what they had done wasn't right, Aden finally gets it. He gets it when he feels Clarke's arms tightening around him. He gets it when she sobs into his shoulder, shaking with the effort and the strain of her cries. And so he holds her, as tightly and securely as he can, to assure her that he's here now.

Aden squeezes her tightly and vows not only to her, but to himself, that he's never going to leave her again.

"I'm sorry," he whispers again, cradling the back of his mother's head. "I'm so sorry, Ma."

"I love you," Clarke sniffles, "I love you, my sweet boy. Don't you ever forget that, alright? You have my forgiveness."

Aden nods and pulls away to press a kiss to her cheek before guiding her out of the bathroom and towards the master bedroom. He ignores the aggressively ruffled sheets and the discarded objects thrown about with little care. He gently helps his mother lay down before he tucks the covers up to her chin. Clarke's eyes are still watery and filled with ample amount of remorse and guilt, but Aden shakes his head. He gives her a soft smile, leaning down to peck her forehead before rubbing her arm and kneeling beside her. Clarke's hand reaches out to cup his cheek, her thumb shaking as it traces his jawline.

"My beautiful, brave, incredibly sweet boy," Clarke softly and tiredly sighs, "I'm sorry I hurt you, Aden."

His eyes water with tears as he tentatively reaches upwards to clasp his hand over his mother's own before giving it a gentle squeeze. He can see that Clarke's eyes are fighting to stay awake, but Aden lays a soft kiss to her palm before giving her a nod. He tells her, through that small action, coupled with another squeeze of his hand, that he forgives her, too.

"I love you Ma," Aden whispers as he watches Clarke's eyelids close shut and soft, steady breaths leave her lips. "I love you."

After a few moments of simply watching his mother slumber, Aden rises. He cracks his joints that had stiffened while he'd knelt at her side. He rolls his shoulders before he turns around, only to be
startled at the sight of Lexa in the doorway. Aden gulps as he looks down to see a baseball bat from the garage gripped tightly in her hand. But that's not what terrifies him.

It's the look of absolutely blankness in Lexa's green eyes, devoid of connection or empathy, that scares him.

"Mom?" Aden whispers softly as to not wake his other mother. "Mom, are you okay?"

Lexa looks to Clarke's sleeping figure and then to Aden. "I… I thought I heard something. I thought someone…"

Aden gulps, piecing together what his mother might have assumed. He takes a deep breath and steps forward. "It's okay. I was just making sure that she got into bed okay. Don't worry, Mom. She's safe. You're… you're safe." Lexa flinches slightly, the grip on the bat tightening for a minute before she hangs her head and sighs. Her grip loosens, and this time when she looks up, Aden is devastated to see the defeat and trepidation in her watery green eyes. Aden gulps but stays strong.

"You must think I'm a monster," Lexa says softly, looking down at her bat. "I… I can't even sleep without thinking… all this time that I've been here, I've been nothing but getting in your way. You and your mother, your sister, they are a family."

"So are you," Aden counters before Lexa can say anything else more self-deprecating. "You're always our family, Mom."

"I don't know you," Lexa admits in a low croak, her teeth gritting together in frustration. "I don't know who you are."

"It's okay," Aden says softly, remembering what Clarke had told him earlier. "It all takes time, remember?"

"Aden," Lexa chokes on his name, "I don't know if I can do this anymore. Just being here… I'm hurting you all."

Aden squares himself, trying to ignore the biting thought of the weight behind his mother's euphemistic words. He inches closer until he stands before her. He notes the deep black circles under her eyes, the gauntness of her cheekbones, and then he notes how she trembles before him, like any touch will simply shatter her. Aden simply reaches up and winds his arms around her neck before closing the small gap between them. Lexa gasps as Aden hugs her tightly, calming the shaking and holding her steady through the tide of confusing emotions that surge between them. It takes some time, and then Lexa drops the bat and reaches upwards to wrap her own arms around his scrawny figure. Aden closes his eyes and lets her sob against him. He thinks of when he'd been younger, and how his mother would hold him just like this, to let him cry until it didn't hurt.

"I love you, Mom. You're not a monster," Aden tells her softly, assuringly, "you're my hero."

Lexa sags against him, but Aden bears her weight, holding her tighter than before as he says, "we're in this together."

"The things I've done," Lexa wheezes between a sob, "Aden, I've… I…"

"It's okay," Aden tells her, knowing that finishing the statement would only bring a reaction neither of them could handle. He knows what his mother means and that's enough, however scary it may be. "You did what you had to do, Mom. I don't blame you for any of it. Neither does Mama or Tris. We love you just the way you, even if you aren't one hundred percent you now."
"I don't know if I'll ever be one hundred percent me," Lexa sobs, clutching him tighter, "Aden, I'm broken."

At this, Aden squares his jaw and grips her tighter. "Then I'll love every broken piece of you. A mosaic can still be a masterpiece, Mom. And you are more than just a masterpiece. We all love you, and we are all willing to do whatever you need in order to get better. You told me long ago that asking for help is not weakness, but pride. It's about knowing that you have somewhere to go, people to ask, support that you can cling onto. You have people that can hold you up until you can stand."

Lexa cries in his arms and Aden can't stop his own tears as he determinedly tells her, "we're here for you, Mom. Always."

"When?" Lexa chokes between cries, her body still trembling. "When will we get through it?"

Aden takes a deep breath before looking at her, holding her face steady in his trembling hands. He looks into those green eyes and he feels a surge of respect and pride rush through him at the sheer want in those viridescent eyes. He knows that his mother was always a prideful person, one that required a lot of effort before she managed to ask for help, but now, in a dire moment, in which their family is holding on by some miraculous super thread, she is here, alive and asking for help.

And though he may still be young and not have all the answers, he manages to reply with, "one day."

March 18th 2014, 11:46
Maimonides Medical Clinic, New York

Abby rubs her forehead as she stumbles into her office. She's spent the last few nights on the phone with Marcus, discussing all that he could have known about the containment camp in which Lexa had been interned in order to learn more about what could have brought on the behaviour that she's currently exhibiting. She looks to her watching, noticing that she only has a few more minutes before she's expected to be at the lab where she's about to meet Lexa and Dr Smith. She grabs the files on her desk and she flips through them, absently sipping at the long-cold coffee from the mug at her desk.

A knock at the door startles her.

Blinking tiredly, Abby nods her head upwards to see Dr Wallace staring at her with a fake smile on his lips.

"Dr Griffin," he greets in a forced tone, "may I speak with you a moment?"

Abby looks at her watch and then stares back up at him. "You have five minutes."

Dr Wallace beams at the agreement. He turns and closes the door behind him and then comes and
sits down at one of her chairs. He looks around the room, smiling at the pictures of her family and the many awards and distinctions she's won over the years. He sets his gaze on the photo of her shaking hands with the president of the hospital from when she'd been named the head of the neurology department. He then glances at the photo next to it, when Clarke had first been hired.

"Lovely reputation you've built," Dr Wallace says charmingly, turning back to her. "I see you pride yourself on hard work and determination. You've set a high bar for your successor, Dr Griffin. I must say, your work ethic is quite admirable."

"Get to the point," Abby snaps, not bothered with formalities. "I'm flattered, but I know that's not why you're here."

Dr Wallace's smile slides off of his face and he sets his jaw firmly. "You're right. It's not."

Abby holds back the shiver that crawls up her spine as she watches Dr Wallace lean forward and nod to the file in her hands.

"You're walking a dangerous line, Dr Griffin. I understand that you're the head of the neurology department, but my training is specific to psychiatry. Which, as you may know, cannot be overruled. I'm at the top of the mental health hierarchy, no matter how much good you think you're doing with my patients," Dr Wallace says in a low voice. "I would advise you step back."

"And do what?" Abby growls as she stands up and straightens her coat. "What you're doing is considered malpractice."

Dr Wallace doesn't flinch, but simply arches his brow. "How so?"

"You didn't send either of the Woods sisters to a therapeutic program. You reverted straight to a killer cocktail of drugs, so deadly that one of them ended up in my hospital after a suicide attempt," Abby says, her words cutting and straight to the point. "I could have your medical license taken away for your disorderly conduct." Dr Wallace doesn't even flinch, and the lack of reaction is what causes Abby to shudder. The man simply rises, smooths out his coat, and nods his head to the files.

"Be careful, Dr Griffin. Crossing my path would not be a smart choice," he tells her calmly, glancing at the photos. "It truly would be a shame to see all of what you've built here come crumbling down."

"Is that a threat?" Abby snaps, walking around the desk to size him up. "Are you trying to threaten me?"

Dr Wallace holds his hands up in a disarming manner, flashing another fake smile. "I would never. I'm simply giving you some advice. I have years of experience over you, Dr Griffin. No matter how grand you think you are here, you pale compared to me. If you are considering trying to get my license revoked, I wish you the best of luck. Truly. I'm just saying, if you know what is good for your career and your reputation here at Maimonides, you would do best to back off and let me do my job."

"You're a sorry excuse of a psychiatrist," Abby spits back, but her voice wavers a little. "Now get out of my office."

"With pleasure," Dr Wallace says with a calm, assuring nod before turning around and heading for the door. He opens it, but then pauses in the doorway. He turns his head over his shoulder, his dark eyes lit with an unreadable expression.

"Consider this a final warning," he tells her as he inches out of the door, "do make your choices
wisely, Dr Griffin."

And with that, he leaves her standing there, struggling to comprehend what had just happened.

Abby stands in her office, staring at the files on her desk with worry and apprehension. If her suspicion towards Dr Wallace's practices hadn't already been murky enough, they certainly were now. He had always had questionable work ethics, but only now Abby is beginning to realize how much he's managed to get away with. She looks to the files in her hands before she squares her jaw and glares at the door. She knows that Dr Wallace has a point. He technically holds a higher power over her, and is better connected to some of the more conservative members of the board that would be likely to take his side in a trial.

Deciding to think about her next move later, she bundles up the files and stalks out of the door, heading towards the lab. The entire time she makes her way down the pastel white hallways, she can't help thinking back to how she'd found Anya in that emergency rooms, wrists slashed up and her entire body a trembling wreck. The thought brings a whole new level of anger when she thinks about Lexa, and the medications she's been prescribed to combat whatever was going on in her head. In all of her years as a doctor, Abby has never felt more useless.

"Ah, just in time!" Abby nods her head up to see Jackson and Dr Smith smiling at her from the entrance of the labs. Behind them, she can see Lexa and Clarke sitting in the waiting areas. Abby sets the files down on the counter where the reception is before she nods to the doctor and her assistant. She looks over their shoulders to see Lexa staring up at her, the expression on her face no longer cold and aloof, but pleading and desperate. In the months they've done testing, Abby has never seen her daughter-in-law in this much pain and agony. It breaks her heart to know that Lexa's trying, but nothing seems to work.

"Why don't you two go get everything set up," Abby says, turning her gaze back to Dr Smith and Jackson. "I'll just give Lexa the low down of what we're going to do today." The two of them nod before heading over to the lab room, closing the door behind them. Abby sighs, massaging her temples with her fingers before she walks forwards and kneels before the women.

"How are you doing Lexa?" Abby asks softly, reaching out to rub her arm. "I know you must be sick of these things."

Lexa grunts, but doesn't say anything else. She hangs her head again and Clarke sniffs from beside her. Abby sighs and stands up, ignoring the creaking in her bones as she nods to her patient gently. Lexa passes Clarke a sad look before she rises and trudges into the room. Clarke's gaze stays on her back until she disappears into the room, out of their earshot.

"Clarke," Abby starts, her voice croaking. "I…"

"I know," Clarke says dejectedly as she rises, smoothing down her lab coat. "I gotta go, I've got a few patients that I--"

"I heard you saw Anya," Abby says, watching as Clarke pauses mid-step. "After what happened…"

"I was stupid," Clarke says softly, unable to meet her gaze. "I thought I was protecting Lexa, but in reality I was just being selfish. I wanted to ignore that I'd done the unthinkable. Each night, I sleep beside her and it haunts me to know that I've betrayed her. And to know that Anya was quietly suffering, just accepting the pain and anger I let out on her… it…"

"Oh baby," Abby coos as Clarke chokes on a sob and shakes her head. "I know it's hard. I'm sorry
any of this is happening."

"You didn't mess up," Clarke says bitterly, "I screwed up, Mom, and now everything is a wreck."

"We'll work through it," Abby tries to assure her, "it all just takes some time, Clarke."

"How much time?!" Clarke snaps, whirling on her mother as tears well in her eyes. "How much time until Lexa can't do it anymore? How much time until I come to the hospital and see her in the same position as my sister-in-law?" Abby stiffens at the words, her shoulders trembling as she sees just how broken her daughter looks. The doctor inside of her wants nothing more than to reach out and fix all the shattered pieces of her, but she knows that she can't do anything but hope for a miracle. She takes a deep, steadying breath as she reaches out to pull her daughter into a gentle embrace.

"I won't let it get to that," Abby tells her sternly, "I will do everything in my power to prevent that from happening, baby."

"Please," Clarke sobs into her arms, "I can't lose her again."

Abby nods, unable to respond verbally. The two linger in their embrace for a few moments longer before they pull apart and head their separate ways. Abby sighs and heads into the lab, pleased to see that Jackson has already done the necessary prep-work of hooking Lexa up to some of the galvanic skin response tracers. Lexa doesn't say anything as she stares at the computer screen in front of her, and Abby decides it's best not to interfere with her current thought processes. She ducks into the lab and takes her seat beside Dr Smith, who has the polygraph and the computer lined up to record the skin conductance response, the electra dermal responses, and the sympathetic skin responses. Abby takes the mic and turns it on.

"Alright Lexa, we're going to get you to open the file on the desktop of the computer," Abby instructs as she opens her file and flips to her notes page. "All I want you do is to flip through the slides and then after you're done each slide, to rate how you felt about the picture at the bottom of the screen. Take as long as you need." Lexa doesn't nod, but she goes to work on opening the file and starting the slideshow. Pictures start to slide across the screen, and Lexa goes about the experiment as orderly and methodologically as possible. Abby watches the skin responses remain the same as she sees pictures of strangers. It's a result that she would expect, considering it's normal in humans to elicit no response galvanically towards a person whom you've never met. But, something shocking happens when the next photo slides through.

It's a picture of Clarke on her own after her university graduation.

Abby looks to the polygraph and the computer results.

Nothing.

Lexa just skips through it like she'd skipped through the other ones.

"There," Dr Smith says as she points to the screen recording the sensory spikes in arousal, "she's at baseline."

"Whereas someone with regular facial processing would have spiked," Abby concludes, furrowing her brow. "She's not making the connection that Clarke in that photo is the Clarke that she knows." Dr Smith nods and leans back in her chair, shocked.

"She sees her as a stranger," Dr Smith says, "look, she just passed a picture of Tris and Aden. No response there, either."
"And when we look at the MRI results and the PET scans, there's the dysfunction in her visual stream of the temporal lobe," Abby says as she fishes out the scans from their previous meeting. Dr Smith nods, her fingers tapping at the board.

"I want to try something new," Dr Smith says, looking at Abby, "I want to do the startle reflex."

"What?" Abby asks, looking up from her scans. "Why?"

"I think that if she's acting the way she is now, there could be some general dysfunction in her amygdala," Dr Smith says as she pulls up another packet of slides and then drops them onto the desktop, making it accessible to Lexa. "I think that she could have a problem in emotion regulation. From what Clarke's said about her drastic mood swings, something tells me that she may have some type of problem in processing or attributing her emotions to certain situations."

"Yes, I understand that. I'm just concerned, because the startle reflex is used to assess psychopathy," Abby says, her voice grating on an alarming tone, "Lexa doesn't exhibit any sort of behaviours that could suggest some sort of psychopathic dysfunction or abnormality. She is aggressive and aloof at times, but surely that can be attributable to her PTSD?"

"Of course," Dr Smith agrees, "but I think that having spent a lot of time in captivity could have damaged her ability to process her emotions or regulate them. We've seen shrinkages in the hippocampus and her temporal lobes, but we should look at the amygdala. In fact, it's probably the one place we should have looked first. Considering we've seen decreased volume and irregularities in her insula and her anterior cingulate cortex, it's something worth considering. We both know that those are important in guidance away from punishment and pain, as well as the perceptions of pain and understanding social norms. The woman walks around with her gun drawn half the time, and whenever she sits down, she stares at people like they're all prey. We need to look into this, so that we can rule it out for good. I don't want it to a diagnosis anymore than you, Doctor."

Abby bites her lip and looks out through the one-way mirror to see Lexa staring at her blankly, awaiting her next order as if she's a dog waiting for a command. The sheer amount of nothingness in her green eyes is chilling, and Abby knows Dr Smith has a point. They'd spent so much time trying to look at the superficial, that they've overlooked the foundation of her problems. She takes a deep breath and turns away from Lexa's haunting vision to give Dr Smith a nod.

"Go ahead and give her the instructions, then."

Dr Smith nods and grabs the mic. "Hi Lexa. We want you to open up the new file on your desktop. You're going to do exactly what you did with that last one. Jackson is going to come up and put some sensors on your head, so don't be alarmed. We're just going to measuring the neural responses to the slideshow. You're doing great so far. I promise it won't take long."

Lexa nods, emotionless as before as she turns back to the computer and clicks on the file after Jackson's finished attaching the sensory cap to her head. Dr Smith pulls up the EEG and records the responses as Lexa starts with the slides. The twelve slides were neutral images of walls and floors, to which Lexa exhibits the normal response of not reacting. When pictures of babies and puppies start to fill the screen, Abby notes that there's not much of a spike of response in her emotions. It's not abnormal completely, but she knows it's worrisome to know that Lexa doesn't seem to have much in the notion of positive affect. Dr Smith looks equally as worried as Lexa moves on to the last half of the exercise: the unpleasant images.

And finally, Abby realizes, the proverbial shoe drops.

When images of men holding guns to the screen or rabid, barking dogs fill the screen, Lexa's
galvanic skin response and her neural activity exhibits a fearful excitation in the amygdala, but not a massive spike. However, when pictures of brutalized victims of torture and gory images come up next, there's no response. No empathetic response, no fear, nothing.

And that result is the most chilling of all.

Dr Smith and Abby exchange a glance of fear, and they both know they've stumbled upon something horrifying. Not only was Lexa unable to associate family members to a visual representation, her ability to feel empathy or fear was greatly reduced. They both continue watching the responses to see if it was just a fluke, but the results seem to be consistent. Dr Smith looks at the scans from the last meeting, staring up at the light to see if there was something they'd missed in their scans.

"Am I done?" Lexa asks, her voice low and cold as she looks at the mirror again. "The cap is starting to itch."

Abby nods, her voice caught in her throat as she shakily reaches for the microphone. "Yes, you're good to go."

Lexa grunts again and lets Jackson come help take her headset off. Abby powers off the mic and looks to Dr Smith, struggling to figure out what any of this could possibly mean. She looks just as distraught, the young doctor, as she keeps filtering through the scans and the mountain of a file that was Lexa. Abby simply sits back in her chair, observing how Lexa rigidly stands, her eyes cold and calculating, as if the images had set off the demons she'd been wrestling inside of her.

"Dr Griffin," Dr Smith's voice pipes up from beside her, "I think that we need to call this in."

"She's not a psychopath," Abby says back in disbelief. "I want a PCL-R done next week. If she scores higher than thirty, we can discuss this. As far as I'm concerned, I think that this is stemming from a desensitization from her containment. This isn't her, not when psychopaths make up only 1% of the global population. Based on your extensive research and the multiple correlations from her scans, I strongly believe that it's tied to the Capgras, Dr Smith. I don't think Lexa is a psychopath."

"Okay," Dr Smith says in a croak, sounding hesitant for the first time since she'd taken a leading role in Lexa's case. "I'll get an appointment set up with a psychiatrist to see if we can get a proper assessment done. I trust you, Dr Griffin, but if this is something external to just some cortical dysfunction, Lexa is in a position where she could create serious damage. You know this. Clarke has shown up with a bruised nose, and you already know that Aden exhibited forms of violence at school. Lexa's behaviour is teetering on problematic for the safety of those around her." Abby sighs and pinches the bridge of her nose. She knows that what the young doctor is saying is completely true, but she doesn't want to believe it.

"Get her booked for an appointment by next week," Abby says as she stands up, "I want this to be resolved immediately."

"Yes, Dr Griffin. I'll get Dr Wallace--"

"No," Abby interjects, turning to face her with a grim expression, "find someone else."

"But Dr Wallace is the most qualified and the only one available for an appointment next week," Dr Smith says, "he's researched heavily in the field of psychopathy and anti-social personality disorder. He's the expert." Abby shakes her head, debating on whether to take a blind leap and trust the young doctor, to go with her gut feeling telling her to avoid him.
"Dr Griffin?" Dr Smith asks, cocking her head. "Would you like for me to book the appointment?"

Abby bows her head and grits her teeth. "Fine, do it. But I want to be there."

"But protocol--"

"Fuck protocol," Abby says as she turns around to glare at the younger doctor. "Either I'm there or he doesn't see her."

Dr Smith nods and acquiesces to the request and quickly pulls something up on the computer. Abby watches as she types the man's name in and books the appointment. Her stomach churns in anxiety, but she knows that this is all temporary. She looks to the data results again and stares at them, long and hard. She knows that these reports can only be surface-level.

There has to be something more to the story, something she isn't seeing.

She knows that there is only one way that she'll uncover it all, and that's by doing the unthinkable. Abby has to go to the source, to where it all started.

Afghanistan.

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March 20th 2014, 10:31

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

Lexa sits on the couch, watching aimlessly as images flash by on the television. Various news reports fizzle into white noise as she loses herself in her thoughts. She turns her head to see Clarke helping Tris with her homework in the kitchen. The little girl had gotten quieter and more reserved as the weeks passed since her big blow out a month ago. Every time that she walks into a room, Tris will whimper and actively seek out Clarke or Aden. She knows that her own daughter is genuinely in fear of her, but she can't blame her. Not when she looks at Tris and questions who she is, where she came from, and if she's hers.

She looks over to other end of the couch, where Aden is curled up and texting someone on his phone. It all feels so damned domestic. And it should feel good. It should feel like that light in the darkness. It should feel soft and warm and complete, but it doesn't. It doesn't because she's not sure if this is her home. She isn't sure if she's the person she sees in the mirror, or if her reflection is what carries her through her life. She keeps thinking back to what Raven had said during their last session, about needing to face her fears in order to move forward through the pain. She knows that she has to do it, but she's scared.

She's scared of what she'll find in the end.

"I'm going out," she announces as she powers off the television and stands up, looking over to
Clarke, "I need to grab a few things from Raven's clinic. I forgot to pick up one of my tensor bands." Clarke swallows and nods, not seemingly entirely pleased, but Lexa doesn't care. She feels waves of aggression washing over her, the tumultuous wave of anger that creeps into her bones and threatens to drown her with her demons. She shakes away the feeling as she slips on her shoes.

Lexa gets into the truck and drives around aimlessly for miles and miles, not really bothering to find a particular destination. She knows that she needed to see Raven, but she didn't want to go there just yet. Instead, she found herself unintentionally driving back to the hospital. She doesn't know why she's here, but something in her body twitches and aches for her to go inside. She parks the car haphazardly in the lot before entering the wing and taking the elevator up a few floors to the neurology wing. She looks to her hands the entire time, trying to figure out if this body is really her own, if she's in control.

The door opens, and Lexa finds herself surprised to see Abby and Raven at the other end of the hall, discussing something. Lexa makes her way out of the elevator and walks over towards them. At the sounds of her footsteps, Abby looks over, her brows raising in surprise at the sight of Lexa coming towards her. She offers her mother-in-law a rigid nod, her teeth gritted.

"Abby," Lexa greets, her voice devoid of emotion. Why, why must she attack her like that, to reach so far and spite her?

"Lexa," Abby says back warmly, "what are you doing here? Is everything alright?"

"Yeah," Lexa replies, her brow furrowed, "I just… I don't know why I'm here."

"Well," Raven interjects, trying to lighten the mood as she smiles, "you caught me here, so that's a plus. I have your stuff in my car. I'll go grab it and give you guys some time to talk. I'll see you later, Abs." Abby nods at the physiotherapist and Lexa gives her a tight smile as the ex-soldier bounds off towards the elevators. Abby gently takes her arm and leads her into her office.

"What's going on, Lex? On a good day I can't get you within a five mile radius of this place and today you're here voluntarily," Abby muses gently. "I'm not complaining, I'm just confused as to why you're here. Is everything alright at home?"

Lexa sucks in a deep breath, looking down at her feet as she struggles to get an answer out. She desperately wants to run into Abby's arms, to seek the comfort of her mother-in-law, to plead for her to explain how she can be better, how she can move past this state of numbness that is tearing her family apart. She wants nothing more than to collapse at her feet and beg for her to do something, to take a part of her out, to relieve the pressure that strains the muscles of her brain.

"I…," Lexa croaks, "I just want to know… I wanted to know how… why…"

"Oh sweetheart," Abby coos gently as she pulls Lexa into her arms and holds her close to her chest. Lexa sighs, her entire body caving from the pressure as she lets herself be cuddled up into the older woman's arms. She allows herself a modicum of comfort for a brief second before she pulls away and scratches at her jaw, her anger having now subsided and mellowed.

"I wish I could do something for you and your sister," Abby sighs sadly, "I hate seeing you both like this."

At this, Lexa frowns.

"My sister?" Lexa asks, cocking her head up at Abby. "What do you mean by my sister?"

Abby's face pales and Lexa feels her heart jar to a halt in the bottom of her chest. "Clarke didn't tell
Lexa shakes her head, hearing the screaming inside of her chant louder and louder, outsider, outsider, outsider...

*Face it, Lexa, they tell you nothing,* she hears the voice in the back of her head say, *because you are an outsider.*

"Anya… she…," Abby stumbles on her words, trying to formulate her sentence. "Your sister tried to…"

Lexa doesn't need to hear the rest of the sentence because she's bolting away from Abby and running to the elevators. She ignores Abby's concerned shouting as she enters the elevator and rides down to the main floor. She sees flashes, memories of her sister blurring through her mind. She ignores the anger at her wife for having not told her because all she can see is Anya laying on the ground, covered in her own blood and pale as a ghost as the life slips away from her eyes, second by second.

She drives to their adoptive mother's house to question Indra. She drives the car onto the driveway and barely has time to turn off the engine and put the truck into park before she dashes to the front door, tears welling in her eyes. She knocks on the door furiously, her hands trembling as she tries to keep the fearful thoughts out of her head. It doesn't take long for Indra to answer, her eyes wide with concern and shock at the sight of Lexa on her doorstep, looking haggard and frazzled.

"Where is she?" Lexa asks, her voice cracking. "Where's Anya?"

Indra's brows furrow slightly, tears glazing them as she turns her shoulder and opens her mouth to speak.

But her voice doesn't come out.

"Who's at the door, Ma?" Anya's rough, haggard voice sounds from inside the room. Lexa's gut twists as she sees her sister, the woman that she'd looked up to for years upon years, the woman that hauled her on her back when she'd been injured during one of their tours, the woman who protected her from their adoptive father's abuse, looking nothing like anyone Lexa had ever known in her life. As soon as her sister sees her, the world around them stops moving for a minute.

"Lexa?" Anya croaks, stepping forward. "What are you doing here, kid? Are you okay?"

Lexa can't answer, not when she looks down to see the gauze taped to Anya's wrists. She looks back up, and instead of responding verbally, she simply throws herself into her sister's arms. She ignores the screams and cries in the back of her head, the swirling and drowning negativity, to simply exist in the present. Anya's breath hitches, but soon those slender arms wrap around her back and the two of them sob into each other. Lexa cries so many apologies into her sister's shoulder, all of which Anya simply coo and hum to soothe the ache in her heart. The guilt is so heavy, Lexa feels suffocated.

She did this. She thought she'd been done with killing people, but even when she wasn't trying, she still managed to do it.

They were all right.

She *is* a murderer.

"I'm so sorry," Lexa sobs into Anya's shoulder, "I'm sorry I'm so fucked up. I'm sorry I fucked up, An. I'm so sorry…"
"Ssh, little one. It's okay. I'm okay now, I promise. I'm not going anywhere," Anya soothes her, pressing a gentle rain of kisses to her forehead and her temple. "Don't cry, Lex. We're okay. We're the Woods Sisters, remember? We're tougher than nails."

But they weren't. They've been getting by, and even that hasn't been enough.

"Oh my sweet girls," Indra whispers softly, breaking them out of their embrace. Lexa looks to her adoptive mother and sees the lines of stress and worry etched into her face, and she can't help but extend one of her arms and pull her into the group hug. The two of them hold her closely, strengthening themselves as her anchor as she feels the years of tension finally collapse. She sobs with them, but it isn't a sob that breaks her heart. No, it isn't heavy and painful.

It's light. Like the first rainfall after a heated summer.

It's… cathartic.

The three of them stand there, embracing each other and assuring each other that their family is not going to be separated anytime soon. That no matter what gets in their way, they won't fall apart. They'll hold each other through the tough times, and they'll make sure that no one is left unprotected. Lexa closes her eyes, allowing herself to think past the delusions and warped senses of reality. She shoves aside the crushing gaze of her reflection and its overbearing thoughts and whispers.

In the arms of her family, Lexa allows herself to finally just exist.

The moment is broken, however, by the grumbling of an engine. The three of them break apart to see a truck park itself up beside her own car on her adoptive mother's driveway. Because her car is in the way, they can't see who the person is until the door opens and closes, before there's a few footsteps. Lexa's anxiety eases when she notices the familiar woman walking towards them with a smile on her face, though her gaze grows tentative when she sees the tear tracks on their faces.

"Am I interrupting a bad time?" Raven asks, fiddling with the box in her hands. "I was just coming to drop off your stuff."

"Thanks," Lexa says as she accepts the package before nodding to her sister and aunt. "This is my family."

"Nice to meet you," Raven introduces herself politely. "I'm Raven Reyes, Lexa's physiotherapist. I was supposed to give her something for her next session but she left the hospital before she had the chance. I didn't follow her here, I promise. Abby gave me a list of addresses of where she could be and I tried this one at random. I also just wanted to make sure she was okay." Raven passes Lexa a sympathetic smile, one that Lexa doesn't find herself up in rage over for once. She smiles back.

"Thank you," she says again, "I'm okay now. I have… I have my family with me."

Raven nods, smiling proudly to the point where Lexa can feel it radiating off her in waves. A part of herself is proud, too, because she knows that this reunion could have gone so many different ways. Lexa realizes that she hasn't even introduced them to her, so she quickly reaches for Indra and gives her hand a soft squeeze before turning to her physiotherapist.

"This is Indra," Lexa says proudly, "she's my adoptive mother."

Raven nods and extends her hand, shaking the older woman's own. "Pleasure to meet you, Ma'am."

"Likewise," Indra says, "I'm glad to see my Lexa has people that genuinely look out for her."
"She's not just a patient to me," Raven says as she smiles at Lexa, "she's also my friend."

Indra smiles at that, before shuffling out of the way so that Lexa can reach for Anya. Raven's eyes only dash down to the bandages around her wrists for a moment before she nods her head back up to flash the older woman a smile.

"This is my sister," Lexa says as she glances at Anya with misty eyes, "Anya."

When Lexa looks back at Raven, she expects to see that same soft smile she'd used when talking about Indra.

Instead, she gets the complete opposite.

When Lexa turns to look at Raven, the smile is gone and the colour has left her face. The only thing that leaves Raven's slightly trembling lips is a breathless whisper, one so soft and quiet that Lexa almost misses it entirely.

"Anya?"

Chapter End Notes

A few end notes:

--> PCL-R: Psychopath Checklist (this measures a score for how high a person rates on psychopathy and anti-social personality disorder; a score of 30+ is a diagnosis)

--> Clarke and Anya still have to figure their shit out when it comes to rebuilding the friendship they broke, as well as telling Lexa about their affair, so I've not ignored that, but it will be addressed in the next chapter, I can assure you.

--> Yes, Dante Wallace is committing malpractice, but the bureaucracy of hospital politics is excusing his behaviour because he generates revenue via prescriptions (this will be discussed in later chapters as well, as this is Kane and Abby's side story) and as the top trained physician in the psych ward at the hospital. He also has connections. A lot of you are definitely on the right track with his link to Lexa and Anya. Don't worry, he will be brought to justice (that's the second half of the story).

--> Lexa and Anya still need to chat and stuff about what happened between them. Their little scene at the end isn't their resolution, not even close to it, really. Also take careful note of the radical and drastic mood swings Lexa goes through. It's important.

--> Read the master post updates for this chapter at this link here: http://a-class-act-president.tumblr.com/post/152191395621/sisters-by-commandmetobewell-cover-art-by; especially the stuff on startle reflex and emotion regulation -- that stuff is so cool. This list has a bunch of resources used to research stuff for the chapters and there were the most amount of articles and academic texts used for this one.

Thank you guys for your patience and kindness! I love you all so much.

Much love, xx.
We All Fall Down [Part Two: Release]

Chapter Summary

Anya tries to rebuild the bond with her sister, Raven confronts Clarke, Abby makes a decision, Aden and Jackson have a moment, and Lexa's worst nightmare becomes a reality.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, MENTIONS OF GORE AND BLOOD, MENTIONS OF DEATH, AND SUICIDAL IDEATION.

This chapter is the MOST intense one that we're going to have for the rest of the story. From this point onwards, it's all about healing. There will still be rough patches because there's a lot of shit these kiddos need to work through both individually and as a family. But now we're halfway through the story and I anticipate that the next couple of chapters will be a good kind of rough.

Thank you guys for sticking with me despite the infrequent updates! I hope this chapter is worth the wait. I think it's one of the longest ones I've written for this story, and boy, did it take a lot out of me. The last scene was especially hard to write. I sincerely applaud Tobey for his performance in the movie because he was so freaking amazing in that meltdown scene. It still gives me shivers and I really hope that I did it justice in the story, even though I took a little bit of a different turn!

TRIGGER WARNING CUES:

In the THIRD section there is a MILD PTSD FLASHBACK, which starts after Raven says, "I'm going to step out for a bit". Nothing too graphic, but a warning just in case.

In the FIFTH section, there is a PTSD FLASHBACK FEATURING BLOOD/GORE, which starts after the third and final ---.

In the SIXTH section, there is a MAJOR PTSD FLASHBACK FEATURING BLOOD/GORE AND MENTIONS OF DEATH, which lasts the entire section up until Clarke says, "Lexa" at the very end. This one still gives me chills when I think about how much it freaked me out while writing it.

In the EIGHTH and final section, there is a MAJOR PTSD FLASHBACK, GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, BLOOD/GORE, and SUICIDAL IDEATION. This is the scene from the movie. It's a little more raw and a lot more darker than the film, so be careful if it's something that might trigger you. I strongly suggest reading the little summary at the bottom if you don't feel capable of reading it. It took me the span of two days to write and I still can't really get over how intense it was. It's easily the most intense thing I've written in terms of the emotionality and brutality of the scene.

Thank you all so much for the support and please tell me what you think in the
comments! I am eager to hear your feedbacks and criticisms on the story, but please (if you can) be nice! I know that this story can sometimes make people get riled up and that's totally fine, but as long as you're respectful, that's all that matters! :D I love reading all the comments and the discussions. Y'all are awesome and when I get time, I plan on getting back to each and every one of you if I can!!

The song in the quote is from the song "Unsteady" by The X Ambassadors.

If y'all want some mood music for this chapter, check out the playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/commandmetobewell/playlist/7xoKJPGrWjuEMZBW0q5aFw

See the end of the chapter for more notes

mama, come here

approach, appear

daddy, i'm alone

cause this house don’t feel like home

if you love me

don’t let go

if you love me

don’t let go

hold, hold on

hold on to me

cause i’m a little unsteady

(a little unsteady…)

March 20th 2014, 11:05

Trikru Residence, New York

"Anya?"
Anya cocks her head mysteriously at the brunette before her, confused as to how she could possibly know her. There's an itching at the back of her skull that makes her question the sound of her voice. It sounds so oddly familiar, but she doesn't ever remember seeing this woman's face. She frowns for a moment, before she reaches out her hand and gives the woman a nod.

"Nice to meet you, Raven."

Raven just continues to stare at her hands, and then at her bandaged wrists, glancing at the white padding and then up at her like she's a ghost. The feeling has her suddenly conscious that she's got scars, that she's a failure, that she'd come close to giving up because she simply hadn't been strong enough. She goes to lightly rub over the bandages, slowly pulling her hand behind her back and timidly looking down.

Just as she's about to panic, Anya feels Lexa step up to her side, her hand sliding down her forearm until it clasps her shaking palm. Anya gasps silently and looks up to see her sister, or the woman who used to be her sister, staring at her with an encouraging, protective smile. Tears almost well up in Anya's eyes as she clenches her hand, terrified to let go in case she wakes up from this dream.

And then, Lexa turns to face Raven. "So, you two know each other?"

"Do we?" Anya answers first with a question of her own. "I mean… your voice… it sounds familiar but I don’t think I’ve ever talked with you before, have I?"

"Yeah," Raven croaks as she shoves her hands in her pockets. "You know how that works. I have a pretty generic voice so I'm sure you've got me confused for someone else. You know, it happens all the time." She's nervous, Anya can tell, and not just from her stumbling efforts at diverting the attention away from herself. She's got her hands shoved in her pockets, her shoulders turned inwards, her eyes glued to the floor. She's a stark difference from the woman who'd walked up their porch. It makes Anya suspicious and wary.

What is she hiding?

"Look," Raven says before Lexa can open her mouth and say anything from beside her, "I gotta jet. I have an appointment with another client pretty soon. I just wanted to drop off your equipment so that you would be able to continue working on your exercises while we're not seeing each other." Lexa nods and hesitantly accepts the bag Raven had slung around her shoulder. The woman nods, still avoiding both her sister's eyes and her own. This time, Lexa doesn't let it slide. She grips the handle of the bag tighter as she moves close to Raven. Not out of anger, but out of sheer concern. Something in Anya's heart stings.

"Are you alright, Raven?" Lexa asks, cocking her head. Raven nods hastily, flashing her a toothy smile that's obviously forced.

"Peachy," she replies quickly before nodding to her car, "anyways, I'll see you later. Keep well, Lex. I'll see you at our next appointment in a few weeks."

Lexa just nods and Raven bounds off towards her car. Anya keeps her gaze onto the clicking sound emanating from the heel of her boot, and that's when she catches the glimpse of metal jutting out from under her shoe. A prosthetic… for what?

"That was weird," Lexa mutters, staring down at her bag. "She isn't usually like this. She’s really nice to me. She’s very understanding. Something’s wrong."
"I'm sure she had a long day. She seems like a busy physiotherapist," Indra coos from beside them, gently brushing Lexa's arm. "Now come on, why don't you come inside for a cup of tea and some toast. It's been so long since you've been here and I'm sure you and your sister need some time to catch up."

*Catch up. Funny way of putting it.*

How *exactly* do you tell your sister you've slept with her wife because you thought she was dead and you wanted to be loved, that you needed something more than just the pain and agony of being alone, of living in constant guilt?

Anya cringes at the thought of it, and she knows better than to do it now. This isn’t about her, it’s about Lexa. She and Clarke still need to discuss the best way of breaking it to her sister. As much as she knows Lexa needs to know as soon as possible, and that she seems relatively stable right now, she knows that this isn't something that can just be told over some afternoon tea. She sucks in a deep breath and gives a stable nod to her sister, her heart breaking inside of her chest as she watches Lexa offer up a flimsy, trying smile in return.

"I've missed you," Lexa says quietly, like she's afraid the words will burn her. "I'm sorry I ignored you. I've just been... I don't know. Struggling."

That knife in her chest keeps digging in deeper. Anya sucks in a deep breath and nods, her eyes glistening with tears.

"I missed you too, kiddo." The words are whispered hoarsely, like a faint catch in the wind. Lexa reaches out and winds her arms around Anya's shoulders. Anya closes her eyes and follows, her lungs constricting with the effort it takes to simply breathe. The voices swarm through her head, her conscious guilty and her heart heavy with remorse.

*How does it feel to know you could ruin it all?*

*You shouldn't be here.*

*Why are you still alive?*

*Why are you still here?*

"Anya?" Indra's voice cuts into the voices slithering through her head. Anya's chin jerks up and she feels something wet sliding down her cheeks. *Weak,* she thinks, *so fucking weak that I can't even keep it together for even a fucking minute.* She chuckles sadly and hastily wipes at her cheeks as she offers another flimsy smile towards her adoptive mother and her sister. Lexa looks concerned, but there's also a guarded expression covering those once warm and open viridescent eyes. Anya gulps again, trying to hold down her nausea.

"Come on," she says, though her voice cracks. *Be strong, big girl. She needs you.* She reaches out for Lexa's hand. "Let's grab some tea, shall we?"

Lexa eyes her hand warily for a moment before she sucks in a deep breath and nods. Anya's entire body stills as she feels those calloused hands back in her own. She shivers and holds back the guilt. *Just let me absorb this moment,* she pleads to herself as she clutch her sister's hand tighter, *please, just let me be selfish one more time.* Lexa gives her another smile, softer this time. It's delicate and young, nothing like how her sullen cheeks or her gaunt jaw show her to be now. Anya holds back tears because this is the first time she’s seen Lexa.

"I love you." The words leave her lips faster than she can stop them. "I love you, Lex."
"I love you too," Lexa says as she moves closer until she is burrowed into her arms. Anya's breath hitches as she feels her sister's head come to rest on the hard edge of her collarbone. She closes her eyes, simply breathing in the characteristic pinewood scent of her younger sibling. Lexa's arms wind around her middle and Anya can't help but return the gesture. She wraps her free arm around the square of Lexa's shoulders, her lips finding that scar on her temple from when she'd fallen out of a tree when she'd been but a small child. She kisses her tenderly, gently, as if anything more would shatter the woman before her. Lexa nuzzles into her embrace and grips her tighter, her own body trembling lightly at the force of their emotional bond.

And then, the last of that cracked dam finally bursts.

She sobs into Lexa's hair, still disbelieving of her sister being in her arms. She can't help but flash back to five years ago, to the last time they'd hugged like this, to Lexa murmuring to her, soothing her as the inevitable draws nearer. She remembers the words that had left her sister's lips before they'd parted ways. She remembers her eyes, steady and true, accepting of her fate.

Take care of them, they're yours now…

"I'm here," Lexa whispers into her collarbone, but her own voice trembles slightly. "I'm here, An."

Anya cups the back of her sister's head as she feels warm, wet tears start to drip into the corner of her neck. Lexa's hands scrabble at the front of her shirt, clawing at something to hang onto. Suddenly, Anya is twelve again, holding a crying Lexa in bed while Titus shouts from the other end of the hallway. She's there, protecting her sister, whispering into her ear…

"It's going to be okay," Anya tells her softly, her strength gaining as she repeats the words she'd once said ages ago. "It's okay, Lex. I'm here. I've got you."

Lexa falls apart in her arms but Anya doesn't waver. She grips onto her sister like her life depends on it. She's let her go once, but she's not letting her go ever again. She keeps Lexa pressed against her, allowing her to seek refuge in the crook of her neck as her sobs grow worse. Indra stares at the two of them over Lexa's shoulder, and Anya holds back a whimper at the sight of pure sadness that is mixed in with the bittersweet smile she has on her face. The expression only makes her hold Lexa tighter, more protectively, more closely.

"I'm scared," Lexa whispers suddenly, her voice barely audible. "I'm scared of who I'm becoming, An. I'm so scared that I'm going to… that I can’t… I…"

Anya's heart cracks at the tiny admission. Her heart swells for her younger sister, out of rage of those who'd done this to her, and out of sadness because she's protected Lexa from so many things, but this time, she can't do it.

How could you protect someone from yourself?

"We'll get through this together," Anya tells her, watching as Indra excuses herself from the room, her shoulders trembling as she holds back her own cries for Lexa's sake. She feels her younger sister shake her head defeatedly against her chest. More sobs rip from Lexa’s throat, and Anya’s strength wavers slightly.

"Not this time," Lexa breathes out in a desolate whimper, "I'm not… it's everywhere… all that they did… all I am… all that I become… it’s unrelenting."

There's a pause, a hitch of her breath, a tremble of her fingers, and then…

"I can't escape it," Lexa cries against her, pleading like a child would for a mother. "I can't escape it,
An, and I don't know what else to do. I can't figure out how to sort them out, all the voices in my head. I just, I can't be here anymore. I can't be with them. I'm breaking apart my family. I'm no good, An."

The confession is earth-shattering, and it only serves to further drive that guilted wedge deeper into Anya's heart. She wants to tell her. She wants to fall to her knees and offer her own confession, but she can't find the words, not while Lexa, her sweet and beautiful baby Lexa who grew up too quickly in a world darker than the skies at night, can't even manage to catch a breath without falling apart. She holds onto her sister tighter and closes her eyes, trying to think of a happier time, of when they'd been younger, free from the perils of reality. She struggles as hard as she can to find that feeling of warmth from her father's hugs, from when he'd scoop them both into his arms and twirl them around, when he'd be the protector, to let them feel safe.

Anya realizes it then, that they don't have that anymore.

Indra is a caring parent, but she's not their mother. Kane is a been dear friend and their only real father-figure, but he's not their father. Even Abby, as wonderful and caring as she may be, is not what they have been yearning for the last few decades. She remembers the day of Lexa's wedding, when she'd stood by her sister at the altar and stared into the crowd, when she'd seen close friends and immediate family, but not their parents. She remembers looking at her sister, nervous and awaiting her blushing bride-to-be, and remembering how in that moment Lexa had looked at her with so much love and affection.

Lexa may not have her father, and Anya may not be her mother, but when has she been anything other than her protector?

More importantly, when did she stop being her protector?

"I won't let you break," Anya says as she steadies her voice. "I won't let you go, Lexa. I can't see inside your head, and I can't battle what's happening in there, but I sure as hell will fight anyone and anything that tries to hurt you."

Even myself, she doesn't add on.

"I can't do this alone anymore," Lexa begs her, clenching harder into her shirt as her knees tremble. "I need you, An. I need my sister back. I need my family back. I just… I see you, all of you, and I don't… I don't know anymore. I don't know you anymore. I don't know you and it's killing me."

The words are harsh, but not surprising as sad as it may seem. Anya had been noticing since she'd gotten home that Lexa had been disconnected. Even the day of her arrival had shown as much, from the guarded look in her eye as she'd seen Tris, to their own short and seemingly uncomfortable hug they'd shared in the airport. It hurts to know that she's lost parts of her sister to the brutality that is war, but she doesn't let it deter her. There's something of her sister still left in this trembling, aching frame. She can hear her in the sound of Lexa's croaking voice, or the quivering of her boney and scarred hands. She knows she's there.

"You don't need to know me," Anya tells her gently, stroking those unruly curls as she holds back her own cry. "Just because you can't remember me doesn't mean we can't make new memories. You're my sister, Lexa, no matter what you can or cannot remember. What matters is now, and what matters to me especially, is that you're here. You're alive, Lex. I went five years without that."

"You don't need to know me," Anya tells her gently, stroking those unruly curls as she holds back her own cry. "Just because you can't remember me doesn't mean we can't make new memories. Without this, without holding you and feeling you in my arms and knowing that you're here. I know that we've got a long way to go, that you've got still mountains of things to work through, but I need to you to know you don't have to climb it alone. Anchor yourself to me, Lex, just like we did when we were kids. I promise you, I won't let you fall. I promise, Lexa."
Lexa sobs louder into her arms and Anya can't take her weight when she crumbles. The two of them fall to their knees in the hallway, holding onto each other for dear life. Lexa's entire body shakes and trembles with the force of her cries, but Anya doesn't let it move her. She keeps to her promise and she holds steady. She strokes Lexa's hair and kisses her cheeks and forehead to calm her. She rubs her back and murmurs sweet nothings into her ear as she simply allows Lexa the time to cry.

God, when was the last time Lexa cried?

And not just the cry that builds as a result of a bad day or a mood swing, but the cry of complete and utter grief. When was the last time Lexa had cried because she's lost a part of herself? When was the last time she grieved over who she left behind in Afghanistan? When was the last time she sat down and cried because she realized that she's fragmented and lost?

When was the last time she cried over coming back to a home she can't remember?

"I'm sorry," Lexa whimpers tiredly against her chest as she slumps further into her arms. "I don't know what's wrong with me."

"Nothing," Anya replies strongly, giving Lexa another tight squeeze for assurance. "There's nothing wrong with you."

"But I can't--"

"It doesn't matter what you can't do, Lexa. There's nothing wrong with you," Anya tells her as she pulls back a little so that she can look down into her younger sister's eyes. She makes out some more insecurity and desperation in those green eyes and she feels her heart ache with sadness. She pecks Lexa's forehead, rubbing her back as she draws her sister further into her chest.

"Can… do you think…." Lexa stumbles over her words unsteadily, "do you think they'll still love me? Even when I'm like this?"

The question pulls tears into Anya's eyes. She can't help but let a few fall when Lexa closes her eyes and whimpers. She feels her younger sister's knees draw up to her chest and she can't stop the anger from fuelling her veins as she remembers that she'd been gone for five years, captive for four of them and alone for the last one. She remembers what Kane had told her, about the camps, about Lexa's injuries, about the state they'd found her in, covered in blood and snow, barely alive.

"They do," she tells her sister with a loving peck to the temple. "We all love you, Lex. No matter how you are."

"But I scare them," Lexa says through gritted teeth. Her voice drips with self-deprecation as she hisses, "I'm a monster."


"You don't know what I did to come back home. You don't know." Lexa's voice is cold, emotionless--chilling, dare she say it.

But Anya doesn't let it deter her.

"I don't need to know," Anya says as she gives Lexa another kiss to her crown. "It doesn't matter what you did. You're here now. That's all that matters to me, Lexa. Whatever you did out there, you did it to survive and to come home to us. You will never be a monster for doing that. Nothing you could ever do could ever make me see you as a monster. I love you, Lex, unconditionally." Lexa
shivers at her words, but doesn't seem to reject them instantly. It takes a minute, before she feels the sleepy weight, or lack thereof, start to grow limp in her arms. Anya rubs her back lightly, easing her to relax even more.

"I'm tired, An." Lexa's voice is but a raspy croak. "I'm so tired."

Anya takes a deep breath, holding in her emotions as she leans down and kisses Lexa's brow. "Then rest, Lex. You're safe."

It's like she's spoken the magic words, because Lexa's eyelids slowly begin to slide shut as she nuzzles closer to Anya's chest like they're kids again. Anya doesn't have the heart to tell her that they're on the floor and that she'll aggravate her injuries, so she does the next best thing. She reaches down and tucks one arm under Lexa's knees before wrapping the other around her shoulders. Lexa's head rolls into her neck as she stands, gently cradling her younger sister. Anya holds back her gasp when she realizes Lexa is lighter than a feather and she can feel her bones sticking out through the thin material of her shirt.

"It's okay," she whispers shakily into her sister's ear as she carries her upstairs, "I've got you and I won't let go."

Lexa gives a sleepy mumble to let her know that the words have processed, and Anya doesn't push for more.

The next part is routine. She lays Lexa down on her bed (all the while trying to ignore that this had been their life thirty-five years ago), and then proceeds to take off her boots and her socks. She slowly pulls back the blanket and tucks her sister in. She places Lexa's boots near the edge of the bed, tucking the socks right inside before she goes back to the top of the bed.

"Sleep easy, Little Lex. You're not alone anymore," Anya murmurs as she pecks Lexa's forehead. Her eyes burn with tears, but she holds them back again. This moment isn't about her, or her guilt, but Lexa. Just as she's about to pull away, there's a whimper from the cracked lips of her younger sister. Anya looks down and watches as those tired green eyes stare up at her. Pleading.

"Okay," Anya whispers as she goes to the other side of the bed and crawls in after shucking off her own socks. As soon as she's under the covers, she feels Lexa burrow back into her chest. Anya knows it must be an engrained, almost conditioned response--something from their childhood. A part of her smiles because it shows that despite what her sister might thing, she's not all lost. She reaches under the covers and finds her hand and gives it a gentle squeeze. Lexa mumbles something sleepily, but squeezes back regardless.

"I love you," Anya says as Lexa dozes against her like they're kids again. "Don't you doubt it, kiddo. I'll always love you."

She might be delusional, but Anya swears she feels Lexa's lips spread into a smile against her chest. She strokes down Lexa's back and kisses her forehead.

There are burnt bridges between them, littered with betrayal and remorse, but in that moment, it doesn't matter. The tension, the nightmares, the memories--none of it matters under those covers and within each other's safe embrace.

In that moment, nothing else matters but their love for each other.
March 20th 2014, 12:50

Maimonides Medical Clinic, New York

It's the same damn thing.

Each time she looks at it, the scans get more and more complex.

"I may not be a doctor, but I'm sure looking it for any longer isn't going to make anything change."

Abby wearily nods her head up to see Kane standing in her doorway, a grim smile on his face. Abby stands, setting the scans down as she rises to meet him. Kane extends his hand and she shakes it before he sits down. Abby moves past him to close the door before she returns to her chair.

"Marcus," she greets him tiredly, "you came."

"Your call sounded urgent," Kane acknowledges with a grimace. "It's about Lexa, I'm guessing?"

"I need a favour from you," Abby says as she folds her hands over her desk. Kane nods, leaning forward.

"You have earned more than just a favour. Ask away, Abby."

"It's not so much a question as it is a demand," Abby says with a slight flinch. Kane's brows furrow in confusion. Abby sighs, looking down.

"I need you take me to Afghanistan," Abby tells him as she glances back up. "I need to see the camp where Lexa was held."

Kane sucks in a deep breath and leans back in his seat. He reaches up and scratches at the light scrubble on his chin. Abby clenches her fist.

"Marcus, this is urgent. I can't do shit with any of the scans. I need to see what happened."

"I'm retired, Abby. I can't do anything," Kane says as he shakes his head solemnly. "I don't have the authority to take you there. The entire village, or whatever remains of it, is under investigation."

Abby stands, grabbing one of the scans before she throws it up on a backlight near her window. She turns off the lights and grabs a marker before she circles an area of the brain. Kane stands and limps over to her, leaning into see it better.

"What is that?" He asks as he furrows his brows in confusion. Abby sets the pen down and rubs the bridge of her nose.

"That's the spot where Lexa's amygdala should be. What that spot is a lesion," Abby says as she points to the lower half of the brain. "Something happened over there, something that was invasive that lesioned the entire inferior temporal gyrus. The lesion didn't just affect her amygdala, but also the corresponding areas in her parahippocampal cortex. Her entire memory system, as well as her basal ganglia, are all ruptured."
"What does that mean?" Kane asks, glancing back at Abby with a worried expression. Abby shakes her head and grits her teeth.

"Usually brain lesions are caused by natural causes, like strokes or invasive head injuries. Lexa presents neither of those things. There's no scarring of brain tissue, nor is there any cerebellar evidence that she's suffered a open-head injury. There's only one other thing that could've caused this." Abby glances back at the scan on the board and crosses her arms. She doesn't want to consider the possibility, but with everything that Kane has told her about Lexa's encampment, she can't stop the dreadful feeling that maybe her hypothesis is true. The thought makes her skin crawl.

"What's that?" Kane asks, voice hoarse with emotion. Abby closes her eyes and takes a deep breath before she turns to face him.

"I think Lexa was drugged," Abby says, and before Kane can speak, she holds up a hand. "When I first did my PET scan on Lexa, she flipped at the sight of the injection. She kept telling me that she didn't want the drugs, that she wouldn't let me do it again. Part of me thought that it was just her simply reacting to a fear of needles, but I've known her almost my entire life. Not once has Lexa ever presented to be trypanophobic."

Kane digests the information slowly as Abby continues to list off her evidence. "You told me that Lexa freaked out when Dante tried to prescribe her medication, and Lexa briefly mentioned that Cage Wallace was found amongst the others who were killed at the camp. What I want to know is what a business tycoon was doing in the ass end of nowhere. Dante Wallace's practices are sketchy, and I have a sickening feeling it's all linked."

"Abby, what are you suggesting?" Kane asks, crossing his arms. "Are you saying Cage was involved in this? He was a POW!"

"How do we know that?" Abby asks, her eyes flashing with worry. "What… what if Lexa's telling the truth, Marcus?"

"I…," Kane trails off, his voice croaking. He gives it some more thought before he gulps and looks at her sadly. "How would we even know?"

Abby takes a deep breath before she extends her hand, holding out her palm. "We won't unless we go. Please, Marcus, do it for Lexa."

Kane mulls it over for a second before he nods and reaches for Abby's hand, grasping it tightly.

"Give me a few days," he tells her as he lets go and heads for the door, "I have an old friend that I need to call."

March 25th 2014, 14:40

New York Dynamic Neuromuscular Rehabilitation & Physical Therapy, New York
"Are you mad at me?"

Raven's head snaps up from where she's adjusting the sticky pad on Lexa's shoulder to see those dull green eyes boring into her. Raven finishes attaching the electrode before offering Lexa a flimsy smile and a shake of her head. She sets the stickers aside and leans against the bed frame.

"No, no. I'm fine. Sorry I've been a little quiet," Raven apologizes as she awkwardly fumbles around the words.

"You've been quiet since you met my family," Lexa replies evenly, cocking her head in confusion. "Did they do something?"

Raven remains quiet, her thoughts still reeling from the encounter with Anya a few weeks ago. She never pictured the other woman to look like that, to have been as lifeless and defeated as she'd been. Part of her is furious because she knows that one of Lexa's real fears is being abandoned. But the other part of her is guilty for that anger, because she'd heard the sheer amount of pain in Anya's desperate voice over the phone.

*I fucked her wife while she was dead and I betrayed her.*

"Raven?" Lexa's voice startles her from her thoughts and Raven tries to smile again, but it barely makes her lips. She turns around before Lexa can notice and focuses her energy on looking at the machine in front of her. She struggles to hold back the mess of feelings whirling inside of her after she'd met Anya. What were the odds that the same person she talked down from goddamn suicide was her client's own sister?

And now?

Now, Raven knew her biggest secret.

*I didn't mean for any of this to happen. I just… I need to die.*

"How has Anya been?" Raven asks, trying to keep her voice even as she sets up the machine. "I trust you guys are close."

Thankfully, Lexa doesn't seem to acknowledge her tight, clipped words. Instead, she replies with nonchalance. "We're talking again. I was mad at her before, for leaving me behind. I guess that I just… I wish they'd tried harder, you know? I wish that they hadn't given up on me."

Raven grits her teeth at the confession and nods, swallowing down her own sadness as she realizes that Lexa doesn't even know. "Yeah…," she replies with a soft tone. "I know that feeling. But I assure you, Lexa, your family maybe lost hope awhile ago, but they're not giving up on you now."

"Yeah," Lexa quietly sighs as she looks to her palms, "but sometimes… sometimes it feels like it would have been better if I had just stayed dead."

The secret weighs down upon her chest and Raven aches to release it, but she knows that she shouldn't be the one to tell Lexa what really happened. Taking a deep breath to steady her thoughts, Raven turns away from the machine after powering it on and offers Lexa a sad smile before she grabs her clipboard. She can feel her pulse thrumming wildly underneath her skin, and she already knows what she must do. With a tentative smile, she reaches out and quickly makes some last minute adjustments on a few of the electrodes before urging Lexa to lie back down.

"I'm going to step out for a bit. I have some paper work to file and send off to Abby regarding the progress on your shoulder and back," she tells her client before she nods at the door. "Dr Lewis is
just across the hall. He'll come and take the patch off and let you go." Lexa looks suspicious, but the
tiredness in her eyes doesn't allow her room to argue. The other woman simply nods and closes her
eyes, rolling onto her side to avoid further jostling the electrodes. Raven pulls her bottom lip into her
mouth and bites down on it lightly before she turns away, heading for the door.

The sounds of the clinic blur past her as Raven's hands begin to shake. Tears are welling in her eyes
as the rattling of beds and the shouting of people in the hallway begin to morph into something else.
Suddenly, the ticking of the clock sounds more like the pelting of bullets. The shouting turns into
screaming. Raven holds her breath and whips her head around, struggling to find something to focus
on as she sees the lights flickering overhead. She hears the whirring of the bone saw, the maniacal
laughter of the man who'd captured her as he'd tied her down to the bed.

She looks up and suddenly, all she feels is fear.

And so, with no destination in mind, Raven runs.

She hears the laughing and the whirring fading in the distance as Raven pushes her way through the
crowds of faceless people until she's tumbling outside. She ducks around the corner of the clinic,
away from the public eye, before she slides down the wall with a harsh, heart-wrenching sob. Raven
holds her head in her hands as she counts backwards from a thousand from seven, closing her eyes
and focusing in on her breathing.

*I killed her. I killed her. I fucking killed her. And I'm gonna fucking kill myself.*

Raven jerks her head up and gasps for breath as she grips at her scalp. She focuses on little things at
first. The red of the stop sign. The green SUV. The city skyline in the background. A child and her
mother walking across the street. A boy walking his dog. Two old men sitting at the bench talking
and drinking coffee. Clarke getting out of her car before locking it. Raven pauses, her skin growing
 clammy and cold.

Clarke.

Suddenly, the panic that had been dormant in her bones is replaced with a searing rage. Raven stands
from where she'd been slumped over and stalks towards the blonde woman. Clarke doesn't see her
yet, as she's on the phone in a heated argument with someone. Raven's fury intensifies as she steps in
front of Clarke. The blonde bumps into her and groans, dropping her phone on the ground. Clarke
notices her then, her face scrunching up into a frown as she reaches down and picks up her phone.
She tells the person on the line that she has to go before hanging up.

"Dr Reyes," Clarke says, a bit of bite to her tone. "Aren't you supposed to be with my wife?"

"She's inside," Raven says, her voice a low growl. "She'll be done in a few minutes." Clarke eyes
her suspiciously, arching her brow in concern.

"Then what are you doing out here?"

"I want to talk to you," Raven says as she crosses her arms. "It's about Anya."

Raven hates how Clarke's eyes flash, how she sees the panic and the guilt in those blue eyes before
the impassive wall settles back in. Clarke takes a deep breath and tries to act nonchalant but Raven
reads straight through it. She knows Clarke can tell that she knows something more.

"What are you talking about?" Clarke asks, her voice shaky. "How do you know Anya?"

"Because… I met her," Raven stumbles on her words, not wanting to breach the elder Woods'
privacy. No matter how fucked up she thought this whole situation to be, she knows that she can't give away private information. Shaking her head, Raven steadies herself and glares at Clarke, who flinches under the weight of her stare. Raven's not sure why she's doing this, why she's up in her client's wife's face about this, but she can't help but feel protective over Lexa. She's experienced the loneliness and depression that came after war, and she doesn't want that happening to Lexa.

"Have you told her yet?" Raven asks, her voice loosing the sharp tone. "Does Lexa know?"

Clarke's shoulders visibly slacken and she hangs her head in shame. "I don't know. I… we don't know how to tell her."

"Well you fucking better figure it out," Raven growls as she crosses her arms. "It'll be hell if it comes from anyone else."

Clarke nods, tears pooling in her eyes as she looks up guiltily. Raven feels her heart plummet to her stomach as she sees the guilt in her eyes. She lowers her arms and rubs the back of her neck, closing her eyes as she struggles to compose herself. Clarke sniffs as Raven blinks up at her.

"I… I didn't know," Clarke chokes out as she holds back tears. "I didn't know she was still alive. If I knew I would have gone there myself to find her. I love her, Raven. I love her more than I could ever love anyone else. Anya… what we had… it never could hold a candle to what I have with Lexa."

"That's not the point, Clarke. I get it. Lexa was dead for five years of your life. You moved on, or at least you thought you did." Raven steadies her voice as she drops the aggressive tone. "But the problem is not you sleeping with another person. The problem is that you slept with her sister."

Clarke nods and whimpers at the harsh jab, but Raven doesn't offer sympathy. "Clarke, Lexa isn't in a state to be strung along. If you really want to be with her, if you really love her, you have to tell her the truth. The longer you keep sitting on this the worse off everyone becomes. Talk to her."

Clarke opens her mouth to say something, but she quickly glances over Raven's shoulder and falls silent. Raven turns to see Lexa standing there with a glare on her face. Raven gulps and prays that she hadn't come too early and accidentally caught the tail end of their conversation. Lexa steps forward and glances between the both of them warily. Clarke rushes to wipe away her tears and Lexa cocks her head, turning her gaze to Raven.

"What's going on here?" She asks her before turning to a still-sniffling Clarke. "Why are you crying?"

"It's nothing," Clarke quickly responds, weakly offering Lexa a half-hearted smile. "I just had something in my eye, baby." Lexa doesn't look convinced, so she turns her head to look at Raven instead. Raven swallows thickly and nods, not wanting her voice to betray her. Clarke sighs and reaches out, her fingers lightly grazing Lexa's hand. Instead of intertwining their hands, Lexa jerks her hand away before glaring at both of them.

"Why won't you tell me anything?" Lexa snarls as she takes a step back. "What are you hiding from me?"

"Lexa," Clarke pleads as Raven's pulse thrums wilder, "it's okay. We were just talking and something was in my eye so I was tearing up. I'm okay."

Lexa still looks unconvinced, but she doesn't argue any further. She simply grunts that she'll be waiting in the car as she brushes past them. Clarke and Raven watch as she stalks off towards the
As soon as she's out of earshot, Raven turns back to Clarke with a serious expression.

"You need to tell her," Raven sternly warns her, "because if you don't, I swear to all that is holy, I will."

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March 27th 2014, 17:45

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

"I still think you're overthinking it," Jackson says as he leans his head up from where he's laying on Aden's bedroom floor. "All we need is a few lines from this scene and then we'll be okay. It doesn't have to be perfect, Ade. Mr Blake totally understands the stress you're under right now."

"That doesn't matter," Aden replies as he flips through King Lear and scribbles down his notes. "My suspension is almost over. I gotta prove to Mr Blake that I'm not fucking crazy." Jackson sits up and makes his way over to his friend, placing his hand over Aden's wrist to stop his motions.

"Aden," he murmurs softly, "look at me." Aden ignores him as he tries to flip through the pages wildly. Jackson stops him again and Aden grunts.

"Jackson, we really need to work."

"No," Jackson says as he sits beside his friend. "We're not doing anything until we talk about what happened."

"There's nothing to talk about."

"Aden."

"Jackson."

"Look," Jackson sighs as he removes his hand from Aden's wrist. "I can't imagine how things must be for you at home, but please, you have to know that I don't judge you. I don't understand it, and that's okay, but I just need you to know that I'm here for you, whatever you need."

"Why?" Aden spits out as he glares up at the other boy. "Why do you fucking care? I beat him senseless. I could have killed him."

"But you didn't," Jackson says sternly. "You were defending your mom. Yeah it was excessive, but you were provoked." Aden scoffs.

"That's not an excuse."

"No," Jackson mumbles sadly as he rubs the back of his head and looks down. "But Aden, he said some really fucked up things. You had every right to be angry. Hell, if you hadn't punched him first, I would have." Aden's head snaps up at this, and he looks to Jackson in a mix of confusion and
disbelief. Jackson's blue eyes flit upwards and he shrugs, trying to avoid eye contact as Aden inches closer and crosses his legs under him.

"You... you would?"

Jackson smiles, nodding slightly. "I'd do anything for you, Ade. You're my best friend."

Aden feels his cheeks heat up as he sees Jackson reach out and gently take his hand in his own. The other boy's voice softens slightly as he looks back up shyly. "I really care about you. No matter what you do, Aden, I'll never think of you any less than all that you are. I... well... I..."

Jackson's brows furrow as he stumbles over the words. Aden smiles and squeezes his hand back, letting him know that he doesn't have to say anything in order for him to understand that he feels the same way. Jackson flushes but doesn't pull away. He leans in further and the two boys rest their heads against each other. Jackson's free hand comes up to lightly place itself upon Aden's shoulder, his thumb lightly stroking his neck.

"Aden... I...," Jackson whispers and Aden shivers at how close they are.

Aden's about to lean in when they hear the front door open and shut. The two boys jolt apart and look everywhere but at each other as footsteps clamber up the stairs. Aden straightens his shirt as he hears those footsteps stop outside of his room as there's a knock on his bedroom door.

"It's open," Aden calls absently as he struggles to calm his racing heart. The door opens to reveal a tired-looking Clarke in the doorway.

"Hey boys," she says gently as she looks at the two of them, "I'm making dinner. Do you want pasta or burgers?"

"Pasta works," Aden says in a croak before he turns to Jackson. "Is that okay?"

Jackson just nods, his gaze glued to the floor. Clarke arches a brow at them, but doesn't question it as she tells them dinner will be ready soon. She closes the door behind her and Aden listens to her footsteps as she descends into the kitchen. Letting out a deep breath, Aden turns to Jackson, who's now picked up their book. He doesn't remember it falling, but he gladly accepts the item from Jackson's smooth hands.

"We should get back to studying," Jackson says softly, looking away. Aden slowly nods and flips open the book. He's about to get back to reading when suddenly Jackson's hand is on his wrist again. Aden looks up, opening his mouth to question him, but the sound never leaves his mouth.

That's because Jackson's lips are on his, and suddenly Aden can't breathe.

But for the first time, the lack of air in his lungs is attributed to something beautiful. Something bright, something... infinite.

The book slides off his lap again as Aden reaches up to place his hands on Jackson's cheeks, drawing him closer. The other boy gasps as their lips part for a moment, and Aden flicks his gaze up to see the fear and apprehension in Jackson's watery blue eyes. Something in his heart snaps at the vulnerability, at the longing and adoration that pools in his vision. He leans his head upwards and tilts his mouth, kissing Jackson softer than before. A soft whimper parts the silent air, but the source of the sound is unknown. Jackson's arms wind around Aden's waist tightly.

"Wait," Aden whispers at last as he removes his lips. "I... I need a minute."
"Sorry. I didn't mean to... well I did mean to, but I probably should have asked before I kissed you, oh God what if you didn't like it--"

"Jackson," Aden interrupts with a soft peck to his best friend's lips. "It's okay. I wasn't stopping because I didn't like it. I mean, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have kissed you back if I didn't. I just... I wanted to stop because it's a little fast. I like you a lot, but I just... I'm not in a place right now to... you know." Aden hangs his head in shame, expecting rage from the other boy, but Jackson just eases his grip on his waist ever so slightly.

"It's okay, we don't have to be anything. I just needed you to know how I felt," Jackson reassures him gently. He moves his hand so that he can trace Aden's bottom lip with his thumb, his movements slow and gentle, filled with love and appreciation. Aden sighs and leans into the touch.

"I'm not ready to be with anyone," Aden whispers as he leans his head on Jackson's shoulders. "Not yet." He looks up and gives his friend a small, timid smile as he nuzzles into his neck softly. "But when I do, I hope you know that I want you to ask me again."

Jackson smiles into his hair and chuckles nervously. "Will you say yes?" Aden closes his eyes and hums.

"For you? Always."

The two boys stay like that for a few more minutes until Clarke's voice echoes up the stairs, letting them know that dinner is ready. The two boys are flustered messes as they pry themselves apart and head down the stairs. They both sit at the dinner table, listening to Tris talking about her day. Aden watches as his mothers are sitting closer today, each of them smiling proudly down at their daughter as she rambles about her painting. Lexa only looks slightly guarded as Tris talks to Clarke animately about her cloud painting and how much she loves drawing the sky and the sun.

Aden looks to Jackson and smiles, feeling the small pit of darkness that had lingered since his mother's death starting to recede. Jackson's eyes soften and he glances down to where their hands are at the sides of their chairs. Without even talking, both of them reach out for each other under the table. Both boys turn their attention back to Clarke and Lexa as their fingers intertwine and small smiles turn up both of their lips.

"And what has you two smiling like that?" Clarke asks as she smirks in their direction. Aden just blushes and Jackson coughs awkwardly.

"Nothing," Aden says as he looks over at Jackson with a small smile. "Everything's just perfect."

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March 29th 2014, 11:00

Maimonides Medical Clinic, New York

"Mom!"
Abby blearily nods her head up from where she had been assessing one of her other patients' file with Jackson. She looks down the hall to see Clarke walking in her direction, a small smile on her face. Abby musters up the strength to nod in her direction and smile back. She hands the file back over to Jackson and the man gives her a farewell before heading off in the direction of the labs. Abby waits for Clarke to join her side before the two Griffin women walk down the hall towards the cafeteria for their lunch break. Abby looks at her watch and notices her meeting is in less than fifteen minutes. Clarke eyes her with a cocked brow before pulling on her arm and causing her to stop mid-step.

"You okay?" Clarke asks softly. "You've been at work a lot recently."

"I'm fine, sweetheart. I just have to deal with the bureaucratic bullshit," Abby tells her kindly, offering Clarke a tired smile. "I promise, nothing is wrong. We're all just working as hard as we can to create better care for Lexa." Clarke nods and lowers her hand, guilt pooling in her blue eyes. Abby leads them back towards the cafeteria and the two women grab their trays before heading to a secluded table near the back.

"You want to tell me what's going on with you?" Abby asks as she grabs the fork and takes a bite of her salad. "Are things getting better at the house?" Clarke shrugs, playing around with some of the questionable pasta on her plate before she looks up and sighs, closing her eyes.

"Anya and I spoke last night," Clarke says quietly, "we're trying to figure out when is the best time to talk to Lexa." Abby nods, grimacing.

"I don't think there will ever be a 'best time'," Abby tells her gently, reaching out to place her hand on Clarke's wrist, "you just have to do it."

"It'll wreck her," Clarke whimpers as she looks up, tears glazed in her eyes. "When she finds out what happened, she'll be devastated."

"She will," Abby sadly resigns, pulling her hand back. "But Clarke, if she doesn't find out from you, it'll be far worse."

"I know," Clarke sighs as she rubs her temples. "I just… I wish I could go back in time. I wish that I could have tried harder to find her."

"None of us knew that she was alive," Abby tries to reason. "It's not your fault, Clarke. It all came down to circumstance." She can feel her own guilt festering in the pit of her stomach as she remembers how she had been one of the few to encourage Clarke to go out with Anya at their New Year's party. She shakes her head, drawing herself out of the memory as she looks back down to her watch with another tired sigh. Clarke swallows.

"Maybe you should take a break," Clarke suggests softly, "you're leaving in a few days."

Abby shivers at the reminder. She knows that she has to steel herself, as Kane had told her just how gruesome the remains of the village was. Even under investigation for three months, there were still human remains turning up every so often. Abby takes a deep breath and steadies her anxiety so that she can give Clarke a reassuring smile. They both stand, having finished with the poor excuse of a lunch and make their way back down to the neurology wing. Clarke looks at her watch before she glances up and loops her arms around her mother tightly, giving her a goodbye hug.

"I'll see you tonight at Indra's?" Clarke asks as she pulls back. Abby nods as Clarke continues to say, "I think it'll be good for us to have a family reunion. God, it's been so long since we've all had dinner together like we used to." Abby sympathetically nods and leans over to peck a kiss to Clarke's cheek.
Clarke waves to her before she turns around and walks towards the exit, her head bowed and her shoulders slumped.

"Dr Griffin," Jackson's voice calls out and Abby turns around to see him holding a stack of files in his hand.

"Yes?"

"Everyone is in the board room whenever you're ready."

Abby sighs and follows him, trying as best as she can to recharge her energy. She steps into the boardroom to see a few of her team members talking with each other, exchanging files and scans. Dr Smith is talking to one of the head neuropsychologists from John Hopkins. She watches the younger woman with rapt interest, noting how Dr Smith holds herself with confidence and assertiveness, but never arrogance. She feels a bit more at ease as she notices how well she carries herself. Jackson clears his throat from beside her and Abby snaps back into the present moment.

"Alright, everyone listen up!" Abby calls out as the last team of neurologists walk into the boardroom. "I have an announcement to make."

The team of doctors and neuroscientists nod and wait for her to continue. Abby takes a deep breath and continues to speak.

"Unfortunately, I need to take an emergency flight in order to continue our investigation into our case. I am leaving Dr Smith in charge of the research teams until I get back. I will be leaving in a few days time," Abby tells them. "I imagine you all can manage without me for a week?"

A few disgruntled murmurs of disagreement and shock weave through the crowd, but her stern glare quiets them immediately. Dr Smith looks somewhat terrified at the prospect of being in control, but Abby sends her a reassuring nod and the younger woman seems to relax a little. Abby sighs as she brings up a few slides she'd prepared about the specific lesions and brain damage they'd noted in Lexa's brain. A few of them get to talking as Abby sets them off to work in their own groups. She's busy organizing her next lab results when Dr Smith walks up to her.

"So… where exactly are you going?" Dr Smith asks timidly, looking back at the various researchers now engaged in their own conversations. "I mean, with all due respect Dr Griffin, I just don't think you should be putting me in charge. Half the people here think I'm a newbie." Abby stops her organizing to smile up at the young doctor. She stands up straighter and places her hand on Dr Smith's shoulder encouragingly.

"When I was your age, I had a mentor that made me do the exact same thing. Now look at me," Abby says as she looks to the team. She glances back down at Dr Smith and sighs. "Look, kid, I know that it's tough. This field is cutthroat and at times, it makes you question your morality and ethics. We're all meant to be doctors, to save lives, but sometimes the damned bureaucracy gets in the way of all that. We have red tape that we constantly need to be wary of, and I need you to know that no matter what, if you're going to keep a solid head in this job, you need to see things clearly for what they are. You cannot let the pressure of others sway you into making ill-defined choices."

Dr Smith frowns at her words, noting the desolate tone in her voice. Abby is about to say more when she glances up to see Dante Wallace walk past the boardroom, a blank expression on his face as he pauses for a moment to stare at her, and then at Dr Smith's back. Abby gulps down her fear at the chilling gaze in the old man's eyes. Dr Smith turns around, but Dante just jerks his chin up and smirks before he turns back to the hall, walking away from the board room.
"Where is he going?" Abby asks, her eyes narrowing in distrust. Dr Smith cocks her head in confusion.

"He has an appointment to assess Ms Woods. Remember when we booked it last week? The PCL-R?"

Abby's eyes widen and she shoves past Dr Smith to bound down the hall, chasing in hot pursuit after the psychiatrist. Abby manages to catch Dante at the next corner. The older man barely reacts bare for an unamused scoff in her direction. Abby briskly keeps up her pace, glaring at him.

"Running in a hospital seems a bit tawdry don't you think?" Dante drawls, lazily staring down at Abby. "I expected more finesse from chief of neurology, Dr Griffin." Abby grits her teeth and holds back the urge to run her fist through the man's jaw and instead steadies herself.

"I know what you're doing," she hisses under her breath, "and that's why I'm coming in with you."

"Lexa is my patient," Dante explains, "I have a right to provide her with confidentiality. I feel like that privacy with these matters is necessary."

"I'm coming in with you," Abby snarls as they round the corner towards the psych ward. "I don't give a damn what is necessary."

"Then you clearly have lost your professionalism," Dante cuts in sharply as he stops mid-step to turn and glare at her. "For your own sake, Dr Griffin, I highly recommend you keep your little science lab out of my jurisdiction. You may be the chief, but I hold a higher rank over you. Do whatever you want, but your research is all that it'll ever be. You cannot fix Lexa. She's not a robot with a missing part. She's a human being."

"You don't think I know that?" Abby hisses as she clenches her fist. "As if you have high morals going into all of this."

"Certainly more than you given that you're the one that seems to be hellbent on trying to interfere with my client's progress."

"You prescribed her a mind numbing cocktail after only fifteen minutes of talking to her," Abby says, aghast. "You're kidding me, right?!"

"Enough," Dante finally snaps as she grabs at her arm and pulls her into the next hall. Abby protests against the hard grip on her elbow as Dante takes them into a supply closet and shuts the door. Abby gulps as he sticks his finger into her chest and towers over menacingly, his lips pulled back into a tight snarl. Abby stands her ground, her hands clammy as they grip onto the metal cart behind her for balance.

"Listen to me carefully, Abby. I won't tolerate your stupidity any longer. You may think yourself to be a big name hot shot, but you're a nobody. Do you understand that? You're just another white coat. Your damned research isn't saving anyone's lives anytime soon," Dante hisses as he spits the words to her with disgust in his tone. "You need to get off your fucking high horse and realize that I have the most expertise to deal with Lexa."

"That's bullshit and you know it," Abby seethes as she nods her head upwards, "you just want the money." Dante pauses, as if considering her threat for a brief moment. Abby smirks, but Dante's expression is blank and impassible as he simply exhales and gives her an icy smile.

"Stay out of my way, Dr Griffin." Dante warns as he straightens and reaches for the door handle. "Next time, you won't get a warning."
Abby goes to follow him, but as they step outside, Dante nods his head towards the security guards. Abby knows that she can't cause a scene, not if she wants the chair to take her seriously. They'd already received a notification about her behaviour from Dante, so she knows she's walking a thin line. Taking a deep breath, Abby looks over to the side where Lexa is waiting with her head down and her hands in her lap. Anya sits beside her, and part of her chest feels lighter knowing that the two sisters seem to have made up somewhat. The moment shatters, however, the minute Dante walks over. Both Woods' siblings look up, one with tired fatigue and the other with suspicion and concern. Lexa stands up abruptly, glaring at the older man as Anya holds her back. A few of the security guards make their way over, but Dante raises his hand to stop them.

"It's okay," she hears the man say, "these things can always be a bit nerve-wracking the first time."

Lexa's teeth remain gritted and her brows furrowed in fury, but Dante pays her no mind as he gestures to the room behind him.

"Let's get started, shall we?"

Abby feels her heart stop beating as Lexa's eyes widen and she trembles. Dante's gaze narrows almost threateningly, and she watches in horror as Lexa shuffles forward. It's as if there was some invisible rope tied to her waist, tugging her forward without her consent. Anya gently reaches out to whisper something in Lexa's ear, and she can tell that whatever was murmured has managed to calm the younger woman slightly. Lexa's shoulders slacken as Dante leads her towards the door. Lexa enters first, her body still shaking somewhat. Anya growls something low and threatening in the psychiatrist's direction, but as per usual, Dante looks unfazed by the threat. With a huff, Anya turns on her heel and storms out of the hospital.

Before Dante enters the room, his eyes make contact with Abby's own from across the hall. Never in her entire life has Abby ever felt so afraid.

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Anya shakes her head as she makes her way out of the hospital. She pulls out her phone and ushers off a text to Indra and is almost done sending it when she feels herself collide with something hard. Anya stumbles backwards, clutching her head as she looks down to see her phone on the ground. Muttering under her breath, Anya reaches down to swipe it up as she looks up, ready to glare and chew out the person who ran into her.

But then, the words die on her lips as she sees Raven rubbing her forehead.

"Oh," Anya croaks as she stands up straighter, a blush taking over her cheeks as she looks at the physiotherapist. "Sorry, I didn't see you there."

"It's alright," Raven says as she looks up, eyes widening slightly when she sees her. "Oh… Anya, right?"

"Yeah," Anya says with a nod. "I was just dropping Lexa off for her appointment."

"With Dr Griffin?" Raven asks. Anya shakes her head and the smile slides off her face slowly.

"No," she mutters as she looks back to the hospital's entrance. "Dr Wallace."

"Dante?" Raven asks, arching her brow. "She's seeing Dante Wallace?"

"Yeah," Anya says with a frown. "Do you know him?"
Raven sighs and rubs her forehead with her forefinger before she looks away. "Yeah… he, uh, was my emergency psychiatrist when I was relieved of active duty. He did my evaluation." Anya's brows raise. She hadn't expected Raven to be ex-military. Raven seems to sense it and smirks lightly.

"I was a mechanic, not a soldier. Thought I still went through field training," Raven says as she points down to her leg. Anya follows the direction, gazing at the rolled up pant leg to see the metallic casing of her prosthetic. "I got trapped under rubble. The fuckers sawed me out before they took me back to their camp." Anya's heart clenches at the tight emotion in Raven's voice. She now knows why Lexa must feel so comfortable around her. Anya lets her gaze drop a little as she realizes that she will never be able to understand the pain and horrors Lexa must have seen.

"Hey, don't beat yourself up about it. I'm past it," Raven says with a shrug. "I got help and I've moved through it."

"That's…," Anya drifts off as she looks up with a small smile, "that's really great."

Raven nods and smiles back, reassuring her that her awkwardness is understandable but that she's not uncomfortable. Raven gestures towards the hospital behind her and clears her throat. "Now, as much as I hate to be rude, I've got a check up with my specialist. I'll talk to you later?"

"Oh yeah, of course!" Anya blurts out nervously as she moves out of the way. "Sorry to have kept you."

Raven brushes off her apology with a light-hearted smirk before she makes her way towards the hospital's entrance. Anya watches her back as she makes her way to the hospital. Anya isn't entirely sure what comes of her as she looks up and opens her mouth.

"Hey wait," Anya says, causing Raven to turn and look at her in confusion. She gulps down her nerves and smiles timidly at the physiotherapist. Raven looks confused, but doesn't turn away as she waits for Anya to continue speaking. Anya straightens up and takes a deep, steadying breath.

"Do you want to come over for dinner later?"

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Lexa sits in the room, her fingers playing with the hem of her shirt as she stares at the small space. There's a jug of water and a few empty glasses on the table in front of her, as well as a few white screens she presumes are necessary for reading x-ray scans. There's a cot in the corner, alongside a strew of medical equipment. The air smells sterile, like disinfectant and ammonia. The scent almost makes her want to gag. Lexa looks down at her palms, focusing on the small scars littering the expanse of her rough skin as she waits for Dante to come in and see her.

She didn't want to go, but she'd been given no choice from her superior officers. It was a checkup, some sort of assessment that she didn't bother to listen for. Lexa doesn't care about it, though, not when she can feel her blood roaring in her ears and her pulse throbbing under her skin.

All Lexa wants is to rip it out.

"So… Ms Woods," Dante's voice echoes through the dimly lit room as Lexa nods her head up, snapping out of her daze. "How have you been?"

"Good," Lexa replies in a clipped tone, refusing to make eye-contact as she clenches and unclenches her fists. "I'm fine. Perfect. Just peachy."

"Any… disturbances?"
"Disturbances?" Lexa asks, cocking her head as her eye twitches slightly. She doesn't look up at him as she mutters, "no, no disturbances."

"Hmm," Dante murmurs as he comes to take a seat right in front of her. "Can you look at me, Ms Woods?"

Lexa freezes, tensing as she feels panic starting to settle in her bones. Dante just sighs and sets his clipboard down before leaning back.

"Ms Woods--"

"Captain," Lexa mutters under her breath as she closes her eyes, "Captain Woods."

"Captain?" Dante echoes but Lexa tunes out his blank tone. "Were you not promoted to Major?"

"I didn't need the promotion," Lexa growls as she finally whips her head up to glare at Dante. "Not after what your son made me do."

If Dante had any emotional reaction to her accusation, he doesn't show it. Instead, the man simply sits and stares at her, his eyes cool and collected. The air of nonchalance causes Lexa to shiver again. She looks over his shoulder to see Cage and Emerson watching her, both of them bloodied and beaten as they wait with grins on their faces. Lexa blinks and fixates back on the floor with a shake of her head. Dante only continues to watch with no reaction, not even a single twitch of his fingers. Clutching at the armrests of her chair, Lexa hesitantly looks up to that icy stare.

"What do you want from me?" Lexa asks, her voice tightly wrought with anger. "Haven't you already done enough?"

Dante doesn't talk back, nor does he react to her accusation. Lexa continues to sit there, her anxiety rising as she feels her grip on reality starting to slip. She rocks in her chair as her fingers start to claw at her scalp, her leg shaking as she feels herself starting to dissociate. Cage and Emerson are closer now, sitting right in front of her with grins on their faces as they continue to watch her fall apart. Lexa grits her teeth and holds down the bile climbing up the base of her throat. She gasps as her lungs burn and she feels herself starting to grow numb and weary.

Dante reaches for the jug of water and pours a glass before handing it over to her. Lexa stares at the object with distrust, but Dante nods his head.

"Please," he says gently, "it'll help with the nerves."

"What's in it?" Lexa growls as she jerks her head up, her fingertips clawing into the leather armrests of the chair. Dante doesn't react.

"Water," he says as he lifts the glass to his lips and takes a long sip. He holds the glass back to her when he's done. "See?"

Lexa continues to eye the glass mysteriously, but after a few more seconds of her dry mouth and fast breaths, she takes it. She sips tentatively at first, trying to decipher if there's any sort of poison, but the liquid tastes fine. Once her little security check is over, she gulps it down and slams the glass on the table viciously. Dante doesn't even flinch as she glares at him, her lips pulled back into a tight snarl. Dante just waits a few moments until her body relaxes and she gets her bearings back before he reaches for his clipboard and his pen. Lexa feels her anxiety shoot up again as she sees him scribbling something down on the pad. The room feels colder than before, and Lexa's vision spins as she feels tingly.
"What was it like over there?" Dante asks, his voice cutting through her panic attack. "How was my son?"

Lexa chokes on air as she looks up at him with watery eyes. Dante's gaze is cold and hard, his eyes blank as he slowly stands from his seat. Lexa watches as he calmly walks over to the windows and closes the blinds, before he makes his way over to the door. Lexa's eyes widen in horror as Dante gently locks the metal into place before turning back to face her. Lexa gulps as he sits back down, but not before reaching into his coat.

"You know," Dante says as he pulls out a picture of his a woman and a little boy. "My wife had cancer. She died when he was young."

Lexa grits her teeth as Dante looks up at her. "He was such a good boy. Loved his mother more than anything. It was a tragedy when she died."

"Why are you telling me this?" Lexa growls between her clenched teeth. "I don't give a fuck. He fucking drugged me! He… he drugged me…"

"Did he now?" Dante echoes softly, glancing back down at his photo. "That's… unfortunate."

Lexa pauses in her shaking to look at him, the realization finally kicking in as she sees Dante pocket the photo and straighten his lab coat.

"You don't believe me."

Dante chuckles airily, the first reaction she'd gotten out of him since she'd come in for her appointment. She's about to say something, but Dante raises his hand and silences her with a cold glare. Lexa tenses, swallowing thickly as she looks to where Cage and Emerson are standing at his side.

"On the contrary," Dante says with a slight smirk, "I do believe you."

"What?" Lexa gasps as she feels pins and needles rushing down into her fingertips. She looks to her hands in confusion, her vision spinning as she feels her mouth go dry. She looks back up, feeling like she's in a daze. "What… what's going on… what did… what did you do to me?"

Dante continues his eerie smile as he leans forward and cocks his head to the side.

"What I was told to do," Dante tells her nonchalantly, "I'm assessing you."

"No," Lexa mutters as she feels the tingling sensation spreading to her arms. "No, no, no…!"

She looks up to see the room falling out of place, only to replace itself with the dark chambers of the torture cell back in the camp. Dante's face morphs into Cage's own, and that sadistic grin and cold gaze stares back at her. Lexa shakes her head and writhes, feeling metal locking over her wrists as she struggles against the restraints. Cage looms over her with a chuckle as she watches him reach for a needle with the red liquid.

"No!" Lexa screams. "No, get it away from me!"

"I warned you," Cage growls as he inches closer. "You should have known better than to have messed with me, little girl."

"Fucking get away from me," Lexa shouts as she writhes in her chair, "I'll fucking kill you! Don't fucking touch me!"
Suddenly, Cage's expression changes into one of pure fear and concern. The needle drops from his hands and he reaches out for her.

"Lexa," Cage says as she feels hands gripping her shoulders. "Lexa, snap out of it!"

"No," Lexa shakes her head and struggles against his grip, "no, let me go! Let me go, you fucking bastard!"

"Lexa!" Cage's voice grows higher pitched and more feminine. "Lexa, focus on my voice. Look at me, sweetheart. Focus on me."

"No," Lexa cries as she closes her eyes and sobs out, "no, please, I can't do it anymore, please stop it. Please!"

"Lexa!"

Lexa blinks her eyes open to see a blurry image of a blonde-haired woman standing before her. It takes a few more blinks for her vision to clear before she recognizes Abby standing in front of her, hands upon her shoulders and a concerned look in her eyes. Lexa's chest heaves as she struggles to regain her breathing and calm herself. She shoves Abby's hands off of her weakly as she goes to stand. Her knees buckle and she almost collapses, but she holds the edge of the table as she looks around the room. The lights are on and the blinds are open. Two security guards are at the door, both of their hands over their guns in uncertainty. They look at her before gazing at a spot over her shoulder.

Lexa turns to follow their gaze, only to feel her heart thud to a halt inside of her chest.

Dante stands, his eyes wide open with fear and concern. There's a guard at his side, one hand placed on his chest and the other on his back as he helps steady him. Lexa turns back to Abby, her body trembling as she struggles to make sense of what's going on. Abby only gently reaches out to graze her cheek. Lexa allows the touch; in fact, she gravitates further towards Abby with a small shiver. A whimper leaves her lips and Abby hums to soothe her anxiety. Lexa allows the older woman to wrap her up in her arms as she sobs into her shoulder, her hands gripping her white coat.

"Ssh," Abby whispers softly as she rubs Lexa's back, "it's okay, sweetheart. You're safe."

"What… what…," Lexa stammers out once she manages to calm down a little bit. "W-What happened?"

"You had a bit of a panic attack," Abby tells her softly. "You weren't responding and when we came in, you'd kicked Dr Wallace down."

"No," Lexa mutters as she removes herself from Abby's grip to glare in Dante's direction. "No, he made me… he wanted me to… he…"

"It's alright, Lexa." Dante's voice is soft and gentle as he slowly removes himself from the guard's grip. "I'm alright. These things happen."

"No," Lexa growls as she points to him with a shaky finger. "No, you did it! You fucking did something to me!"

"Lexa," Abby calmly whispers, "you were only in here for a moment before the attack hit. I don't think…"

Lexa's stopped listening, however, because as she looks to where Dante is standing, Cage is right
beside him. She makes out the silver of the needle in his hands as he watches her silently. Lexa feels a shiver run down her spine as she looks to Dante, who looks just as emotionless and cold. Lexa goes to turn her head to the security guards by the door, but when she turns to face them, all she sees are Emerson and the chief.

"Lexa?" Abby's voice draws her back to the present, however muddled and distant it feels. "Lexa, are you listening to me?"

"I have to go," Lexa blurts out as she shakes her head, prying herself away from Abby. "I have to go."

"Lexa, wait!"

"No," Lexa says as she looks to the floor, trying to convince herself that all she's seeing is an illusion and nothing more. "No, I've gotta go."

Before anyone can protest, Lexa darts past the two guards and makes her way down the hall. She keeps her eyes to the floor, ignoring everyone's whispers and stares as she finally finds the exit to the hospital. She runs out of the building and looks up at the open blue skies. She grounds herself to the sounds of traffic in the distance, of the birds chirping over head. She looks around to the various people on the streets and she feels herself calming down slightly. Fishing out her keys, Lexa makes her way over to her car and opens up the truck before sliding inside.

As soon as she gets in, she powers on the engine and pulls out of the parking lot.

The entire time Lexa mindlessly drives home, she tries to ignore her bloodied reflection staring at her silently from the back seat.

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Clarke finishes putting away her things before she grabs her phone and checks the time. She swears as she realizes that she needs to leave now if she is going to pick Tris up on time from the birthday party she was at. She grabs her keys and wallet before she makes her way to the car. She hears tires squealing and the roar of an engine in the distance and rolls her eyes, assuming that it's teenagers being annoying again.

Clarke pulls her car out of the parking lot and makes her way towards where she's meant to be picking up Tris. Unfortunately, a few minutes into her trip, she hits traffic. She rubs her temples and mutters under her breath as she pulls out her phone and gives Anna, Tris' friend Juliana's mother, a quick call to let her know that she's going to be late. Anna tells her not to worry and that Tris is having fun. Clarke sighs as she hangs up and places the phone in the cup holder. She's inching forward through the slow crawl when her phone vibrates and rings. Clarke glances down.

Incoming call from Anya Woods…

"Fuck," Clarke mutters as she punches the accept button on her car's bluetooth screen. The phone patches through and Anya's voice comes online.

"Clarke?"

"Hey," Clarke says as she continues rolling the car forward through the thick traffic. "Sorry, I'm hitting a shit ton of traffic right now."

"It's fine. Is this a bad time to call?"
Clarke remains silent, but she takes a deep breath and stows away her own fatigue and frustration to shake her head. "No, no, what's up."

"Well, I, uh, just wanted to let you know that Raven's coming to dinner tonight."

Clarke slams on the brakes.

"What?!") She hisses as she flips the bird to the person honking at her to the right. "Why is Raven coming?"

"Because I invited her," Anya replies, her tone full of confusion. "She and Lexa have gotten closer and I think that she's a great friend to her."

"Anya," Clarke says sternly as she pulls into the left lane, "Raven is her physiotherapist. They're not supposed to be friends."

"I know, but I just… Raven's an ex-POW. I think that's why Lexa relates to her. We're only just mending our relationship now, but I want someone to be there for Lexa if she needs someone to talk to. Someone that could understand better than we ever could. I think Raven's that person."

"Anya," Clarke sighs as she hits a red light. "Raven knows about us."

That warrants a pause. There's some jumbling and then Anya's voice croaks over the phone, "what do you mean she knows about us?"

"I mean that she knows about what we did," Clarke dejectedly replies. "Raven confronted me about it a few days ago."

"I… well… is…," there's an audible gulp before Anya whispers, "is she going to tell Lexa?"

"No," Clarke says as she pulls a sharp right turn, "but she will if we don't tell Lexa first. We need to find out when we should do it."

"Soon Clarke," Anya replies, "we just need to figure out what to say to her. We gotta think about how to word it properly."

"I highly doubt candy-coating it will make it any fucking better, An." She hears Anya scoff on the other end.

"Do you have a better idea, Clarke?"

Clarke sighs, rubbing her forehead as she pulls up to another red light. "No… just… we need to think about this, you're right, but we can't wait."

"Yeah," Anya's sad voice comes over the speaker. "I just… I don't want to hurt her anymore than she's already been hurt."

"I know," Clarke replies as she sees Anna's house in the distance. "But we don't have much of a choice. You were right. Both of us got ourselves into this mess. Now it's time to face the consequences." Clarke pulls the car to a stop before she powers off the engine and stares ahead blankly. She thinks for a few moments, dwelling especially on what Anya had said earlier. With a sigh of resignation, Clarke releases her grip on the wheel.

"Clarke," Anya sighs as Clarke stares blankly ahead. "We need to talk about this soon. Not just about how to tell her, but about what happened between us. I… I just want us to be on the same
page." Clarke feels her heart clench in her throat at the vulnerable tone of Anya's voice.

"An," Clarke croaks as she holds back her tears, "I, uh, have to go. I am picking up Tris from her friend's house right now."

There's a small silence, and Clarke closes her eyes when she hears the soft sound of sniffling through the line.

"Oh. Okay."

"Can... can we talk about this tonight?" Clarke asks, wiping away the lone tear that streaks down her cheek. "After dinner?"

There's more to her question and she can tell Anya knows it. There's another a pause before a gentle sigh comes over the line.

"Yeah, that's probably for the best. I'll... uh, see you then."

"Bye An," Clarke says as she takes a deep breath, "we'll talk soon, yeah?"

Anya mumbles a quiet farewell before she hangs up. Clarke lets the dial tone ring out for a bit before she powers off the car completely. She flips down the mirror and fixes her slightly smudged makeup before she gets out of the car and makes her way up the steps to Anna's door. She knocks twice and waits until there's the telltale sound of the door unlocking. The wooden frame swings open to reveal an older brunette.

"Hi Anna," Clarke says with a forced smile as she nods to the taller woman, "sorry I'm late."

"Don't even sweat it, Clarke!" Anna greets her with a chipper smile. "Welcome. Come on in, would you like some coffee?"

"That's too kind of you, but I actually have to get home. We have a family dinner tonight," Clarke says with an appreciative glance. Anna just smiles and nods in understanding as she turns around to holler up the stairs that she's arrived. There's some shuffling and then the patter of feet.

Clarke looks up to see Juliana and Tris peaking out from behind the wall. Tris pouts at the sight of her and Clarke does her best to give her daughter a warm grin. Tris tugs on Juliana's dress and whispers something in her ear. Juliana nods excitedly and beams down at Anna.

"Momma," Juliana says, "can Tris stay for dinner and a sleepover? Pretty please?"

"No honey," Clarke answers in Anna's place, "Tris has to come home now. We've got our family dinner tonight, remember?"

Tris' pout turns into a frown as the little girl crosses her arms and glares at her mother. Clarke nervously wrings her hands as Tris snorts.

"I don't wanna come! I wanna stay here with Jules."

"Tris, honey, I know you want to play some more--"

"I don't want to play," Tris interrupts her with a huff, "I want to stay here forever." Clarke frowns at the statement as she crosses her arms.

"Tris, I'm not going to say it again. You have to come down now. Say goodbye to Juliana. We have to go and get Mommy and Aden."
"No!" Tris whines as her bottom lip starts to quiver. "I don't want to come back to the house! I don't want to be with Mommy!"

"Tris," Clarke sighs, "please, honey, we're going to be late if we don't hurry. Mommy's gonna be worried--"

"I don't want to because I don't want to be with Mommy!" Tris finally shouts out. Clarke stutters mid-sentence, her stomach flopping. Anna pales a little beside her and shifts on her feet awkwardly. She attempts to diffuse the situation by looking up at the two little girls with a soft smile.

"If you want you can come over tomorrow for dinner, Tris!" Anna tries to negotiate in a warm tone. "I'm sure your Mommy misses you."

"No she doesn't," Tris says with tears in her eyes. "I don't like Mommy. She's too scary."

The confession causes Anna and Clarke both to freeze. Clarke feels her throat constrict as she looks to her youngest child cowering behind the banister, clinging onto the wood like it's her lifeline. Anna looks over at Clarke with sympathy before she quietly makes her way up the stairs and ushers Juliana back to her room. Clarke takes off her shoes and enters the house, climbing the stairs slowly as to not startle her daughter.

"Tris," she softly coos as soon as she reaches the quivering girl. "Sweetheart, why does Mommy scare you?"

Tris shakes her head, tears streaming down her cheeks as she sniffles. Clarke sighs and takes a seat on the steps, folding her hands in her lap as she lets the silence pass between them. She waits for Tris to start speaking, and eventually after a few moments, her daughter finds her voice.

"Mommy doesn't like me," Tris whispers softly, looking down at her lap. "She follows me sometimes. I... I... told her to stop but she says that she doesn't trust me." A few heartbreaking whimpers leave her daughter's lips as Tris cowers into herself out of fear. "Sometimes... sometimes Mommy walks at night and she stays in my room. I told her that I don't like it when she stares and she never stopped. I'm sorry, Mama, I'm so sorry."

Tris bursts out into a sob as she trembles. Clarke looks over, trying and failing to hold back her own tears as she reaches out for Tris and swaddles her in her lap. Tris claws into her sweater, her head ducking into the space between her neck as her crying intensifies. Clarke stands, lifting her and carrying her towards the door. She slips on her shoes and grabs Tris' pair before taking them back towards the car. Tris clings to her as she tries to put her in her carseat, so Clarke simply resigns to sitting in the back seat with Tris in her lap, softly humming and stroking her back to calm her.

"I'm sorry, sweetie. I know it's hard," Clarke whispers into her ear. "Mommy's just hurting right now. She needs her family."

"B-But Jules' said that her mommy never pushes her," Tris whimpers as she looks up, her face flushed and damp. "Why does Mommy push you?"

Clarke's jaw clenches as she remembers the time Lexa got lost in a flashback and accidentally shoved her to the floor. Lexa had come back a few moments later, but by then the damage had already been done. Clarke knows that Lexa doesn't intentionally mean to hurt her, but sometimes the force of her flashbacks are far too strong for her to handle on her own. She's so lost in her thoughts she almost misses what Tris whispers next.

"I don't want Mommy," Tris whispers as she nuzzles closer into Clarke, "I want 'Nya."
Clarke's eyes flash open at the confession and she stutters on a breath. "W-What?"

"I said I want 'Nya," Tris says louder, her voice trembling. "I want her to be my Mommy instead. 'Nya doesn't yell and she isn't scary like Mommy." Clarke's head grows fuzzy as she hears the small smile in her daughter's voice. "I want 'Nya back, Mama. Why can't you be with her again?"

As silence befalls them, Clarke realizes that she doesn't have an answer for her daughter.

March 29th 2014, 15:12

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

Lexa parks her car into the driveway, her suspicions raising as she notices another car on the pavement. Something feels off and it's setting every instinct in her body into some sort of hyper-vigilant mode. She powers off her vehicle and exits her truck, gripping her keys tightly between her fingers as she slowly walks up to her porch. She opens up the front door and looks inside to see an unfamiliar pair of shoes at the doormat. Everything looks orderly and neat, and Lexa struggles to remember if this is the same way she'd left the house before she'd gone with Anya to the hospital. She softly closes the door behind her and places the keys on the hook. She hears a man's voice conversing with her wife's own deeper in her house. Jealously and mistrust flares up inside of her as she stalks forward, her eyes searching for the intruder in her home.

When she enters, she sees Clarke sitting with a man who has a child on his lap, and instantly Lexa feels her hands grow clammy.

They both look oddly… familiar. Lexa gulps and rubs her clammy hands on the front of her jeans.

"Lexa!" Clarke stops mid-conversation with the man to stand up and greet her with a cheery smile. "Lionel came to see you. You know him, right?"

"It's been some time, hasn't it?" Lionel tells her softly, his eyes brimming with sympathy as he gently tugs on the hand of the little boy in his lap. Lexa looks at them both with wary eyes, but the nagging guilt and sorrow burble like a volcano ready to burst. Lexa gulps and stiffens.

"Who are you? Why are you here?" Lexa asks, her voice quivering. "What are you doing here?"

"Lionel just called and said he wanted to come visit!" Clarke replies with a beaming smile. "He came over to visit you."

"I came to see you," Lionel replies, his head cocking in confusion slightly. "Ever since I heard the news that you made it out alive, I've been meaning to come." Lexa grits her teeth and wills the tears welling up in her eyes to back down. She clenches and unclenches her hand as she looks to the boy who's now staring up at her with both fear and anger. Lionel seems to notice and smiles, gently patting the boy's back before sighing.
"This is Jeremiah," Lionel says, "he--"

Suddenly, it hits her. She finally figures out just who these people are.

The photograph in the camp. The family that wasn't hers.

*We'll find out whom belongs to whom soon enough.*

"He looks just like her," Lexa whispers as she stares into those brown eyes. "He looks just like Costia."

"Good to see that you can recognize the resemblance," Lionel chuckles as he pats his son's head. "At least you haven't forgotten that much."

"What is this?" Lexa breathes out as she looks up to where Clarke is smiling down at Jeremiah. "What is going on?"

"We're just here to visit," Lionel says, his voice growing fuzzy and muddled. "We thought you would want to meet our son." Lexa watches as the boy's face morphs, and instead of innocent brown eyes staring back at her, all she sees is flesh and bone. Something in her stomach flip as she glances up to Lionel. Her reflection stands over his shoulder, her stare even and cold as she feels the memories of the camp whirring through her mind. She hears the screams, the pleas for mercy; she hears the shouting of the soldiers riling her on, the feel of cool metal in her palm--

"I know that Costia was in that camp with you. They… showed us the aftermath when they told us they'd found her. I don't know what those people did to my beautiful wife, but… well, I'm just glad at least you made it out alive," Lionel says, breaking Lexa from her daze. She looks at him, and despite his voice having no hint of jealously or malice, his eyes ask an entirely different question, one that Lexa can't face the answer to right now.

*Why did you survive and she didn't?*

"Were you there together?" Lionel asks, his hands sliding down Jeremiah's face to cover his ears. "Did you see her?"

*Do you want to see your family again? If you do, then you'll pick up the pipe and kill her.*

"The man asked you a question, Lexa." Clarke's stern voice brings her from the voices inside her head. "I think you owe him a response."

"Yes," Lexa replies hoarsely, "I did." Lionel flinches, and she sees Clarke visibly tense from beside the man.

"Then why are you here?" Lionel asks as he cocks his head. "Why did you come home without her?"

"I… I…," Lexa stammers as she feels cold sweat accumulating on the back of her neck, "I didn't… I just…"

"Lexa," Clarke's low growl of a voice draws her gaze back up to those disappointed blue eyes. "You couldn't save even *one* person?"

"I didn't mean to," Lexa chokes out as she stumbles backward in fear, "please, I didn't mean to! I just wanted to come home."
Lionel, however, seems frozen as he stares at Lexa with tears in his eyes. Lexa glances back over her shoulder to her reflection, gulping harshly as she sees a cruel smirk playing at her lips. She shivers at the sight of the blood starting to spatter against her skin, warm and bitter against her mouth. She feels it dripping from her palms, her chin, her lips. The sensation drives her insane, and before she knows it, her hand reaches up to pick at her skin. Lexa looks down to her arm, only to see bits of stringy flesh hanging from the ends. She can almost imagine the pipe in her hand.

Please, Lexa, you promised me.

"My wife loved you," Lionel bitterly says, causing Lexa to jerk her head upwards. "She loved you and she was willing to die for you. And I bet that's exactly what she did, didn't she?" Clarke looks up and crosses her arms, her eyes stern.

"Did you let her die?" Clarke asks, venom dripping from her voice as Lexa shivers. "How could you let her die, Lexa? I thought you cared for her."

Lexa shakes her head as tears start to blur in her eyes. "Costia and I were together in high school for only a year. I didn't… it wasn't--"

"It didn't seem to matter," Lionel growls out as tears start to drip from her eyes. "She only found her path a few years ago. She was so happy with me, with our son, and now she's gone. My wife suffered for years because of you, her death was because of you, wasn't it? You selfish bitch."

Lexa stumbles backwards as Lionel and Clarke continue stare at her silently from the living room. Neither of them are saying anything. They just continue to stare blankly. She blinks a few times, but no matter how many times she turns away, they never stop staring. When their eyes continue to track her, she finds herself unable to breathe. She turns away and stumbles through the halls with prickly vision, heading for the door. She's about to reach it when she bumps into something hard. She looks down to see Jeremiah staring up at her with a blank expression. Lexa pauses, her throat bobbing with the effort to swallow the pit that obstructs her breathing. Jeremiah holds out his hand and Lexa glances down to see a bloodied, bent-out-of-shape pipe loosely gripped in his palm.

And then, with a chilling monotone voice, the boy finally speaks.

"Are you going to kill me, too?"

Lexa feels the cool metal in her palm and she can't breathe. She feels a shiver go down her spine as she looks back up to see Costia's gruesome form standing beside her son. Jeremiah holds out his hand and Lexa glances down to see a bloodied, bent-out-of-shape pipe loosely gripped in his palm.

And then, with a chilling monotone voice, the boy finally speaks.

"Go on then," her wife coos as she nods down to where Jeremiah waits, "show me what you're
capable of, Lexa."

*Lexa stop, please! Just look at me, don't do this. Don't give in, don't--*

"Lexa?"

Lexa turns her head to see Clarke standing in the doorway. Lexa takes a step away from her and looks at her feet, realizing that it had all been one damned hallucination. Tris is by Clarke's feet, her face hidden behind Clarke's leg as they watch her struggle to hold back tears. She focuses her energy on staring at the small crack in the floorboards, anything to get her mind away from haunting memories of Costia's screams. She tries to block out the sound of the pipe hitting her flesh, breaking through her bone. Lexa's shoulders quiver as she forces down the memory of staring at Costia's mutilated, unrecognizable body after she'd lost her sanity. She clenches her teeth and fights back against the wave of overwhelming guilt.

"Lex," Clarke asks softly, her voice sounding closer than before. "Are you okay, baby? What's going on?"

Lexa waits for Costia's reflection to go away, but that haunting, grotesque face never seems to leave her. Lexa finally turns away after a few moments, focusing in on Clarke to divert her racing mind. She allows Clarke's soft touch on the crook of her elbow before she starts to relax slightly. Clarke slides her finger down her skin slowly before gently reaching for her head. Lexa shivers, but tightly holds onto it as Clarke guides her back into the house. Lexa gulps harshly as she sees Costia in the kitchen now, watching her with her mouth still contorted in the shape of her bloodcurdling scream. Her teeth, yellow and rotten, dangle out between those inflamed gums and Lexa closes her eyes again in fear.

"Lex, sweetheart, what's going on?" Clarke coos from beside her as they sit on the couch. "Talk to me, love."

"I…," Lexa breathes out as she struggles to get her bearings straight. "I can't… I don't want to talk about it."

"Okay," Clarke whispers with a nod. "We don't have to talk about it. We can just sit here quietly for a bit if you want."

Lexa just nods, focusing on her breathing. Her head slowly lifts as she stares at Costia's body. She watches as her reflection creeps out from behind, wearing the dirty prison garb. Lexa's gaze flicks down to her palm to see a bloodied and bent-out-of-shape metal rod in her grasp. A soft chuckle leaves her reflection's lips as she turns to Costia, her free hand reaching out to run down the side of the mutilated woman's cheek. Lexa's chest tightens as her reflection turns her gaze back towards her with a smirk. She removes her hand and smacks the pipe into her palm, her lips curling upwards menacingly. Her face morphs into Cage's own, and Lexa trembles at the sight of that dastardly smirk pulling at his cracked lips.

*Remember, Lexa hears him chuckle as she trembles, you're the one that will kill them all.*

March 29th 2014, 20:55

Woods Residency, New York
Dinner goes as it is expected to go, given everything that's happened.

Lexa sits at the table, her gaze fixated on her plate as she hears the mindless white noise of talking around her. Anya and Raven sit on the other side of her, conversing with Indra about something she doesn't care to pay attention to. Her eyes flit upwards to look at Clarke, who appears just as nervous and lost. Abby sits next to Aden, talking to him in a low voice about something to do with his school. The only person that seems to be not enjoying this awkward semblance of a dinner is Tris, who is glaring at her from the other side of the table, party hat half held atop her head. The girl had just come from a birthday party, and according to Clarke, had been somewhat reluctant to leave her friends and come home.

"So," Indra says as she pats her mouth with a napkin. "How long have you been a physiotherapist, Raven?"

"Oh, a few years now. I was ex-military," Raven replies, setting down her wine glass as she smiles at the older woman. "I guess Dr Griffin just took me under her wing when I was brought it from tour. She patched me up and inspired me to overcome my injuries and become more."

"That's very inspiring," Indra says as she kindly nods over to Abby, "thought it's not at all surprising, considering how much Abby's done for us."

Abby only smiles and nods, though her gaze flits worriedly over to Lexa. "I've had the chance to work with a few inspiring people myself."

Inspiring?

Lexa grits her teeth at the words and looks back down to the uneaten food on her plate. Inspiring is the last thing she would call herself. She's trembling in her seat, trying to figure out exactly what to do or say to try and participate, but her mind isn't here today. Not with the raging storm outside and the rattling of the branches against the glass. She clenches her fork in her hand as she simply nods in agreement. Indra seems to sense the tension because she quickly changes topic. Mindless chatter fills the space between them again, and as Lexa looks up, she stares straight into the green eyes of her daughter. Tris glares back at her with a furious expression, her hands clutching onto a pink balloon tightly.

The rubber groans against her skin, causing Lexa to twitch and the table to quieten.

Clarke seems to note her wife's agitated response and gently leans over to smooth back Tris' curly hair.

"Sweetheart," Clarke murmurs gently, "please stop it. The adults are talking, honey."

Tris doesn't respond, but pauses for a moment. Lexa watches as the girl continues her glaring. Clarke sighs and turns away, but not without passing a worried glance in Lexa's direction. Lexa ignores it and looks back down to her fork, her eyes fixating on the bent metal in the middle. It feels larger, thicker, more round and firm than what it should be. She looks to the tip of the fork and sees a small patter of red dripping off the end. The chatter in the background begins to dull and Lexa feels the world around her begin to fade in and out.

And then, as she looks up, the dinner table is gone and instead of Tris looking back at her, it's her
reflection.

"Lexa?"

She blinks and suddenly she's back again, with everyone's eyes on her. Lexa takes a deep gulp and rolls her shoulders, trying to fake a smile.

"Sorry," she says hoarsely as she sets the fork down and settles her hands in her lap. "I zoned out."

"It's getting pretty late," Raven says as she smiles, trying to diffuse the situation. "And I'm sure the birthday girl needs to get some rest." The table chuckles, but Tris doesn't say anything. She doesn't offer a smile or even respond. Her eyes are still glaring over at Lexa. Her fingers clench around the balloon again and Lexa's jaw clenches at the sound. Her fingers curl into a tight fist as she watches Tris cock her head in her direction.

"Stop it," Lexa growls as Tris makes the noise again. "Tris, stop."

"Or what?" Tris snaps back, tears welling in her eyes. "Will you hit me next?!"

"Tris!" Clarke gasps as Lexa's eyes flash with guilt and rage. "Apologize. Don't speak to your mother like that."

Tris shakes her head and grits her teeth as she stands from her seat and presses the balloon down against the table, causing it to groan again. The noise serves to be too much for Lexa as the older woman rises too with a loud growl, her hands reaching out to violently pop the balloon.

"Enough!" Lexa screams, her eyes blazing with rage. Tris shivers and cowers slightly as she shakes her head again, trembling lightly.

"Why couldn't you just stay dead?!" Tris snarls back as she starts to cry. Everyone in the room goes quiet at her outburst, and even Clarke looks shocked. Lexa remains rigid, cold and aloof as she glares down at her daughter. She's about to say something when Tris sits back down with a huff. Her daughter looks over to Anya with a mournful expression as she continues to sob, her arms weaving around her chest protectively.

"Tris," Clarke warns, her voice hoarse. "Apologize to your mother."

"She's not my mother," Tris growls, "I don't want her to be my mother!"

"Tris don't say that," Aden tries to reason, but Tris shakes her head and screams again in anger. Lexa hovers over her, muscles tensed.

"What has gotten into you?!" Lexa seethes. "You think you can talk to me like that?!" Tris' brows narrow and her lips curl into a vicious snarl.

"You're just mad because Mommy would rather be with Aunt Anya than you!"

And just like that, the room goes silent again.

Lexa recoils as if she'd been burned. "What?!"

"That's right!" Tris says, more confidence building in her voice as she slams her hands on the table. "Mommy and Aunt Anya were together while you were in stupid Afghanistan! She's my real mother, not you. She loves Mommy and Mommy loves her back. We're a family."

"Tris that's enough," Clarke says sternly, but her voice quivers in a way that sends shivers down
Lexa's spine. Suddenly, the weight of Tris' words, alongside the guilty expression in her wife's gaze and the tense silence from her sister weigh down on her and Lexa collapses back into her seat. She doesn't listen to Clarke chastising her daughter or Anya trying to convince her that what she's heard is not a complete and utter lie.

Instead, Lexa looks up to see herself back in her nightmare, buried by the people she once called her family.

There's more chatter, more noise, and it's all too overwhelming.

With a quick motion, Lexa stands and turns her back, ignoring the shouts of her family to come back to the table, to talk about it. Lexa itches the corner of her elbow as she grabs her jacket and rips the front door open. She steps into the storm, the rain pelting down on her face as she walks into the street, her feet carrying her God knows where. She feels the world around her shifting, and she's back at the camp. She's being water-boarded and interrogated and she can hear Costia screaming in the background for them to stop but it never ends. No, it will never end.

In the haze of it all, she sees Anya and Clarke together, hands intertwined, lips pressed together in celebration over her death.

She sees them, the children that once were her own, clinging to her sister like a lifeline.

She sees Clarke, looking at Anya with a love that was once reserved for her.

She sees it all and realizes that her nightmare has just become her reality.

---

"What are you doing?" Anya asks as she sees Clarke getting her kids ready. "Clarke, we need to talk about this."

"There's nothing to talk about, Anya. I need to find my wife," Clarke shakily replies as tears continue to stream down her face. Raven had long since left, much to the reluctance of the physiotherapist, but even she knew that this was a family matter that needed to be resolved without her. Abby and Indra were in the kitchen in deep conversation, but Anya found herself at the doorway, watching as Aden struggled to help Tris with her coat.

"Let me find, Lexa. We don't know the kind of state she's in right now--"

"Anya," Clarke practically whimpers as she stops zipping up her jacket to stare at her sister-in-law with tears in her eyes. "Please."

"Don't shut me out, Clarke. We need to deal with this together. We said we would."

"But--"

"Let me find her," Anya says sternly as she places her hands on Clarke's shoulder. "You get the kids home safely. Please."

Clarke looks like she wants to talk back again, to fight and to disagree, but she hears Aden's soft sobs and Tris' whimpers from behind her and reluctantly nods. Anya offers a flimsy smile as she lets go of her sister-in-law before grabbing her own coat and moving past them towards her truck. She powers it on and drives off, her adrenalin and desperation carrying her in hopes of finding her sister before it is too late.
"Lexa needs real help," Abby says as she places her hand over Indra's own. "She can't do this anymore."

"I know," Indra sighs sadly, tears dripping down her chin. "I just thought that maybe… that she… that she wouldn't end up like Titus."

"She won't," Abby reassures her as she holds onto Indra's hand like a lifeline. "I promise you, we won't let her end up that way."

"How can you promise such things?" Indra asks, her cries turning into heaving sobs as she jerks her head up. "Do you know what they did to my baby over there? Do you know what they've taken from her? What they've stolen from her?" Abby's lips quiver at the raw emotion in the older woman's voice and she hangs her head, her eyes sliding close as she thinks of the trip she has planned. She doesn't know if she's ready to find the answers to Indra's questions. She doesn't know if she's ready to accept the weight of seeing all that had become the youngest Woods sibling.

"What did they do?" Indra pleads desperately as she grips onto Abby's hands. "Please, Abby, tell me what they did to my baby girl? Please."

Abby tries to open her mouth to answer, but no sound comes out.

Indra collapses into her arms as Abby starts to cry harder, and the two women sob as they mourn the loss of a life that is still existing.

March 29th 2014, 22:22

Griffin-Woods Residency, New York

Clarke opens the front door and ushers her kids in. They drip all over the wooden floorboards, having been soaked by the rain in the brief few minutes they had to walk from the car to the house. Aden leads Tris through the hall and up the stairs towards the bedroom while Clarke ventures past the living room to grab some water from the kitchen. She walks in with a limp in her step, her eyes still blurred with tears and anxiety.

And then, as she makes her way through the den, her body tenses at the sight of Lexa sitting in the arm chair, staring blankly at her.

"Lex," Clarke whispers as she freezes. "You… wait… what is that?" Clarke looks to the metal rod in Lexa's hands, her fear growing stronger. Lexa barely reacts, her body stiff and eyes glazed. Clarke gulps but stands her ground, her eyes flicking from Lexa's blank stare to the metal rod. There's nothing but the sound of the storm raging outside their doors to fill the silence between them. Clarke shivers, still wet from the rain.
"Lexa," Clarke repeats her name again in a louder voice, "what are you doing?"

Lexa chooses to ignore her question, but does acknowledge her presence as she glances up, her eyes void of any emotion.

In a cold, even tone, she asks, "where are the kids?"

Clarke clenches her jaw anxiously. "They're upstairs, tucked in." Lexa chuckles lightly and stares at the floor again.

"Did they say their prayers? Get a bedtime story?" Lexa asks softly. She pauses before looking up, finally meeting Clarke's worried gaze.

"Did Anya read it to them?"

"Lexa," Clarke whimpers as she sees Lexa's fingers tighten around the metal rod. "Lexa… it's not what you think. Please let me explain."

"So you didn't sleep with my sister?" Lexa asks firmly, cocking her head. Clarke's jaw snaps shut and she looks down guiltily. Lexa doesn't even respond to her lack of argument. She simply goes back to staring at the floor. Clarke gathers her remaining strength and looks at her wife.

"Lexa…," Clarke trails off in a soft whisper, but Lexa doesn't stir. Her gaze doesn't move, either. Again Clarke repeats her name, but no response.

Silence.

Clarke takes a hesitant step forward, but immediately stops as she sees Lexa's fingers curling tighter around the end of the metal rod.

"Lexa?" Clarke asks, her voice starting to quiver. "Lexa, please just talk to me."

There's a pause, another rumble of thunder outside their house, and then Lexa finally responds.

"What am I supposed to do now, Clarke?"

Lexa's voice is even, but distant. It's empty, emotionless, cold. Clarke shivers at the way the words slide from her wife's lips like venom, at how each letter seeps through her pores and threatens to poison her from the inside out. Clarke can't even find the words to respond as Lexa looks back up at her for a brief second. Those hollow cheekbones and sunken eyes haunt her, and Clarke can't even breathe as Lexa eases herself up. Clarke stumbles backwards in fear as Lexa makes her way over to her, standing in front of her for a moment. Her eyes are vacant and dull. Those slender and boney fingers clench tighter around the metal pipe in her hand and it takes everything in Clarke to not flinch at the motion.

Without another word, Lexa walks past her still body and into their kitchen. The metal pole drags behind her, causing a grating sound to echo in her path. Clarke forces herself to follow, despite her instincts telling her to call for help. She's seen Lexa dissociate several times since having come home, but nothing to this level. She watches her wife limp into the kitchen and freeze, as if controlled by something external. Clarke's hand fumbles into her pocket for her cellphone, but before she can grab at it, Lexa moves. Clarke stays still as she watches Lexa turn slowly.

And then, in the softest of whispers, Lexa asks a question.

"Do you know what I did?"
Clarke swallows harshly as Lexa finally turns to face her, eyes blank and void of feeling. "Do you know what I did to get back to you?"

Shivering, Clarke stands still. She's doesn't know how to answer her wife's question, especially with how Lexa's hand grips the cool metal even tighter than before. She parts her mouth and tries to say something when suddenly Lexa's eyes flash and she steps forward, smacking the metal against the floorboard. The sound causes Clarke to jump and step backwards with a flinch, but Lexa's lips curl into a harsher snarl in response.

"Do you know what I did?!" Lexa screams at her as she raises the metal and slams it down on the counter. "Do you know what I fucking did?"

Clarke can't breathe as she watches Lexa tear the kitchen apart with the metal rod. She slams it up and down the glass cabinets, shattering it and causing shards to spill out onto the floor. Lexa glances back up, eyes wild and feral as she screams, "do you know what I fucking did to get back to you, you fucking bitch?! Do you know what I did?! Do you know how she fucking suffered because of you?! Do you fucking know what I did to her?!"

Lexa continues to scream out the same question as she smashes the rod into the stove, against the sink, upon every single item in the kitchen. "I love you! I fucking love you, Clarke. I love you and I fucking… I… I fucking… agh!" Lexa screams incoherently as she continues to smash up the kitchen. Clarke tries to find the words to comfort her, to bring her wife back, but she's terrified of what would happen to herself if she comes any closer to her wife in such a deranged state. She hears the thudding of footsteps and turns her head to see Aden skidding into the foyer, his eyes wide as he looks to how Lexa is still screaming and smashing the pole around as she continues to violently destroy the kitchen. Clarke reaches out to warn him, but Lexa immediately stills upon her movement. She follows Clarke's hand and stops screaming at the sight of her terrified son.

"And you…," Lexa sneers as she takes a step forward, the iron still gripped tightly in her hand. "You lied to me! You all fucking lied to me!"

"Lexa," Clarke tries to take her attention off of him, "Lexa stop, it's not his fault--"

"Shut up!" Lexa screams as she smashes the iron rod down on the kitchen table as she draws closer. "Shut the fuck up, you fucking cheating bitch. What have you done to my fucking house and my fucking kids? You fucked my sister in my own fucking house?! You fucked her in my own fucking house, you fucking cunt? How fucking dare you?! I love you, Clarke! I fucking love you and you fucked my own fucking sister in my fucking house!" Clarke flinches at the words, feeling each insult cut deeper as she realizes that she never should have hidden her affair for so long. She should have come clean when Lexa had first asked, but she didn't. And now, she can feel the effects of her consequences not only on her, but on her family.

"You're fucking my sister!" Lexa roars as she reaches out to tear at the handle of the fridge before yanking it back. "You're fucking my sister in my own fucking house, how fucking could you?! How could you do this to me, you bitch?" Lexa kicks at the fridge a few times before smashing it with the pole. Clarke's eyes fill with tears but she remains frozen, unable to figure out what to say or do in order to diffuse the situation. She can feel as Aden tenses from behind her while Lexa continues to scream out profanities and smashes up the kitchen in her blind, feral rage.

"Mom," Aden tries to intervene, but his voice quivers with raw fear, "Mom, please stop. Please you're scaring me…"

"Do you know?" Lexa asks the question as she whips around to face him. She hisses between gritted teeth as sweat starts to pool at her brow. She points the metal rod and waves it in his direction.
threateningly. "Do you fucking know what I did? Huh, son? Do you know what I fucking did?"

The metal rod drops and Clarke gulps again, trying to move closer towards her son out of a protective need. Lexa holds up her hands, trembling violently as she shows them to her wife and son, the wild look in her eye only growing stronger as Clarke watches her lose herself to her memories.

"Do you know," Lexa whispers as she stares at her palms, "do you know what these hands have done?"

"Mom," Aden whimpers as he takes a step forward. "Mom, it's okay--"

"No!" Lexa all but roars as she stalks forward. Clarke quickly steps in front of Aden, trying to keep herself as calm as possible. Lexa stops at the movement, her eyes growing watery as she shakes her head and starts to mutter to herself. Clarke shoves Aden back while Lexa's distracted and points to the stairs.

"Go," she whispers harshly, shoving him to get him moving. "Get to your sister and lock the door. Now, Aden."

"But--"

"Go," Clarke repeats sternly. "Go see Tris. She's ought to be terrified. Please, Aden. Go. I have this handled, I promise."

Aden reluctantly nods at the sound of Tris' name being dropped. He flashes one more terrified expression towards Lexa before he bounds away. Clarke lets out a relieved breath before turning to face Lexa, who's now staring at her palms again in fear and disgust. Clarke tries to step forward, thinking that by now Lexa must have calmed down, but when she moves, Lexa's distracted and points to the stairs.

"Go," she whispers harshly, shoving him to get him moving. "Get to your sister and lock the door. Now, Aden."

"But--"

"Go," Clarke repeats sternly. "Go see Tris. She's ought to be terrified. Please, Aden. Go. I have this handled, I promise."

"Lexa...," Clarke whimpers her name as she watches her wife shake her head in disbelief. "Please... I know you're angry. You have every right--"

"Do you know what these fucking hands have done?" Lexa repeats the question as she shakes her head again. "Do you know what these hands did to get back to you?" Lexa nods her head up, her eyes brimming with tears and her lips quivering as she lets out a croaking whimper. Clarke swallows down her own sob and watches as Lexa glares into her palms, tears finally starting to slip down her cheeks and over her jaw.

"These... these fucking hands," Lexa hisses between gritted teeth as she starts to slap at her head. "These fucking hands!"

"Lexa!" Clarke cries out as she watches Lexa slap and hit herself while screaming incoherently again. "Lex, baby please... Lexa, stop it!"

"I love you," Lexa cries as she claws at her scalp, "I love you so fucking much and she suffered because I came back to you!"

And then, Lexa stops. Lightening flashes outside the window as the storm continues to pelt down as Lexa's head eerily cocks up.

"You," Lexa breathes out as she stares at Clarke with pure hatred in her gaze. "You're the reason why she's dead."

"Lexa?" Clarke whispers as she starts backing up, her anxiety sky-rocketing at the sight of Lexa
stalking towards her. "Lexa, what--?"

"She died because of you," Lexa sneers as she clenches her fists. "It's all your fucking fault."

Clarke watches as Lexa goes to raise her hand, but before her wife takes a strike at her, she sees Lexa's eyes drift to the side in shock. Her arm lowers and her lips pull back into a snarl as she turns her attention away from Clarke and to the spot over her shoulder instead. Clarke watches in horror as Lexa reaches into the waistband of her pants and fishes out her gun, holding up and pointing it to the spot where she's staring.

And then in a low snarl, Lexa growls out, "what the fuck are you doing here?"

"Lexa," a familiar voice softly coos, "it's alright. It's just me. I'm here to talk."

Clarke turns her head to see Anya standing at the door with both of her hands up in a non-threatening way. Clarke holds back her gasp as Anya keeps her eyes on Lexa as she makes her way into the room. The older woman is soaked to the bone from the rain, but she continues to walk forward until she's standing right in front of Clarke. Lexa remains frozen with her gun held up like she's paralyzed, but Anya isn't deterred by the sight of the muzzle being pointed in her direction. Instead, she moves closer until her arms slowly start to wrap around Lexa's stiff frame, pulling her younger sister into her arms before she moves them slightly so that Lexa is not looking at her anymore. The gun drops to Lexa's sides, but still remains firmly gripped in her hands as she's overstimulated with emotions. Clarke watches as Anya shakily mouthes over Lexa's shoulder for her to go to the kids and to let her deal with Lexa. Clarke swallowed thickly, not wanting to leave Anya alone with Lexa's current state, but she knows that her children need her more. She takes one last look at her wife before she jogs away, tears streaming down her face in total shock.

"I'm sorry," Clarke whispers as she struggles to to hold herself together. "I didn't mean for this… I didn't mean for any of this."

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"Ssh," Anya coos as she lightly places her palm behind Lexa's neck to stroke the uneven tuft of hair starting to grow. "Ssh, it's alright."

Anya keeps her hands tightly wound around Lexa's back as she watches Clarke bound off towards the stairs. She feels her heart leap up into her throat as memories of when they'd been younger and Titus would have flashbacks start to run through her mind again. She remembers how Indra would try to calm him, but it would only result in a beating because the man was far too gone in the deep end of his bottle to know better. As Anya holds onto her sister's tense frame, she can't help but wonder if she's too late once again. She feels Lexa start to fight against her hold, and she assumes that she must have seen Clarke run past. She feels the cool press of the gun against her side and she stops struggling against Lexa.

"Easy," Anya warns as she tries to calm her sister down, "Lexa, it's just me. It's okay."

"Fuck," Lexa snarls, shoving Anya off of her violently, "fuck you, you son of a bitch. You betrayed me!"

"Lexa, it was a mistake," Anya whispers as she tries to reach for Lexa again. "Please, just let me explain."

"What the fuck are you doing, motherfucker?! You fucking slept with my wife?!" Lexa screams as she shoves Anya away. "You fucking bitch!"
"Lexa, for fuck's sake just listen to me and let me explain--"

"There's nothing for you to explain," Lexa growls as she tightens her grip on her gun. "You're fucking dead to me, you lying sack of shit."

Anya barely has time to react as Lexa raises the gun and aims it at her. She quickly sticks her hand out and wraps it around Lexa's wrist, twisting it so that as she fires, the bullet slams into the wall instead of her chest. Lexa snarls profanities her way, but she doesn't flinch. Anya only tightens her grip on her sister's wrist, causing the gun to clatter to the floor. Lexa pounces upon her, raining down a hail of punches and kicks. Anya manages to block most of them, but Lexa is relentless with her beating. Anya refuses to hit her back, choosing only to place deflecting blows to prevent herself from behind seriously injured. Lexa screams again, the force of her fists stronger than before as she starts to notice Anya's defensive techniques.

"You fucking coward!" Lexa shouts at her as she kneels Anya in the gut. "Fucking fight me, you fucking son of a bitch!"

"No," Anya splutters as blood pools in her mouth. "No… I'm not going to hit you, Lexa."

"You fucker," Lexa spits out as she grabs at Anya's head and smashes it into the corner of the cupboard. "You won't hit me? You think I'm weak?"

"No," Anya barely coughs out the answer. The blow luckily manages to catch her cheek instead of her temple, but it's dizzying nonetheless and words are getting harder to form. Anya slumps over, coughing as she tries to regain her bearings. "Lexa, just… please… stop for a second. Think about what you're doing. This is exactly what Titus used to do. You're not him, Lexa. I won't let you turn into him. Just take a second to breathe."

"Oh so now you want to be the hero, huh?" Lexa chuckles sadistically as she shoves Anya back into the cupboard. "You fucking hypocrite!"

Anya tries to respond, but she's too winded from the blow to do anything other than croak out something incoherent. Lexa, however, doesn't bother to give her a break before slamming her elbow down in the centre of her back and then kicking at her knees in order to drive her to the floor. Anya slumps against the drawers, her vision spinning as Lexa kicks her in the face with yet another rage-filled scream.

"I'm sorry," Anya coughs out as she struggles to stand back up on wobbly knees, "Lexa, I never wanted to hurt you like this."

"But you did," Lexa growls back as she punches Anya in the jaw again. "You left me there to die! So what? You could come back to fuck my wife?!"

"That's not… that's not what I wanted," Anya wheezes as she puts her hands up again, "please, Lex, just listen to me."

"No!" Lexa roars as she tackles Anya to the ground. "You fucking abandoned me! You left me there to die! You fucking left me!" Anya feels tears streaming down her face as she resigns on defending herself. She lets Lexa punch her into a pulp, no matter how fuzzy her hearing or how blurry her vision. She can't stop the dreadful ache in her chest at the raw truth in Lexa's words. Lexa's punches grow stronger with each scream, and with each punch, Anya feels herself growing number. She blinks her eyes open and barely makes out the pure sadness in Lexa's vicious expression.
"Lex…," Anya gargles on blood as Lexa wraps a hand around the base of her throat. "Please…"

"You left me," Lexa hisses, her voice cracking with sorrow as she squeezes her fingers. "You promised you'd never leave me."

Anya whimpers at the words as she feels Lexa's sadness turn into rage. Those fingers squeeze tighter and Anya can feel the sharpness of Lexa's nails cutting into her skin. She writhes under her younger sister, her own hands scrambling for purchase on those scrawny forearms in some wild attempt to push Lexa off of her. Anya's eyes remain open--or as open as they can considering the blood caking her eyelids--as she watches Lexa reach behind her for the gun that had clattered to the floor. Anya stops her movements as she sees Lexa take it into her hands before cocking it.

"You're my sister," Lexa breathes out as she looks down at Anya with a defeated expression. "I was your sister."

"Lexa," Anya croaks as she reaches up one last time to try and stop her sister from strangling her to death. "Lexa… don't… do… this…"

Lexa tightens her grip, causing stars to dance in the corner of Anya's eyes as she struggles to stay conscious. Lexa growls at her menacingly.

"Oh, I think I do."

Just as Lexa's about to place the gun against her, however, sirens start to wail in the distance. Lexa snaps her head up and Anya numbly recognizes the flashing red and blue lights bleeding in through the windows. Lexa seems to visibly deflate against her for a second before stiffening again.

The hand around her throat slackens, and Anya rushes to gulp in a mouthful of oxygen with a stinging wheeze.

"You called the cops on me?" Lexa asks as she lazily gets off Anya's splayed out body. Before Anya can give a response, Lexa tightens her grip on her gun and stands up with a low chuckle. Anya watches as Lexa loads and cocks her gun before making her way outside to where the police are waiting. Anya rolls over onto her side, coughing out more blood and saliva as she feels her ribs contract with the movement. She groans, but fights through her pain as she stumbles to her knees. She tries to stand, but her legs give out and she slams into the floor again with a harsh thud.

"Jesus, Anya!"

Anya cocks her head up to see Clarke's wide eyes staring at her from the bottom of the stairs. The younger blonde runs over to her in a hurry, but Anya shakes her head and flimsily points towards the door. "She'll get herself killed if we don't talk her down. Go, I'll be there in a second."

Clarke looks reluctant but Anya swallows a mouthful of blood before she grits her teeth and growls, "go, Clarke. I'm fine."

With that, Anya watches Clarke run outside to face the chaos.

---

Lexa stands on her front lawn, wondering how it all came down to this.

Only a few days ago she was with her family, thinking that perhaps there was even a small chance even for her to recover. Five years ago she was standing on this very porch playing catch with her son while her wife and sister were chatting with her mother-in-law. Lexa looks to the gun in her
hand before she looks to the slew of police officers in front of her, each of them watching her with worrisome and cautious expressions.

"Evening officers," Lexa announces nonchalantly as she steps further out into the lawn. "Is there a problem?"

"Gun!" One of the officers shout, and the men begin to maneuver themselves behind their respective vehicles for cover. Lexa frowns and shrugs, laughing as she watches one of them call for backup. The one beside him shouts at her to drop her weapon, but Lexa ignores them both.

Five years ago, she knew these policemen by name. Their families. Their friends. Their spouses.

"Lexa!"

Lexa turns her head to see Clarke standing in her doorway, her cheeks slick with tears that were still falling. She sees Clarke's gaze flicker down to her gun and she can't help but laugh again, shaking her head in amusement as she turns back to the police officers staring at her with confusion.

"What are you doing here?" Lexa asks them with an even tone. Her blood is pumping and her hands shake with adrenalin.

"Please, ma'am, drop your weapon!" One of them calls in return. Lexa shakes her head, stepping forward as her anger starts to burble. She can hear some of the police offers yell at Clarke to get back in the house, but Lexa isn't listening to them anymore. She steps closer to the the driveway.

"What are you doing here, huh? This is my house, my property!" She growls at them, raising the gun a little. "Where's your fucking permit, huh?"

"Lexa," she hears Anya's voice call for her this time. Lexa turns around to see her sister leaned over the railing of their porch, blood dripping down the side of her head and one of her arms tightly clasped around her ribs as she continues to stumble forward. "Lexa, stop and listen to them." The police immediately take sight of her dishevelled and wounded sister and begin their squabbling again, causing Anya to snap at them in frustration.

"For fuck's sake just shut the fuck up," her sister yells to the squad of policemen shouting about domestic violence, "this is a family matter. She's my sister, alright, just… fucking give us a second to just talk, alright?" Lexa watches the whole interaction with an arched brow. She sees Clarke worriedly glance over at Anya as she nearly crumbles to her knees at the last few steps of the porch, but her sister waves her wife off as she stands again. Anya hobbles her way down, trying to get closer, but the sudden movement causes Lexa to panic even more.

"Stay back," she screams, waving her gun in Anya's direction, "fucking stay back!"

"Okay," Anya hisses through the pain as she attempts to straighten up. "I'm gonna stay right here. Just… just look at me, Lexa. Focus on me." Lexa tries to stay focused but then the sound of the sirens catches her attention again and she wildly turns her head, her pupils blown wide.

"Lexa," Anya's voice pulls her back again, but she can't stay focused for long, "Lexa, you're my sister. Please. We're family."

Lexa only ignores her and turns back to the police officers. She jerks her head up and points to them with the hand not holding her gun.

"Do you guys know who I am?" Lexa asks them calmly, and a few police officers nod. She sees one of the officers starting to creep around and she panics, her eyes going wild as she raises her gun and
screams at them to stay back. There's more mumbling before Lexa glares at the cops.

"Huh, do you know who the fuck I am?!" Lexa shouts, inching forward again. "And stay the fuck back!"

"Yes ma'am," one of them replies as non-threateningly as possible, "you're a war hero."

A war hero.
A war hero that was selfish enough to beat another soldier to death in order to survive.
A war hero that killed three hundred people in a village.
A war hero that almost strangled her own sister not even twenty seconds ago.

"I'm no goddamn war hero!" Lexa snarls at them as she grits her teeth. "I'm no fucking hero, okay?! Do you know what I've done?!"

"Hey," Anya's voice causes her to snap back around, "Lexa, it's alright. Relax. Look at me."

"Stay back!" Lexa screams as she feels her head starting to pound with all the noise and commotion from the chattering policemen and her sobbing wife. "Stay back, just stay away from me." Anya nods and stays her ground, holding her hands up as best as she can given her current state.

"Put the gun down," another officer tells her sternly, "please ma'am, don't make us ask you again."

"What are you going to do?" Lexa replies with a harsh chuckle as she turns her attention back to them. "You gonna fucking shoot me?!!"

"Lexa," Anya warns, her voice growing weaker with each word that leaves her lips. "Don't do this, kiddo. Please just take a second and breathe."

"You gonna shoot me?!" Lexa screams, ignoring her sister again. She raises her gun into the air and fires it. "Shoot me then, you fuckers. Fucking shoot! Come on, fucking shoot me! Just fucking kill me already! Fucking kill me!" She hears her wife screaming for her to calm down, but she can't.

"Lexa stop it please," Clarke cries, "please just put the gun down."

"Don't you fucking talk," Lexa snarls as she whips around, tears in her eyes as she looks to the woman who used to be her wife. "Don't you fucking talk to me like what you did didn't fucking ruin me! You lied to me. I fought my way out of there to come back to you. I never fucking gave up on you! But you all fucking gave up on me? How could you give up on me? I thought I meant something… I thought you would always love me."

"I do," Clarke sobs as she folds her hands together in a pleading gesture, "Lexa, I love you more than anything. Please, you have to believe that."

"Stop it," she snarls back as she shakes her head in fury, "stop fucking lying to me. Haven't you done enough of it already?"

"Lexa--"

"No!" Lexa snaps as she shakes her head. "No, Clarke. I've had enough. I don't care anymore! I don't care about any of this anymore. I gave up every fucking thing to come back to you, but you gave up on me. You don't want me. No one wants me, not even my own damned kids. I'm done, okay?"
Lexa's voice cracks at the end, her eyes welling with tears as she looks to those blue eyes and yearns for some sort of familiarity or comfort; but all she feels is a void, a sense of estrangement so cold it nearly freezes her over. Lexa can't even hold back the hyperventilating breaths leaving her lungs as she shakes her head and looks away. She turns back to the police officers and she feels her anxiety start to rise, as well as the overwhelming need for an end to just come. Her body is aching. Her mind is tired. All she wants to do is just lay her weary head down and rest.

"You want to shoot me?" Lexa asks again, her voice only audible to herself as she dejectedly gazes at the officers, "then fucking shoot me."

The policemen are yelling, screaming at her to put the gun down, but she's not listening. Clarke and Anya are yelling too, but the sounds are all blending together into a mesh of mumbled incoherencies and unintelligible orders. The world starts to blur together and Lexa loses herself again.

The rain stops pelting down and instead, all she can feel is the cool sensation of snowflakes and the brisk winter air. She blinks again, only to find herself atop that mountain, surrounded by the leering soldiers. She looks down to her palm to see Costia begging for her to not take the pipe, to resist. She sees those wet brown eyes pleading for her to be spared, and she can't turn away from her former lover's bloodcurdling screams. She glances down to her hand to see that the pipe is not there, but her gun remains in place. She glances back up slowly to see Cage and the chief staring back at her. From behind them steps her reflection. The soldiers around them are still chanting, but those three just stare at her in silence.

"Kill her," Cage tells her in a stern voice as he holds up his own gun, "or she'll kill your entire family."

"Kill her," the chief says in a low chuckle, "and show me just how loyal you are, Captain."

"Kill her," her reflection orders with a wicked smirk, "kill her just like you've killed everyone else."

Tears well in Lexa's eyes as she looks back down to see the snow gone, replaced instead by a sandy plain. In front of her is the empty pit from her dreams, filled with nothing but dirt. She looks up to see no one there but herself. The voices linger in her ear, and she knows that maybe this was her fate all along. That maybe all those years of surviving, of running, of fighting and clawing her way back home, were all for nothing.

Maybe she never was meant to come back after all.

Lexa blinks again and sees the police officers still yelling, but she doesn't listen to them. She vaguely hears Clarke's agonizing scream and Anya's desperate yell as she raises the gun and cocks it. Tears well in her eyes as she takes a deep breath looks to where her reflection stands at the house across the street. Beside her stands Costia, Cage, and the chief. Each of them watch her carefully, waiting for her next move. Lexa makes eye contact with her reflection, who gives her the barest of nods, before all three of the hallucinations disappear from her vision with the next blink.

As a single tear slides down her cheek, Lexa raises her gun and presses it to the side of her temple. The motion causes more panic amongst the people watching her, but she can't make out each individual shout. She can't do it anymore. She's witnessed too many horrors, felt too much betrayal, lived through too much pain to keep going on like this. She feels her lungs ache and her heart drop as she feels the cool metal under the slick pad of her fingertip. She closes her eyes and breathes in and out, taking in her last moments…

"Lena! Lena, please! Listen to me."
Lexa giggles as Anya plops down beside her on the grassy field, eyes red and glazed over. A dopey grin covers her face as she watches Anya scramble through their bag for some Doritos. They both look out at the blood orange skies, wide-eyed and slack-jawed as they stare at the beautiful sight of the sun slowly starting to set behind the glorious Oregon mountain ranges. The two of them lay back against the bark of the tree, their hands loosely clasped together as they continue staring out at the beautiful landscape that surrounds them. Lexa sighs happily as the marijuana daze sets in, causing her to feel like she's floating on a bed of clouds. Anya's arm winds around her shoulder and she happily snuggles closer to her sister, resting her head upon her broad chest and smiling into the warm skin of her collarbone as they lay there in contentment.

"Listen to me," Anya repeats as she pecks Lexa's hair, "you're my best friend, okay? Griff's pretty cool and all, but you're the best."

"No you're the best," Lexa giggles back as she pokes her sister's side. "I love Clarke but I'll always pick you first."

"You're such a goofball."

"You're such a cheeseball."

"Oh my god do we have any cheese left?"

"No dumbass you ate it all," Lexa pouts as she goes back to resting her head on Anya's chest. "But I still love you."

"I love you too," Anya whispers back as she softly pecks Lexa's cheek. "You're the best sister a girl could ask for, you know?" Anya's voice suddenly becomes more seriously, and Lexa knows that they're starting sober up. "I mean it, kiddo. You and me? We're unstoppable together. No matter where we go, no one will be able to pull us apart. We've survived so much together, Lex. Everything we've been through, shitty times and all, I couldn't have asked for a better partner through life to help me get through it." Lexa's eyes mist at Anya's emotional confession and she nods into her sister's skin, clinging to her tighter as Anya takes her free hand and runs soothing lines down her back as the night sky starts to show.

"Promise me you'll never leave me?" Lexa asks, her voice vulnerable. "No matter what happens, you won't leave me right?"

"Even if I have to, I'd find a way to get to you," Anya says with a protective undertone to her voice. "As long as I'm alive, you'll never be alone. And even when I'm not here anymore, I'll still always be with you, Lex. I promise you, I will never leave you. It's you and me together, kiddo. We're all we got. We're family." Anya's voice begins to crack with emotion and Lexa can't help but nuzzle closer, winding her arms around her sister's waist.

"Together forever," Lexa murmurs as she closes her eyes against Anya's chest, "never apart."

"Maybe in distance," Anya finishes with another gentle peck to her forehead, "but never in heart."

And then, Lexa feels her eyes drifting close and slumber tugging at her bones to rest.

"Listen to me," she hears Anya's voice lingering in her ear, "I'm right here, Lex. All you have to do is listen and I'll always be there."

"Listen to me, Lexa. You can do it. Come back to me, kiddo."
Lexa blinks open her eyes and turns to see Anya staring back at her, bloodied and bruised. Her hands are on her cheeks, her thumbs shakily wiping away her tears. Lexa stares into those red-rimmed hazel eyes and she finds herself back on that grassy hill. There's no war, no enemy inside of her mind. It's just her and Anya, just how it's always meant to be. Lexa feels her hands shaking as she watches Anya feebly smile at her.

"That's it, come back to me. I'm right here," Anya whispers in a soothing voice. "I'm here. Hold onto me, Lex. I've got you."

"An," Lexa chokes out as tears keep dripping down her cheeks, "Anya… I…"

"What's going on, Lexa?" Anya asks her as she continues wiping her tears away. "What's going on inside your head, Lex?"

Lexa barely chokes out her answer as she lets her grip on the gun falter and waver.

She lets a few more tears fall before she softly breathes out, "I'm drowning, An."

And with that, Lexa finally lets go of the gun, letting it clatter to the cold pavement in one harsh thud.

"On your knees!"

The policemen charge in, ripping Anya away from her as she crumbles to her knees. She doesn't protest or struggle when she feels two policemen laying her to the ground and reaching for her arms. She stares at the ground hopelessly as she feels metal cuffs tightening around her wrists and her Miranda rights being read to her. She registers nothing but an empty sense of numbness as she's hoisted upwards and onto her feet.

Only then does Lexa finally look up to see the most devastating sight.

Lexa's eyes mist as she makes out Clarke's devastated face, her cheeks damp with sweat, tears, and the rain. Her wife is sobbing, a hand clasped over her mouth and her body trembling with the force of her cries. Lexa glances over her shoulder to where Aden is standing in the doorway, a terrified Tris clutching at his leg as they watch her being taken away. Lexa can see that she has a phone pressed in her shaking hands and it hits her then that it hadn't been Anya that had called the cops, but her own daughter. Lexa looks to those green eyes so full of fear, and her world crumbles. She doesn't have the words or the thoughts to figure out her feelings, especially not when she sees the sheer terror in Tris' gaze.

Lexa hangs her head instead, but before she can fully turn away, she looks up one last time to see Anya staring at her from where she's leaning on one of the policemen. One of her eyes is swollen shut and she's clutching her ribs tightly, but still, despite all her many wounds, she manages to give Lexa an encouraging nod and soft smile. The action causes a small dribble of blood to drip from her cracked lips, but Anya doesn't flinch.

At the sight of her weak smile, Lexa lets her head droop down to her chest as she's roughly forced into the back of the cop car.

As the car pulls away and her house fades from her view, and Lexa finally loses sight of the one thing that had kept her alive all those years.

Her family.

Chapter End Notes
The summation of the last scene for those who didn't want to read it because of the trigger warning: Tris outs Lexa to the family and this sets off Lexa's flashback. Lexa destroys the kitchen as Clarke tries to calm her down. Anya appears and Lexa nearly beats her to death out of her rage. When the police show up, they try to talk her down but Lexa is too far gone. She is about to pull the trigger on herself when she has a flashback to a memory of her and Anya, and when she blinks her eyes open, Anya is there pulling her from the flashback. Lexa gets arrested and is taken away from the home.

Thanks for reading!!!
Chapter Summary

Lexa is admitted to an institution, Indra rushes to check on her family after the incident, Tris' teachers are worried about her mental health, Clarke and Anya finally have a much needed talk, and Kane and Abby finally go to Afghanistan to find disturbing answers to only a few of their questions.

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: MENTIONS OF DEATH AND DYING, GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE, SUICIDAL THOUGHTS, AND BLOOD AND GORE.

TRIGGER WARNINGS (WITH CUES):

In the SECOND section, there is mention of ATTEMPTED SUICIDE and GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE. It lasts the entire section.

In the TWELFTH section, there is graphic mention of BLOOD AND GORE and DEATH AND DYING. It also lasts the entire section.

In the THIRTEENTH section, there is graphic mention of BLOOD AND GORE and DEATH AND DYING which starts at the beginning of the section and goes until Lexa says, "I--".

Okay so it's been 84 years I know, but I finally put a massive update on this thing. I've also been hardcore binging crime documentaries (especially Netflix's Making a Murderer) so I've been in a weird forensic mood as of late. This chapter is somewhat of a filler between the this part and the next.

I hope the update was worth the wait and I will hopefully have more soon!

The song in the quote is, "Especially Me" by Low.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

you've fallen in a slumber

just wake one more time

to miss or put asunder

would be a crime
some songs feel like butter
some songs sound like cake
this little number
is for your sake

'cause if we knew where we belong
there'd be no doubt where we're from
but as it stands, we don't have a clue
especially me (and probably you)

March 30th 2014, 03:15
Maimonides Medical Centre, New York

"Any drugs or alcohol in the last forty-eight hours?"

Lesa snaps her head up to the emergency psychiatrist sitting in front of her. She blinks twice, gulping down the knot in her throat before she shakes her head and looks back down with a frown. Her gaze falls to her lap, doleful as she stares at her wrapped knuckles with a forlorn sense of remorse. She can hear Anya in the back of her head pleading for her to stop, just as Costia had done that fateful day.

"Ma'am," the doctor asks again, breaking Lexa from her daze. "I asked you a question."

"No," Lexa mutters as she closes her eyes, "no drugs."

"Alcohol?"

"Not even a sip."

The doctor looks skeptical, but rescinds any further argument by simply scrawling something on his pad. Lexa's jaw clenches at the scratchy sound of his pen on the paper but drowns it out with her own thoughts. She looks up and glances over his shoulder to see Costia, the chief, and Cage staring at her with an expectant gaze, as if goading her to do something more, but she's too tired to acknowledge them.

What has she left to fight for, anyways?

"Major Woods," the doctor's voice interrupts her blank stare. "I'd like to take a blood sample, if that is alright with you?"
Lexa doesn't acknowledge him verbally, but manages to stick her arm out in a robotic fashion. Her eyes stay glued ahead, unfocused and dazed as she barely reacts to the slight pinch from the crook of her arm. She turns her head at the last moment to catch the remaining droplets of blood filling the small capsule before the doctor removes the needle. Looking at her arms, she can understand why the doctor would ask about drugs.

Her veins look shot to hell.

_I told you_, she hears Cage's voice in her head, _you can never come back from this, girl._

"Alright. Now just urine and saliva and we'll be on our way." Lexa grunts a soft, half-hearted chuckle as she nods to her cuffed wrists.

"Can't exactly piss with these things on, doc," Lexa tilts her head upwards as she scoffs out the remark, but there is no humour in her voice. Her back and shoulders ache, and the spotted white bandages at her knuckles have begun to lightly sting. The doctor eyes her wrists and gulps.

"I'm afraid that I cannot undo the handcuffs until we clear you," the doctor says nervously, clearly on edge with Lexa's nonchalant expression. "I think we can arrange for a nurse to help you with the process if need be--"

"That would be unnecessary, Dr. Stova."

Lexa's head snaps up at the sound of a familiar, deep voice. A chill passes through her spine as she straightens and swallows in agitation.

"Ah Dr. Wallace," the doctor sighs with relief. "I was just finishing up with Major Woods here--"

"And you've done a fantastic job," Dante says with a kind voice, his teeth flashing as he smiles and nods. "I can wrap things up. Why don't you head home? Tonight's been a long, rough night for the lot of us. You deserve proper rest, after all." Dr. Stova looks somewhat hesitant, but after Dante places an encouraging--nay, threatening--hand upon his shoulder, the nervous doctor parts ways and leaves the two alone in the room, bare for the security guards and the lone police officer at the door. Lexa is quick to notice that he takes the blood vial with him, rather than leave it alone with Dante. When the doctor has vacated, Dante finally turns back to face Lexa with a soft sigh and a slow shake of his head.

"I was hoping it wouldn't come to this," Dante murmurs sadly as he takes a seat across from her. "Your recovery hasn't gone as expected."

Lexa remains silent, staring into the older man's eyes with a blank expression. Dante clears his throat and continues, "and I know that the situation at home was far more volatile than expected. The officer out front gave me a full rundown of what happened tonight. It's a shame, isn't it? An officer as highly decorated and selfless as yourself betrayed by your own family." Dante murmurs the last part, shaking his head in sympathy.

"It's too bad," he says as he glances up and stares at her, "coming home only to find out everyone has moved on."

Lexa's eyes sheen and she hangs her head, taking the final verbal bullet to the chest as she slumps in on herself.

"I… I tried…," Lexa stumbles on her words, her voice croaking. "I fought to get back to her and I… I wasn't enough. I thought I could be okay."
"Lexa," Dante croons as he leans forward to place his hands on her drooped shoulders. "Sometimes, we aren't okay. Sometimes, we never will be."

"I should have died," Lexa mutters as she starts to tremble under his grip. "On that mountain, I should have died with them."

"But you didn't," Dante finishes for her, "and now you have to bear that burden… alone."

Lexa looks away, her teeth gritting as she holds back her tears. She feels Dante's thumbs lightly massaging her shoulder blades, and for a moment Lexa feels like she's comforted. It's a sickeningly sweet sensation, of trust and mistrust in a muddled combination. Something needed but revolting. It's something… when all she has is nothing.

And so, acquiescing to the war inside her mind, Lexa finally throws down her guard and shatters.

"Ssh," Dante hushes as he draws her into his arms, "I know what happened. I can help you, Lexa. You just have to let me in."

Lexa keeps quiet, ignoring the raging inferno inside of her that tells her not to trust this man. At this point, she doesn't have any other option.

Her wife has moved on with her sister, her kids don't trust her anymore, her parents are dead, and she has no friends.

"Okay," Lexa whispers as she nods her head slightly, exhausted by the long days and weeks of restless sleep. Dante smiles against her head.

"You're making the right choice, Lexa."

Lexa scoffs, hanging her head as Dante orders something to the police officer behind her. She remains motionless and numb, distant to the world, as the cuffs are loosened from her wrists. She doesn't make anything of the short walk from the ER to the cop car in the parking lot. The blurred street lights and trickle of rain are all background to the white noise echoing in her head. She doesn't remember the length of the drive, the music on the radio, or even the small talk between the officer and Dante sitting in the front seats. When the car parks in the lot of the institution she's been assigned to, Lexa doesn't even register the sinking feeling in her gut. Instead, she allows herself to be lead like pigs to a slaughter. She gives the minimum requirement of answers to the questions asked at the front desk, and doesn't even remember shrugging on the standard jumpsuit.

She's lead inside, her head to the ground as she tunes out the sounds of the screams around her. People are crying, yelling, shouting incoherent things, but Lexa pays not attention to any of it. She's lead to her room and given a small paper cup with a few pills in them. The nurse, a small elderly woman with kind eyes and a sympathetic smile, offers her a glass of water and tells her that she has a daughter who is her age. Lexa swallows the pills routinely, tuning out the attempted small talk from her nurse. She sets aside the cup and lays down, staring at the white ceiling.

Dante's words ring in her head, over and over again, and that's when she realizes that she didn't make the right choice in coming here.

Lexa made the only choice.
When she first got the call, Abby had frozen.

She'd only made out a few words—gunshots, Mama, 'Nya, help—but before she could reply she was running for her car. Abby was never one to act impulsively, but when the only image that rolled through her head was that of her slaughtered family, impulsivity was something instinctual. She looked to her phone, listening to the heartbreaking sobs from her granddaughter and the unidentified shouting in the background.

And it was in that moment, despite the guilt gnawing at her mind, Abby made the decision to finally do the right thing.

Looking back to her phone, Abby had taken a deep breath and closed her eyes as she set aside the long-held remorse.

It'd all gone on for too long.

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She arrives within twenty minutes, having run through two stop signs and speeding well above the limit, just in time to see the plethora of flashing blue and red lights from around the corner of her daughter's home. Abby slows the car to a halt as she thrusts open her door. She barely puts the car in park and yanks on the handbrake before she's jetting out of her vehicle in search of her family. Tears well in her eyes as she looks through the blaring lights for the sight of her daughter, relieved when she sees those knotted and tangled blonde tresses from across the yard.

Abby jogs up to where Clarke is standing and talking with a police officer, her chest heaving with exertion as she finally makes it to her destination. Clarke turns at the sound of her footsteps and Abby gasps at the sight of her. Her daughter's eyes are wrung red with exhaustion and guilt, engulfed by the sea of sadness in those tired blue irises. At the sight of her mother, Clarke's brave expression falters and her jaw trembles.

And then, from her cracked lips, Clarke cries out, "Mom--"

"Ssh," Abby whispers as she reaches out and tugs her daughter into her arms, closing her eyes as she presses her nose into her neck. "Ssh, baby girl. Momma's got you, okay? There's nothing to be scared of… I'm here now. I'm here… Momma's got you, sweetheart." Clarke's sobs turn into heaves, and Abby can't stop her heart from breaking as she grips her daughter closer to her chest. The thumping of Clarke's heart beneath her collar is a steady reminder of what she almost lost, what she could have lost if the night had gone the way it was probably supposed to go.

"T-They took her," Clarke stutters between gasping breaths, "they just took her away, Mom. I… they just took her away like she was a criminal…"

"Oh Clarke," Abby sighs, squeezing her daughter tighter. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I'm so, so sorry."
But apologies aren’t enough, are they?

The reality is that Abby wasn’t there. Abby didn’t see what happened, but clearly it was enough to reduce Clarke to a trembling mess of a human being, barely cognizant of her surroundings, let alone her speech. Clarke keeps repeating the same phrase like a broken record, stuttering and skipping words as she continues to shake in her mother’s embrace. Abby keeps her closer, trying to protect her from the darkness of their world.

When Clarke needed her most, she wasn’t there.

"I… I was so blind," Clarke finally croaks, having broken from her loop. "I didn't see how far this had all gone. I was… I was just trying to protect her. I just wanted to help her and I fucked it all up. I fucked up, Mom, and I broke my entire family apart because of it. Lexa didn't do this, I did."

"Honey," Abby sniffles as she hears the deprecation in her daughter's voice. "Please, sweetheart, it's not your fault--"

"No!" Clarke roars, shoving Abby away from her. "Enough of this! Enough of the sympathy. I don't need to be pitied. I fucked up, Mom. I slept with my wife’s sister. It doesn't matter that I thought she was dead. I should have known better. Both Anya and I should have known better to have done what we did. And after it was all over, when Lexa came home, we shouldn't have waited to tell her the truth. I had so many times to talk to Anya, when she wanted to talk to me about telling Lexa, and I was the one who shot her down. I was the one who abandoned her in the stupid, blind ruse I was creating for myself. I thought I was trying to save Lexa from more pain, but I was just being selfish in prolonging the confrontation."

"Clarke--"

"I did this," Clarke growls as she bunches her fists narrows her brows, "if anyone should be hated, feared, or disgusted with, it's me."

"Clarke Jacob Griffin-Woods!" Abby snaps in return, stepping into her daughter's face. Clarke cowers slightly at the rise in Abby's tone, but holds her ground. Abby's eyes water as she shoves a finger into her daughter's chest, her own lungs heaving as she fights back a sob. "You listen to me," Abby continues with a stern voice, "what Lexa did or did not do is not of your doing. Lexa made her own decisions, as did you. There is no culprit. Everyone in this family made mistakes. We all knew what had conspired, and we all stood by and let it fester and unravel. We are all to blame."

"My wife almost died today," Clarke says in a small, broken voice. Abby's shoulders slump a bit at the confession as Clarke's gaze flits over to the ambulance at the other end of the yard where Anya was sitting, oxygen masked strapped to her mouth and bandages covering her face. "And if the cops hadn't come when they did, Lexa would have killed her, too." Abby's heart drops at the helplessness in Clarke's tone, and she closes her eyes.

"My wife…," Clarke drifts off solemnly, "my wife tried to shoot her, and when that didn't work, she strangled her."

"Clarke," Abby gasps, her breath hitching. Clarke's eyes open, dull and lifeless as she gazes back up at her mother.

"Anya told me to take the kids and lock ourselves upstairs. Lexa… Lexa shot at her and Anya was quick enough to deflect it, but…," Clarke trails off again, her voice choking up as she relives the memory. Abby remains still, tense and silent as Clarke regains her composure and nods back to her sister-in-law, now somewhat conscious and looking over at them with one good, half-open and
bruised eye. Abby winces as she notes that the other one is fully closed and puffy. Black and blue coat her face in uneven splotches, like someone had painted the night sky but left out the stars.

"When I came down, Anya was barely breathing and outside…," Clarke's breath hitches as her hands begin to shake, "outside… Lexa was there."

Abby remains quiet, silent tears sliding down her cheeks as she turns her attention towards her distraught daughter.

"Lexa was outside," Clarke whispers as her own eyes fill with tears, "and she had a gun to her head, screaming at the cops to shoot her."

"Clarke," Abby repeats her name, words failing her as Clarke hastily wipes away her tears.

"And I was convinced for a second, you know? That she was going to do it. I saw her eyes, and I… I've never seen her look so empty, Mom."

Clarke sniffles again and places a shaking hand over her mouth as she cries, "God, I… I… I've never seen my wife look so alone."

"Clarke…," Abby whispers, her heart thrumming at an unsteady rhythm as she swallows down the pit in her throat. "Is Lexa… did she…?"

"No," Clarke shakes her head and immediately alleviates the one nagging fear in the back of Abby's mind. "Anya managed to talk her down." Abby sighs and sends a silent prayer to whatever deity might be watching overhead. She'd gone for years feeling the loss of her late husband. She wouldn't wish the loss of a partner, especially a life partner as close as she was to Jake and Lexa is to Clarke, upon anyone. But then, as Abby looks to her daughter, ashen and weathered down from the last few months, she knows that this pain is nothing she'd ever imagined.

It's one thing to lose your spouse, but it's something entirely other to go through it twice.

Only the second time, Lexa isn't dead.

But as Abby takes in the scene around them, of the cops and the neighbours looking on worriedly at the front of their steps; or to where Anya is now leaned up against the side of the ambulance, answering a few questions for the paramedic; or to where Tris and Aden sit on the steps of their cobblestone porch, knees pulled up to their chests and curled into each other with a scratchy-looking blanket between them to offer even a modicum of safety and warmth, both of them barely awake as they answer a few of the officer's questions; Abby surveys it all with a heavy heart and an even heavier mind, knowing that she had the authority to pull Lexa from this home, to provide her with proper care, but she put her heart above her head. As she glances over at her grandchildren, huddled and shivering by the front steps, and then to Anya propped up in the ambulance, her heart sinks.

Abby hangs her head in shame as she realized that she not only failed as her daughter-in-law's caretaker, but also as her mother.

Lexa may not be dead, but whatever this is--whatever she's become as a result of it all unfolding--is far, far worse.

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"Deep breath in," the paramedic gently instructs Anya as she struggles simply sitting up. "Take it easy, your ribs are gonna be sore. Luckily I suspect only deep bruising and maybe two or three of them are cracked. Your nose and face unfortunately took most of the beating."
"Yeah," Anya mutters softly, rubbing the line of her jaw and wincing softly. "I guess you can say that."

"Well, despite everything, I think you managed to walk away relatively unscathed. We'll take you in just to make sure everything's okay, but I doubt there isn't anything major to worry about," the paramedic tells her, offering a weak smile and a reassuring nod. Anya grunts her assent and the man walks away to fill out the rest of his report. Anya sighs and looks up to see Clarke and Abby talking in a heated discussion. Anya looks to her sister-in-law, her chest tightening at the destitute sadness in her posture. Anya notes the slumping of her shoulders, the down turn of her head--

"Anya…"

The ex-soldier glances up and sees her adoptive mother standing in front of her, hands cupped over her mouth in shock. Anya's eyes well with tears as Indra pads forward until she's only a few centimetres away. Anya can't help but let out a small croak of agony as Indra's hand reaches out to graze her cheek, her thumb lightly dusting over the bruises and bandages. She tries to hide her head away, but Indra shakes her head.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I should have done something sooner… I guess that I had blind hope that Lexa would just… get better." Indra's head bows, her voice defeated and small. Anya tries to speak, but instead of words, a hacking cough wracks through her frame. Indra steadies her as she finishes heaving, leaving her winded and dazed. Anya straightens up and grimaces through the shot of pain that courses up her frame.

As Anya looks up, she notices Abby making her way over to the ambulance, a solemn expression on her face.

"Hi sweetheart," Abby greets as she approaches the vehicle, "how are you feeling?"

"Like I've been hit by a car," Anya gruffly replies, wincing as another ache throbs in her shoulders. She glances over the older woman's shoulder to where Clarke is kneeling beside a tired looking Tris. Aden steps in beside her, looping his arms around her neck and pulling her into a hug. Tris manages to worm her way between the two and Anya looks on, happy at least that they have some level of comfort after their terrifying night.

"Clarke told me what happened," Abby says softly, turning her head to gaze upon her daughter. "It never should have come to this…"

"But it did," Anya sighs bitterly, looking to her bloodstained shoes. "Clarke and I hesitated for too long and it all fell apart. It's ironic, huh? We were trying our best to help Lexa, but it turns out that we just ended up hurting her the most. I… I don't even know if she'll ever forgive us." Anya tries her best to hold back tears, but she can't help but let a few slip. Her fingers clench into a tight fist as she sucks in a deep breath.

"Something isn't right," Anya whispers as she unclenches her fists. "She's snapped before, but never like that. She wasn't present, or even responsive. It was terrifying to watch her just stand there, gun to her head… to know that if it had been only a moment later…" Anya can't even finish the sentence without feeling bile rise up in her throat. She closes her eyes and attempts to ward off images of Lexa's bloody head, exploded beyond recognition after she'd pulled the trigger on herself. Abby nods and Indra swallows down her own fear as the women let silence encompass them.

After awhile, Anya decides to break it, glancing up at Abby. "Did Clarke say where they were taking her?"
Abby sighs, "we'll it'll be to the hospital first. Then I'm assuming that it'll be a correctional facility or institution. I can't tell for sure."

"I'm not pressing charges," Anya replies with a frown, before glancing to Clarke. "I don't think either of us are."

"It's not either of you that we need to be worried about," Abby says with a frown, "but the state."

"The state?"

"Lexa's a public danger now," Abby says with a shake of her head. "I've already overheard some police members whispering about Lexa posing a risk to the community. And even though I hate to even consider it, they've got a point." Anya opens her mouth to argue, but Indra quickly cuts in.

"She's right," her adoptive mother replies sadly, "Lexa's not in a good place, Anya. She can't be rehabilitated here. She needs real help, the same help that Titus should have gotten when he'd come home. We don't know how to help her. She needs something stable. Something dependable. Right now, we're all liabilities in Lexa's life. You and Clarke especially." Anya's head bows, but Indra sighs and gently places her hand upon her shoulder. "I don't mean it like that, sweetheart. But you know the truth, too. Right now, the last thing Lexa needs is you or Clarke interfering. Learning about your relationship has thrown her for a loop, and it's unfortunate how everything played out, but she needs time to process it all."

Anya digests the words, trying to not let them dig under the already festering wounds she harbours, but it's no use. All she can see is the look of sheer hatred and disbelief upon her sister's face when Tris had blurted out the truth about what had happened over those five years.

"I just want her to be okay," Anya croaks as she wipes away a trailing tear. She looks up to both women and sniffles. "That's all I want."

She doesn't voice her next thought, but from the looks on Abby and Indra's faces, she knows that they've understood what she meant.

I just want her to be okay, even if it means I'm no longer in the picture.

===

Aden lays his jacket over his sleeping sister curled up against his side as he watches Clarke finish talking to the sheriff. He looks to the slumped back of his mother and his head aches with the overwhelming emotions and memories of the last few hours. He'd barely recognized his mother as she'd stood there, metal pole gripped tightly in her hand and bloodshot, threatening eyes. He never would have thought that it would all fall apart.

Not like this, at least.

He closes his eyes, fighting back the urge to vomit as he remembers staring out his bedroom window at the sight of Lexa with the gun slick to her forehead. He sucks in a deep breath and steadies himself as he remembers Tris' wails, her hands covering her ears and begging for it all to stop.

"Ade?"

Aden blinks upwards and looks at his haggard mother, trying and failing to give her a reassuring smile. Clarke sighs and sits beside him, glancing at where Tris has curled up against his chest, her thumb in her mouth and her nose crinkled in slumber. Aden follows her gaze before letting his sights fall onto the porch steps. He can make out the now dried speckles of blood, and he follows them
upwards to where Anya is being loaded into the ambulance, Indra in tow. Both Clarke and Aden
watch as the vehicle pulls out of the driveway and heads down the street before leaving their sight.
Mother and son fall into a state of silence as they simply attempt to comprehend what had just
happened only a few hours ago.

"How are you holding up?" Clarke asks in a rough croak, slipping her arm around his scrawny
shoulder. "You feeling okay?"

Aden scoffs bitterly and looks down, biting his lip. "As good as anyone could be after watching their
mother almost kill themselves."

Clarke quiets after that, her head bowed and eyes closed. Aden makes out the barest of shivers,
and he immediately reaches for the small, unused section of the blanket before holding it up for his
mother. Clarke looks over at him, her eyes clouded with grief as she offers a haphazard smile and
tenderly curls into the warm material. The sheriff and the deputy make their way over to them, grim
expressions on their faces.

"Mrs Griffin-Woods?" Sheriff McLean addresses his mother in a soft, sympathetic voice. "I'm afraid
we're going to take a look at the house. We want to make sure that we get a full assessment of what
down tonight. I have a search warrant here for you to sign, if you can." Clarke sniffls and nods, her
hand trembling as she reaches up and signs the paper on the clipboard in the sheriff's hand. Aden
swallows thickly as the deputy glances at him, giving him a soft, encouraging smile. It doesn't serve
to make him feel any better, however, and instead, Aden feels just as scared as before.

"I've spoken with your mother," Sheriff McLean says as he takes the clipboard back, "we figured it
might be best if you stay with her for the next few days while we investigate." Clarke frowns, taking
a deep breath before she rises to her feet and stands in front of the police man.

"I don't know what there could be to investigate," Clarke argues weakly, "I've told you everything
that conspired earlier."

"I know," Sheriff McLean mitigates, "but we want to make sure that there wasn't anything else that
could point to a further investigation of Major Woods. For all we know, it could have been planned
out. When people come back from war, they change. I've seen it myself with my own brother."

"My wife isn't a murderer," Clarke snarls, her brows furrowing in disgust at the allegation. "How
dare you even consider--"

"We're not considering anything until we know what happened," Sheriff McLean gently assuages,
"and we won't know unless we do a thorough investigation. I believe in your trust, Ma'am, but we
need to take the necessary steps to make sure that we are confident in our decision on where to move
Major Woods for permanent rehabilitation. Although neither you, nor Captain Woods are pressing
charges, the state has a responsibility."

"A responsibility to help my wife," Clarke bitterly replies, shaking her head. "Lexa did nothing
wrong. I already said I'm not pressing charges."

"Regardless of whether you or not you choose to press charges, Major Woods--"

"Lexa," Clarke snaps, her voice cracking. "her name is Lexa."

The sheriff pauses for a moment before sighing, "fine. Lexa still strangled her sister, verbally
threatened you, and destroyed her own property. We have a right to know whether or not this is an
isolated incident, and based on what your neighbours have said about her behaviour, we're growing
doubtful of that. Your wife--Lexa--needs real help, and it baffles me that she did not receive it earlier." Clarke recoils, spluttering nonsense.

"That's… that's…"

"True," Abby's voice sounds from behind the officers, and Aden looks up to see his grandmother step beside the sheriff and the deputy. Clarke lets out a somber whimper and hangs her head as Abby comes to stand beside them, before winding her arms around her trembling daughter.

"We can't do anything for Lexa now," Abby murmurs to his mother, "we let this go on for too long, Clarke. Enough is enough."

Clarke digests the words, but still seems reluctant to accept them. Abby turns back to the policemen and offers them a slight nod.

"Thank you, officers. I'll take them home and we'll get in touch tomorrow. It's been a long day for all of us," Abby says kindly. The officers nod and give one last sympathetic glance at Clarke before making their way back towards their vehicles. Once the cars pull out of view, Abby turns to the two of them and smiles again, her lips cracked and her eyes bloodshot from crying. Aden can she's really trying to hold it together but failing.

"Come on," Abby tells them gently, "let's go home."

Home.

The statement makes his heart hurt, and he can't help but turn around to look at the house behind him.

As he gets up and hoists a sleeping Tris into his arms, he turns around and tries not to let it get to him that his real home no longer exists.

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April 2nd 2014, 13:10

Public School 131, New York

Tris sits at her desk, tuning out the sounds of children laughing and shouting around her. She can hear her teacher telling everyone to settle down and to begin arts and crafts, but she's not paying attention to Mrs Michelle. Instead, her eyes are focused on the blank page in front of her. She looks to the pencil beside her and hesitates a moment before she reaches out and picks up the pencil in her hand. Tris watches as her hand shakes and she gulps down the pit lingering in her throat before she puts the tip down on the paper. A small slice of lead shears off and Tris flinches.

And then, after she regains her breath, she starts to draw.

The laughter and sounds of pencils scribbling on paper soon turn into white noise, and Tris finds
herself lost in limbo. Her mind checks out, her thoughts all blurring together as her hand automatically starts sketching. She presses harder on the pencil, tears blurring her vision as she sketches harder and faster upon the paper. It's not until a gentle hand rests upon her wrist that she looks up and sees Mrs Michelle kneeling in front of her. The rest of her classmates are staring at her over their desks, each of the children looking equally afraid and confused at the state of her.

With her free hand, Tris reaches up and hastily wipes at her wet cheeks and looks away out of shame.

"Tris, honey, what's the matter?" Mrs Michelle asks, trying to take a glance at Tris' drawing. Tris doesn't answer, instead choosing to stare blankly ahead. The girl barely acknowledges her question and remains motionless. Mrs Michelle takes a deep breath and gently moves Tris' arm out of the way. Luckily, Tris doesn't seem to be resistant to her movement, so Mrs Michelle manages to get a good look at what the girl had drawn.

Terrifying barely scratches the surface of what she sees.

"Um," Mrs Michelle stammers as she quickly glances up at Tris' emotionless face. "Sweetie, why don't we go to the office?"

Tris doesn't respond, only continues to stare forward.

"Tris," Mrs Michelle repeats again, "did you hear me, love? I think we could pay Rosie a visit. I'm sure she has those chocolates you love so much?"

Tris doesn't move, but when Mrs Michelle gives her arm a gentle tug, the little girl slowly follows. She ignores the stares of her classmates as she is pulled into the hallway and lead towards the principal's office. Tris barely registers sitting down as she overhears Mrs Michelle talking with the school counsellor, Rosie. She glances up to see Mrs Michelle handing Rosie the piece of paper that had her drawing. Tris barely reacts as Rosie frowns and sighs at the photograph before glancing over at her. Mrs Michelle leaves the office, passing Tris a sad smile before heading back to the class. Rosie sets the photo down on the desk before standing and making her way over to where Tris is sitting. She kneels slowly, smiling at her.

"Hi Tris," Rosie whispers to her gently, "how are you?"

Tris doesn't answer, and Rosie sighs before reaching out to slowly rub her knee. "Do you want a chocolate? I have those crunchy ones."

Again, no response.

"Alright," Rosie sighs as she stands again, offering Tris a small smile before turning back into her office. She sits at her desk and picks up her phone, dialling a number before waiting for the person on the other end to pick up. A moment later, Principal Jordan walks through into office, and exchanges a few words with the counsellor before stepping outside and pulling out his phone. Rosie looks at the drawing at her desk before glancing back up at Tris worriedly. Despite her counsellor's nerves, Tris watches silently, not listening to anything she's saying.

Her hands stay tightly wrung in front of her and her mind remains blank.

No matter how many times Rosie speaks to her, she never once utters a single word.

===

Clarke jogs down the hallway of the elementary school. Her footsteps echo across the empty halls,
and she finds herself feeling more anxious as she approaches the principal's office. She's about to approach the door when the wooden door swings open, revealing Principal Jordan. The man looks stressed and tired, but nevertheless offers her a kind nod and a sympathetic smile. He extends his hand and she shakes it in greeting.

"Mrs Griffin-Woods," Principal Jordan says as he lets his hand fall, "how are you?"

"I'm fine," Clarke answers as she follows the man into his office, "and you can call me Clarke, sir."

"Very well, Clarke. Please, take a seat." He points to the chair opposite to his desk and Clarke obeys, wringing her hands together nervously. The principal looks hesitant for a moment, but then takes a breath and leans forward, his eyes taking on a more serious, and rather somber expression.

"I'm not going to draw this out for you, Clarke. I am sure you know why you are here."

Clarke nods, gulping down the pit in her throat. "Where is she?"

"With our counsellor, Rosie. She's not been very cooperative as she's been refusing to speak. I was wondering if you might have experienced any sort of familiar reception at home?" He asks the question as if it's redundant, and Clarke almost scoffs because it is.

"She hasn't spoken since..." Clarke trails off, unable to meet his gaze as she softly finishes, "since the night my wife... she..."

"Attempted suicide?"

Clarke's head jerks upwards, her eyes wet and her mouth hung open with shock as Principal Jordan offers a sympathetic nod. She is about to question how he would know, given that Tris hadn't spoken about it and they'd banned any news outlet from covering the story. But then, before either of them can speak, Principal Jordon slowly slides a piece of paper forward and gestures towards it with a somber flick of his wrist.

"Her teacher caught her drawing this during arts and crafts, rather violently she added." No further words are needed as Clarke looks to the picture. She cups a hand over her mouth as she looks at the drawing her daughter had created, one full of terror and an innocence long lost.

She recognizes a sloppily drawn stick-figure version of Lexa standing outside their house. An exaggerated angry face is scribbled on, followed by an object that looks eerily similar to a gun pointed to her head. Clarke looks up in the house to see two stick figures in the window, both of them small and crying. She then looks to the other end where she notices her and Anya messily penciled in, both of them in a state of disarray.

But that's not what catches her eye, however. It's not what causes her heart to leap in her throat either.

Over the stick-figure drawing of Lexa, Tris has spelled one word in all capitals.

*MONSTER.*

And then, above, near the window, two more words.

*SCARED. HELP.*

And finally, by Anya's sad face, it all connects in a sentence that make a chill run down her spine.
Clarke can't hold back the croak of her voice as a whimper crawls up the back of her throat. Principal Jordan hands her a tissue and allows her a moment to simply let out a few tears until she can regain her composure once more. After a few more minutes, and a handful of used tissues, Clarke finally clears her throat and glances up at the principal with a remorseful expression. She tries to open her mouth and speak, but it's no use.

Thankfully, Principal Jordan seems to understand.

"I know your wife was recently found alive after years in captivity and that her reinstatement into civilian hadn't quite had a... smooth transition. We've seen these kinds of drawings from kids who have parental issues or neglect, or even those with abusive and dire situations. With a child as young as Tris, her mind isn't developed enough to voice the fears in her head, and instead she has taken to drawing out those fears." Principal Jordan's voice is smooth and slow, but it doesn't take away from the biting pain his words deliver. Clarke closes her eyes, trying to keep it together.

"Your daughter is clearly traumatized, and from what I know, she didn't know much of her mother prior to her arrival, did she?" Clarke chews on her bottom lip and opens her eyes before bitterly shaking her head and looking down to her feet in shame.

"We told her stories, things and pieces that made up Lexa, but over the years, we slowly... stopped mentioning them. We didn't forget, Lexa. We just... we thought that she was dead and we moved on. And it was the toughest move I've ever had to make. I never grieved my father the way I grieved Lexa, and yet I think that I didn't grieve enough. I should have pushed for them to find her. I should have pushed for them to search for my wife, to hold onto the hope that she was still alive and she was coming home. I... I try to believe otherwise, but I know what I did. I gave up on her." Clarke clenches her fist as she grits her teeth and spits out the last five words with self-loathing and guilt.

Principal Jordan remains quiet as he digests the information. Finally he leans back and mournfully nods. "I apologize, Clarke. I can't imagine what you or your family are going through at the moment. I'm not a counsellor, nor am I a psychologist, but I know that in situations like these, the last thing anyone needs is to worry about the outside world." He reaches into his drawer and pulls out a pad and paper before jotting something down.

"I'm giving Tris a two week holiday where she won't be responsible for turning in any work or attending class. In that time, I want you both to get some help and to really work through the situation at home. I worry not only for your health, Clarke, but the health of your daughter. Adults can talk, but kids are difficult. Tris is probably feeling so many things that she can't focus on a single emotion. She's overwhelmed, she's scared, she doesn't understand what's happened, and she is releasing that fear into the classroom." Principal Jordan hands her the pad with a solemn smile.

"I'm sorry that this has happened," he says as he looks to the scribbled picture. "I know how bright Tris is and how enthusiastic she is to learn. Unfortunately, childhood trauma has a way of developing a sense of permanency into the human psyche. If not treated early, it can have longterm damage. I know that you and your family are under immense amounts of stress, but I want you to really consider the toll it's taking on your daughter. On the outside, Tris doesn't seem to be any different aside from her not speaking, but deep down I know she's feeling so much."

"I know," Clarke murmurs as she runs a hand through her messy hair. "I'll... I'll see if I can talk to her."

Principal Jordan nods before he reaches into his drawer again and pulls out a business card. "This is the contact card for a child psychiatrist that I know. I think it might help for Tris to see someone who
specializes in working with kids who've dealt with intense trauma. I took my son to see him after he found my ex-wife hanging in our closet. He was much like Tris afterwards, silent and brooding, but Dr. Vie helped him get back on track."

Clarke looks at the card and sighs before she nods, pocketing it in her jacket. She looks back up to the principal, defeated and exhausted.

"Can I see her?"

Principal Jordan nods and stands, escorting Clarke from his office and to where Rosie's room is. He knocks on the door and follows suite when Rosie's voice pipes for them to come in. Clarke follows the principal into the room and immediately finds her daughter on the couch, staring at the wall ahead of her. There are toys and puzzles and even some chocolate candies laid out on the table in front, but they're all untouched. Rosie sees her and gives her a small nod before standing. She murmurs something to Tris, but her daughter is basically catatonic as she ignores the words.

"Hello, Mrs Griffin-Woods--"

"Clarke."

"Right," Rosie corrects herself softly, "Clarke. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Clarke almost scoffs at the irony. A pleasure?

A pleasure is reuniting with an old friend after so many years.

A pleasure is going on a date with a new crush.

A pleasure is travelling the world and discovering yourself with someone you love.

What a pleasure is not, is finding out your entire family has splintered apart into unrecognizable and seemingly unfixable pieces.

But still, Clarke quietly replies, "it's nice to meet you, too."

Rosie nods, but she looks sympathetic. Clarke hates it. She hates the pity. She hates knowing that she's the reason all of this happened. She hates knowing because she knows that at any given time, she could have stopped it from unfolding. But she chose to be selfish. She chose to hide things and to lie. She chose to let her family suffer at the expense of her miscalculations and poor decisions, and now, she's not even sure there will be anything left to salvage of this family once everything all simmers down. Clarke glances over to Tris and her heart aches.

Tris, her miracle baby, the child she and Lexa tried for years to conceive, can't even look at her.

"Tris," Rosie's voice filters through her thoughts. Clarke watches as the counsellor kneels next to her daughter and places a hand upon her knee, giving it a tender and encouraging squeeze. "Your mama's here to pick you up. Are you ready to go home?" Tris doesn't reply and Rosie sighs.

"Alright, well I'm going to have a quick work with your mama while you pack up your things, okay? Principal Jordan will get your pack from class if you want to come with him." Tris doesn't reply, not verbally at least, but eventually she slides off the couch and follows the man out the door, without even sparing a glance at her mother. Clarke tries to not let it sting, but she feels the cold stoicism rolling off her daughter in waves.

After the door closes and Clarke is left alone, Rosie finally speaks.
"How are you doing, Clarke?"

Clarke can't even look up. She can't even answer. Rosie sighs again and reaches out to squeeze her shoulder in comfort.

"It's okay if you don't have words to explain. I can't imagine the pain you must be feeling."

More pity. More sympathy.

All of which Clarke knows she doesn't deserve.

"I just had a few questions," Rosie says, almost timidly as a result of Clarke's refusal to respond. "Is it okay if I ask them?"

Clarke nods, tiredly muttering, "yeah, okay."

Rosie smiles weakly and clears her throat before she asks, "are you still living in the home where all of this… transpired?"

"No," Clarke says as she shakes her head, "we're living with my mother until the police finish up their investigation by the end of the week."

"Are you scared to go back to the house?"

"No," Clarke replies as she glances up at Rosie with a puzzled expression, "it's my home."

"Is your son, Aden, scared of going back?"

"I don't think so," Clarke answers with a frown, "at least, he hasn't told me anything of being scared. Why?"

Rosie pauses for a moment before she looks up at Clarke earnestly. "Because I think Tris is terrified of going back."

Clarke thinks back to that night, of watching Tris and Aden on the steps as Lexa had been forced into the back of a cop car and taken away. She remembers the stale tears mixing with the rain upon her daughter's face, as well as the phone clutched tightly in her hand. She remembers how she'd looked to the beaten-up and bleeding figure of Anya, who looked on the verge of death from all the bruises and scratches. She remembers how Tris had screamed when Anya almost collapsed in the paramedic's arms, of how she had bolted towards her almost immediately.

"Tris called the police that night, didn't she?" Rosie asks, her voice quiet and low, almost hesitant. Clarke sucks in a breath and grits her teeth.

"I…," she trails off, looking away as she tries to avoid reliving the events of the night, no matter how much they crawl up on her. She hadn't spoken to her daughter about that night, much less about what had been said over the phone to the police. "Yes. I believe that she did."

"She fears Lexa," Rosie finishes, looking at the couch where her daughter had previously sat. "She sees her as a monster, not as a mother."

"She never got to know Lexa," Clarke weakly defends her wife, "not the one before she'd been captured."

"And that's part of the problem, isn't it? Tris doesn't see Lexa as her mother, but Anya, her aunt."
Clarke's head jerks up and Rosie gives her a sad, flimsy smile before turning around and reaching for a file on her desk. She opens the folder and takes out a few pieces of paper before handing them over to Clarke. The blonde flips through each page, the guilt festering deeper with each one.

"Every picture she has labelled as 'My Family'," Rosie says softly as she follows Clarke's motions, "but no drawing contains Lexa as her mother."

Clarke stops on the last picture, her heart lurching into her chest as she sees what seems to be a messy sketch of Lexa in stick-figures again.

And just like before, the words around the picture are the same as the one she'd seen earlier.

**MONSTER.**

**SCARY MONSTER.**

**MONSTER HURT MAMA.**

**MONSTER YELL AT ADEN.**

**MONSTER YELL AT ME.**

**MONSTER FOLLOW ME.**

And then, at the bottom in red crayon and scratchy writing, Clarke's already broken heart shatters even further.

**HELP.**

There are giant Xs' through Lexa's face and body, aggressive scribbles and scratches as if she could magically erase her from the drawing. In every sketch, there's a smaller stick-figure crying or looking scared and Clarke knows, despite everything she wishes not to be true, that Rosie is right.

"I know Lexa is your wife and Tris' biological mother, but…," Rosie trails off, unsure of how to word the following suggestion. Clarke's grip on the pictures tighten until she glances up, needing to look into the counsellor's eyes as she confesses to what they are both thinking.

"I think that Lexa…," Rosie stumbles on the words before she finally finishes, "I think that Tris shouldn't see Lexa, at least right now."

Clarke's furious, but her argument is weak as she struggles to growl out, "how dare you? Lexa is her mother--"

"And we both know, and as it shows here, Tris' main source of fear," Rosie finishes sternly, though her eyes look remorseful and solemn. Clarke shakes her head, tears dripping down her cheeks as she takes a seat upon the couch, her head bowed into her chest as she starts to cry.

"I'm sorry, Clarke, but I don't think that Lexa being around Tris will serve her any good if she stands a chance at recovering from this trauma," Rosie whispers softly, taking a seat beside the devastated woman. "I know you want to save everyone, but sometimes, you just can't."

"She's my wife," Clarke spits between a hoarse croak, "she's my wife and I love her--"

"And Tris is your daughter," Rosie tells her, furrowing her brow. "She's a child, Clarke. Lexa is an adult. Tris needs her mother's comfort. Lexa can handle herself. And right now, I personally think that some space might do better--"
"You don't know shit," Clarke snarls as she stands, slamming the pictures on the table. "You don't know me, my family, or my wife, you hear?"

Rosie remains quiet for a moment before she sighs and looks to the drawings with a solemn expression. "I don't, you're right. I won't ever know what transpired that night," she says softly before turning her gaze back up to Clarke and hardening it. "But what I do know is that if you don't get your daughter the proper help that she needs, then I will have no other choice than to call CPS and report you for neglecting your child."

Clarke rears back as if slapped, her eyes wide and mouth open in shock. "How dare you threaten me and my family after all we've been through!"

"Clarke," Rosie says sternly as she rises to her feet. "You're thinking too much about things that aren't in your realm of control. How Lexa behaves and reacts is not in your power. She is an adult who is capable of making her own decisions. Tris is a child who doesn't understand right from wrong. She doesn't understand why her mother put a gun to her head or why she acts strange. She tried to understand, and she was met with hostility from her mother. No matter what you've tried to do in bringing them together, neither of them were ready for it." Clarke seethes, blinking back tears as Rosie gathers the drawings in her hands and places them back in the file on her desk before tucking the folder away safely.

"I'm not trying to threaten you, Clarke. I don't want to cause you anymore pain than what life has currently dealt you, but I'm telling you now, you cannot let this go on any longer. It takes years to build up trust and only seconds to lose it. Do not let that happen to your relationship with your daughter. Right now, your kids need you. They don't need their grandmother or their aunt. They need you, Clarke. No one else can support them like you can," Rosie tells her gently, even though there is still a heavy seriousness to her tone that makes Clarke's stomach churn anxiously.

"Please," Rosie pleads with her, folding her hands in front of her, "you need to stop this now before you aren't able to any longer."

Just as Clarke goes to reply, there's a knock on the door followed by the knob turning. Both women turn to see Principal Jordan standing in the doorway with Tris in tow. Clarke's eyes shift down to where her daughter is standing, her body placed behind the older man's leg. Her stare is fixed upon her mucky sneakers and her hands are shaking, no matter how well she manages to hide them in the pockets of her dress.

"Clarke," Rosie's voice pulls her back as Clarke glances over at the counsellor. "Think about what I've said, okay?"

Clarke, too tired to argue and not wanting to see as though Tris had come back, slowly nods and turns back to face her daughter. She takes a few trembling steps forward before dropping to her knees in front of Tris. She attempts to offer a smile, but it comes out broken and weary.

"Hey baby girl," Clarke whispers as she reaches out to gently graze her cheeks. She hates the way Tris flinches away and lets out a heartbreaking whimper, but she shoves aside the sharp pang of remorse as she places her hand back in her lap. "You ready to go home, little one?"

Tris doesn't reply, nor does she nod or make any gesture to indicate she's heard her mother speak. Clarke gulps and tries again.

"We can watch The Little Mermaid and eat some of those caramel popcrons. How does that sound, sweetheart?"
Again, nothing.

Clarke sucks in a deep, shaky breath as she extends her hand palm-up, waiting for her daughter to take her hand and let her lead them away.

It takes minutes—minutes that feel like hours—until Tris' tiny hand places itself in her palm and lightly squeezes. Clarke's heart leaps for joy, even though it's bittersweet. She takes the small gesture as a single victory in her never-ending war to find some sort of absolution. She stands and Tris comes to stand at her side, her head slightly tucked into the soft edge of her thigh. Clarke gives her hand a tighter squeeze, letting her daughter know that she is not going anywhere anytime soon. She ducks her face further into her thigh and Clarke gives her a watery smile as Tris looks up.

And then, with every ounce of courage and strength she has left, Clarke warmly murmurs, "let's go home, kiddo."

April 4th 2014, 12:45

VA NY Harbor Healthcare System, New York

Kane sits at his desk, swirling the half empty bottle of scotch in his palm as he stares at the eight four-inch binders detailing Lexa's service history. He stares at the most recent entry, of her service in Tagab, weeks before everything had gone to hell. He tries to piece together some part of the original mission that might have led to the ambush, but he turns up dry each time. Sighing tiredly, the man sets aside his glass and hangs his head. After taking a moment to breathe, Kane's head nods upwards to a picture of him and Alexander Woods, Lexa's and Anya's father, on his desk.

"I'm sorry," Kane murmurs to his late friend and brother-in-arms, "I made you a promise and I broke it."

Glancing back down at the files, Kane can't help but grit his teeth in frustration. He reaches for his glass and takes another burning sip before reaching for another binder detailing Lexa's early history with the Army. He reads through her psych evaluation, her educational background—everything that spelled out Lexa's early life—and he finds himself tearing up in nostalgia at some of the pictures of Lexa and her early squad. She sees her first picture, as taken with himself and Thelonius Jaha. Anya stands beside her, looking proudly over at her sister rather than the camera.

As he flips through the various regiments and squadrons Lexa had been involved in, he notices that in every picture, Anya always looks to her. It's as if the younger Woods sibling is the only light and purpose in her life, and in someways, Kane knows that the statement isn't all that false. From the get go, he'd understood that Anya's entrance into the Army was solely dependent on Lexa's decision to protect and serve. Anya, despite her great shot and fast legs, never had a bone in her body that propelled her to want to be a soldier. He remembers Alex's wife as being the same. Anya always did take more after their mother, always the peacemaker and the more docile one between the two, while Lexa was a carbon copy of his best friend—ever stoic and brave. She was pragmatic and willing to
sacrifice whatever she deemed necessary to save as many as she could.

Anya was the protector, Lexa was the leader.

Despite the current mess, Kane finds himself smiling as he realizes that nothing about that has ever really changed.

It had come to him as no real surprise when he'd learned that Anya was the one to talk Lexa down from her own end. Just thinking about it makes Kane feel a multitude of emotions—anger, fear, sadness, guilt, relief that she'd not actually succeeded at ending her own life. Part of him wishes that he'd been there, that he could have helped reach out and centre the woman he'd come to think of as his surrogate daughter over the last few years, but he also feels a certain degree of relief knowing that he hadn't seen it. He looks to the picture of Lexa and Anya after they'd first made Spec Ops and he sees the pure love and devotion in both their eyes, and that's when he knows that he would have frozen in fear of losing her.

As Kane is about to ponder some more thoughts, a knock on the door of his office startles him. He glances up to see Abby standing in the doorway with two brown bags in her hands. Deep bags hang under her eyes and her cheeks look gaunt, but Kane still thinks she's the most beautiful woman he's ever laid eyes on. He stands and offers her a gentle smile, beckoning her into the room with a warm greeting before he sits back down. Abby closes the door behind her before walking over and setting the bags down upon his desks. She takes a seat with a tired sigh, looking at his glass.

"It's a little early to be drinking, isn't it?"

Kane chuckles and reaches for his scotch, giving it another twirl. "It's a single malt that the governor gave me. It's a temptation I can't refuse."

"Or a distraction that you can't ignore," Abby suggests otherwise, her voice warm with tease. Kane smiles and nods, setting the glass down.

"You neuroscience types have a way of figuring us common-folk out pretty well, huh?"

"Call it intuition."

"Call it being nosy," Kane replies as he leans back in his chair. "Would you like a glass?"

At first, he thinks that she will deny, as Abby almost always does whenever she comes to visit him during his lunch breaks, but then she hears the woman sigh and shrug. "I suppose," Abby says as her lip curls up in a small smile. "I need a break from reality."

"Don't we all?" Kane muses as he rises to his feet and reaches for the glass bottle on the drawer behind him and a spare glass.

"I'll have it neat," Abby says as Kane goes for the ice container, "I need something strong, not diluted."

"Tough day at work?"

"More like at home."

"Hmm," Kane says as he sets the glass down. He watches as Abby tips the contents back within a single gulp, without flinching. "Clarke okay?"

Abby sets her glass down and swallows, taking a deep, weighted breath. "As good as one can be
nowadays, I suppose."

"The kids?"

"One's coping with silence, the other one is barely around."

"I hate that this is happening to them," Kane mutters as he shakes his head. "The exact thing that Lexa never wanted, and now…"

"She's become the perpetrator," Abby quietly finishes. "However unwilling and unaware she is of what she's doing, she's… she's become Titus."

"Which is why we have to figure out what happened," Kane tells her as he looks back to his files and then back up at Abby. "Are you ready?"

"To go to the very camp where my daughter-in-law was beaten and tortured for four years of her life?" Abby asks, her voice hollow and raw with emotion as she grabs the glass container of scotch and pours herself another shot before downing it. She looks at the empty glass and sucks in a deep breath, glancing back up at the weathered veteran with a slight grimace. "I think that should answer your question, Marcus."

"I've seen the camp," Kane murmurs as he pulls out another folder, "but since there'd been so much damage, we had to wait for an excavation team to come in and dig up whatever remained after the airstrike that destroyed the village. I've spoken to my contact in Tagab, and he's arranged for private transportation to the site the day we arrive. The sooner we know what happened, the sooner we can get Lexa the help she needs."

"But what if it's not enough?" Abby quietly says as she fiddles with the rim of her glass. "I mean, how much can the human mind take before it reaches its limits? Lexa fought her way back from the dead only to find out that the only person she survived for betrayed her with her own sister?" Kane goes quiet, mulling over the harsh truth in his friend's voice. He doesn't want to consider the possibility of Lexa being beyond the point of saving. He glances up at Abby and sets his jaw, giving her a determined expression that causes the woman to arch her brow in confusion.

"It's never not enough," Kane adamantly tells her, "because a woman that endured four years of torture and pain and survived, she isn't someone that anyone should give up on. No matter what happened, I think we both can agree that all of us want nothing more than to help her. Even if Lexa never forgives Anya or Clarke, or even wants to see them--or even us--ever again, as a person, she deserves a happy, peaceful life." Abby digests his words and nods slowly. Even though the thought of Lexa wanting to exclude herself from their lives induces a fear within him, he knows that situations like these require everyone to think outside of the immediate vicinity of family members, and more of a whole-scale recovery.

"So we fly out the day after tomorrow," Abby says with a bittersweet hopeful tinge to her voice. "For better or for worse?"

Kane pauses as he looks back down at his files, before nodding back up at the woman with a steely, determined gaze.

"For better or for worse."
Any'a's on the couch watching the news when she hears the doorbell ring. She sighs and rises to her feet slowly, limping the small distance to her front door in a few moments. She peeks through the peephole to see Clarke leaned up against the side of her doorframe with her head bowed.

Any'a's throat tightens as she realizes that this is exactly the way they'd been five years ago, only a few months after Lexa had been declared dead. She remembers having driven on her bike to Clarke's house, unsure and completely unaware of her own drowning grief. And now, as she stares through the small hole at her sister-in-law and former lover, she realizes that they'd made all their progress only to hit square one again.

She opens the door and Clarke nearly falls forward from the jolting movement. Any'a catches her, huffing when weight falls on her cracked ribs.

"Sorry," Clarke mumbles, easing herself off of Any'a with a wince. "I forgot about the bruises."

"Clarke," Any'a replies, ignoring the apology that she knows is a distraction technique, and cuts to the chase. "What are you doing here?"

Clarke is quiet for a while before she sighs and looks up. "I'm here," she says with a steady tone, "I'm here to talk."

"About?"

"Us," Clarke says bluntly, "about what we're doing, what we've done, what we're going to do…"

Any'a stays silent for a few moments before she asks her own question. "You're sure you're ready?"

"Ha," Clarke snorts sarcastically. "My wife was just arrested for almost killing her sister and then herself. Now's as good a time as any, right?"

"Ha," Clarke snorts sarcastically. "My wife was just arrested for almost killing her sister and then herself. Now's as good a time as any, right?"

"Clarke," Any'a frowns as she crosses her arms in front of her chest defensively, "if you're gonna act immaturely then--"

"No," Clarke soars instantly, shaking her head as she holds up her hand apologetically. "No… I just… I'm nervous. Scared… well, terrified really."

Any'a remains quiet, uncertain of how to respond. When Clarke notices her hesitance, the younger woman sighs tiredly. "Look… I know that both of us were trying so long to find out ways to tell her, but neither of us really planned for what to do when she would find out."

"We can't talk about that yet," Any'a says and Clarke's head snaps up in confusion. Any'a clears her throat. "Not until we talk about us."

Clarke opens her mouth and then promptly closes it again. Any'a steps aside and gestures towards the couch. "Come in. Ma's out right now so we have the house to ourselves for a few hours, which I think should be more than enough time to talk about everything." Clarke digests the proposition and
follows timidly. Anya closes the door behind them and trails after Clarke until they're both sitting on the couch, silent and tense.

"I'll start," Anya decides, seeing as though Clarke still had her eyes trained on her lap. "I… I just need to know… when you and I--"

She tries not to choke up when she sees Clarke flinch from the corner of her eye. She clears her throat and continues, "when you and I were together that night, the night before we got the call from Kane saying that they'd found Lexa, what you said that night… that you loved me… was it true?"

Anya braces herself for the answer, for the blatant negligence and denial, but Clarke surprises her by softly nodding.

"I did love you," Clarke admits quietly, her eyes lifting softly to meet her own. "I loved you differently than I love Lexa."

Anya gulps, clenching her clammy fingers into her jeans as Clarke sighs and continues. "I loved you for your bravery, for your courage, for your kind heart under your tough shell. I loved you for taking care of my kids when I couldn't, for being a mother when they'd just lost one. I loved you for your humour, for your ability to show me that there was more to life, even though it had taken everything from you." Anya's eyes well with tears and she clenches her jaw shut. Clarke watches quietly, pausing to see if she's okay, but Anya just nods, willing for her to continue through the confession.

"I loved you," Clarke whispers softly as she adjusts herself so that she's sitting next to Anya a bit closer. "I did, An. I really did."

"And it went away as soon as Kane called, right?" Anya tries to keep the bitterness out of her voice, but she can't help it. She knows that Clarke is Lexa's wife, and she wants nothing more than her baby sister's happiness, but she can't help the all too familiar feeling of abandonment creep up on her all over again. She grits her teeth and looks away, ashamed for the tears pooling in her eyes as she braces herself for Clarke's answer.

"No," Clarke states quietly, "I still loved you. I just… I was torn. I didn't know what to do and so I pushed you away. I made you the villain because I couldn't accept what I'd done. Some sick part of me thought that because you handled when Lexa'd died, you would be able to handle it again. I threw it all onto you because I knew you would be able to take it and because I was selfish and scared. It's no excuse, it's just the truth. A shitty truth, but I guess I'm a shitty person so it all adds up in the end." Clarke sadly chuckles the last part through wet, heavy tears and a croaked voice.

"Yeah," Anya replies bluntly. "You are a pretty shitty person, Clarke."

Clarke flinches, but doesn't raise her head until Anya reaches over and gently tips her chin up with her finger. Clarke's gaze grows confused.

"You're a shitty person who made a selfish decision, twice. You put your own feelings before everyone else's, even when you thought you were doing what you were doing for the best interests of others. You lied to me, pushed me away, spat on me, kicked me down and abandoned me." Clarke's lip begins to tremble, even though Anya's words are not told to her in a loud or even angry voice. No, Anya remains even-tempered and calm as she continues, "you decided that only you knew what was right for Lexa, despite having had no prior experience with being a soldier or having PTSD."

Clarke goes to hang her head when Anya says, "but you're human, Clarke. And humans are shitty people."
Clarke glances up again, about to speak when Anya finishes, "we both are shitty people, Clarke. There's no beating around that. We both fucked up by not telling Lexa, but if you were at all wondering, I loved you too. You weren't a replacement for Lexa. You were someone when I had no one. You were there when I couldn't hold my head up. You saved me countless times, Clarke. We made a mistake, but we can't change the past. The only thing we can do is move forward. We have to move past avoiding and blaming each other for everything. We have to move on, not just for us, but for Lexa."

Anya watches as Clarke allows her words to digest before her sister-in-law glances up and looks at her seriously, her gaze apprehensive.

"Do you still love me?" Clarke asks in a quiet voice. Anya doesn't react, bare for a soft breath.

"Do you still love me?"

Clarke looks down at her lap again, her brows furrowed in confusion and frustration. "I... I don't know."

Anya sighs and meets Clarke's tired gaze when her head nods back up, "neither do I."

"So then what do we do?"

"We just have to move past it, Clarke. We can't be together," Anya murmurs as she reaches out to gently squeeze Clarke's hand. "That's my sister that you love, and I did promise you that I would kick your ass if you broke her heart all those years ago." Clarke chuckles sadly, a few tears slipping down her cheeks as Anya sniffs and holds back her own urge to cry. She reaches out and slowly tucks a stray strand of hair behind Clarke's ear.

"Can I ask you something and can you answer honestly?" Anya asks softly, her voice croaking. Clarke swallows thickly and nods, bracing herself.

"Do you still love her?" Anya asks, her voice low and tense. "Are you still in love with Lexa, even after everything that's happened?"

Clarke doesn't even hesitate as she chokingly replies, "I don't think I could ever stop loving her, no matter how broken and changed she may be."

Anya's smile is watery and her lips tremble, but she can't help but feel a liberating feeling in her chest. "You mean that?"

"With every fibre in my heart," Clarke swears as she nods, "Lexa's my soulmate. No matter what happens after all of this, even if she never wants to see me again, I will always love her until my last breath--beyond that even. My heart belongs to her, no matter if it strays now and again."

"And you'll protect her?" Anya asks, her voice croaking. "You'll be there for here, even when it gets too tough to even breathe?"

"I'd give her the last of my oxygen if I needed to," Clarke says, her voice growing stronger and more confident. "I would die for her, An."

"Then do me a favour," Anya says as she leans back and gives Clarke a sad smile. "Live for her. Smile for her. Love her for everything she is, and everything she might become. Love her and cherish her and don't you dare give up on her ever again, you hear me? Lexa's fragile now, but she's still Lexa. She's still that quirky nerd with a heart the size of the universe. She needs you to see that she's still there." Clarke's brow arches suspiciously.
"Anya," Clarke says as she notices the tears in the older woman's eyes, "what are you suggesting?"

Anya glances over her shoulder to a picture of her and her sister on the wall behind them from when they'd been just kids and the happiness on Lexa's youthful face makes the next thing she says all the more worth it. She turns to Clarke and offers her a watery, bittersweet smile and a nod.

"I know how we are going to give my sister her life back."

April 4th 2014, 15:56

Stewart Air Force Base, New York

Clarke sits beside her mother in the car, the two of them both waiting for Kane to show up for their flight to Afghanistan. Clarke sighs and leans her head against the headrest, her eyes slowly sliding shut as she tries to fight back the waves of exhaustion threatening to tide her over. Beside her, Abby fumbles with a strap on her backpack before clearing her throat. Clarke blinks her eyes open blearily and nods at her mother.

"I'm sorry," Abby whispers in a soft croak, looking back to the bag, "for leaving you in a time like this."

Clarke sucks in a deep breath and looks out the window. "I understand. It's for Lexa. I mean you don't have anything to worry about anymore since they went and locked her up, right?" Abby flinches out of the corner of her eye and Clarke seethes at the guilt she feels at her mother's pain.

"What happened to Lexa is not your fault," Abby soothes and Clarke can't escape the crushing weight in her chest. "Please, sweetheart--"

"I cheated on her," Clarke coldly responds, "I was too stubborn to see that she needed help because I thought I was enough for her. I thought that I could take care of her and that she wouldn't have to suffer like her step-father did. She fought to get back to me, Mom. And I--"

Clarke chokes up, her throat tightening as she closes her eyes and bows her head in shame. "And I accepted her loss. I never questioned the empty casket or the status report. I never dug deeper. I just accepted that she was gone, that she'd left me. But it's the opposite isn't it? She never knew if she would make it home and she never, ever gave up in the five years she was gone. She held it out, stuck through it all, for me."

No matter how hard she tries, Clarke can't get Lexa's haunting words out of her head.

I love you so fucking much and she suffered because I came back to you!

She died because of you... it's all your fucking fault!

While Clarke has no idea who Lexa was referring to, hearing the crack in her wife's voice and the
desperation in her gaze had her reeling. She thought she knew the details of Lexa's captivity from the officers in charge of her rescue, but clearly she'd only managed to scratch the surface. A steely resolve settles in her gut and she blinks over at her mother with a determined stare, causing Abby to arch her brow in confusion.

"You have to find out what happened to her," Clarke pleads as she grips the steering wheel tighter. "I can't lose her again, Mom."

Abby takes a breath and nods, before leaning over and pecking her daughter on the forehead. "I won't let this rest until we have some answers," Abby promises her as she leans back into her seat and stares out the front window to where she can make out Kane arriving in a Humvee. Clarke nods.

They fall into a state of tense silence, before her mother clears her throat again softly.

"Clarke?"

"Hmm."

"I have something to confess," Abby says with a hint of trepidation in her voice as she turns to face her daughter. "About what happened that night."

Clarke frowns. What could she be needing to confess? She hadn't even been at the scene when Lexa had threatened to kill herself--

And then, it hits her as she looks to her mother's cellphone clutched tightly in her hand.

Her mother's face falls when she sees the moment Clarke has pieced it all together.

"You called the cops," Clarke breathes out shallowly, taken aback. "Tris called you and then you called the cops, didn't you?"

Abby just nods and hangs her head again. She opens her mouth after sometime, in what Clarke expects to be an apology, but she speaks before her mother can have the chance to explain herself.

"Thank you," Clarke murmurs as she looks away, unable to admit that her mother had done the right thing. "I should have called them as soon as she'd run off but I was too scared and too selfish to admit that she'd become a danger to all of us, and herself. I… couldn't do it, so thank you."

There is no malice or spite in her words, only solemn gratitude. She sees her mother nod and look to her lap out of the corner of her map. Clarke fixes her gaze on the C-5 Galaxy taxing onto the runway. She remembers when Lexa had boarded the same plane five years ago. She remembers her wife's teasing but strong smile, her friendly wave, the kindness and affection in those green eyes. Clarke bites her lip and looks away from the massive aircraft, trying to control the flipping of her stomach and the pounding of her headache. She closes her eyes, holding back tears.

And then, the softest of touches grazes her forearm. Clarke glances up to see her mother offering a watery smile.

"She's still in there, you know?" Abby hums as she looks out to the aircraft. Clarke frowns, confused.

"Lexa," Abby clarifies with a soft smile, "she's still with us. She's just… buried under all that rusted armor."

"And how do we take it off her?" Clarke asks, following her mother's gaze. "How do we take it off
so she can just breathe?"

Abby draws a shallow breath, and they both watch as Kane--decked in his full uniform--exits his vehicle and begins to approach them.

And then, with a stern voice she replies, "by going back to the start."

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**April 10th 2014, 03:30**

**Manhattan Psychiatric Centre, New York**

Lexa stares awake at the ceiling, counting the cracks over and over again until she's lost count.

Her bunkmate, a woman about her age, is snoring away next to her. Lexa takes a break from her counting to glance over at her, envious of the restless slumber that she's receiving. She'd not talked to any of the other members of the institution as a result of her late, or rather early, arrival. They'd moved her from the private room tonight, telling her that they couldn't keep her cooped up on her own forever. From what the sweet elderly nurse with the kind, wise eyes had said, her bunkmate is a former vet, too, having served in the Syrian War before being discharged a few months ago. Lexa stares at her, surprised to see that there's no real physical scar or ailment that would show any signs of being in a war or in danger.

But then she remembers, not everyone is tortured for four years or forced to do unthinkable things in order to survive.

Turning her gaze back to the ceiling, Lexa starts her counting again, but finds her mind swimming with darker, more potent thoughts.

Thoughts of the night, of the gun in her hand, of the chilling sensation of knowing she had been so close to ending it all…

Lexa shakes her head, holding down the tears that well to the surface of her eyes as she fights back those dreadful thoughts.

But it should have happened, she can't help but think, shouldn't it've?

She thinks about what life would have been like if she had. If Clarke and Anya would live happily ever after, raising her kids and giving them a sense of peace she's certain no longer exists within herself. Maybe Tris would feel like she has two mothers, not just one and a stranger. Maybe Aden would have less behavioural problems and would be more confident in himself. Maybe Clarke would feel love, and would be able to love. Maybe her death was able to bring Anya a sense of normalcy that she'd been forced to forgo when raising the two of them.

Maybe, she thinks as she blinks back tears, maybe it should have happened.
The pervasive thoughts and feeling spread through her mind like a wild fire and Lexa finds herself unable to breathe. Her chest weighs a million pounds and her body quakes from the nerves. She tries to focus her breathing, to do something to calm herself down, but she can't manage it. She keeps reliving every moment of pain in her life, spanning from her childhood to the previous hours. She sees herself as a child, cowering beneath her protective older sister as their uncle yelled and screamed nonsense. She sees herself falling in love with Costia Green, which only ended badly once she recognized her feelings for Clarke. She remembers their wedding, with only a parent and a sister between the two of them to call family. She remembers the first time she'd been shipped off, the first person she'd killed, the first time she'd had to sacrifice a team member… And soon, it all begins piling up until Lexa can't even see straight anymore.

But then her vision starts to clear as she focuses on a memory in her childhood, of her and Anya when they'd been just six and twelve, respectively. It was just after their father had died and they'd moved in with Titus and Indra. Despite the clouding negativity that threatens to drown her, Lexa finds herself smiling through the tears. Even with all she's learned about what Anya's done, she can't throw away the memories of her past--the things that keep and have kept her sane these past few years. She finds her heart aching, missing and yearning for the innocence and love.

Lexa isn't sure how she manages to make it out of the bed.

She pads down the hall, her feet working like clockwork as she finds herself passing the bunks of other patients. She extends her hands, letting her fingertips drag across the cool walls. She breathes in, out, focusing on the textures of the peeling wallpaper and the sounds of her feet padding across linoleum. She walks until the ringing in her ears and the buzzing in her mind have come to a dull throb, and as she glances up, she sees herself at the door of her hallway. One of the nurses is at the cubby beside the security room, and at the sight of Lexa walking in, stands immediately. Lexa smiles as she recognizes her as Doris, the nurse who had first helped her get accustomed to the institution.

"Hi sweetheart," the woman greets her gently, walking slowly as to not startle her. "Are you having trouble sleeping?"

Lexa pauses, frowning before looking to her feet and then back up with a slow nod. "Yes."

"Well, I can't give you any medication, but how about I sit with you until you are able--"

"I want to make a phone call," Lexa blurts out, interrupting the older woman. Doris pauses mid-speech, looking somewhat shocked.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart, I didn't catch that. You want to… call somebody?"

Lexa nods, wringing her hands together. "Yes."

Doris looks perplexed, but not irritated by the unusual request. Lexa arches her brow, starting to feel nervous again when Doris smiles kindly and places her hands in front of her chest. "I'm not going to deny you, darling, I am just confused. All your time here you've not communicated with anyone outside. Why now of all times?" Lexa takes a minute to assess the question, because she knows that Doris has a valid point. Since she'd been placed in the institution, she's refused to contact anyone from her family, even Indra. She'd been left a mess after her attempt at suicide and virtually inconsolable. She couldn't think about Clarke without feeling anger, guilt, disgust and sadness. She couldn't even think about her kids without feeling her hands shake and her chest start to tighten. And Anya? She could think about Anya without feeling like wanting to die.

"Lexa, honey, did you hear what I asked?"
Lexa blinks, glancing up at the concerned woman and offers a weak, haphazard shrug as she looks away. "I… I just want to call someone."

"Well," Doris ponders as she glances at the clock, and then the sleeping security man, "I suppose we can make an arrangement. You've not caused any problems since being here and you seem like a sweet gal, so I doubt there would be a problem with making a quick call." Lexa takes a deep breath and nods, allowing Doris to lead her through the other end of the hall and towards the line of pay phones near the cafeteria.

Doris shows her to the nearest one and tells her how to use it before taking a few steps back and allowing her some space. Lexa looks at the old fashioned dials and hesitates a moment before reaching up, allowing her finger to spin through the numbers until she's finished. She holds the black phone up to her ear, her thumb tracing the worn scratches on the plastic casing as a ringing sound emerges from the speaker.

And then, finally, a voice picks up.

"…Um, hello?"

Lexa freezes at the sound of that low rasp, of the slight muffled quality that encompasses drowsiness. For a moment, Lexa allows her head to lean against the cool wall, her eyes closing shut as she focuses on the stuttered breathing from across the line. The voice repeats the greeting again, a little less haggard than earlier and despite everything that's unfolded, Lexa finds herself smiling a bittersweet smile, one that tastes of the salt of her tears but still has lingering ebbs of the bitterness that fester deep within her gut. Taking a deep breath, Lexa opens her eyes and replies:

"Hi, Anya."

Her sister coughs a little before clearing her throat, and Lexa knows it's to clear the drowsiness away. "Lex, hey, what's up? You okay, kiddo?"

Lexa smiles again, her heart hurting as she tries to keep out images of what happened that night. "I'm… I'm…," she struggles to find the words because her lips are quivering now. She grips the phone a little tighter and she thanks Anya for her silence, for the moment to recuperate. Swallowing down the painful lump in her throat, Lexa clears her own throat and nods, even though she knows Anya cannot see it.

"I'm okay," she replies as she closes her eyes, "I just… I've been thinking."

"About what, Lex?"

"About everything," Lexa says as she looks up at the wall, her eyes roaming over the cracks. "About you. Clarke. The kids."

There's a pause, one that Lexa can sense is anticipatory and heavy, before Anya rasps, "yeah?"

"I just… I don't know," Lexa mumbles as she closes her eyes again, "I don't know what to feel."

"No one expects anything of you, Lex. You need to take care of you first. If you're mad, get mad. If you're sad, get sad, if you--"

"No," Lexa interjects softly, "it's not that… I've just… I can't sleep, An."

Another pause, this one less heavy. "I'm sorry, kiddo. I… I wish there was something I can do to help. Can… do you want to talk about it?"
"I…," Lexa trails off, before she glances over at Doris now chatting with one of the security guards. "No, I don't. I just… I walked here and I asked Doris if I could call someone because I was feeling… well… I don't know. I just walked here and I called you. I just feel… out of place."

"Lex," Anya soothes and Lexa feels her heart tug, "you're not out of place. I'm all ears for as long as you feel you want to talk. I'm always here."

"I don't forgive you for what you did with Clarke," Lexa grunts, the confession a little sharper than she'd intended it to come across. She hears the hitch in Anya's breath, and she goes to apologize when her sister calmly replies, "and I don't expect you to, Lexa. What happened, it… it hurt you--I hurt you, both me and Clarke. I'd understand if you never forgave us. I'm just… I am really happy you called, Lex. I miss you, kiddo. I really hope that they're treating you okay over there. I've called everyday demanding to talk to the nurses and the doctors, hell, I'm pretty sure they're sick of me by now. I've been thinking of writing a letter or a postcard or something, but I didn't know if you wanted to hear from me or not--"

"Anya," Lexa whispers, tears welling in her eyes, "I…"

She hears Anya sniffle, and Lexa feels herself grow lighter as she faintly smiles and nods, "I'd like a postcard."

"I'll send you seven of them," Anya chuckles airily, "one for every day."

Lexa smiles sadly and blinks back tears as Anya finishes by saying, "maybe I can persuade one of the guards to let me sneak you some chocolate."

And after that, a silence falls over the both of them, but it isn't uncomfortable for once. It's almost as if listening to Anya over the phone doesn't stir up those same feelings of replacement she'd felt whenever she'd seen her sister. Hearing her voice without seeing her face seems to have taken the edge off a little, but Lexa can't seem to understand why. It's like that the Anya on the phone is the real Anya, but the one in person is… an imposter. Lexa tries to shake off the feeling of confusion, but it still lingers like a hovering cloud, constantly causing her to question everything.

"Hey," Lexa whispers softly, her fingers playing with the cord of the phone. "Do you remember that time we first moved in with Indra and Titus?"

Anya seems taken aback by the question, but inquisitively replies, "of course. What's got you thinking about it?"

Lexa clears her throat and drops her finger from the cord. "Well," she starts as she closes her eyes, "do you remember what we did after we moved in? Right after Titus told us that we needed to stop making so much noise?"

"Yeah," Anya says, a nostalgic lilt to her voice as she recounts the memory, "I promptly told him to shove off and plugged in a Vanilla Ice album that was on the shelf and turned the volume all the way up. I don't think I'd ever seen him go that red before. I remember singing terrible karaoke to Another Brick in the Wall and you were my feature air guitarist. The neighbours looked horrified but both of us loved every second of it."

"And then when the neighbours came to complain, Titus told them that it wasn't his fault--"

"And I replied that it was his music and that he loved to listen to 'Ice Ice Baby' on loop but never felt confident enough to really belt it--"

"He gave us dishes and laundry for like four weeks--"
"But it was--"

"Totally worth it," the two of them reply in unison. Lexa chuckles despite it all, feeling a sense of ease that she hadn't felt in years. Even Anya is laughing lightly on the other end, and suddenly, Lexa realizes that all the anger and frustration she'd once harboured feels less... heavy. The two of them fall back into a silence. Lexa plays with the cord again, her thoughts roaming back to those childhood memories as she sucks in a deep breath. Tears sting in her eyes but she doesn't fight them again, instead relishing in the freeing feeling of the salty liquid dripping down her cheek.

"Lex?" Anya's raspy voice breaks through the static. "You okay, kid?"

Lexa takes a minute to breathe before she smiles and nods, before softly replying, "yeah, I'm good. I... I think I'm going to sleep now."

"Alright, Lexa. If you need anything don't hesitate to call, okay? I'm always here for you."

"Yeah," Lexa replies, choking up as she feels the barrage of emotions in her chest. "Yeah, I will."

"Okay," Anya sighs tiredly, "well, goodnight then. I love you, Lex. Take care of yourself in there, alright?"

"I will," Lexa answers before pausing. She takes a breath before she adds, "I love you too, An. Thanks for the call."

There's a hitch in Anya's breath, like the confession had given her a literal jolt of shock. A part of Lexa feels heavy with guilt that her own sister feared her hatred, that being loved was no longer a possibility. It takes a few seconds before she replies, "always, kiddo. Take care and sleep well."

Lexa waits a few moments to simply listen to her sister's breathing before she murmurs her own goodnight and hangs up.

There are crossroads and roadblocks between them, but Lexa knows that in the end, Anya is her family, and family sticks together, always.

And so she pads back to her bed, kindly declining a glass of water from Doris, before she glances up at the ceiling and begins to count.

Lexa doesn't even make it halfway before she loses track of the cracks and finally falls asleep.

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April 14th 2014, 17:30

Hyderabad Base Camp (Primary Investigation Site), Afghanistan

"Feeling okay back there, good doctor?"

Abby glances up from where she's got the sick bag around her lips and groans at the light jest in the pilot's voice. She had been fine on the flight into Tagab, but the helicopter ride from the station's base
to the investigation site seemed to be causing some sort of early vertigo as it would seem. She clutches the sick bag closer as she heaves again, throwing up whatever processed breakfast she'd been served on the flight over. Kane is strapped in beside her, awkwardly rubbing her shoulder as she tries to steady the motions of her stomach flipping violently.

"Yeah," she croaks after another wave of nausea, "just peachy."

"Well, you're about to be in for a world of joy 'cause we're here." Abby lets out a silent prayer of gratitude to whatever deity that might be watching over her as she feels the helicopter begin to descend. She glances out the window to where a blackened pit of sand and debris lay scattered about in the dusty winds. She makes out the tents of the investigation teams and she feels her anxiety pick up.

She's really doing this. She's really here, in the same place where her daughter-in-law, a woman she considers her own child, was tortured.

And just like that, she's hurling into the bag once again.

The pilot chuckles and quickly sets the chopper down before Abby can lose anymore of the food she'd just consumed into the small white bag. Once on the ground, the doctor is the first to spring free from the doors and jump onto the dusty soil. The sweltering heat causes sweat to immediately pool around her neck and her lower back, but Abby finds her nausea only slightly easing as she sees the lines of tents and soldiers crowding the area. Once the chopper is powered off, the pilot accompanies Kane to where Abby is standing, staring at the charred remains of a village.

"Well," the pilot says from behind her, "I gotta go make a drop, so I'll leave ya here. Give me a ping when you're ready to be picked up."

"Roger that," Kane replies as he goes to shake the man's hand, "thanks for the lift, Lieutenant."

The pilot tips his cap before hopping back into the helicopter and starting the engine. A tug on Abby's arm by Kane is the only thing that jolts her feet into moving as they make their way closer to the investigation site. Abby glances around at the scene, trying not to get overwhelmed by the jarring images of destroyed rubble and rusted metal strewn about. She tries hard to not think about the fact that three hundred people once lived here. Abby feels her heart grow heavy as she thinks about the fact that Lexa had been here for four years, trapped in hell and unknown to the world.

"Ah, there he is!"

Abby snaps her head up at the sound of a Kane's voice. She follows the man's gaze to see a well-decorated soldier approaching them.

"Marcus Kane," the man chuckles as he extends his hand and Kane shakes it, "so good to see you… so sorry you're here."

"Likewise Sinclair," Kane says as he lets go of their hands before gesturing to Abby. "This is Dr. Abigail Griffin. She's why I am here."

"Pleasure to meet you, doctor. I hope you find something more than we've already discovered," Sinclair tells her seriously. At this, Kane frowns.

"What do you mean by that?"

Sinclair frowns, releasing Abby's hand to stare at the other soldier. "Are you not with the DA's office back in New York?"
"The DA?" Abby interjects as she cocks her head. "What would they be doing here?"

"I thought you were with them," Sinclair says as he wipes his sweaty brow and frowns again. "Some burly man and pointy-nosed woman came in here only a day ago with a search warrant and some private investigators. You just missed them. They were looking for evidence for their case."

"What case?" Kane asks, frowning. The remainder of Sinclair's confidence falters as he replies, "the one you were telling me about. Major Alexandria Woods? She was held hostage here and is the only living survivor of this village. You wanted to know more about what conspired here. So did they."

"They as in who? The DA?" Abby presses, her heart starting to race. "Why do they want to investigate an Afghan village? It's out of their jurisdiction."

"It's not the village they're after Doctor Griffin," Sinclair answers cryptically. "They're here to gather evidence to incriminate Major Woods."

"Of what?" Kane angrily snaps, crossing his arms in frustration. "She's done nothing wrong. She hasn't committed any heinous crimes. We're here on the basis of understanding her current mental state. We came to help Lexa, not try to put her in a prison. She needs rehabilitation, not punishment."

And then, Sinclair's expression becomes worrisome as he folds his hands behind his back and swallows thickly.

"I'm afraid that you might be a little late for that," Sinclair says solemnly, "because there's something you need to see."

"What is it?" Abby asks, her stomach flipping at the troubled expression on the other man's face. Sinclair gulps again nervously.

"The answer to all your questions."

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April 14th 2014, 09:00

Manhattan Psychiatric Institute, New York

When Lexa is told that she has a visitor, the first thing she wants to do is ignore the request. When Lexa is then told that it's her wife, she hesitates.

It's been two weeks since she'd last seen Clarke, and the only image she can't get out of her head is the one that had plagued her while under the influence of the drugs in the camp; one of Clarke and Anya with their hands intertwined, standing over her grave with joyful smiles while her children embraced their new mother and forgot their old one. She sees Anya in bed with Clarke, taking her and claiming her while she stood frozen.

But then she sees a different image, a memory from her wedding day when Anya had straightened
her bowtie and dusted her shoulders. One where Anya wrapped her arms around her and told her that she'd never been more proud, more happy to see her in love and living a life they once thought they'd never get the chance to have. She remembers Anya standing at the alter, handing her the rings and nodding in approval as she'd wed the love of her life. She remembers Anya's speech, one of humour and childish jokes, but undertones of that deep, familial love that was thicker than blood.

She remembers Clarke then, later that night when they'd both been spent and naked in bed. A memory of bodies intertwined like heliotrope vines, where skin never left skin and their warmth was greater than a fire during a winter night. She remembers Clarke's lips tracing a pattern along her ribs and her breast, later to linger over her heart. She remembers how Clarke had whispered to her, soothed her worries and fears, and promised her that no matter what Lexa had to give the world, there would never be anything that she'd have to give to Clarke other than her love. There were no expectations, no traditions or promises to be kept, only one of a life spent together forever. A memory of something sturdy, something permanent. Clarke had held her that night, having fallen asleep singing praises into her lips and painting a future together upon her skin, and Lexa remembers laying there listening to her wife's gentle snores as she'd finally accepted that love and happiness was there to stay.

She isn't quite sure what propels her to look up at Doris and slacken her frown, maybe it was her phone call to Anya a few days ago or the lingering loneliness of the four walls of her room, but she lets her shoulders loosen and her head bob slowly. Doris looks relieved to hear her acquiescing at last to talking to someone that wasn't Dante or one of the staff at the institution. She follows Doris down the hall towards the reception area.

The security guards still frisk and cuff her, but this time Lexa feels an odd sense of hopefulness as she is paraded down the hall. They make their way through the massive double doors and into the lobby where, low and behold, her wife waits with her arms around her chest nervously.

Despite the anger and betrayal, the miles of pain between them, Lexa can't help but see her as she did on her wedding day.

"You have two hours," the guard says before nodding towards the courtyard outside. "You can sit out there. Enjoy the sunshine."

Lessa nods and watches him go before she slowly approaches her wife. At the sound of her boots clacking on the linoleum, Clarke's head jerks upwards and Lexa's breath gets caught in her throat. Her wife's lips burst into a trembling smile, one held together by an unwavering hope.

"Lexa," Clarke breathes her name and she hates how it sounds so good, "I… I didn't think you wanted to see me."

"I…," Lexa trails off, looking to the ground with a frown before she glances back upwards. "I didn't-"...

Clarke's face falls, and Lexa pauses for a moment, simply taken aback by her wife's features.

For once, Lexa thinks as she gazes at Clarke pensively, she doesn't look like a stranger.

"I didn't at first," Lexa is quick to say once she sees that Clarke despondency hasn't gone, "but something made me change my mind."

"What was that?" Clarke asks, her voice soft and tentative. Lexa furrows her brows and shakes her head.
"I don't know…," Lexa murmurs, trailing off. Clarke nods and stifles a choked sob as she looks back down dejectedly. Lexa takes a deep breath and glances at the courtyard. She thinks about it for a while before she clears her throat and draws Clarke's attention back to her.

"If you want, I know a really nice place that has just the right amount of sun," Lexa suggests, nodding to the courtyard. Clarke smiles and wipes away her tears before she nods in response.

"I think that sounds perfect."

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**April 14th 2014, 18:00**

**Hyderabad Base Camp (Primary Investigation Site), Afghanistan**

The pace they set is debilitating. The sun is too hot, the sand blows in their faces, and dehydration lurks around the corner.

But they don't stop moving.

They *can't* stop moving.

Kane follows as Sinclair leads them to the biggest tent. He recognizes some of the private investigators stationed in the army, and they each pass him a horrified glance as Sinclair leads them further into the information centre. Abby is tight on his heels, and even though he's doing a better job of concealing his fear of the unknown, he's just as terrified as the doctor. He prays that whatever evidence Sinclair has comprised is not as terrible as everyone seems to be making it out to be. He sucks in a deep breath and prepares himself for the worst as they arrive at the media hub.

Sinclair juts around the table in the middle and opens up the laptop that had been laying there. Kane follows Abby as they settle on either side of him. Just as Sinclair is about to speak, Kane looks up and spots a small, almost entirely destroyed camcorder on the desk.

Now he's pleading with the Gods that this isn't what he thinks it is about to be.

"We found it underneath the rubble a few weeks ago. It doesn't work anymore, but the tape inside was salvaged. It was a bit jittery and skippy, but it showed enough," Sinclair says with a nervous croak. Abby frantically slams her palm down on the plastic table in agitation.

"Showed enough what?" The woman demands frustratingly. "Why can't you give us a straight answer?"

Sinclair takes a minute before he clicks on a media player and enlarges it so it's in full screen before turning to face them grimly. Kane looks to the screen to see a group of masked men surrounding two soldiers, one kneeling and the other holding a pipe in their hand. A pit settles in his throat and he feels the blood drain from his face as he makes out the all too familiar face of Lexa as the soldier standing with the pipe, her hair shaved to an uneven stubble and mottled bruises around her face. He
grips the edge of the table and tries to reign in his anxiety, but he fails when Sinclair shakes his head. He notices Abby then, with a hand cupped around her mouth and tears in her eyes as they stare at the pixelated image.

"Because I can't tell you," Sinclair replies as he hovers the cursor over the play button, "I can only show you."

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**April 14th 2014, 09:30**

**Manhattan Psychiatric Institute, New York**

"Summer is coming soon," Lexa says beside her, eyes trained on two bunnies hopping around the courtyard. "It's going to get warmer."

Clarke nods and smiles as her wife turns back to her, resting her cuffed hands upon the wooden table. "I'm sure it'll be beautiful as always."

"Why are you here?" Lexa asks abruptly, cutting off the conversation. Clarke swallows and wrings her own hands together.

"I came… I came to see you because I needed to apologize," Clarke says before taking a breath. "And more importantly, to explain everything."

"About you and Anya?" Lexa asks nonchalantly, brow arched. Clarke nods, trying not to let Lexa's emotionlessness affect her. She opens her mouth to continue her thought, but Lexa cuts her off with an inquisitive question, one lacking detectable malice and sarcasm.

"Did you love her?"

The words hit Clarke like a hurricane, but she sucks up the damage and forces her head up.

"I did," Clarke replies honestly, no matter how the words rub her throat raw. "I did… when you were gone, I loved her."

"Do you still love her?"

Clarke pauses and Lexa gives the barest of flinches at her silence, but she pushes through the painful expression to answer, "I don't know."

Lena doesn't react, not even a twitch and Clarke grows more concerned by the second that she's doing this too quickly, that Lexa's going to get overwhelmed and they're going to drop back to square one, maybe even square zero, that she might have gone too far too soon and will lose her--

"I hate that it's her," Lexa interrupts her chain of thought quietly and Clarke's breath is stolen from her lungs, "I hate that you loved my sister."
"Lexa, I'm sorry--"

"But at the same time, I don't hate it."

At this, Clarke pauses, her lips still trembling in anticipation and confusion. "W-What?" Lexa nods, glancing back up emotionlessly.

"It makes sense," Lexa says in a cool, calculated tone. "I'm gone, my sister has no one and my wife is left to take care of her children alone. It's logical, you know? A matter of elimination. There was no one else who could've understood that loss but her. I hate that it happened. It makes my blood boil. I wanted to kill her and I almost did. Can you believe it, Clarke? I almost killed my sister and I would have if they hadn't come."

Clarke tries to bite down the guilt that festers in her chest, but before she can address it, Lexa is speaking again. "Knowing that she touched you--that she loved you--creates a fire inside of me that cannot be put out. It haunts me to know that the one thing that I feared, the one thing that I saw so many times in that camp, was not actually a delusion. My nightmare had become my reality, and there was no escape from it this time."

"Lexa--"

"I wanted to die, Clarke." Lexa says it so literally that Clarke barely has time to register the weight of the words. "I wanted to die, but I didn't."

"Lexa," Clarke croaks as tears start to slip down her cheeks, "I…"

But Lexa shakes her head and looks down at her cuffed hands with disdain. "I could have died in that village. I could have died there and I wouldn't have known that you'd moved on. I could have died and everything would have been fine. I… I should have died, shouldn't I have?"

"No," Clarke shakes her head as she sniffs, "no, Lexa. You did nothing wrong, baby. We were the ones who went too far, okay?"

"It's not a matter of right or wrong," Lexa growls, her voice escalating slightly. "It's about what I did, how far I went to get back to you. I shouldn't have come back because it's not me that's back, Clarke. It's some twisted, damaged, broken version of me that can never be fixed. I'm a danger to society. Why do you think I'm here? It's because I've proven that I'm not sane enough to live a normal life. I'm not deserving of it, either."

"Lexa," Clarke stumbles as she struggles with finding a reply to Lexa's confession, but she's unable to seek out the words. Lexa just sighs and murmurs, "I don't hate you or Anya. I don't hate Tris or Aden, even if they hate me. I don't hate Ma or Abby. I hate myself for letting it slip, for not being able to be in control. I hate myself for taking it out on you, for hurting you, for making you bleed when I love you more than I love anything in the world. I vowed to protect you and I failed you."

Tears film in her wife's eyes as Clarke watches Lexa sniffle and shake her head, chuckling sadly.

"I don't hate that you and Anya had each other through my absence," Lexa admits solemnly. "She wouldn't have been able to cope without you."

"Lexa," Clarke rasps quietly, "you don't understand… it's not like that."

"Don't try and tell me she didn't try to kill herself multiple times," Lexa bluntly responds, arching her brow. "I know her better than anyone, Clarke."

"I… I don't know what to say. I just… I'm sorry, Lexa. If I had known that you were still alive, if I
had pushed just a bit harder to get you back, all of this never would have happened," Clarke says, hanging her head in shame as she braces herself for Lexa screaming at her like she did the night before. Instead, however, she's met with nothing but silence. Cautiously, she glances upwards to see Lexa staring at her inquisitively.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Clarke asks, her voice cracking. "Say something, Lexa. Hate me, yell at me, do anything, just say something."

"I'm not mad anymore, Clarke. I'm just… tired," Lexa sighs bitterly as she looks back to the two bunnies. "I don't forgive you or Anya for lying to me, and I still don't want to be around you anytime soon, but I'm tired, Clarke. Being here, being away from you all has given me time to properly think about things, about what happened when I was in captivity. I just… I had so much anger from what they did to me… from what they made me do…"

"Lexa," Clarke whispers softly as she reaches out and tentatively places her hands a few centimetres away from Lexa's own. "What happened?"

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**April 14th 2014, 19:30**

**Hyderabad Base Camp (Primary Investigation Site), Afghanistan**

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Abby doesn't move in those two minutes and fourteen seconds.

Her eyes stay glued to the screen. She never looks away or closes her eyes.

She watches every swing, every hit, every scream, until it's all over.

Abby doesn't even react when she hears Kane retching into the corner of the tent when the clip is finished.

She's frozen, her stare fixated on the empty look in Lexa's eyes and the crimson blood spattered across her entire body.

All she knows, after she tries and fails to look away, is that what she's just seen can never be unseen.

"That's what they took," Sinclair speaks once Kane returns, shaken and pale. "They made a copy two days ago and took the first flight back."

Abby glances over to Kane, unable to even speak or create a plan. Her associate looks just as lost and dazed. Abby struggles to clear the foggy images in her mind, to return herself to some state of reality in order to focus on the next step. She takes a deep breath and swallows thickly.

"What do we do now?" She asks, her voice wavering as she looks to Sinclair. The man looks to the screen and sighs, shaking his head.

"Pray like hell that you dig something up that they couldn't find," he says with a grim expression,
"there are no survivors to attest this wasn't something done voluntarily. There are no orders being
dished out, no video evidence of someone instigating a fight to the death. The DA hit a goldmine
finding this. It's scrubbed perfectly so that it only shows the beating and her reaction--or lack thereof-
-after it all goes down. It doesn't help that Lexa's DNA was found on the bodies of twelve American
soldiers that had been sent in to infiltrate the village following an airstrike."

"What?" Kane splutters out in horror. "What do you mean her DNA was found on twelve soldiers?
That's circumstantial evidence, Sinclair."

"It must have been during the infiltration and airstrike," Sinclair says as he rifles through the
computer to pull up the confidential files. Immediately, images of horribly mutilated bodies of the
soldiers fill the screen and make Abby's stomach flip in disgust. "Look, here. First Lieutenant Emile
Dawkins, Private Andrew Colburn, Captain James Morgana; the list goes on. The boy was identified
as Kareem Ibraim. Lexa's fingerprints tested positive when the data analyzed the bruised ring around
his neckline. His mother, Asha Ibraim, was found shot through the head atop him." Abby stares at
the photographs of the strangled boy and tries to push away the words her daughter had uttered to
her not even two weeks ago.

*My wife tried to shoot her, and when that didn't work, she strangled her.*

"This can't be right," Kane growls as he slams his fist down on the table. "Lexa would never betray
her own country, less her own men!"

"Maybe she didn't," Sinclair offers without an ounce of confidence, "but you're going to have have
some pretty good evidence to suggest that."

"But what does this mean, though?" Abby asks, her words muffled together as she tries to focus.
"Why is the DA involved?"

Sinclair blanches and looks away, but it only takes Abby half of a second to figure out what he's
trying to communicate.

"Marcus," she says, her voice quivering in fear as she looks to the older man in desperation. "We
need to tell Clarke. We have to warn them."

"It's too late," Sinclair whispers as he looks to another file on the computer. "I think they've already
built their case and their charges. All they have to do is wait for that last proverbial shoe to drop and
they'll pounce." Kane frowns and looks at the fellow soldier with a confused expression.

"What do you mean, 'last proverbial shoe'?" Kane asks suspiciously. Sinclair puts his hands up
defensively and shrugs.

"It could be anything! Any sort of behaviour that deviates from normalcy, especially if it proves
hazardous to society or to family--"

"We have to head home now," Kane says as he rises from his seat, face pale and ashen, "we have to
go and talk to Lexa before--"

"No," Abby says as she stares at the computer screen. She feels a weight build in her chest and she
sighs, knowing that she's making yet another decision that might ruin the already strained relationship
she's having with her family. She looks to Kane resolutely and takes a breath.

"Call Clarke and tell her what is happening, but we aren't leaving," she orders sternly as she rises.
Kane looks bewildered and confused.
"Abby, have you lost your goddamn mind? We need to be with Lexa! The DA's office is ruthless! They will--"

"I know what they'll do," Abby growls as she stands her ground, "which is why we need to stay here and find a way to stop them."

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**April 14th 2014, 10:00**  
**Manhattan Psychiatric Institution, New York**

Lexa looks down to her hands, trying to imagine them without the permanent stain of blood or cracked callouses. She flexes her fingers, open and closed, open and closed, failing to ignore how the cool metal of the cuffs feels all too similar to the pipe that'd been in her hands. She breathes in and out slowly, trying to focus on the cool air of the spring breeze and not of the dusty heat from the camp. She closes her eyes and blinks back images of Cage grabbing at her hair and chopping it off, or of Emerson pulling the molar from her mouth with a pair of ragged pliers.

"Lexa," Clarke's soft voice lulls her back into the present. "What happened to you over there?"

She thinks not of Costia's debilitating screams, nor the limp body of Kareem beneath her hands. She doesn't think about the countless corpses scattered around the campsite, burnt and ripped limb from limb from the explosion. She doesn't imagine standing in the rubble, watching what had become of her men mowing down the innocent villagers, the woman, children and elderly, like they were playing a game and not waging war.

Lexa swallows, and tries to imagine that her saliva doesn't taste like blood.

"Lexa?" Clarke sounds more concerned now. "Please… tell me what happened. I won't judge you. I just… I want to help you."

Lexa's eyes flash open and she looks at Clarke with an empty expression, her breathing slowing as she adjusts to reality.

"You want me to tell you what happened?" Lexa asks, watching as Clarke's eyes grow wet with tears. "You want to know what I did?"

Clarke takes a breath, steadying herself before she nods. "If you want to tell me, then yes. I want to know what happened."

Lexa leans forward and takes a deep breath, bracing herself for the confession she's kept only to herself so far. "I--"

But before she can say the words, a pair of hands clasp her shoulders and she feels herself being pulled from the table. When she looks up, she sees two burly police officers gripping onto her tightly, each of them looking at her in horror and disbelief. Behind them, one of the correctional officers is
arguing with a policeman on how they can't arrest her because she's in rehabilitation. The police seem unfazed and ignore the man, and when the officer goes to resist, he's pulled away by two other policemen. Lexa shifts her gaze from the commotion to Clarke, but she only sees confusion and anger in her wife's eyes, but it's not directed towards her. Clarke whips around the table and shouts at the officers to put her down, but it's no use.

"Major Alexandria Woods," one of the police officers says as they both roughly push her against the wooden table, "you're under arrest for fifteen counts of murder, fourteen counts of mutilation, and suspected treason against the United States' Armed Forces and the US Government--"

"What?!" Clarke blurts out as she stares at the officers. "What the fucking hell are you talking about, she's been here this whole time--"

"They're not talking about here," Lexa replies quietly, her voice steady and calm as she watches Clarke's face morph into horror and confusion.

"Lexa…," Clarke trails off, shaking her head in disbelief as the officers read Lexa her Miranda Rights again. "What are you saying…?"

"You wanted to know what I did, didn't you?" Lexa chuckles coldly, her gaze unwavering as she stares at her wife in complete seriousness. "You asked me what I did to get back to you, and you said you wouldn't judge me, remember? This is the truth, Clarke. This is how I escaped." Clarke has tears rolling down her cheeks as she continues to shake her head, as if in denial, but Lexa doesn't feel anything but a numbing void entrapping her.

"This is what I did Clarke," Lexa tells her through gritted teeth and narrowed eyes as the officers hoist her upwards. "This was the only way home."

Clarke's face pales and her body quakes in fear as Lexa shakily utters the four words she knows her wife will never forget until the day she dies.

"I killed them all."

Chapter End Notes

BEFORE Y'ALL FREAK OUT. I answered a question regarding Lexa's trial and what will happen when she goes to court on my blog (dunno the link but it's there somewhere). I have gone a slightly different route which I think will be better in terms of Clexa development and Lexa/Anya's relationship. Also, I really wanted to go into detail on the trial because I've been watching so many crime documentaries and I really want to do the entire system justice in this story in terms of the realism.

As a note, in case it was muddy, Lexa doesn't forgive Clarke or Anya for what they did. They still have a LONG way to go before their relationships become any better recovered, but I mean it when I say that now we can go nowhere but up. They start their healing from the next chapters onwards, beginning with Lexa's trial. So don't worry about any Clanya drama coming up anymore. That's officially over.

Again, sorry for the long wait but I hope the length helps tide y'all over until the next update! I can't believe we're only 15 chapters in and at 200k+ words already. Amazing. Thank you all so much for reading this shit show and for commenting (even if you're
not so nice) because it makes my day. I will find a time (I swear) to reply to each and every one of you when I get the chance. I love reading the long comments and the debates (as long as they're constructive and decently friendly). I love you all! :D

Cheers and as always, thanks for reading!

End Notes

I hope you guys enjoy it! I literally cannot believe that I had a dream and decided to write it out. I'm a poop.

Check out my other works or hit me up at @ a-class-act-president on Tumblr!

Much love, xx.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!