Spelling It Out

by Geyranger

Summary

Clarke studied the twigs Lexa handed her for a second, holding them up to the light. Then she looked back up at Lexa. Earnest turned to mischief in her eyes.

“Thanks, Lexa. You’re a star.”

Then she disapparated with a loud bang, and Lexa was left staring into open air without a single twig.

Or

The HP AU where Clarke and Lexa are apprentices of competing wand makers, and are sent around the world to fetch materials for wand cores and somehow always manage to run into one another.

Notes

Go to geyranger.tumblr.com/tagged/spelling+it+out to find edits that I’ve made and teasers for the next chapters!
Clarke was in a bad mood.

She was sitting by the bar at the inn she was staying in, reading a book and nursing a pint of beer. It wasn’t her drink of choice, but this was small-town Germany and the barman had laughed in her face when she asked if they did martinis. The beer would have to do.

She’d been staying in Goslar for 2 weeks now. Anyone who looked at her would assume she was a backpacker or maybe a traveling writer or artist who had taken a fancy to the small down. Clarke wasn’t in the business of correcting them: it was a good a cover as any. She would leave the inn at the break of dawn every day, seemingly to explore the town, and return in the afternoon. Every day, without fail. And Clarke was sick of it.

She looked back down at the book in front of her. It was an old and tattered book, but one of her most prized possessions. The front page read “Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, by Newt Scamander,” and Clarke was currently studying the same page she has been studying since she arrived in Goslar: the bowtruckle.

The door to the bar opened. Clarke took no notice.

When Ollivander had sent her to Germany to collect a special kind of wood for his next collection of wands, she had looked forward to a nice weekend. She had planned to go to Germany, find this special tree in the forest next door to Goslar, break off a few twigs and maybe try a swig of the local brew before zooming back to Diagon Alley with her prize.

She went to Goslar. She found the tree, which had a beautiful red wood.

She did not expect the piece of wood, about the size of her hand, which screamed and launched itself at her and clawed for her eyes the moment she tried to break off a twig.

She felt like an idiot for not expecting the bowtruckle. She knew of them; everyone in the wand-making business did. The little buggers could be found in trees of wand quality, and be fiercely protective of their home. And once they’d taken notice of you they were unlikely to forget you. The numerous scratches on Clarke’s face and hands, accumulated over the last 2 weeks, were proof enough of that.

Someone came up to the bar next to her and tried to get the barman’s attention.

Scamander had warned her of it in his little book. She had read it about a million times. She kept coming back to the chapter in the hopes that it would have a hint on how to befriend a bowtruckle after it has declared war on you. Or advice on where else to find an incredibly rare red wooded aspen tree in wand conditions. Or what to do if you’re a wand maker’s apprentice who has landed herself in the deep end and can’t go home without a stupid piece of wood to show for her efforts because she really wants to do well in this job.

Clarke sighed in frustration.

“Having difficulties?”

Clarke looked up. Next to her stood a tall and slim woman, with her long brown hair in braids
down her back. She was easily one of the most beautiful women Clarke had ever seen in her life. And she was looking at Clarke’s old copy of Fantastic Beasts with a knowing smirk.

Clarke glanced back down at her book, still open on the bowtruckle chapter, and quickly shut it.

“Not at all, thank you“, she replied, her frustration at her fruitless search for clues forgotten. She could feel herself getting distracted. Well, nothing like a pretty face to take your mind of your current predicament. And what a face it was, too.

Clarke turned her attention back to her conversation partner, as the woman chuckled lowly.

“Well, if you’re thinking about visiting the one in the forest to the east of here I would recommend maybe giving it a day or two first. He’s in a foul mood at the moment”, the woman said.

“Had a run-in with it, did you?”

“More like a run-away from, if I am being honest”.

That made Clarke chuckle. The barman came back to give the woman her drink, and she sat down in the bar chair next to Clarke, placing her large shoulder bag on the bar.

“Yeah, he’s a rotten one”, Clarke said, not being able to keep the frustration completely out of her voice.

That made the woman look up, smiling. Her eyes bore into Clarke, and they were a deep forest green. Clarke couldn’t look away.

“What did you want with the tree to make the bowtreckle so upset with you?”

Clarke looked her over and got slightly sidetracked by the leather coat the woman it wearing, which framed her figure perfectly. She looked back up to her eyes and decided that this might be worth a shot.

“Who wants to know?”, Clarke said, putting on the crooked Griffin smile which had never failed her before.

The stranger eyed her for a moment, before putting on a smile to match Clarke’s.

“Lexa”, she said, holding out a delicate hand.

“I’m Clarke”, Clarke said as she took it.

“I take it from your accent you’re from America? You’re a long way from home”


“Canada. So, Clarke,” Lexa said, turning to face her fully, leaning a bit forward, “are you going to answer my question?”

Clarke got distracted by the whims of hair which fell over Lexa’s shoulder when she leaned forwards.

“Sorry?”

“What were you doing in the bowtruckle’s tree?”
“Can’t a girl travel to Germany and take a 5 hour hike in the forest to find a rare tree and piss off its magical guardian without there being an ulterior motive?”

Lexa was definitely grinning at this point.

“I am sure she can, Clarke, but intuition tells me this is not the case with you”.

Clarke sighed dramatically.

“You’re right. I was after its wood. To make wands. You know Ollivander, the wand maker? I’m his apprentice”, Clarke said, with more than a touch of pride.

Lexa got a knowing look in her eyes and nodded slowly, which Clarke assumed meant she was impressed.

“And it did not go very well, I take it?”

Clarke leant forward in her chair.

“No, and I can’t go home until I’ve got it. Which means that I have at least a few more days here in Goslar, now that you have made the bowtruckle angry again. Don’t worry though; I’m pretty good at what I do. I’ll get the wood soon enough”. Clarke placed her hand on Lexa’s thigh. “And how long will I have the pleasure of your company here, Lexa?”

It was forward, and she knew it. But fuck it, Clarke had had a long two weeks, and this Lexa was just what she needed. Hot, smoking hot actually, funny, and if her advances were rejected it was unlikely that Clarke would ever meet her again. She could afford to up her flirting game a little.

Lexa leant towards Clarke as she took a sip of her drink. It made Clarke hopeful.

“Unfortunately, I have acquired what I came here to get already. I am leaving tonight”.

Still grinning smugly at Clarke, she downed the rest of her drink and got up. Clarke’s face fell.

“It seems that we are in a similar predicament, Clarke. The difference between you and I, however,” she took her bag from the bar counter and reached her hand into it to pull out something, “is that I am good at my job”.

She was holding a handful of long twigs, in a beautiful red wood. The very twigs Clarke had almost lost her eyes trying to get a hold of for the last 14 days. Clarke’s mouth fell open in shock.

With one last smug grin at Clarke, Lexa turned around and walked out of the bar.

Striding quickly down the small street in the sunlight in the provincial town, Lexa was still holding the twigs in her hand. She wasn’t usually one to brag, but she hadn’t been able to resist wiping the smug smile off Clarke’s face. She knew she shouldn’t have; hell, she shouldn’t even have started flirting with the blonde in the first place. She was trying to keep a low profile.

Lexa pondered briefly the coincidence of meeting another wand maker apprentice in such a small place. Then again, she supposed, getting valuable wood from a bowtruckle tree is probably something most wand makers make their apprentices do. The two of them probably weren’t the first to try, and wouldn’t be the last. She grinned down at the twigs in her hand as she continued to walk.
Lexa had been on a fair few of these excursions by now, whenever old Shikoba Wolfe, her mentor and best wand maker in North America, told her to fetch supplies. Lexa had never run into another apprentice before though, and certainly not someone like Clarke. She hadn’t meant to walk up to her, she was just going for a drink. She hadn’t meant to start flirting, it just sort of happened. And once they had started it was somehow difficult to stop.

Lexa shook herself. Her job was difficult enough, if she wasn’t adding trying to impress the competition on top of it. Thank goodness she had seen the opportunity for a dramatic exit and managed to tear herself away. With any luck she would never see Clarke again.

“Lexa! Wait up!”

Lexa whirled around and to find Clarke running down the street and coming to a windy stop in front of her. So much for luck.

“Clarke”, Lexa acknowledged, smug grin slipping unbidden back on her face. ”Did you want something?”

Clarke stopped to quirk an eyebrow at her, an equally smug grin slowly forming. “Well, yes. I don’t think I was being particularly subtle about that”.

Lexa blushed. She hadn’t blushed in years. She opened her mouth and quickly shut it again.

“Actually though”, Clarke continued, “I was wondering if I could have a look at the twigs you collected? I’m going to try to see if I can get any of the fallen branches instead of the tree itself, to avoid the bowtruckle, but I need to see what they look like in a healthy condition to know which ones to pick”.

“O-oh, sure”, Lexa stammered as she handed over the twigs, cursing herself. She had been so cool less than 3 minutes ago. Clarke had caught her off guard, and Lexa knew that she was staring. It was just that Clarke, cheeks red and slightly windy from her run, was making Lexa lose all train of thought. And that neckline. Who even wears necklines like that in public?

Clarke studied the twigs Lexa handed her for a second, holding them up to the light. Then she looked back up at Lexa. Earnest turned to mischief in her eyes.

“Thanks, Lexa. You’re a star.”

Then she disapparated with a loud bang, and Lexa was left staring into open air without a single twig.
When Clarke got hired as Mr. Ollivander’s apprentice, she had all sorts of wonderful visions in her head of the things she would be doing. Travelling to far away lands, encountering magical beasts of all kinds to get the materials Ollivander needed for his famous wand cores. Seeing the wonders of the world up close. Meeting exotic people.

Which is why she was more than a little bit disappointed, a month after her escapades in Germany, to find herself in Wales.

Soggy, boring Wales.

At least this time her assignment was a little more interesting. After her success with the bowtruckle (Clarke had left the details out when reporting back to Ollivander), her mentor had decided that she was ready for slightly bigger things, and he had given her a new target: Grindylow horns. Clarke was thrilled; this was an animal which could actually eat people. On rare occasions, at least. She didn’t think she would be having difficulties, this was third grade defense against the dark arts material after all, but it would make a much better story to tell her friends back in London. So she had spent weeks hunched over her books, researching the best place to find grindylows in Britain.

And now she found herself in a small town in soggy Wales. Bala, it was called, famous for one thing and one thing only: being on the banks of Llyn Tegid, the biggest lake in Wales. Famous in magizoology circles for a grindylow infestation 20 years ago which had never really been fought off.

Clarke had done her research.

The Wales part aside, Clarke quite enjoyed her job. Ollivander was an odd man, but easy enough to take instructions from. Clarke had graduated from Hogwarts with excellent N.E.W.T. results and her heart set on being a healer, but she had quit after her very first day of training at St. Mungo’s. She had too many bad memories from that place. Her mother was horrified. Instead she had eventually found her way into Ollivander’s employ, and she found freedom in learning wand lore and travelling on Ollivander’s behalf like she never had before. She hadn’t seen her old friends from Hogwarts in weeks, and she hadn’t sent an owl to her mother in at least a month, but Clarke still somehow felt lighter than she had in years.

She wandered down the streets from the B&B she was staying in, looking at the buildings and idly wondering if she should try to find some local wizards to ask for the best grindylow sites, or just go down to the lake and see for herself. It was raining lightly.

Clarke rounded a corner onto a new street with a few shops, and people standing around looking at wares. She was a few steps into the street before she looked up and her eyes landed on a familiar figure.

A figure who, thank all that is holy, was facing away from Clarke.

Clarke froze in the middle of the street. Her brain barely had time to register the fact that she could recognize Lexa from the back of her long leather coat and the brown braids alone before Lexa started to turn around.

Clarke’s brain short-circuited, and she bolted down the nearest side street.
Clarke dashed down the small street and wrenched open the nearest door, which turned out to be a pub. She closed it with a bang and leant on it, looking over her shoulder through the small window onto the street outside. It was the coward’s way out, and she knew it, but the truth was that she was more than a little intimidated by Lexa. All billowing coat and smudged eyeliner, Lexa was a sight which practically screamed authority and competence. Lexa looked like she knew her stuff when it came to wand material. Like she ate Grindylows for breakfast. Like hexing someone who had stolen wand material from her might not be entirely out of the question. And Clarke was growing less and less certain the she had gotten away before Lexa had seen her.

A slender figure in a leather coat marched down the side street Clarke was looking at through the window, and Clarke quickly ducked away from sight.

“Shit”.

She chanced another look a few seconds later, too agitated to not know what was happening. Lexa had stopped outside the pub and seemed to be looking around. Her long neck was exposed to the elements, Clarke saw, and her braids and coat were dashing around her as she searched. Her face was beautiful and terrifying. Clarke’s heart raced, but not just from fear.

Lexa eventually seemed satisfied with the desertedness of the street. With one last glance in Clarke’s direction, she turned and marched back the way she had come. Clarke let out a breath she hadn’t know she was holding and turned around to face the patrons of the pub, all of whom were staring at her. Clarke noticed a glass polishing itself next to the barman and put on her most cheerful smile.

“Hello there, gentlemen. Anyone seen a grindylow around these parts?”

A few hours later Clarke had made her way down to the lake a little way away from the town and had taken her position among some reed beds. The patrons of the pub had been friendly enough, and the barman in particular had given her a few helpful pointers as to where she was most likely to find a grindylow at this time of year, and where they came up to feed at nighttime. Now the sun had well and truly set and she was waiting for the little buggers to surface, wand at the ready. She hadn’t seen Lexa again.

Clarke could only assume they were here on the same business; maybe there was some sort of curriculum wand makers usually made their apprentices follow, and now they had both reached the grindylow stage at the same time. Just like how they had been going after the wand tree and the bowtruckle simultaneously. She couldn’t think of any other reason why she could possibly have run into Lexa in a small town in bloody Wales.

Unless Karma had decided it was pay time, of course.

Clarke couldn’t get her out of her head. Just remembering the intense look in her eyes as she looked for Clarke in that small side street was enough to send her pulse speeding again. And before that, the stare she had received as Lexa gladly handed her the aspen twigs in Germany.

She felt a twinge of guilt when she thought about it now. Which was new; at the time she had just felt really clever. Clarke tried to shake it off. She had a job to do.

The first grindylow broke the surface a moment later. Clarke was temporarily captivated by the sickly green color of its head, the long, thin fingers which searched for edibles among the reed
beds, and the small pointy horns on its head. It glided through the water silently, barely making a ripple, looking for food. Clarke clutched her wand and waited for the right time.

Soon the grindylow started getting excited; it had found a small nest of eggs hidden in the reed bed, the bird it belonged to off looking for food somewhere else. It started making snuffling sounds, head whizzing around as it counted the eggs and looked for any defenders. It’s long, thin fingers grabbed an egg and the creature opened its mouth wide, preparing for the feast.

Clarke shot a stunning spell right into its mouth.

It was a perfect shot, the grindylow falling face forward into the nest of eggs and laying perfectly still. Clarke gave a yell of victory, and waded forwards to catch it before it slid beneath the surface. A quick cutting spell removed one of the precious horns, which Clarke stuck in her pocket. She then waded back to shore, where she turned around and looked at the small body lying in the reed beds.

Ollivander had been very specific about this part of the process. Grindylows are vermin, he’d said. Get the horn, then dispose of it. Everyone wins.

Everyone except the grindylow, Clarke thought quietly to herself. She raised her hand but hesitated.

Although, Clarke reasoned with herself, her assignment from Ollivander was to get the horn. Which she had now done. So technically she had finished this task, really. Which meant that she didn’t have to do as she had been instructed anymore. Clarke took some pride in being what her friends lovingly called a hard ass, but maybe this time, with no one around to see it, she didn’t have to be.

She shot the counter-curse on the grindylow, and started walking back towards the town before it began to stir.

Never once did she see Lexa, hiding 15 feet away in the reed beds, watching her with an expression which had turned from resentment to intrigue.

Clarke headed back to her room at the B&B. Once there she reverently placed the Grindylow horn in a small silk bag, especially made for the task, and placed the bag delicately in the top of her backpack. She has been collecting things for Ollivander for almost a year now, but this, Clarke felt, this was special. This was real wand maker work, not breaking off twigs from trees or visiting the shop to get all the important items. And, though no one need know, there was now a grindylow in the world who was alive because of her. It wasn’t quite like healing people at St. Mungo’s, Clarke thought to herself, but it was a small victory none the less.

She decided she had earned a drink, and headed back to the pub she had hid in earlier. And she made sure to tell the barman to tell her immediately if a tall pretty brunette with braids and a murderous expression came in the door.

She had a great evening. She opened with defeating one of the pub regulars in a drinking game, which made her instantly popular. Then she made friends by telling her slightly exaggerated but brilliantly told stories of her life as Ollivander’s apprentice. The small group of people who had gathered around her were laughing and gasping in all the right places, and Clarke felt great. Her mind kept turning back to Lexa, but with less of fear and more curiosity this time. Where was Lexa now? Did she have any luck finding her grindylow horn? Was she still mad at Clarke, or had she
forgotten her completely?

By the time she made it back to her room it was past 2 in the morning, and Clarke was ready to pass out on her bed. She kicked off her shoes and shrugged out of her coat, then decided to take one more look at her prized grindylow horn before going to sleep. Just to look at it. She was allowed to be a little proud, she decided. Proud and happy.

As she opened her backpack her mind turned back to Lexa, idly wondering if she would run into her again. Clarke would be quite happy not to, she decided; one unexpected meeting was enough for her. Yet she couldn’t help but wonder if Lexa managed to get her aspen twigs in the end, and if she was still furious with Clarke. She hoped she wasn’t.

If Clarke had paid more attention to what she was doing rather than thinking about Lexa, she might have noticed how the small silk bag containing the grindylow horn was in a different place in her backpack now than when she had put it down. She might also have noticed that it was considerably lighter. Clarke was, unfortunately, deep in thought, and only realized these things as she opened the bag and gingerly pulled out the only item in it, which was a piece of parchment. In neat, cursive handwriting it read:

“Hello again, Clarke.

Thanks for getting the grindylow horn for me. I think we’re even now.

You are truly a star.

L xxx”

Clarke threw open her window and screamed into the night.

“You fucking BITCH!”
2 weeks after Wales, Lexa was sitting in a log cabin in Sweden.

She was in Sweden because it was where the magical national park *Fågelskydd* was. She needed the magical national park *Fågelskydd* because that was where the world’s biggest population of jobberknolls lived, and Lexa was on a mission to get hold of a few of their tail feathers.

She had rented the cabin. She figured that if Mrs. Wolfe insisted on sending her on excursions so often that she spent more time on the road than in Mrs. Wolfe’s shop in Oregon learning the craft, she could afford to splash a little on comfort now and then. Nothing fancy, she couldn’t afford that. Lexa had a tent she had bought herself, which she was quite fond of, but sometimes it was nice to treat herself a little.

It was spring time, and the national park was beautiful; dense coniferous forest intercepted by the odd mountain as far as the eye could see, and a multitude of animals, both magical and not, if you knew where to look. It reminded Lexa of Canada, and she gave a deep sigh and collapsed onto her small bed. Lexa decided she felt more at home here than she had ever since the last time she had been home, almost a year ago.

God, she missed Canada.

There wasn’t anything wrong with Oregon per se. It just wasn’t home. Lexa didn’t spend a lot of time there anyway, what with the rate that Mrs. Wolfe sent her out on missions to fetch wand wood or wand core material. Running errands, she called it. Lexa snorted.

It had been a long day. She had arrived late the night before and started out from the cabin at the break of dawn to search for the jobberknolls. Lexa had been so focused on the task at hand, crafting a bunch of magical traps up in the canopy to catch the small, blue birds that she had taken a wrong step and fallen down a steep hill. She had been shouting and swearing and making such a ruckus that the forest came alive with the sounds of every animal in a mile’s distance running or flying away as fast as they could. She had to go to a completely different part of the park, red-faced and start over.

Throughout the day she had kept an eye out for a certain blonde. Not that she expected Clarke to show up in Sweden, exactly, because there are coincidences and then is ridiculousness, but she imagined that if she was to turn up Clarke might be less charming to her this time around. Lexa still smiled to herself when she remembered the scream of rage she had heard from Clarke’s room when Lexa was getting ready to apparate out of Wales that night. It wasn’t that Lexa would have a hard time getting a grindylow horn for herself, but the opportunity to get revenge had just been too good to let go. That, and it was kind of fun to outsmart Clarke. It made her feel less embarrassed about how easily Clarke had tricked her in Germany, at least.

She didn’t see Clarke anywhere in the national park. A small part of her was a little disappointed, but she crushed it down.

Eventually, she had got hold of one of the little birds and hexed it to sleep so it wouldn’t feel it when she gently pulled out a pinion feather. Her prize was now resting on her small bedside table, and Lexa smiled at it briefly. She did love this job, really. It made her enough money to send a bit
home, and she got to travel and see amazing things. And meet fascinating people.

She quickly snapped out of that line of thought and got up from the bed again. She headed for the shower; her hair was still full of twigs and leaves from her run in with the hill earlier.

She forgot to lock the door to the cabin.

She stayed in the warm water of the shower for much longer than it would take someone to sneak into her room too.

When she came back out from her shower her blue feather was missing. In its place was a messy sketch of Lexa falling down the hill, signed with a C and a star next to it.

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Less than a week after Sweden Clarke was walking down a suburban neighborhood in Wisconsin. She hadn’t been back to London to deliver her, or rather, Lexa’s feather yet because this time Ollivander had sent her out with a list of a few items which he believed she could get in one go. You better get used to the travelling, he had told her; you are going to be doing a lot of it.

Clarke was cheerfully calling it Griffin: the World Tour.

She was whistling happily as she walked down the street, looking for a promising daisy patch.

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Lexa watched her walk past, hidden behind a house corner.

She had seen Clarke from her hotel room in downtown Milwaukee and had recovered from staring in disbelief quickly enough to make a spur of the moment decision to follow her. Now she had made a pretty good guess as to why Clarke was here. Knarls frequented this neighborhood all the time, and the little hedgehog-like creature had pins with magical properties which were much desired by wandmakers. Lexa only knew this because she had been here less than a month ago on the same errand she guessed Clarke was in was now.

This time around Lexa was only in Wisconsin because Mrs. Wolfe had sent her there to buy powdered dugbog skin from one of her shady business contacts. Lexa had no interest in Knarls. But she did have an interest in fucking with Clarke.

She briefly remembered something Mrs. Wolfe had told her a few times: mockery isn’t the product of a strong mind. But then again, Mrs. Wolfe had tried to teach her a fair few personal philosophies the Lexa didn’t at all agree with.

And Mrs. Wolfe wasn’t here right now.

Lexa wracked her brain for ideas, and briefly wished she had paid more attention in Magizoology. Knarls were very friendly creatures, she remembered. The only caveat was that they went mad if they thought people were trying to poison them.

Well, that was promising.

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Clarke had reached the end of the suburban street, where there was a small grassy playground between the houses. It was empty despite the brilliant sunshine since it was too early in the day for
children to be out of school. Clarke looked carefully around it. Soon enough she saw it: there, in the bushes next to a small house, a creature was rummaging. It looked for the whole world to see like a normal hedgehog, but Clarke knew better. She grinned and sat down about 6 feet from the bush, speaking softly with her hand outstretched.

“Come heeeeeeere, Mr. Knarl. Come come come!”

The little creature lifted its head to look at her. Deciding that she didn’t look very dangerous, it started sniffing the air and moving closer to her.

“Yeah, that’s a good boy. Come closer… who is going to snatch one of your pins and run away? Certainly not this girl, that’s for sure… Just a little closer…”

The knarl was getting closer and closer, just about 3 feet away now, moving with benign interest. Clarke made sure to not do any sudden movements; though docile now, she had read that knarls could get savage pretty quickly. That’s why she was planning to run away as soon as she had the pin. As the knarl slowly moved closer Clarke looked briefly up in the direction it had come from and froze.

Lexa was standing next to one of the houses, in plain view, watching Clarke intently. She was sporting a wide grin which Clarke under any other circumstances would have thought was beautiful. Now it was terrifying instead. Clarke’s heartbeat sped up. Only when Lexa started moving forward did Clarke realize what she was holding in her hands: a small bowl of milk. Clarke quickly regained the power of speech.

“Lexa! What are you doing?!” She hissed through gritted teeth. The knarl stopped moving forwards and looked towards the approaching woman instead. “Lexa, don’t!”

Lexa ignored her, moved closer, much closer to the Knarl than Clarke would have dared, and put down the bowl of milk right next to it. Then she very carefully straightened up again, grin never leaving her face, and quirked her eyebrow at Clarke. Then she disapparated with a loud bang.

Clarke, hand still outstretched towards the Knarl, could only watch her disappear. Then she looked back at the Knarl as it sniffed the milk, and every single pin on its back stood straight up. Clarke groaned as the Knarl let out a high-pitched snarl and rounded on her.

Clarke decided she really hated Lexa.

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It only got worse from there.

In Louisiana, Clarke stole Lexa’s clabbert skin by hiding in a side street and quickly transfigurating it into a piece of used parchment as Lexa walked past. Lexa threw it in the trash when she discovered it in her bag, and Clarke simply picked it up again and transfigured it back to its original state. Then, just for good measure, she followed Lexa until her attention was turned somewhere else, took an actual piece of parchment, scribbled a C with a star next to it on it, and very carefully levitated it over to land in Lexa’s bag.

In Belgium, Lexa stole Clarke’s chizpurfle claw by pretending to be a maid at the hotel and sneaking into Clarke’s room to ‘clean’ while the blonde was out. Clarke couldn’t even have been sure it was Lexa and not an honest mistake on the hotel’s part if Lexa hadn’t deliberately left a glass of milk and a doodle of a knarl on the nightstand.

In Armenia, Clarke set fire to Lexa’s alihotsy twigs with a risky but well-aimed spell from the
window as Lexa was getting a celebratory drink in a muggle bar. Lexa couldn’t use magic to save them since there were muggles present, and had to stomp hopelessly on the twigs as they turned to ashes. She barely caught a glimpse of blond hair disappearing from the window while desperately trying to put out the flames.

In Latvia, Clarke had gone to great lengths to smuggle a niffler with her from Britain, planning to use the creature to dig up some emeralds from a mine which Ollivander planned to use to create a high-end range of wands. Unfortunately, it turned out that someone had slipped her niffler a befuddlement draught, and the niffler went on a three-hour excavational dig in the mine only to return proudly to Clarke with a bag of green mints. Clarke didn't know where he even found mints in a mine. When coming back to her hotel room she found the empty bottle of befuddlement draught, now only containing a piece or parchment with the letter L and another star on it.

Clarke really really wished she could say she didn't enjoy it, even a little bit.

Chapter End Notes

Come holla at me on tumblr at geyranger.tumblr.com for edits and soundtracks and other shenanigans! Also stay tuned for next chapter is gonna be fab, and by fab I mean that there are actual interactions between the main characters.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

They stared into each other’s eyes for a long moment, all adrenaline and panting breaths. Clarke couldn’t help it; her body was high on the rush of flying and racing against Lexa, and now Lexa was spread out on the forest floor underneath her. Clarke’s eyes flickered down to Lexa’s lips and back up again. Lexa didn’t look away. Her gaze slowly lowered to Clarke’s lips, too.

Chapter Notes

Come find me on Tumblr at geyranger.tumblr.com/tagged/spelling+it+out for edits and other shenanigans! I am not making up any of the magical creatures, by the way, they're all in Fantastic Beasts. Aiming to update every two days, dropping previews and extra material on Tumblr on the off-days!

The last installment of the current leg of the Griffin world tour ended up taking place in France.

For the last item on her list Ollivander had instructed her to get him a feather from a golden snidget, and at the time, Clarke had pretended to know what a golden snidget was just long enough to get home and look it up. A snidget, as it turned out, was the bird that was the origin of the golden snitch in quidditch. The sport was originally played with the seekers trying to catch the golden snidget for 150 points, and the popularity and violent nature of the game quickly made the snidget population in Great Britain plummet. It was now fiercely protected all across Europe, but the biggest free roaming population could be found in the large woodlands of France.

The problem with the snidget was that, even though it was an incredibly fat and practically circular bird, it was very fast and unbelievably agile. That was what made it such a useful bird for quidditch in the first place. It was nigh on impossible to hit with a spell even by the most experienced wizards, and a nightmare to catch for wandmakers who wanted the beautiful, golden feathers. It was also highly protected, and Clarke had to dodge 3 separate delegations from W.E.T.A. (Wizards for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) before she even made it into the forest.

Clarke hadn’t brought her books and her usual repertoire of well-prepared spells to this particular mission. Instead, she had brought her broomstick. It was time to see if 3 years as captain of the house team at Hogwarts would finally pay off.

She walked through the forest with a keen eye fixed on the canopy. The woodland was old and beautiful, and the spring sun filtered down through new leaves. The canopy was old and dense, creating a roof over the shaded forest floor. Old leaves made a gentle crushing sound under her feet.

She ran into Lexa in less than ten minutes.

Lexa was standing in the middle of a clearing, clutching her own broom and looking towards the
canopy too. Clarke couldn’t help but stare at her, at her slender figure and her tattered but well-fitting leather coat. Lexa’s braids were flowing down her back, reflecting back the sparse sunlight which was filtered through the canopy. Clarke briefly indulged the thought that she could have stood there staring all day if she hadn’t been so strongly compelled to hex Lexa on sight instead. Clarke’s breath caught when Lexa turned around none the less.

Lexa started when she saw Clarke, which was the only reason Clarke didn’t think Lexa had followed her there. For a moment, they just stared at each other.

“Lexa.”

“Clarke. What brings you to France?”

“I’m here to hunt elephants, Lexa, what about you?”, Clarke said, rolling her eyes and giving a pointed look at Lexa’s broomstick.

The side of Lexa’s mouth twitched. Clarke walked a little into the clearing until she was about 10 feet from Lexa. Clarke was unsure if she should reach for her wand and hex her right on the spot, or just keep walking until she was within reaching distance of the brunette instead. She kind of wanted to do both.

“And do you often bring your broom with you when you hunt elephants?”

“More often than I bring milk to a knarl fight, at least”

“Oh dear, the knarl wasn’t upset, was it? I would hate to think I have inconvenienced you”

“No, don’t worry about it. I took some comfort in knowing you didn’t get a knarl pin out of that encounter either”

“I wouldn’t if I were you; I got my knarl pin a few months before”

Clarke’s mouth fell open.

“You didn’t even need the knarl pin?”

Lexa just looked at her with a smug smile.

Clarke’s heartbeat was picking up, and she was telling herself it was from anger. She really wanted to wipe the smug grin off of Lexa’s face.

“I suggest you close your mouth, Clarke. It is insect spawning season after all”.

Clarke’s mouth snapped shut. Her cheeks turned red, and her blood was racing. This time, she was pretty sure it was just from anger.

“Tasteful, Lexa. At least I don’t have to worry about your competition right now; flying takes gracefulness and bodily control, and from what I saw of your spectacular fall down that hill in Sweden you have very little of either”

Lexa’s eyes narrowed.

“At least one of us has some experience in catching birds and don’t have to revert to stealing”

“That is more than a bit rich, coming from you”
“And am I right in assuming you haven’t been back to London with my jobberknoll feather yet?”

“So what if I haven’t?”

“Because then I should expect it to still be in your bag, actually”

Lexa eyed Clarke’s shoulder bag, which the blonde shifted to be slightly more hidden behind her. Clarke locked eyes with Lexa, her gaze part resentment, part challenge, and fully ice cold.

“If you want it, come and get it”

The two women stared hard at each other. Lexa had just moved her arm slightly, Clarke assumed to get her wand out and curse her when they both heard a sharp cry above them.

There, sitting on a thin branch about 20 feet above them in the canopy, was the golden snidget. It was about the size of a regular snitch, maybe slightly bigger, with the same golden color. The only difference was the bright red eyes which stared down at them with intense wariness.

Clarke looked back at Lexa. Lexa looked at Clarke. Clarke let her shoulder bag fall to the ground.

In a blur of motion, Lexa threw herself on her broom and zoomed towards the sky. Clarke, jumping on her own broom and racing after her, couldn’t help but notice that Lexa was anything but ungraceful; her long leather coat streamed behind her, hair whipping around her face as she sped towards the snidget with the ease of someone who has spent a lot of time on a broomstick. Clarke gritted her teeth, hot on Lexa’s tail.

The snidget didn’t move until Lexa’s hand was less than three feet away from it. Suddenly it dashed away, so fast that neither Lexa nor Clarke saw which direction it went. Lexa pulled her broom up to slow her speed, frantically looking around for a glimmer of gold on the forest floor.

Clarke saw it first, though. Doing a fast lap around Lexa so she didn’t have to slow her speed she zoomed towards the snidget, which was hovering a foot above the ground at the edge of the clearing. It saw her coming, and turned around and sped into the undergrowth of the forest.

Clarke followed faster than she ever thought she’d flown before, dodging trees and branches, never losing sight of the spot of golden feathers. She could feel Lexa hot on her tail. Clarke assessed that she and Lexa were about tied for skills, which was good for Clarke as she was still a few feet in the lead. Lexa, however, seemed to have a better broomstick, and whenever the snidget did a sharp turn or they had to veer out of the way of a tree trunk, Lexa gained slightly on her.

They were practically side by side when the snidget took a sharp turn upwards and burst through the canopy into clear air above it. Lexa and Clarke burst through seconds after it, and it had already turned down towards the canopy again. When coming down after it Clarke misjudged the strength of one of the branches she cut through, and the impact knocked her slightly off course as she came back into the undergrowth. Lexa was back in the lead, and Clarke cursed loudly.

The snidget was getting tired. Clarke could tell from the way it took longer to get back on course after each turn, and how Clarke with Lexa within reaching distance was, at last, starting to gain on it. Clarke became slightly panicked; if the chase came to a close now, Lexa would get the bird, and Clarke wasn’t sure she would ever be able to live it down. Flying was supposed to be Clarke’s forte, goddammit, and she screamed in frustration as Lexa raised her hand out towards the snidget, only inches away.

Clarke took a look at the billowing leather coat right in front of her and made a spur of the moment decision. She reached out her hand and tugged hard on it.
Lexa veered off course, shouting loudly in shock. Clarke had about a tenth of a second of feeling triumphant until she realized she had miscalculated badly: Lexa, fighting to regain control of her broom, veered right into Clarke, who lost her grip. In her panic, she grasped for anything to hold on to, and her hand found Lexa’s boot and pulled on it. They both plummeted towards the forest floor.

Thankfully they had only been about 6 feet up when they crashed, and the forest had a rich underwood of bushes and ferns. They landed in a pile of limbs and broomsticks, and Clarke landed directly on top of Lexa and had the breath knocked out of her.

“No!” Lexa shouted as she desperately tried to turn around, Clarke still on top of her, to look for the snidget. She turned back towards Clarke when it became apparent that the snidget was nowhere to be seen, rage in her eyes.

Clarke couldn’t breathe. She was trying to catch her breath after the hard landing, but it became very difficult when Lexa’s green eyes, full of fury, were directed straight at her from less than eight inches away. Clarke, still struggling to breathe, looked away and around the forest, heart sinking as not a single speck of gold was in sight. She looked back down at Lexa again.

They stared into each other’s eyes for a long moment, all adrenaline and panting breaths. Clarke couldn’t help it; her body was high on the rush of flying and racing against Lexa, and now Lexa was spread out on the forest floor underneath her. Clarke’s eyes flickered down to Lexa’s lips and back up again. Lexa didn’t look away. Her gaze slowly lowered to Clarke’s lips, too.

Then they heard the muted cry of the snidget, and both their heads snapped towards the forest where the sound had come from. It was clearly miles away already. Clarke rolled off Lexa with a groan, lying on her back and massaging her ribs.

Lexa sat up, shoulders tensing. She looked back down at Clarke next to her, subdued annoyance etched in every inch of her face.

“Where did you learn to fly like that?”

Clarke gave a long exhale, still massaging her ribs.

“Hogwarts house quidditch team captain. What about you?”

Lexa paused for a moment before she looked away and said: “I used to coach my brother’s little league team”.

“You what?”

Clarke sat up with an incredulous look at Lexa, but Lexa was already standing up and walking to where her broom was lying a few feet away. When she turned back around the annoyance in her face was no longer subdued.

“Why did you pull me off course? I was seconds from getting the damn bird!”

Clarke raised an eyebrow, unamused.

“Yeah, that’s kind of why”

Lexa threw her arms up in frustration and turned around to pick up her broom, but Clarke was not going to sit around and watch Lexa take the moral high ground on this.
“Well, what did you expect after that stunt you pulled with the Knarl?”

“That was a Knarl! There’s one in every garden back garden in the western hemisphere! Do you have any idea how long it’s going to take me to track down another snidget?! They’re the rarest bird in Europe!”

“Yeah I know how long it takes because I am going to have to do it too. And they’re not the rarest bird in Europe, the population has been recovering for 70 years! Did you even open a book before coming here?!”

Lexa turned back towards her, her expression murderous.

“That information had been completely irrelevant if you hadn’t stopped me from getting the one that was right in front of my fingers. I think I can take care of myself without your little encyclopedia knowledge”

Clarke got to her feet and spat back, “Will you have fun with that. I am going to go track down another snidget, which should take me less than a week because I am not a stuck up, malevolent bitch who thinks she is too good to open a damn book!”

“Yeah, you do that, and take your time since the only reprimand you’ll get for being late is a disappointed look from your beloved Ollivander!” Lexa was shouting now. “Some of us are actually adults with real life problems, who can’t afford to gallivant around France for weeks to find a bloody bird! I have people depending on me! That might be a complicated thing to understand from someone who has clearly never had any responsibilities in her whole life”

They were screaming at each other at a few feet’s distance, their shouts echoing through the forest. Clarke’s voice got dangerously low as she stepped closer to Lexa.

“Don’t presume to know a thing about me, Lexa. You have no idea what I’ve been through, and you wouldn’t care if you did because you are a callous evil hag. If you have people depending on you then I feel truly sorry for them because they are eventually going to realize what a horrendous human you are, and hopefully, they’ll tell you to go fuck yourself”

Lexa was livid. Clarke could see it in her face clear as day, and for a moment Clarke thought she had gone too far. She expected Lexa to get her wand out and curse her, or maybe just punch her in the face. Instead Lexa, by what seemed to be massive strength of will, furious eyes never leaving Clarke, took a step back and disapparated with a loud bang.

Clarke let out a breath she hadn’t known she was holding.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

A loud crack filled the air as Lexa and Clarke materialized. Lexa could tell that they were still in the Rockies, and probably not too far away from where they had just left. There was a tent next to them, which Lexa assumed had to be Clarke’s.

“What the hell, Lexa?!”

Lexa groaned and let her body fall to the ground.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The whiskers of the kneazle cat can make excellent wand cores, Mrs. Wolfe had told Lexa. The wand would be unparalleled at producing truthfulness charms and remove disguises, Mrs. Wolfe said, because it would copy the kneazle cat’s ability of detecting distrustful or suspicious people. They were very prized in wand-making circles. Of course, they were very difficult to obtain since any kneazle would notice your ulterior motives when you approach. That was all Mrs. Wolfe had to say on the subject, but Lexa sensed a certain underlying air of ‘good luck figuring that one out’.

Lexa assumed it was punishment for coming back with her snidget feather three weeks late.

Lexa had gone to the outskirts of Denver, Colorado, because rumor had it the kneazles in the Rocky Mountains were bigger than in the rest of the world. Lexa had assumed that would mean they were easier to find. However, as she listened to the local people chatting on and on about how the kneazles in the Rockies were not as much the size of cats as they were the size of a small puma Lexa started to question the wisdom of her decision.

Well, she’d come this far.

She knew Clarke was in the area because Lexa had seen her. Clarke had been standing in a shop, all blonde hair and brilliant blue eyes and charming grin and confidence, negotiating the price of camping supplies with the shop owner. Lexa had felt her pulse quickening, and had promptly turned around and stalked away.

Lexa did it mainly because she didn’t fancy a repeat of the screaming match in France. She did it partially because she didn’t want Clarke to know Lexa was there, so she could sabotage her again. She did it only a little bit because Lexa could feel herself wanting to go and talk to Clarke, to explain why she had been so furious with the things Clarke had said to her in France, to get to know Clarke better, to make Clarke chuckle again like she had in that pub in Germany before everything had gone off the rails. And that made Lexa really scared.

Also, Lexa was still furious about missing her snidget and this fruitless mission she had been sent on to Denver because of it, and she didn’t quite trust herself not to curse Clarke if they came face to face.

Lexa had left Denver as soon as possible after seeing Clarke and set off into the mountains. She
had pitched her tent on the most even hill she could find, surrounded by the first flowers of spring
and mountains which still had snow-covered tops. It was beautiful, and Lexa’s mood had
brightened considerably.

Her tent was one of the few keepsakes Lexa owned. It was small on the inside compared to most
wizarding tents, with only a small kitchen, a living room, and only one bedroom, and the furniture
was well worn and rugged. There was a faded chesterfield sofa in the corner. Lexa remembered
camping trips as one of the favorite parts of her childhood, and the tent was one of the very few
luxuries Lexa had allowed herself after moving out of her childhood home. She had taken longer
than she would ever admit choosing the right decor and furniture within her very limited budget, to
make it feel right. Now her little palace was perched on a beautiful site in the Rockies.

Lexa had picked some flowers on the first day and put them in a mason jar in the kitchen.

It took her a few days to scout of the area and decide on a few promising sites, where she left
scraps of meat which she had brought with her from Denver. Then she had placed a surveillance
charm on the sites, which would notify her if anything visited them. Lexa felt it was a solid plan.

After three days of getting up at all hours of the night to catch nothing but foxes and on a
memorable occasion an angry wolverine, Lexa was forced to reconsider.

The thing was, Lexa didn’t usually have a well prepared plan when she went on these missions.
She was a really competent witch, this she knew, and she could usually manage just fine by
trusting her instincts. She had been getting out of scraps her whole life by just trusting her instincts.
That, her dueling abilities and natural talent for spells, had been enough to get everything Mrs.
Wolfe had wanted from her thus far. Lexa wasn’t sure it was going to be enough this time.

Lexa rested her head on her fist with a pout and threw another small stick into her campfire. Maybe
Clarke had a point about the book thing.

Hopefully, Clarke wasn’t having any more luck with the kneazle than Lexa was having. Though,
Lexa conceded as she got up and stretched, Clarke probably had a small library with her in her bag,
full of books about kneazles and their many hiding places. Clarke probably knew exactly what she
was doing.

Lexa looked up towards the sun, which was just starting to sink down towards the mountains. She
didn’t want to see Clarke again. She really didn’t. But she also didn’t want to return to Mrs. Wolfe
empty handed. Lexa took a long, deep breath, and let it out slowly through pursed lips. Right.
Time to find Clarke.

Tracking down Clarke took less than an hour. Lexa would like to think it was because she was
good at tracking and reading the environment, but by now she suspected that she and Clarke might
just be destined to keep running into one another and that her tracking skills had nothing to do with
it.

Lexa watched her from behind the safety of a boulder as Clarke followed a rocky path up the slope
of a mountain. She wore rugged camping gear, and she was holding Fantastic Beasts and Where to
Find Them open in one hand and clutching her wand in the other. Wisps of her hair were
characteristically tied behind her head, and she looked for the entire world like she had been born
for this. Clarke moved cautiously but determined up towards the mountain. Lexa followed at a
distance.
Soon enough the path turned a corner and widened into a ledge. To the side of the ledge was a small cave; Lexa gauged she could probably just about sit upright in the opening if she bend her neck a little. Clarke took a moment to walk around and scope out the ledge, always keeping a watchful eye on the small cave.

When satisfied with whatever she was looking for on the ledge, Clarke came to a stop in the middle of it. She placed her book on the ground and kneeled, raising her wand and pointing it at herself. From Lexa’s hiding place behind the corner she could see Clarke close her eyes and mumble a series of spells, casting them on herself. It went on for several minutes.

Eventually, Clarke’s eyes opened again and fixed themselves on the small cave. Never taking her eyes off it, Clarke crawled towards it and put her wand on the ground in front of it. Then she crawled back and sat down on the ground, waiting.

Lexa was aghast. The kneazle could be a very dangerous creature, and Clarke had just rendered herself wandless. Lexa seriously considered revealing herself to Clarke just to ask her what the hell she was thinking, but before she could make her decision she froze. A pair of glowing green eyes had appeared in the small cave.

The kneazle crept cautiously forward. It looked about the size of a cougar, but its fur was bright ginger. Its green eyes flickered around the ledge and found Clarke’s wand. It sniffed suspiciously and seemed to somehow understand that it meant that the visitor was now unarmed. Then it looked up and fixed its gaze on Clarke.

Clarke, to her credit and Lexa’s amazement, didn’t move a muscle. She looked the kneazle in the eyes as it crept out of the cage and started to slowly walk in a circle around her, taking her measure. Clarke kept looking straight ahead, her back straight and determined. It occurred to Lexa that the spells she muttered a minute ago must have been spells designed to conceal her character and the suspicious nature of her visit. Lexa wracked her brain for what possible sort of spell could achieve that, and shook her head slightly at the dawning realization at just how good Clarke was at this, and how well prepared she was compared to Lexa.

The kneazle had come full circle around Clarke, and came to a stop in front of her. It looked at her with a regal expression. Clarke looked it in the eye, and slowly, ever so slowly, started raising her hand towards it head. The kneazle made no reaction to move away or hiss, just kept looking at her. As Clarke’s hand was just inches from the kneazle’s head Clarke allowed herself a minuscule smile.

Then the kneazle sniffed the air. Its head turned slightly in the direction of Lexa before it growled and jumped back, beginning to prowl around the ledge.

Lexa had been so wrapped up in the wonder in front of her that she hadn’t taken into account her own lack of protective spells. And, as she was here in the same errand as Clarke, the kneazle had undoubtedly begun sensing her. Her eyes widened in panic at the realization.

Clarke was worried too. Lexa could tell because her eyes had narrowed, clearly trying to work out why the kneazle was getting so agitated, and she was starting to lean away from the stressed cat. As the creature got more and more worked up, it walked back and forth in front of her, growling and bearing its teeth and snapping at Clarke. It clearly couldn’t tell the Lexa was there, just that something was wrong. Clarke’s eyes shot towards her wand on the ground several years away, but even Lexa could see that it was too far away. As the kneazle got ready to pounce on Clarke, Lexa saw the first twinge of fear in her eyes.

The kneazle leaped at Clarke, claws out.
“No!”

Lexa jumped up from her hiding place, and shot the first spell she could think of at the kneazle. It was an exploding spell, and by all accounts should have blasted the cat away, but all it achieved was to make it angry. It turned away from Clarke and rounded on Lexa. She barely had time to catch Clarke’s shocked expression at her sudden appearance and couldn’t even open her mouth to cast a new curse before the kneazle was on her.

The bite around her upper arm felt like red hot metal. The claws sinking into her calf felt like venom. Lexa cried out in pain.

Then suddenly the kneazle flew off her with an angry cry. Lexa was hazy with pain, but she heard it tumble down the path behind her as her vision filled with blonde hair. A strong hand closed around her uninjured arm, and Lexa felt the familiar tightening all around her as Clarke apparated them away.

A loud crack filled the air as Lexa and Clarke materialized. Lexa could tell that they were still in the Rockies, and probably not too far away from where they had just left. There was a tent next to them, which Lexa assumed had to be Clarke’s.

“What the hell, Lexa?!”

Lexa groaned and let her body fall to the ground.

She could vaguely feel blood pumping out of her body through the wounds in her shoulder and her thigh, and Lexa was only faintly aware of what was going on around her. She heard Clarke swear loudly and disappear into the tent only to reappear a moment later, muttering a spell. Lexa felt the cold air of the cutting spell on her shoulder and for a bizarre moment thought Clarke was going to murder her, until Clarke pulled her ruined sleeve away to look at her wound. Clarke cleaned it with a quick spell, and reached the bandage she had gotten from the tent over the wound to cover it.

Lexa cried out in pain.

“Shhhh, come on, it’s ok” Clarke muttered reassuringly, and Lexa felt her whole body relax as Clarke must have put some sort of calming medical spell on her. Lexa felt instantly better. It was odd, she felt almost like she was floating. Lexa had never felt anything like it before. She waited until Clarke had finished with her shoulder and moved on to fuzzing over her leg before sitting up slightly, and looking down at the blonde.

“I am going to need to remove one of your trouser legs, is that ok?”

It took Lexa a moment to realize that Clarke was looking at her expectingly and that Lexa was supposed to say something. Lexa opened her mouth, but no sound came out; the last few glints of the sun were catching in Clarke’s hair, and as eyes as clear as day met Lexa’s she couldn’t think of anything else than how incredibly beautiful they were.

The distraction must have shown because Clarke got a funny smile on her face and chuckled lowly. It was somehow the most exquisite sounds Lexa had ever heard.

“That would be anesthesia charm. Don’t worry; it will wear off in a minute. Lexa, I need to remove your trouser leg to treat the wound. Is that ok?”

Lexa blinked hard a few times.
“Yeah, sure. Whatever you need”.

Lexa kept staring as Clarke made quick work of her trousers, cutting them just above her knee and pulling them away, and started cleaning the wound. The floaty feeling gradually left Lexa’s body and she could feel her upper arm and calf ache intensely. She gritted her teeth together. She looked at Clarke’s hair again as she worked; now it looked just like normal hair with a bit of sun in it. Lexa let out a breath through her teeth.

Clarke was still working on cleaning the wound in her calf without looking up the next time she spoke to Lexa.

“What were you doing on that ledge?”

Lexa winced as Clarke’s fingers brushed a particularly sore spot.

“Hunting elephants”

Clarke looked like she had to bite back a smile at that. Lexa looked at this girl who she had thought hated her guts working tirelessly to stitch up her leg again, and decided she deserved some honesty.

“Actually, I had been following you for a while”.

“Why?”.

“I couldn’t find the kneeazle on my own”.

“Oh”.

There was a bit of a break before Clarke spoke again, this time with a hint of resentment in her voice.

“What were you going to do if I had succeeded in getting the whiskers?”

Lexa sighed again.

“Honestly, I don’t know. I think I just wanted to see how you dealt with it, really. I had no idea where to find the kneeazle. I’ve been setting traps, but I’ve only been getting foxes and a very angry wolverine”.

Clarke’s cheek got a tint of red, but she didn’t look up from Lexa’s leg. Lexa suddenly got suspicious.

“Clarke? Did you put that wolverine in my trap?”

“Hey, you just messed up my kneeazle hunt when I was literally inches away from the prize. You don’t get to take the moral high ground here”.

Lexa frowned down at Clarke, irritation battling with resentment in her mind. She was just so used to hating Clarke by now; it was difficult to let the habit go.

Clarke looked up at her and quirked her eyebrow with a frown before she looked down again and started to bandage Lexa’s leg.

“You know Lexa, where I am from, when someone rescues you from a dangerous animal and then stitches you up to stop you from bleeding to death, we usually say ‘thank you’”
Lexa blushed.

“Thank you, Clarke. I am not ungrateful”

“Don’t worry about it”.

“No, Clarke. You could have left me there. And with our… history, honestly I wouldn’t have blamed you. But you didn’t. Thank you”.

Clarke smiled down at her leg as she worked.

“Thank you from blasting it when it pounced on me first. You didn’t have to do that either”.

Lexa took a moment to think about that. She had been acting on instinct ever since the kneazle first leaped at Clarke, and it honestly hadn’t occurred to her that if she hadn’t interfered then it would be Clarke with the gashes in her skin, instead of Lexa. She didn’t like the thought of that at all.

“You’re welcome”.

Clarke finished tying up her bandage and gave her leg a pat.

“There you go, good as new. It wasn’t too deep a wound. Just maybe don’t put all your weight on it immediately, and change the bandages regularly”.

Lexa pulled her leg towards her and touched it experimentally. It hurt. She tentatively stood up, Clarke hovering as if worried she was going to fall over. Eventually, they both straightened up and looked at each other.

“So…”

There was an awkward pause. The comradery they had briefly shared seemed to have vanished now that they were both relatively back to normal. Lexa felt like she could physically feel the distance increasing between them.

“I guess I’ll be heading back to my own campsite then”.

“I guess so”.

Lexa started to turn around but hesitated.

“Clarke. I have been… well, I suppose we have been quite unfair to one another. I am happy to call a truce now if you are.

Watching the smile which spread across Clarke’s face was like watching the sunrise.

“What, no more competing? No more stealing?”

“Well, at least no more mindless sabotaging”.

“I think you will find that since you just sabotaged me less than an hour ago I am the one missing out in this agreement”.

“Seeing as you started us down this path by stealing my aspen twigs I think you will find that we are actually even”.

“Actually, I just stopped you from bleeding to death, so you still owe me one”
Lexa rolled her eyes.

“Please just agree to the truce, Clarke”.

“Sure, Lexa. See you around, yeah?”

Lexa gave her a small smile before turning around and heading back down towards her own camp site and saying softly to herself, “I don’t think I could avoid that even if I wanted to”.

Chapter End Notes

Look up geyranger.tumblr.com/tagged/spelling+it+out for edits and other shenanigans! I’ve got about 7000 more words of this fic already written, but I am going to stick to posting a new chapter every 2 days :)
Clarke was painting.

She was sitting in front of her easel in the middle of her living room, home in her flat in London. The pale daylight was streaming in through her windows; she had settled on the flat in the first place especially because of the natural light. The walls were shaded and her furniture was mostly dark wood, the chairs which were scattered around and her dilapidated ancient sofa upholstered in green velvet. One of the walls was just one big bookshelf.

Every last horizontal surface was covered in opened books and half-finished art projects.

Clarke loved it. She wasn’t there nearly often enough to get annoyed with the out-of-date interior, and she loved having a place which was only hers. In this flat she could spend hours painting without the rest of the world looking in. In this flat she could be bent over her books, researching where to go next on her missions from Ollivander, dreaming of faraway lands and what the future might bring.

This flat was the first place she had felt really happy since her dad had died.

She was sitting with her back to the big window to make the most of the sunlight. She had opened the window to let the warm may air in, and her curtains ruffled gently as Clarke painted. In front of her was the door to the kitchen and the hallway which led to her bedroom, on her right was the bookshelf wall and on her left was an infrequently used fireplace.

Clarke let her thoughts roam freely as her hand moved over the easel, thoughts seamlessly commanding her wand to produce the right colours. It was instinctual by now; Clarke barely had to think the words before the right hue appeared, flowing over the white surface at her command.

She had spent the last 2 weeks or so in this flat, not going out much. Ollivander had reprimanded her for her slow progress in the field of wand lore, but he had noticed her aptitude for collecting materials. As a way of testing her limitations, he had given her a mission which he said he normally wouldn’t spring on apprentices until they had trained for several years. Her target: the ruby scarab, a beetle which was holy to the ancient Egyptians, and was thought to be extinct.

Clarke was determined to succeed. Not only did she want to do well in this job, impress Ollivander, and prove to herself that she had made the right decision in quitting healer training; everything else aside Clarke had always had a hard time saying no to a challenge. It had landed her in detention at Hogwarts so often that her various teachers had started always keeping their Tuesday nights open, just for her.

She wasn’t very deterred by the assumed extinction of the ruby scarab. Ollivander was a sensible man, she figured, and wouldn’t let her out on a wild goose chase if he didn’t actually think she had a chance. And so she had spent day after day hunched over her books, making frequent trips to Flourish and Blotts to get every published work they had on the ancient Egyptians.

The picture she had put together was this: most populations of the ruby scarab did go extinct several hundred years ago. However, when wizards and muggles started excavating the tombs of the old pharaohs in the nineteenth century they sometimes found small groups of ruby scarabs
living in the catacombs of the pyramids. The beetles tended to escape out of the opened tomb and get picked off by vultures and cats almost immediately, so Clarke figured she was unlikely to find a wild population no matter how hard she looked.

There were, however, a small number of unopened tombs left in Egypt.

Clarke grinned at her canvas. She had already set her mind on the most promising one: the Qabar min Sahar.

There were a few problems associated with exploring a hitherto unexplored tomb, of course. Firstly, unexplored tombs were unexplored tombs because the Egyptian Council of Magic had decided to keep it so to “prevent the continued plunder of our national heritage and riches”. After due consideration, Clarke had decided that retrieving a beetle which everyone thought was extinct anyway probably wasn’t technically stealing, and she promised herself to not take anything from the tomb other than a single ruby scarab and leave everything else in its place. Still, she was sure she would encounter a fair number of magical protections in her efforts. Secondly, and this was the real problem, since no one had set foot in Qabar min Sahar since it was closed 3000 years ago, Clarke had no way of knowing what she might find once inside.

Clarke was a research based explorer. She was good at her job because she always came prepared with exactly the right ingredients she needed to succeed, something she could do because she always knew what to expect. Walking blindly into a pyramid did not fit well with her method of exploring.

She did, however, know someone who had a more instinctual and spur-of-the-moment approach to exploring. Someone who Clarke had decided owed her a favor for still having two intact arms and two functioning legs.

Clarke knew that involving Lexa was a risky plan, considering their history of snatching prizes out from under each other’s noses. But Clarke knew there was no way she would make it into the tomb alone, and Lexa was definitely very good at her job. Clarke needed her. Still, it had taken her three days of pacing around her flat to make her mind up.

Clarke ignored the butterflies in her stomach as she painted. This was a good plan, she had decided, and Clarke Griffin rarely went back on a decision.

When she had finally made her mind up she had bounced out of her flat, giddy with the idea of going to Egypt and maybe a little with the idea of seeing Lexa again, only to immediately realize that she had no idea how to contact her. Having bumped into each other so frequently that last few months it was an odd feeling to be wanting to see Lexa but not knowing where to start looking for her.

Clarke was nothing if not resourceful, however; she had pulled in favors from her friends.

Raven had smuggled some sort of detection machine she had been working on out from the Department of Mysteries, the long wand-shaped metal rod hidden in her cane when she left work. Trust Raven to be a senior ranking Unmentionable within 2 years of graduating Hogwarts, and abusing her position at every opportunity. Clarke had initially protested of the theft, pointing out that Raven could definitely lose her job and possibly be sent to Azkaban, but Raven, ever the rule breaker, was very keen on the idea and wouldn’t take no for an answer.

Clarke was feeling considerably less morally ambiguous about convincing Octavia to help; the two of them had a longstanding history of friendly blackmail and good-natured extortion. Talking Octavia into sneaking past her boss at the Auror’s Office to investigate if the ministry’s archives
had anything to say about Lexa, wand maker’s apprentice, last name unknown, was hardly worse than when Octavia talked Clarke into exchanging McGonagall’s pumpkin wine with Monegro Potion she had stolen from the potions room in their first year at Hogwarts. Clarke got caught, but Octavia had turned herself in and they had both been given detention for a month from a deputy headmistress who suddenly had a long flowing mop of hair. They had been best friends ever since.

Octavia was the only person who hadn’t questioned Clarke when she decided to drop healer training. She was probably the person in the world who knew Clarke the best.

Octavia was also the only person Clarke knew who felt like it was somehow socially acceptable to apparate straight into people’s homes, which Clarke was reminded of when she heard a loud bang in the kitchen.

“Come in,” Clarke said dryly without looking up from her canvas.

Octavia walked into the living room, lazy expression and black coat billowing behind her, looking like she had just walked off the set of a slightly naughty action movie. Being an Auror really suited her.

“Would it kill you to clean your flat now and then, Clarke?”

“Yes”

“I can count no less than 15 used coffee mugs in this room alone”

“It fuels my creative self-expression”

“It fuels your fuck off pretentious vocabulary, more like”

Clarke finally looked up from her painting and beamed at her best friend as Octavia flipped some books off the couch and threw herself down on it.

“How is life treating you, O?”

“Good, but would be better if there wasn’t so goddamn much paperwork involved in locking up bad guys. You’d think I’d get a medal for catching death eaters but instead, I am chained to a desk for my efforts”.

“Well, such is regrettably the nature of the right to a fair trial”.

Octavia snorted.

“Regrettable. But also, my best friend has been getting some sort of weird promotion and is gallivanting all across the western hemisphere to steal other people’s toys or something like that, so I hardly see her anymore and I am lonely”.

“Please, you live with Raven. How lonely can you be?”

Octavia pouted. Clarke sighed.

“I’ll make it up to you, I swear. Next time I am sent to Eritrea to collect erumpent dung I’ll bring you back a sample as a souvenir”.

“Gross”.

“Just for you”.
“Seriously, though, I haven’t seen you for more than half an hour at a time in weeks. Is everything ok? You know there’s a law against working more than 60 hours per week, right? Do I need to bring Ollivander in for questioning?”

Clarke met Octavia’s worried gaze and smiled a genuine smile.

“Yes, I’m good. Work has really picked up; Ollivander is testing to see just how far he can push me before I admit defeat, I think.”

Octavia chuckled.

“Poor man is in for a hell of a ride.”

Clarke grinned.

“Now that I’ve struck a truce with Lexa I am actually finishing missions faster, so he must think my learning curve is exponential”.

“That’s the chick we’ve been tracking, right? Lexa something?”

“Yeah, she’s the one who stole my grindylow horn that I told you about”.

“And why do you want to find her again? Sounds to me like not only is she a massive bitch, but this truce is easier upheld if you don’t see each other ever again”.

“I need her to break me into a pyramid”.

“A pyramid?”

“A pyramid”.

“Cool. Anything I can do to help?”.

For an employed law enforcer, Octavia really had a very relaxed view of crime.

“Not unless you have an encyclopedic knowledge of unexplored Egyptian tombs”.

“Can’t help you there. I do have good news for you, however. Raven says she’s found this Lexa of yours”.

Clarke fell off her chair.

Her adrenaline had suddenly skyrocketed and she had tried to reach for her wand and her shoulder bag at the same time, and now Octavia was looking at her with wide eyes and a growing smirk as Clarke sat sheepishly on the floor and massaged her elbow.

“Wow, Clarke. You wouldn’t happen to be a tad more interested in this mysterious Lexa than what you’re letting on, would you?”.

Clarke blushed, and Octavia looked like a Christmas had come early. She sat up excitedly, staring at Clarke on the floor.

“I thought you hated her guts!”.

“I do”.
“You said she was a callous evil hag”.

“I did. I have also said that to her face”.

“Then how come you’re crushing on her? And didn’t tell me?”

“I am not crushing on her”.

“You fell off your chair”.

“She just makes me nervous, ok! Seriously, whenever I’ve gone somewhere the last two months I’ve been expecting her to turn up out of the blue and hex me. I literally walked into a lamp post in Belgium because I was busy looking over my shoulder”.

“And now you’re voluntarily seeking her help”.

“I need her expertise. I told you. And she owes me; I stitched her up after the kneazle savaged her in Colorado”.

“What?”

“She kinda saved me when it lunged for me first. She would have bled to death, O! It’s not like I had a choice!”

“Let me get this straight: you, my blonde and attractive friend got in over your head with a dangerous magical creature, then wonder girl swooped in out of nowhere to save you and afterwards you carefully tended her wounds with your trembling feminine fingers?”

“Ok, first of all, I was not in over my head. I had everything under control”.

“What does she look like?”

“Secondly, please don’t describe any part of my anatomy as trembling and feminine ever again”.

“What does she look like?”

Clarke looked at Octavia for a long moment before groaning and closing her eyes.

“Like a goddamn Amazonian goddess”.

Octavia fell apart laughing as Clarke hid her face in her hands.

Chapter End Notes

Hit me up at geyranger.tumblr.com/tagged/spelling+it+out so see what Clarke was painting..
Clarke walked down a busy street in Portland, Oregon. She was clutching a piece of parchment in her hand with a series of numbers on it.

When Raven reported having found Lexa, Clarke assumed she had tracked down whichever wandmaker Lexa was working for and found the wand shop, but that turned out not to be the case. Instead, Raven had used her metal gadget from the Department of Mysteries to put a complex and completely illegal tracing on Lexa, which had found her coordinates. Raven had proudly delivered those coordinates to Clarke. Clarke hadn’t used coordinates to do anything at all since she was seven and her dad had tried and failed to teach her the wonders of muggle technology and when Raven found out she had rolled her eyes so hard that Clarke was worried they would disappear into her skull completely.

A quick ‘Introduction to Coordinates and GPS 101’ lesson starring soon to be Professor Raven Reyes later, Clarke had gone home and spent a solid two hours bent over her World Atlas before working out that the coordinates were somewhere in Oregon. She had spent another hour double checking since she was sure Lexa had said she was from Canada before it dawned on her that she could, of course, have gone somewhere else to find work. After cross-referencing a list of known wandmakers she had acquired from Ollivander after she first met Lexa several months earlier she had worked out that Lexa must be working for Shikoba Wolfe, headquarters: Portland.

Clarke was biting her lip as she looked for anything which might seem like a wand shop as she meandered down the street. She was nervous, there was no denying it. Though she was sure Octavia was overplaying this whole supposed crush, she had never seen Lexa in a setting where they weren’t competing or sabotaging each other before. She wasn’t entirely sure where to find her, much less how to convince her to help Clarke commit crime in Egypt.

Clarke had put on her favourite blue shirt. She didn’t think about why.

Her eyes eventually landed on a small and seemingly old door between a clothes store and a restaurant. Above it was a faded sign which seemed to have two sticks in a cross on it, and the muggles walking past seemed to ignore it completely.

Clarke smiled as her heartbeat picked up.

The first thing which struck her when she walked in the door was how light it was. Clarke was used to Ollivander’s shop in London, which was old and musty and had very little natural daylight; this place was completely different. It had a tall ceiling and the walls were light brown wood. The shop was decorated with pictures and even a few vases of flowers. Clarke couldn’t imagine Ollivander had even entertained the notion that a wand shop could be decorated. Yet the shelves of wands lining the walls were still dusty and smelled like the old wand shop smell Clarke had come to know and love at Ollivander’s. It reminded her of a small-town bookshop; all inviting with the promise of spending hours lost in a different world.
After waiting a moment to take everything in, her eyes scanned the room and found Lexa, who hadn’t looked up when Clarke entered. Lexa was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt, sitting on top of a tall pile of crates and using her wand to whittle on a stick, shaping it into a new wand. She was dangling her legs slightly as she focused on the job at hand. It looked like she might start to whistle softly at any moment.

Clarke was so perplexed by seeing Lexa so at ease that she completely forgot the opening line she had decided on before going inside. Instead, she just stared.

Lexa looked up and her eyes widened. Her hands stilled.

For a moment, they just stared at each other.

“Hi”, Clarke tried tentatively.

Lexa just stared. Clarke had never seen someone managing to look like such a deer caught in headlights while sitting on a pile of boxes and wearing flannel.

“Hi,” Lexa eventually managed to reply. “Were you looking for something?”

“I was looking for you, actually”.

Lexa just stared at her uncomprehendingly. Clarke could understand why.

“Why?”

Clarke looked around the shop. There were no one else inside, and Clarke assumed Lexa had been minding the shop, though from the way Lexa had been so lost in thought when she walked in Clarke couldn’t imagine she was expecting any customers. She turned back to Lexa and tried to put on her most charming smile.

“I need your help”.

Lexa seemed to size her up a bit, before finally moving and jumping easily down from her pile of boxes. Her long brown hair wasn’t in their regular braids, and gentle curls bounced lightly as she landed. When she straightened up again she was a lot closer to Clarke. Lexa regarded her in a weary but not inherently unfriendly way, and Clarke figured Lexa had decided to at least try to be civil to her. Clarke’s smile didn’t falter.

“How can I help you?”

It was odd seeing Lexa out of her usual work uniform. Her casual shirt and loose hair made Clarke feel like she had walked in on Lexa in her home and seen a degree of domesticity which Clarke had never been meant to see. Lexa seemed like she was at ease, which in all the months of knowing and competing with Lexa was something Clarke had never seen before.

Clarke blinked hard a few times and tried to remember the question.

“Right, so, I assume you remember the last time we met? In Colorado?”

“I do”.

“And how I, through the goodness of my heart, stopped you from bleeding to death?”

“I haven’t forgotten”.

“Even after you sabotaged my kneazle hunt which was otherwise going great, putting me in mortal danger?”

Lexa’s eyes narrowed slightly.

“Are you going somewhere with this?”

Clarke had always been a firm believer in getting straight to the point. She figured there was no way she could ease Lexa into this question, anyway. It was just that level of absurd.

“I need your to break me into a pyramid”.

Lexa looked incredulously at her for a long moment, like she was expecting Clarke to break and tell her she was joking. Clarke kept her face impassive.

“You want me to break you into a pyramid”.

“Yes”.

“In Egypt?”.

“Yes”.

“Why?”.

The same nervousness as before crept into Clarke again. She was starting to recognise it as something. For months, Clarke had gone to great lengths to prove to herself that she was better than Lexa, but now, for the first time, Clarke sort of wanted Lexa to think she was good too. And Clarke was pretty sure that trying to blackmail Lexa into helping her might not impress her.

“I have a long list of well thought-out arguments, actually”, Clarke said, pulling a long scrap of parchment out of her bag.

Lexa stared at her for a long moment. She looked like she still couldn’t quite believe that Clarke was there, in Portland, let alone trying to set them up to go on a mission together. Clarke couldn’t blame her. Lexa eventually seemed to come to terms with the fact that this bizarre meeting was really happening, and that Clarke had actually brought a list of arguments as to why it would be a good idea. Then she gave a long sigh like she frankly hadn’t expected anything else.

“I guess you better sit down”.

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“So, let me see if I got this straight,” Lexa said, “You’re after the ruby scarab?”

“Yes”.

Lexa had led her into the back of the shop, where there was a small kitchen and a staircase leading up to the next floor, and now they were sitting across from each other at the kitchen table. Clarke had a bunch of parchment spread out in front of her with all the background research she had been doing, and Lexa was holding a mug of milky tea which she had most definitely forgotten about.

“The ruby scarab, which is extinct”.

“Assumed extinct, yes”.

“Assumed extinct, yes”.
“And you think we can find it in one of the unopened tombs, which is guaranteed to be closely guarded by the Egyptian authorities”.

“Yes”.

“And why do you need me to come with you?”

Clarke sighed.

“Because I have only a vague idea of what I might find once I’m inside it. The ancient Egyptians are famous for their talent for sinister magic and traps, and there is no way of knowing what might be waiting for us once we’re inside. My strength is in being prepared, you might remember, but there is no way to be as prepared as I would like in this situation. And you are better at improvising”.

Lexa looked at her like she had a hard time believing Clarke had just, sort of, complimented her.

“And why would I agree to any part of this plan?”

“Aha! Well,” Clarke shuffled through her parchments to find her premade list. “Ok, so, one: because it’s a challenge and we both know you would have a hard time dealing with me getting one of the most prized items in wandology without you. Two: because if you agree to help me we can get a scarab each, and they are phenomenally valuable. It would massively boost your paycheck for the next year, believe me. Three: If I set off on my own, let’s face it, you will probably be sent on the same mission in a few days and we’ll end up sabotaging each other again, and I am trying to premeditate that. Four: because you owe me big time after Colorado and I assume I’m the last person on earth you want to be indebted to”.

Lexa looked at her for a moment.

“That is a very comprehensive list”.

“I came prepared”.

“I think there is a proportional difference between you stitching me up in Colorado and me breaking international law for you, though”.

“Ah, you see, you will not actually be breaking the law”.

Lexa’s eyebrows met in the middle.

“I thought we were stealing extinct beetles?”

“The thing with being extinct is that legally you don’t actually exist, so you can’t really be stolen. And the tomb is closed by law, true, but actually being in it isn’t technically illegal. I’ve looked it up. The only illegal act involved will be opening the tomb itself, which I am happy to do for us”.

Lexa leant back in her chair and regarded Clarke with a ponderous expression. Clarke allowed herself a small smile, sensing that Lexa was at least considering the offer.

“Oh, there is one more thing. We can’t remove any of the ancient artefacts from the tomb because they are protected by law as part of the Egyptian heritage”.

Lexa nodded.

“Ok”.
Clarke opened her mouth, and then closed it again. She had expected Lexa to fight her on this; Lexa was essentially making a living by stealing valuable items, same as Clarke, and Clarke had gone so far as to come prepared with yet another list with a set of reasons why they couldn’t steal anything this time. She hadn’t expected Lexa to just accept it as fact.

She also didn’t expect Lexa to be slowly nodding at her. Frankly, was still slightly surprised Lexa hadn’t hexed her on sight.

“When do we leave?”

Clarke’s eyes widened.

“You mean you’ll do it?”

“Yes”.

“Actually?”

Lexa cocked an eyebrow.

“Well, you did come with a comprehensive set of reasons why I should. But after this, I am debt free from you”.

“Sure. Hopefully, we’ll never see each other again”.

“That would be ideal”.

Clarke ignored the small pang in the pit of her stomach at that and soldiered on.

“When can you leave?”

Lexa shrugged.

“Immediately, I guess”.

“Can you just leave the shop? What about Wolfe?”

“She only comes in to check on me every few weeks. We will be back before that, I assume?”

“Sure, but don’t you need to pack?”

“I doubt I’ll think of anything that you haven’t already put in that bag of yours, actually. As you said, you are the one who likes to come prepared. Have you got travel food and water?”

“Yes”.

“Sleeping bags?”

“Yes, two”.

“First aid kit?”

“Yes”.

“Wood for a fire?”

“Yes”
“A basic set of potions?”

“Yes”

“And, let me guess, a solid and well-prepared plan for how to get close enough to the pyramid to break into it undetected?”

Clarke grinned cheekily.

“Obviously”.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

“Ok. How do we get to the pyramid without setting off the alarm?”

“I don’t know”

Lexa huffed.

“I thought you said you had a plan”.

“You’d be shocked to find out how few books get published which contain security
details about national landmarks. I assumed we had to wing it a bit”.

Chapter Notes

geyranger.tumblr.com/tagged/speling+it+out for edits! Update every two days, I hope :) 

Less than 24 hours later, Clarke was standing in the scorching hot Egyptian sun, watching as Lexa
cheerily talked to a guard. They were in Abnub, a small town close to the Qabar min Sahar
pyramid. The town was slightly elevated, and Clarke could see the pyramid below them from the
town square, slightly out of the town. She was eager to go and annoyed with Lexa for wasting time
talking to this guard. She was also a little annoyed because it had turned out that Lexa spoken
fluent Arabic and Clarke didn’t like not knowing what people were saying.

After Lexa agreed to come with her, Clarke had insisted on waiting to leave until the next morning.
She had taken in on a B&B and quickly sent owls to Octavia and Raven about where she was going
and that if she wasn’t back in two weeks they should find Lexa and avenge her murder. The next
morning she had met Lexa outside the wand shop, and Lexa was dressed in her regular leather coat
and rugged travel gear that Clarke was used to seeing her in. She looked amazing, as usual, but
Clarke still missed the flannel. They had just exchanged nods; there didn’t seem to be a whole lot
else to say to each other. Clarke had awkwardly reached for Lexa’s hand and apparated them to
Abnub.

Now the guard laughed merrily, and with a few more words to Lexa, he turned around and went on
his way. Lexa walked back to Clarke, who was bristling.

“Are you done wasting time?”

Lexa cocked an eyebrow.

“Are you done just standing around while others try to gather valuable backstory on the pyramid?”

“Whatever. Let’s just apparate down there and scope out the defences”.
“No”.

“Excuse me?”

“We can’t. That’s what the guard was telling me; the whole area is protected by antiapparition spells”.

“Oh”.

“Yes”.

Clarke gave a long sigh and rubbed her eyes. Lexa got a pair of shades out of her bag and put them on.

“I guess we walk then”.

“We do”.

They had walked downhill towards the pyramid for about half an hour when Clarke eventually spoke again.

“Good work finding out about the antiapparation spells”.

“Sure”.

“I wouldn’t have thought to ask the guard”.

“That’s because you are inherently rude and think you are better than everyone else”.

Clarke threw her arms up in the air in resignation.

The rest of the trip down to the pyramid passed in much the same way. One of them would make a half-hearted attempt at polite conversation, and would quickly be shot down by an insult or snide remark. Clarke didn’t mean to, exactly, it was just that whenever Lexa opened her mouth she got filled with annoyance and needed an outlet. Since they were technically in a ceasefire it seemed both women were reverting to verbal attacks to fuel months of pent-up aggression.

Whichever crush Clarke might have been nursing quickly subsided.

Night had fallen by the time Lexa and Clarke eventually reached the pyramid. It was a pretty small pyramid, Clarke saw, not higher than a 5 story house. It was lit up by warm electric lights to give it a haunting glow in the night air to benefit the tourists who were hanging around.

Clarke and Lexa, now decidedly chilly towards one another, blended in with the tourists and walked around the pyramid pretending to admire it. There was a large door on the southern side, with a security barrier keeping visitors at least 20 feet away from it. Clarke subtly held her wand and muttered detection spells to herself, trying to figure out which spells had been put it place as protection. Lexa gazed up at the pyramid and seemed to be keeping a small eye on the security staff patrolling the area.

When 8 o’clock rolled around a few tough barks from the security guards let everyone know that the pyramid was now closed to visitors, and it was time to leave. Lexa tugged briefly on Clarke’s sleeve and muttered “this way”. Making sure the guards were all busy shepherding the tourists she jogged over to a thicket of bushes a little way away from the pyramid, Clarke in tow, and they both
crouched down to hide.

They gave it 30 minutes until the place was empty of people and the security guards had disappeared into the small visitors hut on the other side of the pyramid.

Clarke gazed towards the pyramids.

“Do you think the guards will come running if we just walk straight up to it?”

Lexa rolled her eyes before picking up a fist-sized rock from the ground and throwing it towards the door of the pyramid. Immediately an obnoxiously loud alarm sounded, and the guards flowed out of the visitor’s hut like ants from a hill. Some of them walked around the pyramid, looking for any sign of intrusion, others looked at the ground searching for clues as to what could have set off the sirens. Eventually, they seemed satisfied that it must have been a false alarm and went back inside.

“Yes”, Lexa said dryly.

Clarke rolled her eyes.

“Ok, I am picking up a few detection spells. Anything moving will apparently set off an alarm. There’s also a boundary line about 10 feet from the door which will notice if anything biological crosses it. Then there’s the security on the pyramid itself, which will probably set off an alarm if any human touches it or a part of it gets moved around. Opening the door might be complicated”.

Lexa seemed to bite back another sarcastic comment, and instead looked up at the pyramid and thought for a while. Eventually, she spoke.

“I think I can get us through the door if you can get us close enough”.

“Ok, good. I know a spell which can temporarily shut off all biological processes in the body; it might be enough for us to make it across the boundary line”.

Lexa looked at her incredulously.

“How on earth do you know that spell?”

“Paramediwizards use it to stop trauma victims bleeding out before they can get them to the hospital”.

Clarke knew that didn’t really answer the question, but Lexa let it slide.

“Ok. How do we get to the pyramid without setting off the alarm?”

“I don’t know”

Lexa huffed.

“I thought you said you had a plan”.

“You’d be shocked to find out how few books get published which contain security details about national landmarks. I assumed we had to wing it a bit”.

“This was your idea”.

Clarke bit her tongue to avoid getting into a whispered argument with Lexa. She figured it
probably wouldn’t improve their chances of making it into the pyramid undetected.

“Ok, let’s be logical about this. They can’t have hexed the whole pyramid; it’s just too big. There must be an object somewhere on it which they have put the spell on and set a large range. If we could find it we could disarm it”.

Lexa still looked annoyed.

“What kind of object?”

“I don’t know. Something inconspicuous which looks like it belongs. But very central to the structure itself, and probably with a good vantage point over the rest of the pyramid”.

Lexa and Clarke both looked at the pyramid. Simultaneously their gazes drifted upwards until they landed on the pyramidion, the top stone.

Lexa gave a long sigh and massaged her temples.

“Great”.

“At least we know where it is”.

“Clarke, that rock is over two hundred feet away. Neither one of us is going to be able to get close enough to disarm it, and there is no way we can hit it with a spell from here”.

Clarke had really underestimated the degree to which Lexa could get on her nerves.

“That’s probably why they chose it in the first place”.

Lexa seemed to ponder it for a moment.

“Ok, I can levitate you up until you’re at eye level with it. Then you should have a better shot at hitting the stone with a disarming spell”.

Clarke snorted.

“No offence Lexa, but I trust you about as far as I can throw you. I’ll do a trust fall on a dementor before I’ll let you levitate me anywhere”.

Lexa bit her teeth together in frustration.

“Then come up with a better plan”.

Clarke thought for a while.

“When you set off the alarm with the rock, did you see where the sound came from?”

Lexa was clearly still annoyed.

“Over by the hut. Why?”

“Because I don’t think they would have hexed an actual part of the pyramid to make the noise. It’s too invasive, considering they are trying to conserve it. They may just have magically linked it to a speaker instead, and if we could find the speaker…”

“We stop the noise. Got it”.
Lexa was up and gone before Clarke could even protest, sneaking in a wide birth around the pyramid towards the hut. Clarke let out an annoyed breath. Cooperating with the brunette was getting a lot more on Clarke’s nerves than she had expected. It suddenly dawned on Clarke that she would probably be spending several days with Lexa inside the pyramid, in very close confinements and with no other company. Clarke groaned. Maybe they should just take bets right away about who would hex the other one first.

A few minutes passed before Lexa came back from the same direction she had come from, slightly winded. She crouched down in the bushes next to Clarke.

“You were right. I broke the speaker and double checked it by throwing another rock at the pyramid. We’re good”.

“Ok. Ready for the paramedic spell?”

“What does it do, exactly?”

“It stops all biological processes for a short time. Cellular respiration, hair growth, bleeding cuts, that kind of thing. If we were plants it would halt photosynthesis. I don’t want to leave it on for more than maybe 30 seconds, though, as there’s a very real possibility of anoxia and brain damage. I’ve never seen anyone put it on themselves before”.

Lexa rolled her eyes.

“Solid plan, Clarke”.

“Thanks. So, I’ll put the spell on us, and then we run to the door, and then I’ll lift it again. Hold still, this might feel a little weird…”.

Clarke quickly cast the spell on Lexa and then herself. There was a tingly sensation which crept all the way up her spine and left Clarke feeling like her hair was standing up. She met Lexa’s gaze, and the distracted look in her eyes told Clarke that she was experiencing the same thing. Clarke opened her mouth to suggest they run for it but found that she couldn’t speak. Instead, she shrugged and gestured towards the door. Lexa nodded, and they both took off running.

Clarke thought maybe she could feel it when they passed the boundary line. It was like the sun was hitting her skin for a brief moment even though it was night time before it suddenly went away again. Lexa reached the pyramid first, stopping within reaching distance of the door, Clarke right behind her. Clarke raised her wand, sending a brief thankful thought to her teachers which had insisted on her learning non-verbal spells, and lifted the paramedic charm.

Lexa took a deep breath in through her nose and let it out through her mouth.

“Did you pause to consider that halting all biological functions might also have stopped your ability to use magic and lift the spell?”

“Only when we were halfway to the pyramid”.

Lexa shook her head, clearly not impressed, and turned towards the door. It was a single huge slap of rock, clearly never moved since it was put in place thousands of years ago.

“That was reckless. And stupid”.

Clarke bit her teeth together. Now that they were so close to their target her annoyance with Lexa got multiplied by the adrenaline in her body.
“At least I got us across. All you have done so far is chatting up a security guard back in Abnub”.

Lexa regarded her frostily, and looked like she was about to bite back when her eyes caught at something behind Clarke, and she froze. Clarke turned around to follow her gaze.

There was a security guard outside the hut. He hadn’t seen them yet; Clarke’s spell must have worked. But he walked slowly around, seemingly inspecting the pyramid.

“Guard patrol”, Lexa mouthed into her ear from behind.

Clarke’s breath caught. She hadn’t realised Lexa had sidled up closer to her.

“What are you doing?”

“Yes”.

The guard started walking around the pyramid. Thankfully, he went the other direction than to where Clarke and Lexa were standing. Clarke waited until he was out of sight before turning to Lexa.

“You’ve got two minutes”.

Lexa didn’t waste any time. She turned back to the door, and raised her wand, starting to mumble spells. Clarke couldn’t keep her curiosity contained for long.

“What are you doing?”

“Turning it into a portkey”.

Lexa finished with her spells, and took a step back, looking up at the door. Clarke was perplexed.

“But we’re not going anywhere”.

“No, but the door is”.

“Where are you sending it?”

“About 10 feet behind us”.

“Lexa, when I said I wanted to get into the pyramid undetected I didn’t really plan on leaving a ten-ton slab of limestone to herald our arrival”.

“It’s a two-way port key”.

“We can’t move any part of the pyramid. It would set off the alarm”.

“We aren’t moving it, technically. It is just disappearing here and reappearing somewhere else in the same state. I think it’s a large enough distinction to not set off the alarm”.

“It still has to be touched by something living to be activated, and we can’t do that; the alarm goes off at human contact”.

Lexa bent down to pick up a pebble.

“We don’t have to”.

“We don’t have to”.
With a delicate movement of her wand, she transfigured the pebble into a beetle. She looked expectantly at Clarke.

“I believe you said you would do the actual opening of the tomb, Clarke”.

Clarke just stared at Lexa for a moment. She had known Lexa was good, but she hadn’t known she was this inventive. Clarke was impressed. She tried not to show it. Brandishing her wand she levitated the beetle out of Lexa’s palm and over to the door, touching it ever so gently.

The door vanished without a sound and reappeared behind them. It wobbled slightly like it might fall over before it came to a still.

Clarke and Lexa looked back towards the gap it had left behind. It was the beginning of a tunnel with a downwards incline, disappearing into darkness, not 10 feet in. The walls were covered in hieroglyphs and ancient drawings. Clarke swallowed. But she could hear the guard approaching from the other side of the pyramid now, and, quickly meeting Lexa’s eyes they both moved into the tunnel. Clarke spotted the beetle on the ground and quickly levitated it onto the door again. It soundlessly reappeared in its original place.

Clarke and Lexa were left in complete darkness at the start of the tunnel. Everything from the outside world had been blocked away, and no light and no sound could be heard. Lexa mumbled something, and a soft yellow light grew from her wand, illuminating their faces and a few feet in front of them. She looked at Clarke, raising her eyebrow.

“Now the fun begins”, she said dryly.
The tunnel they had found themselves in went on and on in a steady downwards incline. Lexa figured this meant that they were heading deeper and deeper underground, and that the inside of the tomb might be a lot bigger than the size of the pyramid itself suggested. The walls were covered in ancient Egyptian inscriptions, and murals of the pharaoh who Lexa assumed was buried there. The tunnel branched now and then, and Clarke always seemed to choose the path which let them further down. The only light came from their raised wands, and it flickered like torches against the sandstone tunnel walls.

The first day did not go well. Lexa was convinced that Clarke was just waiting for the right moment to curse her and leave her behind in the dark catacombs. Clarke seemed to pick up on Lexa’s heightened awareness, and probably thought Lexa was planning to murder her.

They came wand to wand within an hour of entering the pyramid.

The problem was, Lexa still wasn’t wholly convinced that Clarke hadn’t talked her into this pyramid to betray her and leave her behind in the first place, to rid herself of the rival once and for all. It seemed a bit of a stretch that the blonde had simply needed her help; Clarke was a very competent witch. Surely she didn’t need Lexa around to sabotage her. So when Clarke’s hand twitched Lexa assumed she was going for her wand, and pulled hers out first. Clarke was only half a heartbeat behind.

They stared at each other for a few seconds, wands outstretched and in each other’s faces. Their wand tips still shone with soft yellow light, throwing flickering shadows on the walls behind them. Lexa’s gaze flittered between Clarke’s narrowed eyes, looking for any sign of bad intentions. Eventually she decided Clarke was just as suspicious as she was, and wasn’t planning to hex her. Right at this moment, anyway. Simultaneously, they cautiously lowered their wands. Without a word the both started walking again.

The same thing happened not 30 minutes later.

And again an hour after that.

They hadn’t run into anything magical yet. In fact the catacombs seemed almost suspiciously empty. Yet Lexa was getting more and more nervous the further down they went; it seemed like the absence of anything sinister was trying to lure them into a false sense of security. Lexa jumped every time they rounded a corner, expecting the worst to be waiting for them.

The fourth time Lexa was staring down Clarke’s wand in less than two hours even Lexa knew something had to happen. They couldn’t keep going like this. Lexa was seriously considering just hexing Clarke and getting it over with when the blonde gave a long sigh and took a step back, lowering her wand, one hand coming up to push loose strands of golden hair away from her face. Lexa kept her wand up.

“I am not going to curse you, Lexa.”

It was the first thing either of them had said to each other since they entered the pyramid.

“You’re not making a very convincing case”

“Why would I drag you halfway across the world and into an unopened pyramid if I were planning to hex you less than a day in?”
“Because you’ve had enough of us trying to outcompete each other and because you’re tired of me stealing your stuff.”

“And you think that makes me want to kill you inside an ancient tomb, just to add a bit of dramatic irony?”

“Also because you’re a huge bitch.”

Clarke closed her eyes, probably to stop herself rolling them. Lexa reluctantly lowered her wand.

“Honestly Clarke, I am suspicious because I don’t know why I am here. We loathe each other. We’ve barely made it a few hours in and we’ve almost started duelling four times already. You are more than competent enough to manage this without reaching out for my help. Why on earth would you seek me out if not to get some sort of revenge?”

Clarke furrowed her brows in confusion.

“I told you. I need you because I don’t know what we will find in here, and I am not convinced I can manage on my own”.

Lexa just stared back at her, not convinced. Clarke gave another sigh.

“Listen, I might not like the idea of cooperating any more than you do Lexa, but I am even less keen on the idea of going back to Ollivander and saying I failed. You can probably relate to that”.

Lexa thought of the only time she had returned empty handed to Mrs. Wolfe. The old witch had given her a long look, and said how she had had such hopes for Lexa. Hopes which were clearly misplaced. Lexa had felt her heart shrivel up and fall to the pit of her stomach, and had bit her teeth together to keep her jaw from trembling. Wolfe had made her do nothing but sweep the floor of the wandshop for three weeks afterwards. When she reluctantly decided to give Lexa another chance Lexa had vowed to herself never to return empty handed again, no matter what it took. She remembered the numerous times after that when she had stupidly risked way too much going after the items she was sent for, just so she wouldn’t have to deal with the crushing sense of disappointing herself and her mentor again.

Lexa looked Clarke up and down, slowly realising that Clarke must probably have had a similar experience. It was slightly unnerving, just how much they had in common.

“Ok. No more almost cursing each other”.

The side of Clarke’s mouth pulled up slightly.

“At least until we’re out of this pyramid. After that, it’s fair game”.

Lexa snorted.

“Deal.”

“Let’s just set up camp, ok?” It’s almost midnight”.

Clarke turned around, shifting her bag off her shoulder and reaching into it to pull out sleeping bags and some rations. Lexa thought she was probably trying to show a little trust, deliberately turning her back on Lexa while Lexa was holding her wand. Clarke threw one of the sleeping bags and some granola bars at Lexa, who caught them. Silently they both started setting up a place to sleep, on separate sides of the tunnel.
Clarke found a small jar in her bag and hexed a yellow flame into it to serve as a lantern. She put the lantern in the middle of the corridor, half way between them. Then she sat down and pulled her sleeping bag up to her waist, leaning against the tunnel wall and facing Lexa.

“I’ll take the first guard. You can sleep”.

Lexa peered at her over the soft light of the lantern. Clarke was looking at her earnestly. Lexa massaged her temples and internally debated if was worth fighting about it. Eventually, she decided that she may not know everything about Clarke, but she felt like she knew her well enough to know that she wouldn’t hex Lexa in her sleep. That would have to be good enough for now.

“Ok. Wake me in a few hours”.

Lexa slipped into her sleeping bag and turned over to face the wall. She was asleep within minutes.

The next day didn’t go much better.

Though they had through mutual agreement stopped reaching for their wands as soon as the other made a sudden movement, they had instead reverted to their old pattern of trying to one-up each other at every turn.

They ran into their first trap soon after packing up their little camp. Clarke had stepped on a hidden ledge, which had caused the tunnel in front of them to fill up with ominous looking red smoke. Lexa shot an exploding spell through it, which didn’t achieve much. Clarke had rolled her eyes and used a suction charm to absorb the smoke into her wand, revealing the trap door which was hidden in the floor. Red faced, Lexa quickly transfigured it into a normal floor stone.

The next trap appeared soon after the first one. Lexa had stepped on a piece of string, which seemed to trigger some sort of mechanism in the wall; Clarke and Lexa stared as the clicking sounds moved away from them in the direction they were heading. When the clicking sound reached about 10 feet down the tunnel, a giant sandstone started slipping out of the wall; in a few seconds it would block the passage completely. Lexa gave a cry and with incredible speed transfigured the stones on the other side of the corridor into long metal poles, halting the sandstone in its progress. Lexa and Clarke sprinted past it, making to the other side just before the metal poles gave in and the sandstone slid across to block the way they had come from. Lexa gave a smug look at Clarke, who huffed.

It kept going like that for a few hours. Occasionally neither of them would be fast enough to prevent the trap, and they had to backtrack and try a different corridor. Sometimes Clarke would be the fastest with a spell or a curse, and Lexa would huff. Other times Lexa would think of a better spell than what Clarke had tried, and Clarke would glare. Lexa snorted when Clarke accidentally sent the wrong spell. Clarke laughed cruelly when one of Lexa’s spell backfired and she had to duck to avoid getting blasted. It wasn’t long until they were both bristling.

The traps they found got more and more complex and dangerous the further into the labyrinth of the pyramid they went. Every time they made a turn Clarke would note it down on a map, which Lexa was grateful for; without it, they would surely be lost by now. They used the map whenever they to both their chagrin had to backtrack.

It wasn’t until the end of the day when they started shoving each other out of the way to cast a
spell first to prove they were better that they realised it might have gone too far.

Something had triggered bursts of magic to start demolishing the tunnel in front of them. Red bursts of light were shooting up from the floor to the ceiling, crushing stones which fell down and started to make an impenetrable barrier. Clarke yanked Lexa by her shoulder backwards to start shooting spells to stop it. Lexa instinctually shot a body binder curse on Clarke’s legs, making her fall over so that Lexa had a clear shot at the magical mayhem in front of them. Clarke shouted out in indignation, using a kicking curse to knock Lexa’s legs out from underneath her, making Lexa hit the ground and hit her head on the hard stone floor. They could only watch as the tunnel in front of them filled up with rubble.

When the last stone came to a still, there was an impenetrable barrier of rocks blocking the tunnel. Clarke swore and sat up to lift the curse on her legs before leaning back against the tunnel wall. Lexa just rolled over to lie on her back.

Clarke was the first to speak.

“This isn’t working.”

“You don’t say.”

“We need to cooperate. We’re two days into an ancient pyramid, and at this rate, we will never make our way out, let alone find any scarabs”.

Lexa let out a long breath. Clarke had a point; as much as every instinct in Lexa’s body said that proving herself better than the blonde was the absolute top priority Lexa didn’t fancy spending the rest of her life getting lost in catacombs.

“You’re not wrong.”

Clarke let her head fall back against the tunnel wall with a muted thump.

“We could probably be really good if we could just work together.”

Lexa glanced over at her. Clarke was staring at the ceiling, looking tired. Lexa spoke up.

“We just have to stop trying to, one, curse each other, two, try to get each other killed, and three, outdo each other at every possible turn.”

Clark chuckled darkly.

“That about sums it up.”

Lexa rolled her head back down and stared up at the ceiling. They were quiet for a moment. Lexa could feel something trickle down the side of her head. She reached up to touch it and winced. Her fingers came down again with blood on them.

“Crap.”

Clarke down again at her.

“You’re bleeding from a head wound. Sit against the cave wall; I’ll get some bandages”.

Lexa did as instructed, leaning against the cold stone. Clarke came to sit beside her, cleaning the wound on her forehead with her wand and a liquid which stung more than Lexa would admit. They were quiet for a while as Clarke worked. Lexa briefly though how weird it was that Clarke could
go from being her biggest competition to caring for her wounds in such a small amount of time. It didn’t feel all that weird. It just felt natural. They fought, they competed, they patched each other up. It’s what they did.

“How come you know so much medical magic?”

“What?” Clarke replied distractedly.

“You fixed my leg and shoulder in Colorado, and now you’re doing it again. You know anaesthesia spells, and the paramedic spell you used to get us in here. Why?”.

Clarke was silent for a long while, so long that Lexa was beginning to think she was just going to ignore the question. Then Clarke spoke up again.

“I was in medical training. When I graduated from Hogwarts, I was dead set on becoming a healer. I had all the right grades, read all the books, and an internship set up at St. Mungo’s in London before I had even packed out of my dorm”.

“What made you change your mind?”

The side of Clarke’s mouth pulled upwards in a humourless smile as she reached for some bandages.

“Most people just assumed I failed the internship.”

“If I am being bested at every turn by some sort of medical school dropout then I would like to think she at least left voluntarily.”

Clarke gave a bark of laughter, and then quickly went quiet again like she was embarrassed. Lexa turned slightly towards her, surprised but delighted by the sound. Lexa had to focus not to smile; less than fifteen minutes ago it had seemed like the most important thing in the world to outdo Clarke, but now Lexa wanted just to forget about it to see if she could make her laugh again. Clarke had that effect on her.

Oh no.

Clarke resumed putting the bandage on Lexa’s forehead.

“You’re not wrong”.

Lexa waited patiently. Eventually, Clarke gave a sigh.

“My father died a few years ago. Vanishing disease. He was in St. Mungo’s for the last few weeks of his life. My mom is a healer there. Afterwards, she told me that it was inevitable, that there was nothing anyone could have done, and I believed her. But then I found out that one of the junior healers had made a mistake, which worsened the disease, and my mom was covering for him. I was furious, refused to talk to her for almost a year, and I decided to become the best healer I could so that no one else had to suffer because someone made a mistake. I was sixteen”.

Clarke kept fidgeting with Lexa’s bandage, obviously lost in deep, though. Lexa held her breath, hoping Clarke wouldn’t stop. Eventually, she lowered her hands from Lexa’s head.

“I quit after one day of my internship.”

Clarke scooted backwards to lean against the other side of the tunnel. The corridor was so narrow
that their legs could still be touching. Clarke met Lexa’s gaze evenly.

“Why?”

“I took one step into the building and panicked. Everywhere I looked I just saw all the terrible memories of my dad dying. I turned around and walked out, and never looked back”.

Clarke broke eye contact and reached for her bag. She started pulling out the sleeping bags and some of their rations.

Lexa didn’t take her eyes off Clarke. Her blonde hair fell in front of her face, her blue eyes glimmering in the yellow light from her wand. For so long Lexa had considered Clarke to be nothing more than a pest, hell-bent on sabotaging Lexa just for the fun of it. Never had she considered that there might be more to the blonde who had long since proved herself to be Lexa’s equal.

Clarke threw her another granola bar and sat back down against the wall with a slightly sheepish expression. Lexa assumed she felt like she had overshared.

“Thanks for telling me,” Lexa tried. It wasn’t quite enough to communicate all Lexa wanted to say; that she knew it could hurt, that she knew it wasn’t easy to talk about. That she on some level felt deeply blessed that Clarke Griffin had entrusted her with these details about her life. It wasn’t enough, but it was a start.

Clarke shrugged.

“How come you speak Arabic?”

“How?”

“With the guard back in Abnub, you were speaking Arabic. When did you learn?”

Lexa hesitated only slightly before answering.

“My last girlfriend’s family was from Sudan. She made me learn it”.

Clarke gave an unladylike snort.

“Lucky you. The last girl I dated only insisted on teaching me crocheting”.

For the first time in days, Lexa’s mouth broke out in a real smile.

Oh no.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Sorry for the brief stop in updates! Life has been busy, but i've got several chapters already written so I'll try and stay on schedule.

The third day went better.

They started out on a politer note than before, packing up their camp and walking away from the rubble to find the nearest corridors that branched off. It was a crossroad with three branching tunnels, and as usually Clarke picked the one which went the steepest downwards.

“Why are you always doing that?” Lexa asked, curious.

“Doing what?”

“Picking the tunnel that goes the most down”.

“Oh. I read that scarabs tend to seek deeper into the ground during times of stress, so I thought that as they slowly ran out of food over the centuries, the population probably migrated further and further down. I had no idea this tomb was so deep, though; I don’t think anyone has realised it doesn’t stop at ground level”.

“Anyone but us”.

Clarke gave a small smile.

“Feels weird that we’re the first people in millennia to see the inside of this place”.

“So we keep walking down until we find the scarabs?”

“Pretty much. I am noting every turn down on the map so that we’ll have a chance in hell of finding our way out again”.

“Sensible”.

“You know me”.

“I’ve never been to Egypt before”.

“Me neither. I had read a lot about it before I came to shanghai you into the mission, though”.

“You? Reading? I can never imagine”.

They kept bantering as they walked down the tunnel. Lexa had to admit that it was a lot more pleasant than the last few days. She felt that something had shifted between them after last night. Maybe it was something about being stuck in catacombs underground together, Lexa mused; the situation simply didn’t allow for hostilities for too long. What you got instead was something akin to companionship.
Clarke and Lexa found their first cavern not long after. The walls and ceiling of the tunnel widened out into a small room about thirty by thirty feet, which was richly decorated with statues in stone and ebony. Having seen nothing but dark corridors for the past three days, Lexa decided it was a sight for sore eyes. In the middle of the room was a sarcophagus.

Next to Lexa Clarke drew in a sharp breath and let it out through pursed lips.

“Wow”.

“Is this… you know”.

Clarke was already reaching into her bag and getting a small book.

“I don’t think so; it seems like a much too small a chamber to be the actual pharaoh”.

Clarke reached over to let her finger gently follow the inscriptions on top of the pyramid, while comparing the symbols to those in her little book. She mumbled slowly, translating as she went.

Lexa left her to it and went to explore the rest of the cavern. Now that she looked closely Lexa could see glimmers of gold on almost every surface; the statues wore gold jewellery, the tables had gold inlaid in the décor. Lexa walked timidly around the room, thinking that there were more riches in this cave alone than she had ever seen in her entire life. When she reached the furthest part of the room where the corridor continued, she stopped and stared.

There was a big wooden chest to one side of the exit to the tunnel. It was moving.

Clarke had apparently finished her translation and walked obliviously up to Lexa.

“Not the pharaoh, just one of the senior wizards that attended him. I think that’s a good sign, it probably means we are getting closer to the centre of the pyramid if we are finally finding some tombs. Though it may also mean that we are going to run into more and more traps, so we have to—”

Lexa fumbled blindly behind her to find Clarke’s elbow and squeezed. Clarke stopped talking immediately.

The chest kept scraping across the floor in front of them. Lexa could hear a slight groaning coming from it.

“What do you think it is?” Clarke mumbled softly.

“I have absolutely no idea”.

“Should we just leave it? Carry on?”

“Maybe. But on the off chance that it is something dangerous I don’t want it to escape and surprise us while we’re sleeping or something”.

Clarke nodded slowly.

“So we open it”.

The two girls moved a few feet back, raising their wands. Lexa let go of Clarke’s elbow.

Clarke opened the chest with a quick spell.
Out of it rose what looked like a small, slimy ogre. Lexa immediately recognised what it was. It was howling loudly and seemed as perplexed to see them as they were to see it. Clarke raised her wand, but Lexa quickly intervened.

“No, Clarke! It’s just a ghoul”.

Clarke hesitated. The creature slunk out of the chest and fumbled over to hide behind a few statues. It moaned woefully.

“Are you sure?”

Lexa rolled her eyes.

“One hundred percent. There was one in the basement in the house I grew up in. It’s harmless. I wonder how it has survived down here for this long though”.

Clarke had lowered her wand again.

“I know they feed on insects; maybe it’s been eating our scarabs. In the original Arabian mythos they ate the flesh of corpses”.

Lexa stared.

“You know that much about ghouls, but not what they look like?”

Clarke gave her a sheepish look.

“Not all books have pictures”.

Lexa chuckled.

“Let’s move on and leave it here, but put a barrier spell on the exit. I don’t want its moaning to follow us around”.

As they got closer to the centre of the labyrinth inside the pyramid it became more and more difficult to find their way around. They had to backtrack multiple times, running into dead ends and collapsed tunnels much more frequently. Lexa almost felt like the pyramid was deliberately trying to lead them astray. After finding a particularly difficult crossroad with five branching corridors Clarke and Lexa had tried four dead ends before finally following the right tunnel.

This tunnel seemed a lot nicer than the other ones had. The sandstone on the walls was polished smooth and appeared to be a lot more durable. It made Lexa’s hair stand on edge.

She found out why soon enough.

The corridor they were in widened into a long chamber, much longer than the last one they were in. The ceiling was held up by tall pillars, and in the centre of the room stood a raised platform. The room was lit up by large burning torches on the walls.

Lexa didn’t know everything about pyramids, but she was pretty sure that a place which was supposed to have been abandoned for 3000 years typically didn’t have burning torches in it.

Clarke met her eyes, and Lexa could see her own thoughts reflected in them.
As they stepped into the room, the torches suddenly blazed and roared. A creature stepped onto the platform, seemingly out of nowhere. Lexa gasped out loud, and Clarke’s hand shot out to grab her wrist.

It was a sphinx.

With the body of a lion and the head of a woman and giant eagle wings, the Sphinx eyed them regally through oval eyes. Its slit pupils regarded Lexa and Clarke with obvious disdain. Then it spoke.

“Who dares enter the Qabar min Sahar?”

Clarke met Lexa’s eyes again, mirroring her astonishment and no small amount of fear. Lexa looked back at the sphinx and got the distinct impression it was sizing them up for its next meal.

Clarke took a step forward. She was still holding Lexa’s wrist.

“Clarke Griffin and Lexa…”.

She looked back at Lexa. Lexa cleared her throat and stepped up next to Clarke.

“Lexa Wyvern”.

Clarke got a funny look on her face but turned back to the sphinx. It regarded them coolly.

“Very well, Clarke Griffin and Lexa Wyvern. To pass on from this chamber, you must correctly answer three riddles. Answer them correctly, and you may carry on peacefully. Refrain from answering, and I will allow you to turn back the way to came from unscathed. But answer wrongly and I attack”.

Clarke nodded vigorously. Lexa spared a brief thought to how many books Clarke must have read about sphinxes. Clarke looked back at Lexa.

“They always do this. Sphinxes love riddles”.

Clarke, Lexa figured, was more excited about the prospect of potentially dying than she really should be. Then again, Lexa knew Clarke well enough by now to know that she loved a challenge.

The sphinx was pacing back and forth in front of them as Lexa and Clarke both looked up to meet its eyes. It came to a halt in the middle of the platform and sat down. Clarke and Lexa inched forward, Clarke with a fascinated expression.

“Your first riddle is this: who is the first animagus?”

Lexa blinked. Then she looked over at Clarke, who was staring at the Sphinx.

“What?”

The sphinx looked annoyed.

“Who was the first animagus?”

Clarke looked frustrated.

“That’s not a riddle! It’s supposed to be a riddle!”
The sphinx bristled.

“You will answer the riddle, or you will leave this chamber”.

Clarke turned to Lexa with a mutinous expression. Lexa cleared her throat awkwardly.

“Clarke, maybe this isn’t the time to argue semantics”.

“But it’s supposed to be a riddle, Lexa! This is one of the most legendary creatures in magizoology and we’re meant to beat it by being clever and answering riddles! Not meaningless trivia questions!”

“I know, but maybe you could answer the question first, and we’ll make a formal complaint afterwards. You know the answer, right?”

Clarke turned back to the sphinx, grumbling. The sphinx didn’t look impressed.

“Well?”

“The first animagus was Falco Asesalon, who turned into a falcon”.

The sphinx nodded slowly, clearly annoyed.

“Correct. Your second question is this: who discovered parseltongue?”

Clarke turned slowly to Lexa with a worried expression, which did very little to reassure Lexa’s nervousness.

“Er... Lexa?”

Lexa wracked her brain.

“Parseltongue, parseltongue, parseltongue... Wasn’t that one of the contemporaries of DaVinci? Pa someone or other?”

“Paracelsus! Yes!”

Clarke turned back towards the Sphinx with a smug expression. It seemed to be getting angry.

“Fine. And your last question is this: who was the first ever Wizard?”

Clarke stared at it blankly. Then she turned back to Lexa, stone-faced.

“Clarke?” Lexa whispered, “I thought no one knew who the first wizard was? I thought their names were lost to history a long time ago”.

Clarke nodded, confused.

“They were”.

“So why is it asking us that question? I thought sphinxes only answered questions with actual answers to them?”

Clarke shrugged hopelessly.

“So did I. But they are only supposed to ask riddles too. This one is clearly not playing by the rules”.

“Incorrect.” The sphinx said, sounding annoyed. “The first wizard was...”
“Well, we can’t go back. This was the only corridor which didn’t lead to a dead end”.

“What do you think our chances are of fighting our way past it?”

Lexa eyed the Sphinx’ massive paws and its sharp teeth. It was licking its lips, fluttering its large wings slightly.

“Slim”.

Clarke let go of Lexa’s wrist and started pacing back and forth.

“Something is wrong here. Sphinxes are supposed to ask riddles. I don’t understand”.

“Ok, tell me all you know about sphinxes. Maybe there is a way out”.

Clarke kept pacing, throwing worried glances at the Sphinx. It had stood up and was clearly getting agitated.

“Sphinxes are giant lions with the head of a woman. They have existed for thousands of years and were held holy by the ancient Egyptians. They have frequented muggle fairytales ever since, sometimes with large eagle wings. They love riddles, but have been classified as highly dangerous by the ministry of magic due to their lust for violence”.

Lexa stared hard at the Sphinx. It was stretching its paws. Then she reached out an arm to stop Clarke pacing and pulled her closer.

“I think I have worked out why it isn’t behaving like a normal sphinx”, Lexa mouthed very quietly into Clarke’s ear, keeping her gaze fixed on the ceiling.

Clarke furrowed her eyebrows.

“Why?”

“Because it’s not a sphinx”.

Clarke’s eyebrows almost met her hairline.

“What?”

Lexa gave her a tight-lipped smile before raising her wand. She launched an exploding curse at the Sphinx, who yelped and dove off the platform, making the spell hit the wall behind it. The sphinx shrunk and morphed into a white horse, which looked very scared and shot off down the tunnel behind it.

Lexa chuckled. Clarke looked like the sky had just fallen down.

“What the hell just happened?!”

“It was a kelpie. You know, like the lochness monster? They’re native to Europe I think, but this one has clearly made it a bit farther. They’re shapeshifters”.

“I know kelpies are shapeshifters, Lexa. What on earth was one doing in the catacombs of a pyramid?”

“Don’t ask me”.
“How did you even know?”

Lexa shrugged.

“You said it yourself. Sphinxes only have wings in fairytales. This one had obviously taken inspiration from the wrong ones. And it made sense; they’re not very smart, and couldn’t have thought of a riddle itself. I bet you could have said exactly anything to answer those questions, and it would have let it pass”.

Clarke shook her head slowly, looking at Lexa in bemused awe.

“This, Lexa, is why I needed you to come with me to Egypt”.

Lexa blushed.
“So your last name is Wyvern, huh?”

“Yeah.”

“Unusual name.”

Clarke and Lexa were setting up camp for the night, still in the sphinx’ chamber. After the not-sphinx had fled they had taken a few minutes to explore the room they were in; engravings along the walls and detailed portraits told the story of the pharaoh whose final resting place they were breaking into, and Clarke had gotten so wrapped up in trying to translate it all that by the time Lexa politely coughed behind her it was already late. Clarke couldn’t help it; the writings on the wall had gone untranslated for 3000 years. It was too fascinating to abandon easily. Lexa seemed to humour her, maybe as sick of the never-ending tunnels as Clarke was.

Clarke reached into her shoulder bag to find a sleeping bag and threw it to Lexa, who caught it. They were setting up their little camp in the far corner of the room, their bags in the corner and their sleeping bags along the walls, their head ends meeting. It was quite a change from sleeping as far away from each other as the narrow tunnels they had been in allowed, but neither Clarke nor Lexa mentioned it.

Clarke finished spreading out her sleeping bag and sat down cross-legged on it, pulling out a granola bar. Lexa sat down as well and caught the bar Clark threw to her. The lantern burned between them as usual. Maybe it was the bigger room or the considerably less chilly atmosphere this evening, but the flames seemed welcoming and warm.

It didn’t seem like Lexa was going to say anything else, so Clarke tried some more probing.

“It’s a type of dragon.”

Lexa snorted.

“Yeah, I know. That’s kind of why it’s my name.”

“How so?”

Lexa took a deep breath and let out a sigh. She looked up into the ceiling.

“It’s a long story.”

Clarke tried a small smile.

“We’re not exactly short on time.”

Lexa quirked an eyebrow at her.

“It’s also somewhat personal.”

“Hey, I treated you to my tragic dad-dies-family-falls-apart-dreams-are-abandoned story. I think I deserve a little peak into your history too”.

Lexa smiled.
“True. Well, my last name is Wyvern because legend has it there’s a dragon in the mountains close to the house I grew up in”.

“Why didn’t you take your parents’ name?”

“I don’t have any. The house was an orphanage”.

Clarke’s mouth fell open.

“Lexa, I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have been prying”.

To Clarke’s surprise, Lexa just smiled reassuringly at her.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m not secretive about it or anything; it just hasn’t come up before because, you know…”

“We hated each other’s guts. Gotcha”.

“Right. Anyway, all the kids at the orphanage got the same name, Wyvern. To remind us that we were a family”.

Lexa smiled fondly at the memory. Clarke was amazed.

“Were they all wizards and witches, then?”

“Yeah. There are still many rural communities in Canada, some with very backwards views. When a muggleborn child starts showing a magical talent, it would sometimes be abandoned, or its parents told that the child cannot stay in the community. That’s how most of the kids end up at the orphanage”.

Lexa had a faraway look in her eyes as she spoke. Clarke bit her lip to keep from interrupting.

“Unnuar Aok, it’s called. Means Night Blood, after the mountains close to it. We’d have lessons during the day, so I guess in a way we were all home-schooled. On the weekends, we’d go camping and suchlike. Both the lessons and Aok itself is run by those kids who have grown up and moved out. Most of us get jobs and send money back, but some stay behind to look after the next generation of children. It’s a really good place”.

Clarke was quiet for a minute as Lexa was lost in thought.

“That’s what you meant,” Clarke said finally.

“Sorry?”

“In France, when you said you had people depending on you. That’s what you meant”.

“Yes.”

“And that’s why you agreed to come to Egypt, to get the scarab and sell it to send money back.”

“Yes.”

“Lexa, I’m so sorry. The things I said…”

Lexa snorted again, as she leaned her head back to rest against the wall.
“Clarke, I think we have both said some things we didn’t mean. If we’re holding grudges, we’re not going to get far”.

That made Clarke smile. She lay down on her sleeping bag, trying to get comfortable, resting her head on her hands to look up at Lexa.

“So you’ve been at Aok your whole life?”

“For as long as I can remember. Some of the kids have memories of their birthparents, but I never did”.

Lexa looked down at Clarke briefly to meet her piercing stare. Lexa rolled her eyes.

“Don’t look at me like that. I had a family growing up, and it was a good one. I never particularly wanted or needed to meet my birthparents”.

“And how did you end up with Shikoba Wolfe?”

“There was a lengthy ritual when I was 15, where we all competed about who got to become the next wand maker’s apprentice. Dark stuff, all blood magic and unforgivable curses”.

Clarke gasped and sat up, staring at Lexa. Lexa met her eyes for only brief moment before chuckling and looking away. Clarke huffed and rolled her eyes, lying down on her back.

“Rude, Lexa”.

“Sorry”. Lexa sounded a great deal more amused than apologetic.

“So what actually happened?”

“My older sister, Anya, moved out when I was about 11. I got to go with her to help her move into her new flat in Oregon. When we walked past Wolfe’s shop I saw a jar of eye of newt. I thought they looked so pretty and I wanted to give them to Anya so she could have them in her flat. I tried to steal them, but Wolfe caught me. I thought she’d curse me, but instead she just cackled and said ‘come find me again in about ten years, child, and then we will talk’. Lo and behold, here I am”.

Clarke chuckled.

“Now that story, I believe”.

On the fourth day, Clarke made Lexa laugh. Not just the low chuckle she would give when Clarke was being deliberately silly, and not the slow smiles she used to show gratitude when Clarke insisted they stop so she could fix up Lexa’s newest scratches and wounds. A real laugh.

They were walking down yet another corridor, talking animatedly, when something occurred to Clarke.

“Hey, if we get caught, what do you think they’ll call us?”

“What?”

“You know how infamous criminals get cool nicknames by the press, like the Lonely Heart Killers, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. What do you think they’ll call us?”
Lexa snorted.

“I think I can live a long and happy life as long as no one ever calls me the Sundance Kid.”

“We could be the Pyramid Entrepreneurs.”

“That is without a doubt the lamest criminal name I have ever heard.”

Clarke pouted.

“You come up with something then.”

Lexa seemed to give it due consideration as they continued down the tunnel.

“The Tomb Raiders.”

“That’s already a muggle videogame, I believe.”

Lexa seemed surprised.

“How do you know?”

“My dad was muggleborn. He made a valiant attempt at raising me as a child of both worlds”.

“How from the way you use your wand to brush your teeth, I assume he was unsuccessful.”

“He was. What about the Sarcophagus Spies?”

“Considering how often you have outwitted me I had really hoped you were smarter.”

“Hey!”

Lexa hid a smile.

“How about the Catacomb Cabal?”

“Brings the magical element in nicely. Makes it sound like there are more of us, though”.

Lexa grinned.

“That’s our mystique. We’re so good that no one realises the crime could have been committed by only two girls, so we get away with it”.

“Nice, but makes us sound like we’re from the nineteenth century.”

Clarke thought for a bit longer.

“Oh, what about the Chimera Crew?”

“Why chimera?”

“Well, my name is Griffin. A griffin is half lion and half eagle. Your name is Wyvern, which is a dragon. A chimera is part lion, part dragon, part goat”.

Lexa nodded appreciatively.

“Who’s the goat?”
“You’re definitely the goat.”

Lexa’s mouth fell open in surprise and disbelief, but she didn’t manage to phrase her indignation before her face twisted into laughter. Clare stared in amazement; watching the laughter spread through Lexa’s features was like watching the sun come out from behind a cloud. Lexa bent over in breathless giggles, hands to her stomach. Clare had to stop walking to allow her to ride out the waves of her laughter, and Clare couldn’t help but giggle too. It wasn’t even a particularly good joke; Raven would have flayed her alive for even daring to call it humour. But Lexa was laughing, and the sight filled Clarke with indescribable warmth; warmth which started in her chest and spread all the way out to her fingers and her toes and the top of her head, until it felt like her whole body was positively glowing. Seeing Clarke’s goofy grin only made Lexa laugh harder, and she reached out a hand to steady herself against the tunnel wall. That, in turn, made Clarke crack up.

Maybe it was the last four days of pent-up aggression which was finally being disarmed or maybe it was the hours after hours spent in dark tunnels. Maybe it was the shields they had both been keeping up finally coming down, or maybe it was the realisation that maybe, just maybe, they were in this pyramid with someone they could trust.

No matter the cause, for several minutes, their laughter sounded clear as day in the catacombs. And when Lexa eventually pulled herself together and looked at Clarke, face beaming and fire in her eyes, Clarke was breathless from more than just laughter.

As they went on the traps they encountered seemed to be getting more and more dangerous. One time an axe came out of nowhere, aiming straight for Clarke’s head, and only fast reflexes made her duck, which saved her. Another time ten or so darts fired from a wall on Lexa’s side, which Lexa narrowly avoided by a very quick shield charm. Clarke had picked up one of the darks and sniffed it, and a familiar sour smell had filled her nostrils. She had crinkled her nose and looked back up at Lexa.

“Paralysing potion.”

“Nasty.”

They kept walking, chatting now and then. The tunnel they were in crawled slowly downwards. Clarke felt like it was somehow getting darker like the stone walls were absorbing more of their wand light.

Eventually, they reached a dead end. This wasn’t like the other dead ends they had come to, however; while the corridors were usually blocked by rubble, collapsed on itself at some point in the millennia it had been closed, this dead end was just one big stone blocking their path. It made Clarke’s hair stand on end.

Lexa walked up to it, gazing at the corners and trying to find some way of moving it. Clarke held back, slightly hesitant.

“I don’t like the feeling of this, Lexa.”

Lexa let her fingers drift over the stone, apparently not listening very closely.

“It seems to be a perfect fit to the corridor,” she mused, “maybe we can shift it backwards.”

“Lena…”
Lexa got her wand out, quickly checking for any protective spells.

“Nothing. I am going to give it a push, see what happens”.

Clarke bit her lip. She was still standing several paces behind the other girl, watching as Lexa gently placed the tip of her wand against the stone and took a stance behind it.

“Right, here we go…”

The brunette mumbled a spell. Instantly the corridor started shaking; the stone in front of them was crumbling into pieces, big cracks moving out from the tip of Lexa’s wand. For a moment Clarke though that Lexa had done it, that her worries were for nothing. Then the floor disappeared beneath Lexa’s feet, and she shot downwards.

“No!”

Clarke threw herself after her as Lexa plummeted downwards, just about managing to grab her arm and pulling her away from the sudden pit in the corridor. The stone Lexa had been trying to break apart was still trembling and turning to rubble, falling into the hole where Lexa had stood only seconds earlier. As Clarke did her best to pull Lexa onto the corridor floor again, the walls and ceiling also started to collapse. Clarke gave one last pull and Lexa managed to swing her leg up onto the ledge, still clinging desperately to Clarke’s hands. Only then did Clarke realised what was happening.

The final part of the corridor had fallen away. Clarke was pulling Lexa onto the part of the tunnel which was still there, but it was now emptying into a large cavern with no floor. The dark abyss went on and on as deep as the light allowed Clarke to see. On the other side of the bottomless cavern, maybe thirty feet away, the corridor continued on.

Lexa now had her upper body on the remaining part of the tunnel. Clarke grabbed hold of her elbows to help pull her up the last part of the way, and a few seconds later they were standing, panting and face to face. Clarke was still holding both of Lexa’s elbows, and Lexa was still clinging onto Clarke’s arms like her life depended on it. Lexa’s eyes were wild, searching all around her, clearly still in shock and breathing deeply.

“Lexa! Lexa, look at me. It’s ok, it’s alright, I’ve got you…”

Lexa’s eyes eventually settled on Clarke’s face, and she seemed to calm down a little. Clarke swallowed, trying to calm herself as well; all the time focusing on making sure Lexa was ok.

“Are you alright? Did you break anything?”

“No… no, I’m ok”. Lexa took one deep breath and let it escape shakily.

Clarke couldn’t help it; she needed to be sure. Her hands travelled from Lexa’s elbows to her neck, to her face, to her hair, searching for scratches or any signs that the brunette was in pain. Lexa closed her eyes, still breathing heavily, and held onto Clarke’s elbows as the blonde continued her investigation. Eventually, Clarke was satisfied, and her fingers came to a stop on Lexa’s jaw as Clarke let out a final deep breath.

“You’re ok,” she repeated, mostly to herself. Lexa’s eyes slowly opened again.

They were so close, closer than they had been ever since Clarke had landed on top of Lexa after their catastrophic snidget hunt in France. Clarke couldn’t tear her gaze away from Lexa’s deep green eyes, which in turn bore into Clarke’s. Clarke’s fingers were still at Lexa’s jaw, perfectly
still.

Lexa closed her eyes again.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Lexa’s eyes opened again, and she looked Clarke straight in the eye.

“No, Clarke; thank you.”

Clarke met her gaze for a bit longer, before giving a small nod.

“Ok.”

Lexa broke their stare but held on to Clarke’s hands as she turned her head to look out over the chasm they were standing next to.

“So, breaking that stone might not have been the best idea I’ve ever had.”

Clarke couldn’t help but smile as her hands drifted away from Lexa’s face and came to rest on her elbows again. It was ridiculous; Lexa could have died only minutes earlier, and here she was, trying to make Clarke laugh, to reassure her.

Clarke shook her head slightly.

“No, it might not have been. Good thing that when I convince someone to do stupidly dangerous things halfway across the world with me, I take their security seriously”.

Lexa smiled slightly. She let go of one of Clarke's hands but kept the other.
“So how do we make it across the chasm?”

Lexa was looking out across the abyss. 30 feet away the corridor continued, but there was an insurmountable distance between them and it. Lexa’s pulse had finally slowed down after her fall, and her breath was returning to normal, but still, she felt like this was no place to relax. Her grip on Clarke’s elbow held fast.

“I don’t know.”

The blonde had stepped forwards, standing next to Lexa and peering over the edge into the darkness below them. She seemed deep in thought, barely noticing Lexa next to her or the iron grip Lexa held on her elbow. Lexa wished she could be as calm as Clarke was.

“You didn’t pack any broomsticks in that bag of yours?”

The shadow of a smile came across Clarke’s features as she continued to look into the darkness in front of them.

“No, I didn’t. In hindsight, I clearly should have predicted the ancient Egyptians’ flare for the dramatic.”

Lexa could feel her grip on Clarke’s arm was loosening as she calmed down. Her hand slid down from Clarke’s elbow, over her arm and her wrist, lingering slightly at her fingers before retracting completely. Lexa folded her hands in front of her for lack of anything better to do with them. She was a little embarrassed.

“I don’t know about you, but I have warmed up a little to this whole trust idea if you want to give the levitation plan another go.”

Clarke giggled.

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It only took another half an hour after floating each other across the chasm before Lexa and Clarke ran into what seemed like the final destination of their journey.

The tunnel widened slightly, the ceiling which had never been far out of reach gently inclining upwards. The tunnel led up to a grand double door, which as far as Lexa could tell was made of solid gold. It was decorated with hieroglyphs and detailed drawings, detailing a myriad of scenes. On the top right was a huge battle, and on the middle left was what Lexa thought looked like a wedding. The door was locked in place by a thick wooden bar lying horizontally across the whole expand.

Lexa looked over at Clarke and saw that she had a reverend look in her eyes.

“You think this is it? The final tomb?”

“I should think so. Give me a moment to translate the writing”.

Clarke got out her little book and got to work on the hieroglyphs. Lexa watched her as Clarke’s hand came up to gently trace the writing as she mumbled slowly, eyes on her book. Lexa couldn’t
stop watching Clarke’s fingers ever so gently move from one image to the other, fingertips getting acquainted with every little detail. Now and then Clarke would look up, staring at a particular symbol, but not like she was trying to understand it. Lexa thought it was almost like Clarke was admiring it instead. With a start Lexa realised that she knew almost nothing about Clarke; she knew the tragic backstory, true, she knew the short version of how Clarke ended up at Ollivander’s, but she didn’t know anything about Clarke. She didn’t know what Clarke liked and didn’t like, what she did with her free time, who her friends were. Did Clarke like art? Is that why she seemed so interested in the symbols? Lexa didn’t know. But she wanted to know.

Lexa opened her mouth to speak, but she didn’t know where to start. Clarke and Lexa weren’t enemies anymore, it was true, but were they friends? Were they business contacts? Lexa had never had a business contact of her own but from her experience with Mrs. Wolfe they didn’t seem to spend a lot of time talking about art. Was Lexa overstepping a boundary?

They had spent months yelling at each other, speaking to each other, and now finally opening up to each other, but as Lexa watched Clarke admire the hieroglyphs with a gentle hand she felt like she had forgotten how to speak entirely.

As she stood there, mouth opening and closing again, Clarke finished her translation and closed her little book.

“It’s the pharaoh,” she said, still looking at the door with awe.

Right. Talking about the pyramid. Talking about the mission they were on. Lexa could do that.

“Does it say anything about protective spells?”

“No, it only talks about having reverence when opening the chamber and respecting the honour of being allowed into the presence of the pharaoh.” She looked over at Lexa. “I guess they didn’t expect any thieves to make it this far”.

Lexa gave her a small smile.

“They didn’t expect us.”

They held each other’s gaze for a moment until Lexa broke it, looking back at the door.

“So we just open it?”

“I guess so.”

Simultaneously they stepped forwards, grabbing a part of the thick wooden bar each. They exchanged another glance and a nod before they both pushed upwards. The wood hit the floor with a muted thud, and they both stepped backwards. The doors creaked open slowly.

When their wand light reached the inside of the room, it lit up like they were looking at the sun.

Clarke squinted, and Lexa’s hand came up to shade her eyes as they side by side moved into the chamber. The room was large, several times the size of the chamber they had found the ghoul in earlier, and filled with statues of furniture, all arranged around the large sarcophagus on a raised platform in the centre of the cavern. Every last surface was covered in gold; every wall, every statue, even the sarcophagus itself. It made it look like the air itself was on fire with radiance. Not a sound could be heard.

Clarke dimmed her wand, and Lexa took the hint and did the same, bringing the light down until
there was barely the brightness of a match coming from her wand. To Lexa’s eyes, which had been adjusted to the dull darkness of the tunnels for several days, it felt much more normal.

Lexa looked over at Clarke and saw that she was turning slowly on the spot, regarding the cavern with an open mouth, gazing up at the walls which were adorned with yet more symbols and art bathed in the dim light from their wands. Lexa thought it looked like Clarke had stars in her eyes as she squinted at the walls like she couldn’t believe what she was seeing. It took Lexa’s breath away.

Lexa briefly looked over the rest of the chamber. There didn’t seem to be any secret scarab lairs anywhere, only endless gold surfaces which glimmered warmly in the dim wand light. Lexa turned back to Clarke, who was still staring at the walls with a faraway expression.

“Clarke? Where do we find them?”

Clarke eventually looked down to find Lexa; expression still like she couldn’t quite believe what she was seeing.

“Find what?”

Lexa stared at her.

“The scarabs.”

Clarke seemed to shake herself.

“Oh, right. I forgot”.

Lexa rolled her eyes, almost more out of habit than from an actual desire to make fun of the girl in front of her. Clarke didn’t notice, busy looking out over the rest of the cavern.

“I don’t know. I thought they’d just sort of be here”.

Lexa looked incredulously at her. It brought Clarke back down to earth pretty quickly.

“Well, you said we should go to the bottom of the pyramid because that’s where the scarabs would be. Here we are, at the bottom of the pyramid. Where are the scarabs?”

“Can we at least have a look around the room before you start accusing me of having pulled you along on this mission for nothing?”

Lexa rolled her eyes again, and they took one direction each around the sarcophagus. On Lexa’s side were three giant golden sphinx statues, glaring through emerald eyes towards the sarcophagus in the centre of the room. Lexa noticed their large eagle wings and chuckled slightly. It seemed like a certain kelpie had been making a good living in Egypt for quite a time.

When she completed her semicircle, she came face to face again with Clarke who didn’t seem to be having any luck either.

“Well?”

“Don’t look at me like that. I’m sure they’re here somewhere”.

Lexa closed her eyes to stop them from rolling.

“Let’s try what we did with the Sphinx again.”
“What?”

“Tell me everything you know about the scarabs, and maybe there will be something we’ve overlooked. A clue”.

“Nice. The Chimera Crew has a signature method now”.

Clarke grinned, and Lexa sighed.

“Just do it.”

Clarke seemed to collect her thoughts for a moment before she spoke.

“Ok. Ruby Scarab. Closely related to common black scarabs and precious emerald scarabs, but the only one to display magical properties. Assumed extinct and any part of the animal is highly valuable. The ancient Egyptian magicians used its legs and pincers as wand cores, though modern wand makers typically prefer more stable material. The shell, when ground up, is rumoured to be an ingredient in creating the philosopher’s stone”.

“Anything about where it lives? Where to find it?”

“It used to live throughout the Sahara desert. The ancient Egyptians would place them in pyramids as they believed they guarded the gateway to the underworld. Some populations have been able to survive inside old tombs for a remarkable amount of time”.

“You could be making this all up, and I would have absolutely no idea”.

This time, it was Clarke’s turn to roll her eyes.

“They were here at some point, though. The inscription on the wall mentions them as the companions of the pharaoh”.

Clarke indicated vaguely towards one of the walls, which was as far as Lexa could tell covered in the same gibberish inscriptions as the rest of the room.

“So where did they go?”

Clarke shrugged helplessly.

“I don’t know. No one knows really. If everyone knew how to find them, they wouldn’t be so rare”.

“Helpful.”

“They try to get to the lower ground when they are under stress, such as under a drought or a lack of food. That’s why I thought they’d be here”.

“What do they eat, again?”

“Meat.”

Lexa met Clarke’s eyes, and for a moment, they just stared at one another. Then, at the same time, their gaze slowly shifted towards the sarcophagus on its raised platform in the middle of the room.

Lexa groaned.
Clarke had a sheepish expression on her face.

“Well, I guess we found the clue we had been missing.”

“I did not sign up for this, Clarke.”

“This is exactly what you signed up for.”

Still, neither of them made a move towards the sarcophagus. The large gold-covered stone coffin seemed to Lexa like it emanated a certain feeling, a sense of magic and a certain something else Lexa couldn’t identify. Not exactly ominous, not malevolent, but like it should not be disturbed. Like it was something neither Lexa nor Clarke was worthy to touch let alone open.

Lexa swallowed.

“What, like there are ancient eyes watching us, trying to size us up and see if it should swallow us whole immediately or give us a chance at opening the sarcophagus first?”

“Yeah.”

“No, not at all.”

Even in the midst of her nervousness, Lexa found the time to roll her eyes. Clarke stepped forwards slowly, onto the raised platform and kneeled in front of the sarcophagus. Slowly she reached out a hand, and gently touched it. She retracted her hand just as slowly with an unreadable expression in her eyes.

“Clarke?”

No response.

“Clarke? Are you alright?”

Even from six feet away Lexa could hear Clarke swallow.

“Lexa, I am not an expert on sarcophagi.”

“But?”

“I don’t know what they are supposed to be like. In fact, this is the first one I have ever seen”.

“But?”

Clarke hesitated.

“Well… I don’t think they’re supposed to be warm”.

Lexa stared. Then, just as gently as Clarke had, she stepped onto the platform and kneeled next to Clarke. She reached out her fingers and touched the gold next to where Clarke’s fingers had been.

It was warm. Not just not as cold as a stone which hasn’t seen the sun for 3000 years could be expected to be, but warm to the touch. Lexa extended her hand more fully and placed her palm
against the glimmering material. She looked sideways over at Clarke.

“I think it’s also vibrating slightly,” she whispered.

Clarke reached her hand back up and placed it next to Lexa’s. She nodded slowly. Together they stood up and walked backwards down from the platform until they were several feet away from the sarcophagus. Lexa noticed that they were both clutching their wands.

“What do we do now?” Lexa whispered softly, not taking her eyes off the golden coffin.

Clarke seemed to draw in a deep breath.

“We’ve come this far.”

A lot of thoughts went through Lexa’s head in a very short time. Mostly she was scared, but she wasn’t about to reveal that fact in front of Clarke Griffin. But she also really wanted to know what was in the coffin. No human eyes had seen this room for millennia, and the adventure of it was pulsing through Lexa’s veins. A quick glance to her side told her that the brilliant blue eyes next to her seemed to be feeling the same thing. And when looking into those eyes Lexa, for a brief moment, felt like she could do no wrong. It was an intoxicating feeling.

“Ok. We open it”.

Clarke nodded slightly.

Side by side, they raised their wands.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Everything else was dead quiet. Clarke and Lexa exchanged a glance. It was as if the air in the chamber was charged with electricity, and the dam would break any moment. It made Lexa scared to even breathe.

Clarke stepped a foot forward, and the spell broke.

At the command of their wands the top of the gilded sarcophagus started to rise. It was slow, almost like it was too heavy for their wands to manage or like some magic was holding it down. Lexa had to reach out and grab her wand with both hands.

The top of the sarcophagus slowly rose until it was about a foot above the rest, then Lexa and Clarke slowly levitated it to the side and lowered it to the ground. It landed with a muted thump, resting against the step up to the raised platform.

Everything else was dead quiet. Clarke and Lexa exchanged a glance. It was as if the air in the chamber was charged with electricity, and the dam would break any moment. It made Lexa scared to even breathe.

Clarke stepped a foot forward, and the spell broke. A chittering sound came from the opened coffin, and scarab after scarab with a red shimmer in their bodies welled out of it. There were so many of them that Lexa had trouble fathoming how they had all fit in there in the first place. They fell out of the sarcophagus in waves, hitting the floor and crawling towards the shadows around the room with incredible speed.

Before she knew it, Lexa was yelling stunning spells and aiming for any scarab she could hit. Clarke was doing the same next to her. The beetles were difficult to hit; Lexa had barely set her eyes on one before it disappeared in the mess of small, writhing bodies, and despite the black wave many of her spells hit the stone floor. For a brief moment the floor of the chamber was covered in small black and red bodies, shimmering and disappearing into the cracks in the walls or behind the statues. The last two scarabs crawled out of the sarcophagus, fell to the ground and skittered for safety. Clarke hit one of them with a stunning spell as Lexa watched the other disappear into the shadows.

Lexa looked around them. About 20 small beetles lay scattered motionless on the floor, the rest having found their way and were nowhere to be seen. She walked gingerly over to the wall and picked up two scarabs, turning towards Clarke with a victorious grin.

Clarke wasn’t looking at her. She was biting her lip, still clutching her wand, and looking at the now opened sarcophagus. Lexa followed her gaze.

From their position on the floor, they could only see a little part of the death mask over the rim of the sarcophagus. Lexa could see precious stones around the eyes of the metal, and the face was gilded like everything else in the room. She understood why Clarke was staring, however; while everything else in the room was illuminated by the faint golden light from their wands, the mask was lit up from underneath. It was bathed in crisp scarlet light from somewhere around where Lexa
knew the chest of the mummy would be, light which seemed to be pulsating slowly and was stronger than both their wand-lights combined. It cast long shadows away from the sarcophagus, rendering the walls and corners of the chamber dark and ominous while the mask shone and almost looked alive.

Lexa carefully pocketed the two scarabs and turned her full attention towards the opened sarcophagus and the red light.

The feeling of being watched hit Lexa just like before, but this time, it was even stronger. She glanced quickly around the room, but could see no sign of anything or anyone else. Still, it made her shiver. She could hear Clarke audibly swallow, and looked up to meet the blonde’s gaze.

Clarke was still biting her lip, but she didn’t look scared. She seemed to be asking Lexa a question, just with her eyes. Lexa didn’t stop to contemplate when they had begun to communicate flawlessly without words. Instead, she just nodded. They both walked slowly towards each other, and, when they were side by side, ever so slowly started approaching the sarcophagus.

As Clarke set her first foot on the platform, the red light grew stronger, making Clarke start. She immediately stopped, and Lexa could see that she was clutching her wand tightly. Lexa felt a sudden urge to reach out and take Clarke’s hand but decided to ignore it. This was definitely not the time or the place, and they had a job to do. Besides, Clarke had kept her cool through every step of this pyramid. She hardly needed Lexa to help her stay calm.

Still, Lexa could have sworn she saw Clarke’s eyes flick towards her hand before she put her foot back on the platform and stepped up.

Lexa followed her up, and the light grew ever stronger as they approached the sarcophagus side by side. Lexa quickly looked up to meet Clarke’s eyes again before they took the last step and peeked over the edge and into the sarcophagus. Only then did they see what had been hidden inside, and what was causing the scarlet, pulsating light.

Lexa gasped, and Clarke’s mouth fell open.

The mummy lay fully bandaged in the middle of the sarcophagus, his death mask adorned with rubies and sapphires, empty painted eyes staring past Clarke and Lexa and into the ceiling above them. It didn’t look like the scarabs had done much damage; as far as Lexa could tell everything about the mummy seemed intact. But Lexa barely spared it a glance, because in the nook where the mummy’s arms met lay the source of the red light.

It was an egg. It was about the length of Lexa’s hands from wrist to fingertip, standing upright in the centre of the sarcophagus. The egg was the colour of burning embers; deep reds and bright orange and darkest black flickered over it, ever changing, as it there was a magical fire burning within it, emanating light which painted everything it met in a deep red colour. Lexa could feel the heat from it on her face, like the sun she hadn’t seen in days was right there in front of her. In the absolute silence of the chamber, Lexa could hear a slow hum coming from the egg. Everything else in the cavern had been undisturbed and dead for millennia, but this egg felt like life itself. Lexa rested her palms on the sarcophagus as she leaned over to stare at it. She could feel Clarke doing the same next to her.

A sharp cry from above started both of them. Lexa cast a glance up, saw a flurry of red and golden feathers falling towards them, and panic set in. She grabbed Clarke, who still seemed to be in a daze, around the waist and threw them both backwards off the platform. They landed hard on the stone floor, Lexa practically in Clarke’s lap, and they both scrambled off to look at what was
happening behind them.

A bird had descended from the ceiling. Where it had hid Lexa had no idea, because its wings were six feet across and bright orange, like the egg, yet neither Clarke nor Lexa had seen it. It flew in circles around the room, crying warnings every time its path led it over where Lexa and Clarke were lying in a heap on the floor. Lexa had never seen a bird like it before, but she still recognised it. She had grown up hearing about the legends.

It was a Phoenix. It was beautiful, much bigger than any bird Lexa had ever seen, and while clearly distressed it still circled above them with reverend grace. Its cries were melodic, like a song from times lost long ago. It was the most awe-inspiring sound Lexa had ever heard.

The Phoenix kept circling. Lexa thought it seemed like it expected them to get up and try to get the egg again, but Lexa and Clarke were frozen, partly in shock and partly in awe, one of Lexa's legs still across Clarke’s. Neither girl noticed. Giving one last swoop and making sure that they had no plans of moving from their positions on the floor, the Phoenix gracefully landed on the sarcophagus again. It seemed to inspect the egg closely, making sure no damage had come to it. Then it cooed gently and musically, caressing the egg with its beak, before looking up again at Lexa and Clarke with a vary expression.

Lexa blinked, awestruck. The surge in adrenaline was still pumping through her body, but now it was dulled by the wonder of the sight in front of her. The Phoenix was clearly not going to harm them, and Lexa was consumed by the knowledge that she was seeing a sight few people would ever be fortunate enough to witness. There were wizards and witches all over the world who would pay their last galleon to see what Lexa was seeing. Yet here she was, side by side with Clarke Griffin, watching a miracle. Clarke turned to face her, and Lexa managed to tear her gaze away from the sight in front of them to meet her eyes.

Lexa saw every emotion she was feeling in the blonde’s gaze. Clarke had the same the same disbelieving wonder in her eyes as when she had been looking at the ancient encryptions earlier. Lexa had been admiring it then, but she hadn’t been prepared for what it felt like to have it directed at herself. Her breath caught as the Phoenix kept lovingly caressing its egg on the platform. Clarke’s eyes, still fixed on Lexa, were filled with infinite gentleness, and Clarke smiled a small smile as she let out a slow breath, her blue eyes sparkling with concealed joy. As the Phoenix gave a few more beats of its large wings, Lexa felt like it was her own heart that was taking flight.
Chapter 14

Finding their way out of the pyramid turned out to be a bit more complicated than Clarke had been hoping for.

Leaving the chamber of the Phoenix itself had gone alright. After a while, the Phoenix had seemed to lose its patience with their presence in the chamber, and it flew over to lift the gilded lid of the sarcophagus back in its place with its incredible strength. Then it had sat down on top of it and gave them a pointed glare. Lexa had nudged Clarke, bringing her out of her daze, and they had scrambled to pick up the stunned scarabs and put them in Clarke’s bag before they crept reverently from the chamber, closed the door, and put the thick wooden bar back in its place.

It was after that they started running into a little trouble. They had followed Clarke’s map as far as they could but failed to take into account that some of the passages they had come down had been closed behind them in various ways. It led them down blind alleys and wrong turns, and several times they had to backtrack and simply try different tunnels until they were back on track. Still, little could lower their moods after their encounter with the Phoenix. Clarke was so full of energy she had to control herself not to skip, and she couldn’t stop talking.

“Have you ever seen a Phoenix before?”

“No, Clarke.”

“Me neither. There was a rumour at Hogwarts that Dumbledore had one in his office, but I never saw it.”

They continued walking side by side down the tunnels, their hands so close they could be touching. Clarke felt like she could practically see the dark tunnels getting brighter the further up towards the surface they went.

Lexa hid a smile.

“You never got sent to the headmaster’s office?”

“No, but I do hold the record for most detentions in a single year,” Clarke replied with a hint of pride.

Lexa snorted.

“Why am I not surprised. Which year was it?”

“First year.”

“Really? You cooled down as you became a teenager?”

“No, but I got better at getting away with things.”

“Of course.”

“What about you? Did you get into much trouble at Aok?”

“When I was younger. Later I had to grow up a bit quickly I guess, since the older kids essentially run the place.” Then Lexa grinned widely as if remembering a particular memory. “We had a lot of fun convincing the younger kids to do dumb stuff to piss off the oldest kids, though. And there are
always the wardens, those who have come back as adults to supervise the house. Annoying them was great fun.”

They kept walking and chatting now and then for most of the day, making their way back over the chasm, through the sphinxes chamber and back through the cavern with the ghoul. Clarke felt her heart getting lighter as the tunnels steadily led them upwards and back towards the surface. They came across much fewer traps this time, and they moved through the tunnels much faster. Clarke guessed they would make it back to the surface in a day or two more.

They set up camp that night in one of the many tunnels they had walked through on their way down. It was practically a routine by now, Clarke finding their sleeping bags and some food and throwing them to Lexa before setting up their lantern.

Clarke watched Lexa laying out her sleeping bag and sitting down on it before tentatively taking a bit of her granola bar. She was holding it in both hands and seemed to revel in the taste, curiously reading the label to find out what she was eating. Clarke couldn’t quite understand how the woman she had competed with for months, who had been both terrifying and mysterious, was the same person as the one who was currently sitting cross-legged on one of Clarke’s sleeping bags and picking sultanas out of a meal bar. Clarke shook her head slightly, trying to hide a small smile. Eventually, Lexa looked up at her, and her expression looked a bit sheepish.

“I’m not a big fan of sultanas.”

“I can see that.”

Lexa blushed, and Clarke’s grin grew.

Clarke was suddenly hit with the realisation that they would soon be out of the pyramid, and would be going their separate ways. Less than five days ago that thought would have filled her with relief, but now she felt a pang of something indescribable in her chest. She decided to ignore that feeling, though. They had gotten in, they had gotten the scarabs, fortune and glory were waiting for them on the outside. This was a happy occasion. Still, Clarke’s smile fell a bit. She distracted herself with asking Lexa more questions.

“What will you do when we get out of this pyramid?”

Lexa looked up from where she had continued her quest to rid her granola bar of sultanas.

“I’ll go back to Mrs. Wolfe I guess. Sell my half of the scarabs, send the money home. Might keep one to show to Wolfe, though.”

“You could have it stuffed and mounted, hang it on the wall,” Clarke mused.

Lexa grinned.

“No, I’ll put the scarab on the ground and dress up in jungle gear and those funny British-empire style explorer hats, and then I’ll pose next to it for a picture while holding an oversized gun. And then I’ll hand the picture on the wall.”

Clarke nodded appreciatively.

“Over the fireplace?”

“Of course. I would have to acquire a fireplace first, but the plan still stands.”
Clarke grinned. She had been doing a lot of that these days.

“Sounds like a good plan.”

“What will you do?”

“Sell them all, tell Ollivander that I didn’t find anything, and then buy a mansion somewhere in France.”

Lexa nodded seriously.

“I’ll send you a copy of my trophy picture which you can hang in the dining hall.”

“Please, I’ll have my own trophy picture.”

“Mine will look better.”

“I’ll mount if next to the trophy of the Jobberknoll feathers.”

Lexa’s eyes narrowed.

They hadn’t really talked about the various theft and sabotage they had been subjecting each other to over the last many months yet. Clarke had purposefully avoided the subject, reasoning that the catacombs of a pyramid with small possibilities of getting away would not be an ideal place for a duel. Now Clarke was resisting the urge to bite her lip, waiting to see how Lexa would react.

The silence stretched on for a while. It made Clarke more and more nervous. Eventually, Lexa spoke.

“You should send me a copy of your trophy picture too.”

They held each other’s gaze a bit longer before Lexa’s mouth pulled up into a cheeky grin.

“So that I can mount the grindylow horn on your forehead.”

Clarke burst out laughing. Lexa’s grin widened.

“Are you actually not going to tell Ollivander that we found them?”

“No, I am way too keen to do well in this job; I’ll have to tell him. And I am pretty sure he sent me on this mission in the first place to make me admit defeat and take my confidence down a few notches, so I am looking forward to seeing the look on his face when I bring home an extinct beetle.”

“Not that you’re proud or anything.”

“Not at all.” Clarke smiled a genuine smile. “Then I think I’ll go home and read every book in my library that says anything about phoenixes. I am feeling inspired.”

“You have a library?”

“Not really,” Clarke admitted, “but an entire wall of my living room is taken up by bookshelves.”

The side of Lexa’s mouth quirked upwards.

“That doesn’t surprise me in the slightest.”
Clarke smiled back at Lexa and tried to decode her expression. There was mirth, sure, and some teasing. But Clarke could swear there was something else there too; Lexa’s eyes had gotten a specific glint to them, a glint which Clarke could imagine was the seed of an idea. Clarke bit her lip as she thought of the little time they had left together, and if she would have an opportunity to find out what Lexa was thinking about before their paths split.

They reached the front door to the pyramid late the next day. Lexa had been just about to suggest setting up camp for the night when she recognised the tunnel as the very first one they had seen the day they had sneaked past the security spells on the outside.

Clarke was still laughing from a joke Lexa had made when Lexa pointed out where they were, and Clarke’s face split into a large grin.

“That’s fantastic!”

Lexa smiled too, albeit more reserved. “I’m not going to lie; I am looking forward to seeing the sun again.”

“I hate to burst your bubble, but it will be night time on the outside.”

“The stars, then.”

Clarke nodded.

“I am just looking forward to selling the beetles. I can practically smell my French mansion.”

“Flowering gardens and all?”

“Even the dinner parties and champagne.”

“I’m just hoping Mrs. Wolfe hasn’t been back and realised that I abandoned shop for a week with no notice. She can be a little… disapproving sometimes.”

“A few extinct scarabs might persuade her to be more understanding.”

As they talked, they rounded another corner and found the large sandstone which served as the door to the pyramid.

Lexa bent down and picked up a pebble as she kept talking. “Maybe, but to be honest, I think I could have plucked every single tail feather from that Phoenix, and the woman would still not be visibly impressed.” With one graceful motion, she transfigured the pebble into a beetle just like she had on their way in, to use on the port key door.

Clarke raised her wand and levitated the beetle out of Lexa’s hand, towards the stone door. “I know the feeling; Ollivander’s just the same. Figures that wandmakers had to be the one profession which still treats their apprentices like medieval dirt.”

Clarke met Lexa’s eyes and smiled, clearly not needing to focus much on levitating the beetle. Lexa smiled warmly back. There it was again, that feeling of wordless understanding that Clarke sometimes gave her. Lexa had never met someone who so intuitively understood her, who didn’t need a longwinded explanation to perfectly comprehend exactly what Lexa meant. It was refreshing. It was invigorating. As Lexa smiled warmly back at Clarke, she realised for the first time how glad she was that Clarke was there with her. It had been a long time since she had had a
friend.

“We should go get a drink when we get out, see if we can find some Egyptian vendors of items of questionable legality to take some scarabs off our hands,” Clarke suggested.

A drink. To find someone who would buy the beetles. It wasn’t a date. It most certainly and definitely was not a date. More like a business dinner, if anything. Not in any way shape or form, something even vaguely resembling romantic.

Lexa had to look down to hide a blush all the same.

Clarke’s levitating beetle hit the stone door, and the door vanished and reappeared a little way away from its original place, opening the ancient pyramid to the outside world. There was a blissful moment when Lexa took a deep breath of the warm night air, leaning forward and glancing upward to try to see the stars. She thought Clarke might be watching her through the corner of her eye.

Then loud alarms pierced the calm air.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loud alarms pierced the air.

Lexa and Clarke jumped. Lexa recognised it as the blaring alarms which had gone off when she threw a stone at the pyramid on their first night in Egypt, the alarms which she had sabotaged to get them into the pyramid. Lexa took a few steps out of the door and saw that guards were already pouring out of the security hut, ready to find whoever had set off the alarm.

“They must have repaired the alarms!” Lexa shouted, seizing Clarke’s hand and pulling her into a run towards the path leading up to the village. Lexa felt a sudden heat as they ran away from the door, and it made her shudder and set off a whole new round of alarms. The biospell, Lexa remembered, which Clarke had counteracted with the paramedicharm. Lexa groaned. There was no doubt that someone had been breaking into the pyramid now. Luckily the security hut was on the far side of the pyramid so Lexa and Clarke had a fair head start on the guards, but a lot of shouting behind them told them that they had been spotted as they ran towards the path.

“Come on!” Lexa yelled, yanking hard on Clarke’s hand, “We just have to make it to the town, and then we can disapparate out of here!”

The two girls sprinted up the rocky path as curses started flying over their heads. Clarke managed to swear loudly while gasping for breath in the rough terrain. Lexa chanced a glance behind them, firing off a few shield charms.

“They’re gaining on us!”

Lexa could see the town coming up in front of them now, and she ran after Clarke towards the cobbled streets. Then suddenly one of the spells hit Clarke’s backpack, and it tore open. Clarke shouted loudly as their precious scarabs fell out. Lexa tried to grab a few but missed, and they all fell to the ground as the speed of their running took them a few feet ahead before they could stop and turn around. Lexa grabbed Clarke’s arm as they stared at the beetles on the ground. Then, at the same time, they looked up at the army of twenty or so very angry Egyptian security guards which were coming straight for them and were less than a hundred feet away. Then back down at the scarabs.

Lexa swore loudly, but turned around and pulled Clarke back into a sprint, leaving the scarabs behind.

“Lexa! We can’t leave them!”

“It’s this or prison, Clarke! It’s an easy choice!”

Clarke seemed to agree reluctantly because she sped up and raced side by side with Lexa towards the town. Lexa realised she was still clinging on to Clarke’s arm, but didn’t let go. The guards were still gaining on them. Their feet hit the cobbledstones of the town, and they dashed around a corner and out of view of the approaching horde of law enforcers. Clarke shouted as they ran, “we should hide!”

“Good idea!”
They both turned and dashed down opposite side streets. When Lexa realised that Clarke was no longer next to her, she came to a sudden halt and turned around, seeing Clarke doing the same thing on the other side of the street. Clarke had just started jogging back towards Lexa when the horde came running through the street, obscuring Clarke from her view. They all rushed past their small side streets, and Lexa crept back to look around the corner.

The group had come to a stop a little further down the street, realising they had lost their trail. One man, who seemed to be the commanding officer, was barking orders as his henchmen were fanning out, knocking on doors and conjuring spells to look for intruders. They seemed to be operating with military precision and were obviously highly trained. Lexa felt a touch of pride that she and Clarke had made it past their security and spent days in their pyramid without the guards even realising.

Lexa looked across the street to where Clarke was standing with an alarmed expression on her face. She was winded from their run, and Lexa could see her chest rising and falling rapidly. Some of her hair had come undone from the knot behind her head and had fallen down to frame her face. Her blue eyes bore into Lexa, and Lexa understood perfectly what she meant. They were in the town. They were ok to disapparate. But neither of them could come to the other side without being caught by the guards, so they couldn’t disapparate together. That meant they had no way of disapparating to the same place.

This would be where their paths split.

Lexa bit her lip. Clarke shrugged with a sheepish expression on her face, and Lexa nodded. Clarke mimed drinking a drink and mouthed *later*. Lexa had to bite back a smile. Then Clarke took a step backwards and disapparated with a loud bang. Lexa felt a twinge of regret in the pit of her stomach as she watched the blonde disappear, but she followed suit, stepping back, closing her eyes, and focusing her thoughts on getting her anywhere but here.

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When she opened her eyes a few seconds later, Lexa was a little surprised to find herself in France. Specifically in the forest where they had raced for the snidget and almost ended up duelling each other. It felt like a lifetime ago. Lexa looked around at the dark forest. She had let her thoughts pick a place at random, really, but she didn’t know why this particular forest had crept up in her mind.

Well, she did. It was because it was the closest location to Egypt where she had run into Clarke in the past, and she had hoped Clarke had been thinking in similar veins and would be here too. It was stupid really, and Lexa felt silly for even entertaining the notion. Which was why she was much happier thinking to herself that it had just randomly crept up in her mind. Clarke was probably back in London already, safely home in her flat.

Lexa let out a long sigh and looked up. She could see the stars from the forest floor, just through the leaves. She allowed herself a small smile as she closed her eyes and just took in the feeling of being out under an open sky again. She let her arms hang loosely along her side, swaying gently from side to side.

That’s when she felt the bulge in her pocket. She hadn’t given it much thought, being so preoccupied with making it back out of the pyramid and then running to safety, but her hand slipped into the pocket to investigate. As her fingers found two small, round and stunned beetles, she suddenly remembered the scarabs she had picked up in the tomb, just before they had found the phoenix egg. She had pocketed them absentmindedly. The only two scarabs which they hadn’t lost when Clarke’s backpack tore.
Lexa’s hand curled protectively around them, a smile spreading across her face.

It took Clarke three days to get back to London.

When disapparating from the street in Egypt, she had gone to Goslar, the small town in Germany where she and Lexa had first met. She had hoped that Lexa was thinking the same thing and would meet her there, but the brunette had clearly just gone home to the States instead. It made Clarke more crestfallen than she would like to admit. Not that she had expected Lexa to be searching for her really, but they were friends now, weren’t they? Clarke worried that after the fiasco with losing the scarabs Lexa was seriously regretting the whole pyramid ordeal. Clarke couldn’t blame her; it had been a lot of work, and now they had nothing to show for it. Clarke should be regretting the whole thing too, but somehow she couldn’t make herself wish she had done anything differently. Except maybe having a magically reinforced backpack.

Still, she wasn’t exactly excited about going home and telling Ollivander that she failed, so she drifted aimlessly around for a few days, sulking. She told herself that she was just trying to find some courage, getting to terms with having failed her mission so she could go home and explain it all without breaking down. She kept finding herself drawn to the different places she had met Lexa though, hoping against all odds that the brunette would be there. Not that it would get Clarke any more scarabs, but she just felt like having Lexa around made things seem less bad somehow. If Lexa Wyvern could fail at something, Clarke thought, then it was damn well above human capabilities to succeed.

Eventually, she gave up waiting and looking for Lexa, figuring that she would have to face Ollivander (and her defeat) sooner or later, and it might as well be sooner. She arrived at her flat late in the evening, after stopping by Wales to stare gloomily at the lake with the grindylows. This way, she figured, she would at least have a good night’s sleep in her own bed before the inevitable misery that explaining the situation to Ollivander was going to be.

Clarke unlocked her door with her wand, glancing quickly around to check that none of the Muggles in the block could see her. She hung her jacket on the coat hanger, dropped her backpack on the floor, wandered blindly into the living room and fell face first on her couch. Then she let out a long, pained groan, muffled by the cushions.

She almost jumped out of her skin when the vocalisation of her misery was answered by a soft hoot from the corner of the room. She sat up quickly and spotted a large eagle owl perched comfortably on top of her easel. Confused, she looked around the room and realised that one of the windows was opened; Octavia or Raven must have left it open when they had stopped by to keep an eye on her plants, which seemed to be thriving more under their temporary care than they ever had while Clarke had been in the flat. Clarke glanced back at the owl.

Clarke unlocked her door with her wand, glancing quickly around to check that none of the Muggles in the block could see her. She hung her jacket on the coat hanger, dropped her backpack on the floor, wandered blindly into the living room and fell face first on her couch. Then she let out a long, pained groan, muffled by the cushions.

It was huge, almost two feet tall, but very docile. It regarded Clarke lazily, blinking slowly and seemingly waiting for Clarke to get over the shock. Clarke noticed there was a parcel about the size of a matchstick boxes tied to one of its legs. The owl reminded Clarke of Lexa somehow; fierce yet calm expression, intimidating yet trustworthy. Beautiful big eyes.

Clarke shook her head gently, telling herself that it had been a long day. She walked up to the owl to relieve it of its cargo, went into the kitchen to find some orange juice and a slice of ham to offer it. It wolfed down the ham and ducked its beak into the juice before giving a grateful hoot. Then it perched on Clarke’s arm as she carried to the window and let it take of and fly off into the night. Clarke went back to the sofa to have a better look at the parcel.
It was wrapped delicately in brown paper and string, with no name on it. As Clarke gingerly tore off the wrapping, a small folded piece of paper fell out. Unfolding it with care, Clarke read the single sentence written on it:

“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

It was signed with a star, and the letter L. Clarke stared at the paper for a while, then at the little box. Then back at the paper. Then she reached for the box, opening it with trembling fingers.

In it was a single, ruby scarab.

Clarke ran to the window and shouted into the night.

“I bloody LOVE you!”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys didn't think the fic would end after the pyramid. Hit me up on Tumblr at geyranger.tumblr.com!
Chapter 16

Two weeks after Egypt, Clarke still felt like she was soaring. Ollivander had stared at her for a solid ten minutes when she had brought in the scarab the day after returning to London, before grabbing every piece of equipment he owned and setting about doing tests to find out if it was a fake. Clarke had to mind the shop for three days straight until the old man had run out of things to try to prove the falsehood of her prize and had to concede that Clarke had actually managed to do the impossible. Then and only then did he listen to her as she explained where and how she had found it. He applauded her conclusion of seeking the scarabs under ground, but was horrified that she had broken into a legally protected tomb. Wand making, he said, was a clean business and should not be confused with bounty hunting. Still, it did nothing to put a dent in Clarke’s pride.

Clarke didn’t mention that Lexa was involved. She didn’t think that teaming up with someone was strictly against Ollivander’s instructions, per se, but she had the distinct impression that wandmakers were solitary people who put a lot of stock in competition and were not naturally prone to team play. And, being an apprentice, her receiving outside help might be frowned upon, if Ollivander found out. Clarke didn’t particularly want Ollivander to expressly forbid her associating with Lexa, reasoning that it was better if he simply didn’t know. So Clarke kept Lexa her own little secret.

Clarke still couldn’t believe Lexa had sent her a scarab. She remembered now how Lexa had picked them up and pocketed them, probably forgetting about them, but the fact that she decided to share them with Clarke, even if it meant sending an owl halfway across the world just to deliver it, baffled her mind. This was the same woman who had almost cursed her over the theft of some aspen twigs. Clarke felt grateful, and a little honoured, that Lexa had decided to share their spoils with her.

She really wanted to repay Lexa, but she had no idea how. Clarke guessed that she could easily find Lexa in Portland should she so wished, but what would she say if she went? It felt a little excessive going all the way to Oregon just to say thanks for the scarab, and at the same time some simple words did not at all seem like enough payback for the favour Lexa had done for her. Having not heard from Lexa again these last two weeks Clarke felt like it would be a little intruding to barge into Mrs. Wolfe’s shop for no good reason.

Clarke’s conundrum solved itself the morning two weeks after returning from Egypt.

It was a Saturday, Clarke’s day off. She was having a lazy morning, painting some summer flowers she had seen the day before. She had been obsessing slightly about what she could do to repay Lexa for a few weeks, and painting was her way of relaxing and taking a step back from it all. The rain was pouring down outside, thunder rumbling on the horizon, but the air coming through Clarke’s window was still warm and her painted flowers were full of colour and life. She was just mixing colours, trying to get a perfect shade of green when her doorbell rang.

Clarke stared suspiciously towards the hallway. No one ever rang her doorbell. The only people who visited her were Octavia, who always apparated into the kitchen, and Raven, who disregarded doorbells in favour of banging loudly on any available door with her cane until someone let her in. If it hadn’t come with the flat Clarke wouldn’t have bothered having a doorbell at all.

The doorbell rang again, and Clarke sighed and put her colours down, sticking her brush into the loose ball of hair on her head, before making her way over to the front door and pushing it open. “Yeah, hello-“
Clarke stopped dead halfway through her sentence, because at her front step, biting her lip and dripping slightly from the rain, was Lexa.

Clarke was so shocked she could do nothing but stare. Lexa somehow managed to look as surprised to see Clarke as Clarke was to see her, despite being the one who had knocked on Clarke’s door. She was wearing her leather coat, but not the rugged gear under it that Clarke was used to seeing her in; instead, she appeared to be wearing a nice blouse. Her hair was tied into braids and damp from the rain outside. Her expression was that of a deer caught in headlights. For a minute they just stared at one another. Then Lexa cleared her throat awkwardly, but before she had a chance to speak Clarke blurted out, “How do you know where I live?”

Lexa blushed slightly, and Clarke immediately cursed herself. Way to shoot the conversation with the girl you’ve been obsessing about for weeks in the face on the first syllable, Griffin.

Lexa seemed a little hesitant when she replied, “I went to Ollivander’s in Diagon Alley. He told me where to find you.”

“Oh,” Clarke said. That didn’t really answer any of the questions burning in Clarke’s mind, such as why Lexa was there, or how on earth Clarke could properly express her gratitude for the gesture Lexa had done with the scarabs. The girl in front of her was watching her with a passive and open expression as if she was waiting to see what Clarke would do. Clarke was looking back at her with an expression which she imagined must be very similar. The silence stretched on a bit, but it wasn’t inherently awkward; more like they were both a little lost for words. What do you say to someone who you spent days and days with on an adventure, but didn’t even say goodbye to? Eventually, Clarke shook herself a little and decided the silence had stretched on long enough.

“What can I do for you, Lexa?”

Lexa seemed to draw in a breath.

“Actually, I was hoping to borrow your library.”

“My library?”

“You briefly mentioned that you had one. I have been given a new mission, one which I recognise needs some preparation, and I can’t find the appropriate books in any of the bookshops I have visited. I was hoping to browse your library to see if I can find the information I require.”

Clarke could feel a smug grin slip unwarranted back onto her face.

“Are you saying you have come around to the ways of reading, Lexa?”

Lexa rolled her eyes. It was odd how that one familiar motion made a bright feeling spread from Clarke’s chest.

“Not even remotely. I just need to look up some quick facts.”

Clarke gave a dramatic sigh, shaking her head slightly to properly convey her pretend resignation. “We’ll make a reader of you yet.” She took a step back and gestured for Lexa to come in, “What sort of mission are you on?”

Lexa stepped into the flat and followed Clarke down the hall.

“Wolfe is sending me to get essence of ghost.”
“What on earth is essence of ghost?”

Out of the corner of her eye, Clarke could see Lexa giving her a small smile.

“I have no idea.”

They walked into the living room, and Clarke’s eyes scanned the room. There was two weeks’ worth of coffee mugs littered around, not to mention the myriad of opened books covering up every horizontal surface. In a rare moment of productiveness yesterday Clarke had tidied away all the plates and cutlery and take out boxes, which she was suddenly very grateful for now that Lexa was standing in the room. She turned back to face her.

Lexa was looking around the room with a fascinated expression. Her eyes lingered on the bookshelf wall and the fireplace and looked at the easel in front of the window for quite some time. When Lexa’s eyes came back to meet Clarke’s she gave a slightly hesitant smile.

“Sorry to barge in on you like this.”

Clarke could feel her face break into a grin, and she realised with startling clarity that having Lexa here, in her flat, was exactly what she wanted. And she would be damned if she let her go without a fight.

“Don’t worry about it. Sorry about the mess,” Clarke shrugged, still grinning.

Lexa shook her head slightly, “No, no… it suits you.”

Clarke quirked an eyebrow.

“Are you saying I’m a mess?”

Lexa’s shoulder tensed, and her hands came up as she gesticulated. “No, I just meant… you like reading, so the books make sense. They don’t have to be on a shelf; that’s fine. And I see you are using a stack up them as a table for your coffee over by the easel, which is very practical. And, and, the fireplace is probably very good for keeping warm in the winter, although the bunch of parchment scrolls next to it could be a fire hazard so you might want to remove that before…”

Clarke watched her flounder with a fascinated grin. As Lexa ran out of words and just gesticulated around herself, cheeks tinted slightly red and refusing to meet Clarke’s eyes, it dawned on Clarke that Lexa must be nervous. Lexa, who stared down a sphinx less than a month ago. Lexa, who cursed a kneazle as it pounced on Clarke and ended up getting herself savaged pretty badly without once looked scared. Lexa, nervous to be here in Clarke’s messy flat in London. The thought gave Clarke a funny but warm feeling in the pit of her stomach, and she had to turn around to conceal her smile.

Clarke quickly tidied the books off the sofa and looked back at Lexa. She was standing in the middle of the room, quietly watching Clarke. She was wearing black jeans and a red blouse, and her long leather coat brushed the wooden floor slightly. Her braids were a little messy, and some had escaped from the order they were usually confined to. The whole picture of Lexa in Clarke’s flat seemed to Clarke very surreal but at the same time very right. She had to swallow hard to keep herself from staring.

“Please, have a seat. I am just going to put on something other than my pyjamas; I’ll be back in a second. Can I take your coat?”

Lexa nodded furiously, maybe glad to not have to open her mouth again, and shrugged off the coat.
Clarke took it and walked back into the hallway to hang it on the hook on the door, and took a moment to admire how it looked hanging next to her own clothes. Then she wandered into her bedroom, which was at the opposite end of the hallway from the living room. Clarke tried to hurry, jumping into her small en suite bathroom for a quick shower and brushing her teeth, but she still ended up taking an embarrassing amount of time choosing what to wear.

When she walked back into the living room, Lexa was sitting on the sofa, leant back and fiddling with her fingers in her lap as she studied the rest of the room. The big open windows on the other side of the room were letting in the grey daylight from the dark sky, and the sound of heavy rain drifted in through them. Lexa looked up at Clarke when she came back in and smiled an open smile. Her hair was lit up from behind by the windows. Clarke got a sudden urge to paint the scene in front of her; the rains, the sky, Lexa; it was all too perfect a picture to let go to waste without committing it to canvas. Her fingers twitched for a brush and her gaze flickered to her easel in the corner, but she resisted the urge in favour of focusing her undivided attention on the woman in front of her.

She would have to commit the scene to memory instead.
Hi guys, sorry for the wait! I am probably scaling down to about 2 chapters a week because life is happening. But fret not, I have the story planned out and it will definitely be written :) Holla at me at geyranger.tumblr.com

Lexa watched Clarke as she wandered around the room and picked seemingly random books out of the bookshelf, piling them in her arms. The living room was, in Lexa’s opinion, almost a perfect mirror image of Clarke’s personality. It was cluttered with books and information but in no particular system or order. The old furniture gave the room elegance, but the worn upholstery showed that it was for a practical purpose and never just for show. The large windows gave plenty of light but must lose a lot of heat in the winter; that made it prettier than it was practical, which in Lexa’s opinion described Clarke’s presence in her own life perfectly.

Still, they were beautiful windows and lit up the whole room.

On the low coffee table in front of the sofa were the supplies Clarke had already collected from seemingly random places in her flat. The rolls of parchment from the fireplace, which was in front of the sofa and table, were now laid out neatly on one side. On the other side were a bottle of ink and some quills which Clarke had produced from under the cushions of the armchair at the end of the table. What Lexa really wanted to look at was the easel in the corner in front of the windows. On her first round of the room looking for books Clarke had stared long and hard at the canvas which was mounted on it, angled away from Lexa, before she had bit her lip and moved on. Lexa was part thrilled that her earlier assumption about Clarke painting was correct, and part incredibly curious as to what was on the painting. Yet she felt it might be a bit rude to just get up and look, so she stayed on the sofa.

Clarke came shuffling back to the sofa, her face mostly obscured by the massive pile of books in her hands. Lexa had to contain a grin as she almost lost her balance under their weight and had to take a few side steps to make it to the table without dropping anything. The coffee table groaned slightly as she unceremoniously dropped the pile onto it, and the book pile immediately collapsed, and books slid out across the table in a neat line. Clarke took no notice, only plumped down on the other side of the sofa and started pointing out books.

"Ok, so I got a few I think might be useful. There’s an encyclopedia on metahumans, that’s the big one over there. Then there’s the Layman’s Guide to Supernatural Remedies; I thought it might give us some helpful pointers. That’s the small red one. Right in front of you is the D-K issue of An Alphabetical Narration of Magi-Ecosystem Services. The rest of the books are basically just short stories and real world narration of experiences with ghosts; I figured some of them might help give us a clue as to what essence of ghost actually is”.

Lexa peered at all the books Clarke was pointing out. Some of them looked a little worn, but they were mostly in good shape. Lexa was a little impressed at how many books on ghosts Clarke had managed to produce; she had known Clarke has a small library, knew the girl liked to read, but she hadn’t quite realized just how useful a collection of books like these would be in their line of work. Out of the corner of her eye, Lexa could see that Clarke was looking at her expectantly. Lexa
figured it was time to give her mouth a second chance, despite its poor performance when Clarke accused her of calling Clarke messy. Lexa turned to Clarke.

“Well, I believe you are the research expert. Where do I start?”

“You can take the encyclopedia, and I can take the Magi-Ecosystem Services maybe?”

Lexa was surprised. She had just come for the books really, at least on paper, and had been thrilled when Clarke had started to set her up with a work station instead of just giving her the books and sending her on her way. But she hadn’t expected Clarke actually to help her look through them too.

“It will take a while to get through it all. Are you sure you have time to help me?”

Clarke snorted and looked up to meet her eyes. “I know we might have a somewhat complicated tally system of who owes who insults and who owes who favours Lexa, but I think that right now the least I can do is help you work out what essence of ghost is, and where to get it.”

Lexa hesitated slightly. She had been worried about this; Clarke thinking of the beetle she had given her as some sort of payment and thinking that Clarke was in Lexa’s debt. Lexa wanted Clarke’s help, wanted her books and her company more than anything, but she wanted the offer to be because Clarke wanted her company too, not because of some misplaced sense of duty. Then again, maybe Lexa was pushing her limits. If given the impression that the debt was repaid Clarke might expect her to leave, on friendly terms but leave none the less. Lexa eyed the blonde girl on the sofa. If Clarke was doing Lexa the same favour Lexa had done her, which was probably the case, then at least it bought Lexa some more time with her. Maybe that would have to be enough for now.

Lexa had to work her features away from a grown and into a grateful smile. “Thank you, Clarke.”

They spent most of the afternoon hunched over the books, discussing whatever they found in the books they were reading. Clarke asked her if she would like some tea or anything, and disappeared into the kitchen. Leaning back on the sofa Lexa could see through the door, and watched as Clarke pulled out an unopened pack of Lexa’s favourite tea and made it just the way Lexa liked it. Lexa asked her about it when she came back out, but only received a non-committal shrug and some mumbling about seeing how Lexa took her tea in Portland. Later Clarke read that essence of ghost was invented in Georgia, and she pulled a massive Atlas down from the top shelf, staggering slightly under its weight, and they spend a good 30 minutes lying on their fronts on the floor, peering over the maps and debating whether it was Georgia, US, or Georgia, the country. Clarke was taking in all the new knowledge with a passion, and it made Lexa feel warm on the inside. Soon they were both laughing a great deal more than maps could really inspire. The rain outside only got worse as afternoon turned into evening, but Lexa felt cosy and happy. Clarke didn’t close the window even when thunder rolled across the skies.

As the evening stretched on their conversation became less and less focused on the task at hand. Lexa figured it began when the brush Clarke had haphazardly stuck into her hair threatened to drip paint onto her forehead, and Lexa’s fingers had shot out to save the drop before it found its destination. She had only meant to save Clarke cleaning it up, she really had, but as her fingers caught the drop they also rested briefly against Clarke’s forehead and the sudden sensation of skin under her fingertip made her lose her train of thought. When she pulled her hand back and showed a startled Clarke the drop of paint as her alibi, Lexa knew she had a tint of red in her cheeks. It did, however, give her an opening she had been waiting on for a while; an opportunity to ask Clarke about her painting.
“So you paint, Clarke?”

Clarke gave a nonchalant shrug, eyes not leaving the book in front of her. Lexa didn’t believe that for a second, and continued “I figured you would be, with the amount of time you spent staring at the paintings and hieroglyphs we found in Egypt.”

Clarke slowly looked up to meet her eyes. Then a smile spread across her face.

“Yeah, I paint. Have been painting since I was small.”

Lexa returned the smile. “What do you paint?”

That prompted a whole conversation. Clarke painted whatever she felt like, she said. Mainly flowers now in summer, and a lot of nature since she moved to London; she missed the open landscape. When Lexa asked what her favourite thing to paint was, Clarke left and found about ten canvases from her bedroom, all of which had beautiful scenes of stars and the night sky painted on them. As Clarke spoke about painting, gesticulating wildly and grin never leaving her face, Lexa thought about how this might be the first time she was seeing Clarke completely unguarded. It made Lexa feel something special which she couldn’t quite put her finger on. Something good. Clarke even took her over to see her current project, though with repeated warnings that it wasn’t finished yet. Lexa gasped when she saw it; it was the phoenix from the pyramid, rising majestically over the sarcophagus and its glowing egg.

Lexa kept expecting Clarke to feel like she had overshared and suggest they go back to the books, but instead Clarke turned the conversation around. They were back on the sofa, but the books were forgotten, and Clarke was essentially quizzing her on Aok and what it was like growing up there. Lexa found herself telling Clarke everything, even all the little titbits she usually assumed people wouldn’t be interested to hear, like how she had broken her arm falling from a tree when she was ten, and how Gustus, the warden at the time, had helped her sneak into the broom shed and taught her how to fly when she was six. They weren’t stories she usually shared with people, but the warm, dark room and the rain beating against the window made her feel safe, like this was a place where nothing bad could really happen. At least not right now. Clarke had a look in her eyes like she was drinking it all up with fervour, and it made Lexa want to keep going; anything to keep that look on her face for a little longer. And so they talked, into the small hours of the night.

It was past midnight, and they were five cups of tea in when Clarke shot up out of the sofa. Lexa, who was leaning against the armrest with her feet on the cushion, just stared; Clarke had been half way through the story of how she got banned from being in the Herbology greenhouses without a teacher present, and Lexa was looking forward to hearing the ending. Apparently, it had something to do with secretly growing plants only considered legal in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Instead, Clarke just sprinted down out of the hall and into what Lexa assumed would have to be her bedroom, and Lexa could hear her rummaging around. When she came back, she was holding a large black tome with golden inscriptions. She let it drop onto the table with a loud thud and started flicking through the pages. Lexa could see several schematic drawings of plants, and gave Clarke a questioning look.

“This is the book where I read about the plant in the first place. I stole it from the library before I graduated, figured it had potential. But I think I remember another entry too, one that’s more relevant to us…”

She continued flicking through until she found the right page, and opened the book wide with a triumphant shout. Lexa leant over the table excitedly, their elbows brushing. On the page was a drawing of a plant which looked very much like a pale jellyfish turned upside-down, with the heading *Pylop medusa*. The text next to it included a description of what it looked like, where to
find it, how to grow it, and its uses. Clarke read it aloud, her finger following the words as she read.

*If multiple ghosts or poltergeists are made to pass through the Pylop medusa it will become a pale pink or green colour, respectively. When boiled outside under the full moon the Pylop medusa will then dissolve, producing essence of ghost.*

Clarke looked up at Lexa with a triumphant grin, which Lexa returned wholeheartedly. “We got it!”

Their faces were very close, their elbows brushing as they were both hunched over the black book. Lexa thought she could count every single freckle on Clarke’s face if she wanted to. And she kind of wanted to, to be honest. Lexa’s eyes committed complete mutiny against her brain by flickering down to Clarke’s lips. Lexa though she had just felt their shared smile change somewhat, just taken on a slightly different tone almost imperceptibly but still unmistakably, when the quiet of the flat was interrupted by the loud cracking sound of someone apparating into the kitchen, accompanied by loud swearing and the unmistakable sound of breaking glass. Lexa jumped, which made Clarke jump. The moment ended.
Out of the mess of the kitchen, putting out a small fire on her cloak and using swear words which almost made Lexa blush stepped a tall brunette. All long and elegant black cloak, eyeliner and style, she looked to Lexa like she should probably be crouching on a rooftop somewhere, ready to either save innocent civilians from being robbed at gunpoint vigilante-style or preparing herself to break into the national gallery to steal the prize jewel of their diamond exhibition. She didn’t look up as she walked into the room; too busy casually preventing the fire in her clothes from spreading to the rest of the flat.

“I swear to god Griffin, if you don’t clean up your kitchen soon I am going to send those trolls from the Department of Magical Health and Food Safety over here to- oh. Who is this?”

The brunette had stopped when she had spotted Lexa on the sofa next to Clarke. Lexa looked over at Clarke, who seemed definitely annoyed. Absolutely fair, Lexa considered; you didn’t simply apparate into people’s homes like that. No matter how stylish you looked.

Clarke cleared her throat somewhat pointedly. “Octavia, this is Lexa. You might remember me talking about her. Lexa, this rude piece of shit is Octavia. Best friends since our first year at Hogwarts, I’ve told you all the stories.”

Ah, Lexa thought. The famous Octavia. She had featured heavily in almost all of Clarke’s stories all evening, and the image Lexa had created in her mind of Octavia actually fit surprisingly well with the would-be diamond thief in front of her. Lexa felt herself drawing herself a little higher; Octavia was, for some reason or another, a person Lexa wanted to impress.

Octavia’s face had taken on an expression of part surprise and part joy when Clarke introduced Lexa. “You mean to say that this is the girl we have been illegally tracking for almost a month?”

Lexa looked at Clarke through the corner of her eye and saw that her eyes had narrowed. “Why are you still tracking her? It’s been weeks.”

Octavia shrugged. “Because you didn’t tell us to stop I guess.”

“Well, you can stop now,” Clarke said, indicating needlessly towards Lexa next to her on the sofa, “I found her.” Clarke looked back to meet Lexa’s gaze. “Don’t look at me like that; it was a pain to find you when I needed to Shanghai you into coming to Egypt.”

Lexa nodded slowly. Yes, she didn’t like finding out that she apparently had a tracking spell on her. Yes, if this had been a month ago she probably would have been furious with Clarke, and some hexing might not have been out of the question. But now? She couldn’t really be mad. And she didn’t want to be mad at Clarke either, which was honestly a novel feeling for Lexa but a welcome one none the less. And if the roles were reversed she probably wouldn’t have had any moral ambiguity of doing the same thing, to be honest.

Octavia seemed to think the conversation had gone off track, and made her voice sugary sweet as she directed the attention back to the elephant in the room. “And to what do we owe the pleasure of Lexa’s visit?”

Clarke narrowed her eyes. “We’re doing research for her next mission. What are you doing here?”

Octavia didn’t answer, only gave Clarke a huge grin. Lexa watched the scene in front of her with
interest. She knew that Octavia was an important figure in Clarke’s life; she had learnt that much over the past few hours. But Clarke was shooting dangerous glances at Octavia every five seconds or so, and Octavia seemed unnaturally chirpy. There was something going on here, Lexa decided, and she would get to the bottom of it. Sooner or later.

Octavia, cloak now fire-free, came up behind the sofa to peer over their shoulders at the book in front of them. Her face fell, and Lexa thought it looked like she was disappointed to find actual topical textbooks there.

“Oh. What are you researching?”

Clarke’s voice seemed somewhat strained when she replied, “Essence of ghost.”

Octavia snorted, and Lexa recognised it as Clarke’s signature sound each time Lexa had said something vaguely funny. “Oh, that thing where you have to boil a plant which ghosts have passed through? You should go to Stonehenge to do it; there’s a bunch of ghosts of dead Celts there which do a ritual dance every bloody two weeks or so. You can just leave your plant in the middle, go to a party or to sleep or whatever you want, and collect it again in the morning.”

Clarke looked absolutely stunned as she regarded Octavia with an open mouth. “How do you know this?”

Octavia shrugged. “Essence of ghost is used to ghost-proof holding cells; it’s damn difficult to catch ghosts that have turned to a life of crime without it, the fuckers just slide through the wall when you lock them up. The Auror office uses it all the time.” Octavia went over and plumped down on the chair on the other side to the table, one leg over the armrest, and pulled the black book over to have a look at it. “Oh, and you don’t need to bother with the whole boiling in moonlight malarkey, Boil it whenever and however; it still works. The guys who discovered it just had a flare for the romantic. “

Lexa, who had been conjuring images in her head of maybe asking Clarke if she would like to join her for the boiling process for educational purposes and maybe setting up some candles and wine and making an evening of it, felt a little dejected.

Clarke spoke again. “Wow, O, I’m a little impressed.”

Octavia leant back in the chair, getting comfortable, and blew her hair out of her face. “Yeah, well, you tend to underestimate me.”

“That’s not true.”

“You said I would never be able to smuggle the skelegro potion out of the infirmary without being caught too.”

“Which turned out to be accurate.”

“Only after we slipped it in that Hufflepuff prefect’s drink. The actual theft had nothing to do with it.”

Clarke was smiling at Octavia now, and the sight gave Lexa a warm feeling in her chest. It spread from her heart, it felt like, and brought new blood to her organs. It made her breathe deeper, more slowly, like her body needed more oxygen to fuel her senses, at the same time as her mind seemed crystal clear yet at ease. If she had gotten a moment to reflect on it Lexa might have realised some important changes which her mind was going through, but her moment was interrupted when Octavia turned to her with renewed vigour on her face.
“So, Lexa. What is it that you do?”

Clarke rolled her eyes and pulled back the black book to study the schematic drawing of the plant some more.

Lexa cleared her throat. “Well, I’m a wand maker’s apprentice just like Clarke. I work in Portland.”

“You’re from the states?”

“Canada.”

Octavia nodded seriously. “Good. We don’t have room for more than one obnoxious American around here.”

Clarke looked decidedly resigned but kept her attention focused on the book in front of her. Lexa’s mind was busier compartmentalising the fact that Octavia was of the opinion that Lexa’s presence in Clarke’s life was there to stay.

“Why do you need essence of ghost?”

“Mrs Wolfe asked for it. I think she is making a new range of wands meant to be specialised for ghost detection or something like that.”

“And how did you come to be in Shikoba Wolfe’s employ in the first place?”

Octavia kept grilling Lexa for a few minutes, and Lexa felt like she was back at the summer exams the tutors at Aok would make them sit before the kids could take their summer holiday. She answered questions on her favourite subjects at school, places she had been while working for Mrs Wolfe, and how she and Clarke really had met. Octavia seemed to be of the impression that they had met in Wales when Lexa had stolen Clarke’s grindylow horn, but Lexa gave Clarke a narrow-eyed look before correcting Octavia and telling her about their first meeting in Germany, when Clarke had straight up grabbed Lexa’s twigs out of her hand and apparated away.

Octavia looked scandalised as she turned to Clarke. “You didn’t tell me about that at all!”

Clarke glanced up from the book to grin at Octavia when she replied, “You will remember when you asked me about it, your specific words were ‘when did you start hating her’ and not ‘where did you meet’, so technically I wasn’t lying.”

“That is the most ridiculous excuse I have ever heard. Although I assume you have gotten over the hate thing by now.” Octavia rolled her eyes and looked back at Lexa. “You have probably realised that Clarke here is a slimy fucker.”

Lexa grinned. She liked Octavia; she reminded her of her friends back home at Aok, all ruthless humour and mocking jibes yet fierce loyalty beyond all else. “It had occurred to me.”

“I have been telling her for years that she needs to get another hobby than extensive evasive lying.”

“Well, to be fair, she is a wonderful painter,” Lexa conceded, giving Clarke a smile. Clarke smiled back gratefully.

Octavia snorted again. “Yeah well, she might be, but sadly we will never know since-“. She suddenly did a double take at Lexa. “Wait, you’ve seen her paintings?”

Lexa looked back at Octavia. “Yes?”
Octavia rounded at Clarke again, who had fixed her gaze firmly on the book in front of her, regarding it with a completely neutral expression.

“You’ve shown her your paintings?!”

No reply.

“You don’t show me your paintings! We’ve been best friends for ten years!”

Clarke still didn’t reply, only slowly turned the page of her book. Lexa had to hide a grin. Octavia looked scandalised, before bolting from the chair she was in towards Clarke’s bedroom, where Lexa had learnt Clarke stored her paintings. Clarke threw herself over the back of the sofa and raced after Octavia down the hall and out of view for Lexa to put a locking spell on the door before Octavia could get to it. From the vague shouting and swearing Lexa could only assume Clarke had succeeded. The warm feeling inside her grew from her chest until it filled her up from her toes to her fingertips.
The next morning Clarke hurried out of her flat with a grin on her face. She was hurrying because she was late for work. She was grinning because after Octavia had left last night Lexa and Clarke had stayed up talking until Lexa had fallen asleep on the couch, and Lexa was still lying there now. Clarke had woken up already late, and had torpedoed out of her bedroom while pulling on her shoes; she had stopped dead when she realised Lexa was still in the room and sleeping peacefully. Jolting back to life when she remembered the time, she had written down a short message to Lexa on the parchment on the table next to her head and jogged out of the flat as quietly as she good, beaming brightly.

The message she had written read:

*Lexa,*

*Don’t run away! I’ve had a great idea. I have gone to work, but I’ll be back in the afternoon. Help yourself to food in the kitchen, and any books you want. I’ll make a reader of you yet…*

She had signed it with a C with a star next to it.

Clarke opened the door to Ollivander’s shop in Diagon Alley and hung her jacket on the hook. She could hear Ollivander rummaging around in the next room, and took her usual seat behind the till. Her mind was on the idea she had had when she woke up this morning. It was simple, but in Clarke’s opinion, brilliant. She would ask Ollivander if he didn’t need some essence of ghost too. Then she would volunteer to get some, and go with Lexa. She couldn’t imagine Ollivander would be difficult to convince; essence of ghost seemed like a very sensible thing to get an apprentice to fetch, and Clarke knew she was in his good books after the scarabs. She would get the mission; she would pick plants with Lexa and then they would go to Stonehenge together. Brilliant.

She was grinning to herself as she tidied away empty wand cases and sorted out the mess on the desk, preparing for the day. The last item she picked up from the desk was today’s issue of the *Evening Prophet*; Ollivander always got the morning edition and finished it before Clarke came to work. Clarke spared a glance at the front page, and her smile froze in place. The heading read ‘Wolfe and Ollivander - bitter rivalry or partners in crime?’. Clarke immediately dropped what she was holding, grabbed the paper and read the whole article, continued on pages 9, 10, 11 and 12.

The article was written in response to an announcement published earlier that week, in which Ollivander’s plan to recreate ancient Egyptian wands using ruby scarab cores was made public. Clarke knew Ollivander had been secretive about the beetles when the journalists had come knocking, and she had ushered them out of the shop herself when Ollivander had grown tired of the endless questions. This time, it seemed they had done their research. The article delineated how ancient Egyptian wands required ruby scarab wand cores, and the assumed extinction of the key ingredient. The article had however dug even deeper; it seemed someone in the Prophet had gotten wind of the fact that Shikoba Wolfe was planning the same thing. Clarke bit her lip as she read. Would it be possible to convince Ollivander that Wolfe was just trying to copy him, and probably did not have the scarabs too? Even if it were, Clarke would still have to think of some quick answers. Maybe she could play up the rivalry part because God forbid Ollivander found out about Lexa. Clarke reached the end of the front page and flicked quickly through the paper until she reached the next part.
She almost dropped the paper in shock.

Plastered on top of the newspaper page were head photos of her and Lexa. Clarke recognised her picture as the one taken when she graduated Hogwarts. The photo of Lexa was similarly posed and formal. Clarke’s heart was speeding up as she read the article as fast as she could. The article portrayed them as the mysterious and dangerous apprentices of the two wandmakers and claimed that they were likely the ones who were responsible for procuring the scarabs if they really existed. But the author had dug even deeper and found reports of the ‘attempted break-in’ in the pyramid in Egypt two weeks ago. Witnesses claimed they saw two girls matching Clarke and Lexa’s description fleeing the scene; the only thing they got wrong was the assumption that Clarke and Lexa were trying to break into the pyramid rather than getting out. The author of the article speculated at some length about the possibility of Ollivander and Wolfe, two of the best wandmakers in the world, joining forces to achieve great feats and sending their apprentices on dangerous and illegal expeditions in the process. Clarke groaned. The article ended by asking several questions, such as if Ollivander and Wolfe were accomplices or competitors, how far the arms race would go before one of them admitted defeat, and what lengths Lexa and Clarke were willing to go to in order to deliver what their masters wanted from them.

Clarke slowly put the paper down. It felt like her heart and breathing had stopped completely. Her brain was working overtime, producing plan after evasive plan, all of which were immediately discarded. Clarke had just started entertaining the notion of going home, grabbing Lexa and leaving the country immediately just to get it over with when she heard someone clearing their throat to her left. She turned slowly, knowing exactly what she would see.

Ollivander was standing there, arms folded in front of him, with the coldest expression Clarke had ever seen on his old face. Clarke swallowed.

 Lexa was having a great day. When she had woken up, she had been momentarily mortified to find that she had fallen asleep on Clarke’s sofa, but she had found the note Clarke had left soon after. That had eased her worries, and she had spent the morning doing more research, waiting for Clarke to come home and tell her of whatever her newest bright idea was.

Lexa had made her best guess at what time Clarke would be home and had raided her kitchen to prepare some dinner. She was a little appalled at the food available, which was mainly limited to canned soup and pop tarts which Lexa was pretty sure you couldn’t even easily get in the UK, but she had still managed to rustle up enough grub to start cooking. Now she was frying some onions and mushrooms, seasoning it with whatever she could find. Lexa liked cooking. The rain from yesterday had cleared up, and now sunlight and a gentle wind were flowing into the flat through the opened window. The breeze played with Lexa’s loose hair as she hummed a melody to herself.

Lexa had taken time this morning to do some thinking and had arrived at a few facts. One, she and Clarke were a really good team. It was no small feat they had accomplished with the scarabs, and Lexa was pretty sure neither of them would have managed to get the precious beetles on their own. They probably wouldn’t even have made it into the pyramid in the first place. Two, having Clarke in her life was, everything else aside, incredibly useful. Just her library alone had provided Lexa with everything she needed for her ghost mission, and Clarke’s experience and intellect were a great help too. The number of times Clarke had patched Lexa up from various degrees of serious injuries were a testimony to the fact. Three, and this was the point Lexa had spent most of the morning coming to terms with; she really enjoyed Clarke’s company. Clarke was funny. Lexa would wager she had laughed more in these past 24 hours with Clarke than she had in the two weeks leading up to it, with her quick wit and all her stories of Hogwarts shenanigans. And Clarke
was kind and compassionate too. She always listened attentively whenever Lexa spoke, listened in a way which made Lexa want to keep talking. Keep sharing. Keep putting herself out there, making herself vulnerable, opening herself up for Clarke. Lexa was usually a very private person; she hadn’t met anyone who made her feel the way Clarke did in a very long time. Clarke made her feel very happy like there was joy in her chest which could not be contained.

Just thinking about it made Lexa smile as she cracked a few eggs into the frying mushrooms.

The sound of the door opening in the hall sent Lexa’s heart into her throat, but not in an entirely unpleasant way. She shouted a cheery “in here!” as she brought the frying pan away from the stove. She could hear Clarke hanging up her coat, and footsteps coming into the kitchen. Lexa didn’t turn around as she started loading the omelette onto two waiting plates, only spoke over her shoulder, “I hope you don’t mind me raiding the kitchen, I figured you might be hungry when you came home from work. Though, honestly Clarke, I don’t know how you have managed to survive on soup allo- what’s wrong?” Lexa had finally turned around and was met with a stone-faced Clarke clutching a newspaper in front of her. Clarke was biting her lip and didn’t meet Lexa’s eyes, just wordlessly handed her the paper. Lexa’s eyes caught the headline. She took the newspaper and read the whole article in a matter of minutes, the cheery sunlight feeling leaving her and being replaced by growing heaviness in her chest. When she had finished, she looked up at Clarke again, who was still biting her lip and looking anywhere but at Lexa, looking like she was very worried about the next thing Lexa would say.

Lexa really wished she knew what to say to make Clarke look less worried.

“Where did you find this?”

Clarke stopped biting her lip just long enough to reply. “At Ollivander’s.”

Lexa’s eyes widened. “Has he read it?”

Clarke nodded.

“And?” Lexa tried, prodding gently.

Clarke let out a long breath, and a hand came up to push her hair away from her face. “And he said that he was appalled that I was associating with anyone connected to Shikoba Wolfe and that I was not to leave Diagon Alley on any sort of mission until he deemed me fit for active duty again, which he made sure to tell me was in no way guaranteed would happen. And then he took care to forbid me expressively to associate with you ever again if I wanted to keep my job.”

Lexa watched Clarke carefully as she spoke, even as her words filled Lexa with dread. She subdued it as quickly as it came; Lexa was starting to realise how beside herself Clarke was with worry. Clarke’s eyes were flickering around the flat, never staying anywhere long and outright refusing to land on Lexa. She was breathing shallowly, and Lexa could just about tell that her hands, which were balled into fists at her sides, were shaking. Lexa did not have time to deal with her own worry right now; Clarke needed her.

“I see,” Lexa began, Clarke’s gaze finally coming up to meet hers, her eyes wet with panic, “so the next time we go on a mission, we will have to be more subtle about it.”

Lexa was pretty sure Clarke stopped breathing completely.

“What?”

“Well,” Lexa said, carefully measuring each word, “I don’t know about you, but I think we make a
really good team. And I am reluctant to let that go just because Ollivander and Wolfe, who by the way I imagine will be giving me very similar instructions, have an archaic view of cooperative efforts.”

Clare stared at her. “But I can lose my job. We can lose our jobs.”

Lexa met her gaze steadily. Clarke’s job meant the world to her. Lexa knew that. Lexa’s job meant the world to Lexa too. Sometimes it felt like all she had. The moment seemed to stretch out forever and be filled with a tense energy; Lexa sensed that what she said next could turn out to have consequences way beyond what she and Clarke could foresee. But for once in her life, that feeling didn’t fill Lexa with fear but with confidence.

She shrugged with one shoulder, faking casualness, and eyes not breaking contact. “Only if we get caught.”

Clarke’s eyes never left Lexa’s. The look on her face was a mix of intensity, to see if Lexa was serious, fear, for what consequences their choices might bring, and, eventually, relief. Relief which made her take a shaky inhale, and Lexa could have sworn her gaze flickered to Lexa’s lips before Clarke closed her eyes and her hand came up to rest against her forehead. Then the blonde stumbled forward blindly, and before Lexa could do much more than raise her arms, her vision was filled with blonde hair as Clarke hugged her tightly. Clarke’s arms came up around her midriff, squeezing her rib cage, seeking comfort in the closeness. Lexa clutched her shoulders right back; she suddenly felt like it was difficult to breathe, and not just because Clarke was squeezing her like she was afraid she would drift away with the wind. Clarke had her face buried in Lexa’s shoulder, and Lexa felt like the sunlight feeling inside her was back in full force, this time electrified by the tingling nerves spreading from her chest. Her hands were acting completely on autopilot when one of them came up to stroke Clarke’s hair gently. The intensity of Clarke’s grip eventually faded, but she made no move to step out of their embrace as the minutes stretched on. Inside Lexa the electric sunlight had grown into joy again, and even though she knew the situation was serious, knew that they could both be in a lot of trouble very soon, she couldn’t keep the grin off her face. When she eventually loosened her grip on Clarke’s shoulders, and the girl’s only response was to tighten her own grip on Lexa, Lexa couldn’t help the chuckle which escaped her.

“You were really worried about this, weren’t you?”

The reply only came in muffled words from where Clarke’s face was still buried in her shoulder.

“Shut up, Lexa.”
They had agreed afterwards that it was probably best if Lexa went home to put out some fires with Wolfe. Like Lexa said, it was probably unlikely that she would receive a lot of praise for coming home with essence of ghost at this point anyway, so she might as well face the fire head on. Clarke had been incredibly impressed as Lexa had gotten ready to leave, knowing very well the nightmare which was waiting for her back in Portland, but still just squaring her shoulders and getting ready for it with without wasting time. Last time Clarke had been dreading going back to Ollivander she had spent three days sulking all across Europe. Lexa didn’t have to pretend not to be worried, however; Clarke knew. They were probably the only two people in the world who had a crystal clear idea of what the other was going through. Lexa and Clarke understood each other.

Still, Clarke was sad to see her go. They had agreed not to push their luck more than they had to; no helping each other out with random missions, like the scarabs and the essence of ghost. They would wait patiently until they were sent on the same mission again, and then join forces on the way once they were far away from London or Portland. That way they were only overstepping their master’s instructions while trying to achieve the task they had been set, and both Lexa and Clarke felt like that somehow made it more morally acceptable. At any rate, it made it easier to get away with, and they wouldn’t even have to lie; they could just omit certain details when explaining to their masters how they completed the task.

A few days later Clarke received a letter by owl from Lexa, telling her how it had been to see Wolfe again. Wolfe had, apparently, said much the same thing as Ollivander had, but in the effect of being a vicious old hag (Lexa’s words, which made Clarke smile) she had also threatened to curse Lexa if she overstepped again. Lexa had been put on wood collecting duty for the foreseeable future. Clarke wrote back saying she was still confined to Diagon Alley; Ollivander was making her study the theory of wand lore. It was becoming more and more apparent to Clarke that her talent for obtaining wand core material didn’t stretch to include any innate sense of wand theory; it was tedious, and Clarke felt herself fall asleep several times. Sometimes she would wake up on her own, and sometimes by a semi-hard slap to the back of her head from Ollivander. Nowhere near enough to hurt, just enough to remind her that she was an apprentice and therefore the lowest of the low on the pecking order. A month previously the whole ordeal would have had Clarke teetering on the brink of mutiny, but now it barely made her annoyed. Her and Lexa’s quiet rebellion was plenty to keep her mind occupied and gave her a small smile on her face, and she barely reacted to Ollivander’s many scoldings.

They kept exchanging letters over the next few weeks. They deemed letter writing safe enough; Clarke doubted Ollivander would go as far as to intercept her mail, although Lexa had suggested half seriously that she wouldn’t put it entirely past Wolfe. Clarke was thrilled to be eventually allowed back in the field again as June soldiered on, even if it was just to collect mundane items like garden gnome teeth, and she made sure to tell Lexa every time she got a new assignment. Even catching rabid garden gnomes, Clarke reasoned, might be almost pleasant if she was doing it with Lexa. Their schedules never quite coincided, however; whenever Clarke was sent out, Lexa was home, and whenever Lexa was sent after wand wood, Clarke was stuck reading wand lore. If the article in the Prophet hadn’t been so adamant that Ollivander and Wolfe hated one another Clarke would have half suspected them of scheming together to give them conflicting schedules. In one of her letters Lexa suggested that they should have just told their masters everything back in spring when they were still sabotaging each other at every turn; they would probably have been very proud. It made Clarke laugh. Clarke wrote back suggesting that maybe they should keep that as their cover story if Ollivander and Wolfe eventually realized they were going place together; they were just there to be a nuisance to the other. Lexa replied that Clarke would always be a nuisance.
to her, and therefore it wasn’t even a lie. With every letter, Clarke felt her affection grow until the very sight of an owl on the horizon outside her large windows made her smile.

Though allowed out on a rare mission, Clarke was still spending most of her time inside. Ollivander kept Clarke doing slave labour for days on end, peering over dusty old tomes in search of obscure facts about wand lore which Ollivander no doubt already knew and could have told her flat out. Clarke liked research, it was true, but she was starting to suspect that it was the travelling aspect of her job she really loved, and research was only interesting when it was about which item to look for or which place to go next. Studying plain wand lore was downright boring. Ollivander kept hinting that he was preparing another mission for her, one which was ‘consistently nasty in parallel with the degree of her disobedience’, but Clarke half-suspected he was just saying it to make her confinement even more frustrating. ‘Consistently nasty’ sounded like a dream compared to mouldy old books when the sun was shining outside.

The torture went on for almost two weeks, and Clarke was beginning to wonder if Ollivander was ever going to let her out of the shop again. It was a particularly nice day in late June, and she was holding the large tome she was currently supposed to be reading under her arm as she stood in front of the door to Ollivander’s office. She took a deep breath and knocked. It took a good thirty seconds before he replied, and if Clarke wasn’t so sure he was definitely in there (she had been keeping a close tab on his movements ever since she and Lexa had decided to start being sneaky), she probably would have turned away. Eventually, however, she heard a low ‘come in’, and she gently opened the door.

She had only been in Ollivander’s office a few times. She was in charge of the whole shop when Ollivander was gone, took care of customers and restocking and cleaning, but Ollivander’s office was kept out of bounds. She looked quickly around the large, dark room; no windows meant to daylight, and it was only illuminated by a kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling. Ollivander was sitting at a desk facing the door on the other side of the room, making notes with a quill on a piece of paper. He didn’t look up. As Clarke approached, she noticed that he was peering over maps of Asia, and her heart picked up. Maybe all this talk of a new mission wasn’t just meant to taunt her. She came to a stop in front of his desk and held her breath. She needed to focus on why she was here; it was a simple request she was going to put before him, but she didn’t doubt that Ollivander had it in him to turn her down.

Ollivander didn’t look up. “Yes?”

Clarke quietly cleared her throat. “Er, Mr. Ollivander, I was just wondering, is it ok if I take my research outside?”

Ollivander stopped writing but didn’t look up. “Outside?”

His old face was impassive, but Clarke knew how scary it could look when he decided she was disappointing him, so she soldiered on before she could lose her nerve. “Yes, I was just thinking, the weather is amazing, and there’s no reason I couldn’t read outside. I could bring the book and my notes and my quill, and do the same work outside. I just thought, I mean, I would quite like to, that is, it would be nice enjoy the sun while it lasts.” She practically stammered out the last sentence, the complete absence of any reaction on Ollivander’s face giving her a sinking feeling in her stomach. He was going to say no, she just knew it. Just a simple request, yet she felt stupid for even asking. Even as she was standing there, her fingers were itching for parchment to write to Lexa about it, to complain about the injustice of the world in general and her employer in particular. But as she stood there, wishing she was anywhere but here, Ollivander looked up at her, and his eyes bore into hers.
His face, which until now had been completely neutral, twisted into a grin which was nothing short of terrifying. It was the sort of grin which cats would give when it encounters a mouse who suggests they sleep in turns so that one of them can keep watch. Ollivander’s keen eyes sparkled with an almost childish mischief when he asked, “so you want to enjoy the sun, do you?”

Clarke gulped.

Lexa hurried down the small London street towards the building were Clarke’s flat was. The sun was just setting, but it was still warm, and Lexa was sweltering in her long leather coat. She had apparated into Diagon Alley, figuring it was the only place in London she knew it was safe to apparate into, but Clarke’s flat was a fair distance from the magical street. Now she was half running to get to Clarke’s flat as fast as possible, dodging slow muggles and ignoring their stares.

Her face was twisted in concentration to remember the way, and in excitement of the news she was about to share. And she hoped, hoped, hoped Clarke would have some good news for her too.

She had meant to write, really she had. Whenever she imagined finally getting a real mission again and checking in with Clarke to see if she had gotten the same one, she had imagined sticking to the plan, writing a letter and hopefully planning together where and how to meet up. Lexa was usually calm and collected and more than capable of rational thought. However, when Wolfe had finally called her into her office to give her a respite from picking twigs to give her a mission which was difficult, intimidating and was promising to be lengthy and uncomfortable as a punishment for her discrepancy, Lexa’s heart had soared. She couldn’t help it; she needed to tell Clarke instantly. She had barely lasted to the end of her work day to go to her room over the wand shop and pretend to do research before she had apparated to London.

And here she was, short of breath and coming to an abrupt halt in front of Clarke’s door. The notion that it might be in vain had occurred to her as soon as she heard about the mission Wolfe had prepared for her, but she simply didn’t have the patience to wait and find out. Letters were slow; owls crossing the North Atlantic Ocean and most of the continental US took a while. Lexa needed to know if Clarke had gotten the same mission, and she needed to know now.

Lexa raised her hand to ring the doorbell. She paused for a second. It had been two weeks since she last saw Clarke. They had been writing frequently, but the afternoon of pacing the shop in Portland and then legging it to London hadn’t given Lexa a lot of time to prepare for what it might be like to see her again. Lexa really missed her, and that made her nervous. She took a few deep breaths, trying in vain to slow her racing heart, and rang the bell.

A moment of silence, then Lexa could hear footsteps running to the door. Clarke wrenched it open, and her face mirrored the excitement and nervous eagerness Lexa was sure was apparent on her own face. Lexa was entirely unprepared for how seeing Clarke again took her breath away, and she didn’t even try to formulate an opening sentence before Clarke held her hand up to silence her. Clarke fixed Lexa with an insistent stare.

“Yeti hair from the Himalayas?”

Lexa’s pulse picked up even more. “Yes!”

Watching the smile which spread across Clarke’s face was like watching the sunrise. Lexa could feel it warm her up right to the core, and for the first time since they had parted two weeks ago Lexa felt like she was right where she was supposed to be.
“Me too. Come in.”
Chapter 21

The Himalayas is the highest mountain range on earth. It is home to countless human societies and cultures, some seemingly as odd and unique as the mountains themselves. The Himalayas are also home to some of the rarest fantastic beats in the world, some of which have never been captured for human studies. One of these beasts is the yeti, which is one of the wizarding world’s worst kept secrets; though large and difficult to compel and therefore never caught, muggles stumble across its tracks or catch a glimpse of it so often that the International Confederation of Wizards has put in place a permanent international task force in the mountains to control the situation. It is not a creature many wizards or witches go searching for voluntarily.

Three days ago Lexa wouldn’t have known any of this. She had been all in favour of apparating on the spot and see what they would find when they arrived, but Clarke had talked her into doing some research first. They had spent the next few days hunched over books again, researching all and everything they could find on yetis. It probably was a good idea. Lexa was no fool; she could recognise that the neatly written pieces of parchments now nestled safely inside Clarke’s bag contained a lot of information which would help them later on. Still, she was more than happy when Clarke eventually grew tired of her fidgeting and staring out the windows, and declared them ready to go.

They had settled on the town of Yadong in Tibet. It was small, close to the frosty mountaintops, and, most importantly, it was where the international task force was based. Clarke and Lexa figured that was as good an indication as any of there being frequent yeti sightings there.

They had apparated from Clarke’s flat early in the morning. Clarke’s backpack contained all the maps and notes they had been working on, as well as a few books. Lexa practically had to drag her away to stop her bringing her whole library. Lexa’s backpack contained only her tent, which she had hesitantly gone back to Portland to get. The tent was important to Lexa; it was one of the few things she owned which was hers and hers alone, and the prospect of showing it to Clarke was both daunting and thrilling. Lexa couldn’t quite pinpoint why, but she hoped Clarke liked it.

When the time had come to apparate Lexa had grabbed Clarke’s hand in preparation before she fully realised what she was doing. When she had looked up at the blonde, whose wide eyes were regarding her with surprise, Lexa’s cheeks had immediately tinted red as her head caught up to what her body was doing. Her heart sped up, and her hand felt tingly where it touched Clarke; she had quickly apparated them out of London before she could analyse it any further, or before (god forbid) Clarke noticed her blushing.

They were chatting amicably as they walked into Yadong. Clarke was munching happily on an apple, which, when Lexa pointed out that it had been less than two hours since they had breakfast, she claimed was doctor’s orders part of her diet. The sun was shining on the grey stone buildings, and the air was chilly. Lexa could see her breath steaming now and then as she talked. Looking out over the town in all directions were impossibly high snow-covered peaks. Clarke had just said something which made Lexa snort with laughter, and she recovered quickly enough to catch Clarke’s face lighting up with the prospect of teasing material. As the blonde’s grin grew three sizes of mischief Lexa realised she needed to change the subject abruptly if she was ever going to live it down.

“So, Griffin, what’s the plan?”

Clarke, to Lexa’s relief, seemed to let the snort laughter subject drop and pondered the question. She tapped her apple pensively against her chin.
“Well, we have a few things to take care off before we can set off into the mountains. We should probably try to get a hotel for the night, and then we can set off in the morning.”

“What do we need to get again? Snowshoes and clothes, definitely.”

“An up to date map too. We should try to find this task force and see if they have any tips on where to find the yeti.”

Lexa ran through their planned mission in her head. “And we need to get rations.”

Clarke nodded. “Sounds like a comprehensive list.”

“Your favourite kind.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “So divide and conquer? You get the snow gear, and I get supplies?”

Lexa shook her head. “Absolutely not.” She turned away from Clarke’s suspicious gaze and started walking down the street, saying over her shoulder, “I have tried cooking in your kitchen; there is no way you get to be in charge of rations. I would like to eat something other than granola bars three times a day for the next few weeks.”

Clarke’s half-eaten apple came sailing over her shoulder, and Lexa laughed.

Tambah text

They met up again in the early afternoon and compared their spoils. Clarke had tracked down the best hiking equipment shop in town and charmed the owner into giving them half price off of their gear. Lexa had planned a week’s worth of meals and bought supplies accordingly, and Clarke made big eyes at the amount of food she had procured.

“Don’t look at me like that, Clarke. You’ll be glad of the cocoa and fresh vegetables when we’re snowed in for three days straight.” Just the thought of being locked in close confinements with Clarke for days on end was enough to send a deep thrill through Lexa. She shook it off. “I found out where the office of the task force is, though. Let’s go there and steal their maps.”

They wandered down the street towards the building the shopkeeper had pointed out to Lexa earlier. It seemed to be the only building in the whole town with three floors. Concrete steps led up to a wooden door which was set slightly ajar. Over the door was a faded sign which read ‘Yeti spotting group – will pay for photos’. Lexa knocked hard on the door and was met with a cheery voice inviting them inside.

The inside of the house was decorated much like an office, but the fact that they were in a small town in the Himalayas was still hard to conceal. There was a small sitting group, presumably for visiting guests to wait, but the amount of empty coffee mugs and daily prophets laying around suggested it was probably used more as a break space. There were three desks on one side of the room, occupied by two young men and a woman. One of the men was interviewing two rugged and slightly frantic hikers who were gesticulating wildly and speaking rapid French. The interviewer seemed serious as he noted down the details, but Lexa could see that he was concealing a smile. The other man was chatting to the woman, who was laughing. When he saw Lexa and Clarke, the guy walked over and sat down at his own desk, and smiled at them as he waved them forwards.

“Hello, my name is Clive, research specialist at the Yeti Spotting Group. Do you have any yeti sightings to report? We will pay extra for photos, triple if your information leads to another spotting. Please, state your name and recite the events as they transpired.” As he talked, he dipped
his pen in ink and pulled out a piece of parchment. Then, pen at the ready, he looked at them expectantly.

Lexa glanced at Clarke, who shrugged. Lexa cleared her throat.

“Actually, we’re here to find a yeti. We were hoping the task force could help us locate one.”

The guy’s smile fell. “I see. I apologise; we have to run the standard opening monologue since most of those visiting are muggles in need of a swift memory charm.” He put his pen down and regarded them with a suspicious glance. “you aren’t from the Yeti Hunting Association, are you? We told you lot before; the Yeti is a protected species, and besides, you will probably kill yourselves trying. We frankly can’t be bothered to deal with the paperwork associated with Yeti deaths again. I don’t care if they make good hunting trophies—“

Clarke cut in before the young man could talk himself into a fit. “No, we’re not here to hunt yetis. We are here for more scholarly reasons, actually. Can your group help us locate a Yeti, or will we have to try on our own?”

He leant back in his chair, regarding them both coolly. “We can’t help anyone without knowing their exact reason for finding a yeti. Why do I feel like I know your faces? Have you been here before?”

Clarke looked over at Lexa. Lexa held her gaze as they had a brief, silent conversation. Eventually, Lexa nodded, and Clarke turned back to the accusatory look on Clive’s face.

“We are here to collect yeti hair. We only need one hair each. I assure you, no yeti needs to be harmed, and we will certainly not try to kill one.”

Clive squinted his eyes at them for a moment more. Then his whole face lit up. “You guys are the wand apprentices! That’s where I know your faces from! You were in the *prophet!*” Before Lexa could do little more than blink the young man was out of his chair and on the other side of the table, furiously shaking their hands and calling the other two people in the office over to explain the situation. Soon Lexa was shaking three pairs of hands over and over again as the Wizards talked over each other about how much they admired their escapades in Egypt, how cool they thought their ‘underground team of wand vigilantes’ was and what an honour it was to meet them.

Lexa could only stare; never, not once in a million years, did she see anything like this coming when she took on her apprenticeship. Her eyes were still wide in shock when Clive finally took a breath, and she had a spare moment to look at Clarke. Clarke was grinning from ear to ear, and Lexa’s amazement at the whole situation only grew as the blonde next to her answered all the questions the group was firing at them with a hundred percent confidence and a smug smile. As Clive asked them another question about Ollivander and Wolfe and whether they were rivals or teaming up Clarke slipped her hand into Lexa’s and pulled her imperceptibly closer. Lexa was still staring at Clarke, still not quite believing what was happening until Clarke glanced over at her and gave her a brief yet gleeful grin and squeezed her hand. Lexa blinked, and smiled back. She squeezed Clarke’s hand again and looked back at the group surrounding them.

It took a solid fifteen minutes before Clive calmed down enough to go back behind his desk and dig out the necessary forms to allow them to try tracing down yetis. The other two, who it eventually transpired were called John and Anna, hovered in the background. Clarke didn’t let go of Lexa’s hand.

“Right, so, you need to sign these forms. They give you permission to stay for up to a month in the mountains, provided you check back in with us on a weekly basis. I’ll add in some maps with our
most recent Yeti sightings and known feeding grounds” He looked back up at them with a hopeful
grin, which Lexa thought was already becoming annoying. “Will you require some guides to go
with you?”

“No,” Lexa said quickly, her voice breaking slightly. She cleared her throat. “No,” she repeated,
more clearly this time, “we don’t require guides. But thank you for offering.” Lexa kept her
attention on Clive’s slightly disappointed face and blatantly ignored Clarke’s smirk next to her.

“Well, then all I need is your signatures on this dotted line. Is there anything else we can do for
you?”

Clarke let go of Lexa’s hand as she bent down to write her name. Lexa tried to ignore how cold her
hand felt as she addressed the question.

“Well, we’re actually looking for a hotel to stay tonight, for setting off tomorrow morning. Can
you direct us to the nearest one?”

Clarke finished her signature and handed the pen over to Lexa as Clive got a slightly sheepish
expression on his young face.

“Well, there was a hotel in town, but it closed down a few months ago. Not enough customers.”
Lexa slid the paper back across the desk, and Clive took it and examined their writing. He looked
up at Lexa with wide eyes. “Lexa Wyvern? Are you related to Gustus Wyvern?”

Lexa met his eyes. She hadn’t heard that name since she left Aok. Gustus had been the warden at
Aok in the first ten years of Lexa’s life; he had comforted her after nightmares, had saved her treats
for dessert, had patched up many a bruised knee and broken bone. Gustus had taught her how to fly
a broomstick. He had eventually left, like all wardens do, but kept visiting now and then. Lexa
hadn’t seen him in years. “Yes, he’s my… yes, we’re related. How do you know him?”

Clive grinned again. “He’s the senior official of the task force!”

Lexa stared. “What? Really? I thought he was in Toronto?”

“He was, until about a year ago, when the Canadian Council of Magic appointed him their delegate
to the task force. He’s been running this place since. He’s off in New Delhi to settle some things
with the Indian government, but he should be back in a few days.” Clive had his customary grin
back in place, but Lexa was willing to forgive him because of the news he was sharing. “Hey, a
friend of Gustus is a friend of ours. John? Don’t you think they can take our spare room?”

John perked up. “Yeah, of course. Theoretically, it’s reserved for visiting members of the task
force, but no one wants to visit this godforsaken outpost so it’s never used,” he explained.

Clive grinned again. “Perfect. You can take the spare room, and set out tomorrow morning. It’s
upstairs, John will show you the way, won’t you John?” He received an enthusiastic nod from
John. “We have a pub and communal areas in the basement; I hope you will join us for drinks
tonight?” Clive stood up and reached out to shake their hands again. “Really, massive privilege to
have you here. Huge honour. I’m a big fan. Welcome,” he added, “to the Himalayas.”
Chapter 22

Clarke followed John up the stairs and down a small hallway. Lexa was right behind her and clearly not paying attention to where they were going, because when John suddenly opened a door on their left, and Clarke stopped to avoid walking into it and giving herself a black eye, Lexa came crashing right into Clarke’s back and had the breath knocked out of her. Surprised, Clarke had turned around, and immediately dissolved into laughter at Lexa’s frankly outraged expression at the foolishness of her body. Without thinking about it, Clarke reached out to take her hand again and tugged Lexa with her as they followed John into the room beyond the door.

Clarke was still smiling when they entered. Lexa!s hand in hers both reassured her and exhilarated her. She hadn’t thought much about it, but it felt right, having Lexa’s hand in hers. They were a team. It was Clarke and Lexa against the world, and Clarke wanted to show it off so that no one who saw them would ever doubt it. Feeling Lexa tighten her grip on Clarke’s hand slightly as they walked through the door together made Clarke’s grin grow impossibly larger.

The room they came into was small. John gave them a completely unnecessary tour of it, which consisted of pointing out the chest of drawers, the window on the far wall, and the small double bed. He explained that there was a bathroom on the next door down the hall, and they should just ask if there was anything they wanted. Then he just stood, staring at them with a hopeful grin. Clarke and Lexa, still hand in hand, met his gaze with identical blank expressions. When the man made no move to leave the room, Clarke eventually cleared her throat.

“Thank you, John.”

John nodded excitedly but still made no move. Clarke looked over at Lexa, who met her eyes with half a smile. Clarke looked back at John.

“We are very grateful for your help. Is there anything we can do to help the task force while we’re here?”

For the first time, John looked slightly embarrassed. “Well, there is one thing. It’s not for the task force, though, exactly.”

Five minutes later John left the room happily with two scraps of paper bearing Clarke and Lexa’s autographs on them. Clarke waited until the door shut behind him before she looked over at Lexa’s expression. The confusion she was met with made Clarke start laughing again. She was laughing a lot these days. Lexa shook her head in disbelief.

“I don’t understand why they want our autographs, Clarke.”

Clarke shifted her backpack off her shoulders and stuffed it one of the corners of the room. “Apparently, we are a little famous, Lexa. Might as well get used to it.”

“But why are we famous? The article in the Prophet made it seem like we were dangerous criminals.”

Clarke met Lexa’s eyes and smiled deviously. “True, but you can’t deny that the stunt we pulled with the pyramid was pretty cool. Apparently, the general public agrees.”

Clarke looked over at the small bed. It hadn’t sunk in on her yet that there was only one bed in the room, but now it came in full force. It made her stop what she was doing as she just stared at the bed. Her first thought was that this might get awkward. Her second thought was to visualize just
how close they would have to lie for both to fit. Clarke could feel her pulse quickening and a blush
creeping up on her face, but she fought it down. They were friends. They were a team. Sharing a
bed was probably to be expected when gallivanting across the globe with a friend in search of rare
magical items. Clarke took a deep breath and could feel herself calming down. This would work.
This was good.

Lexa, oblivious to Clarke’s internal dialogue, hadn’t let go of the whole famous thing yet.

“But Clarke, it’s a problem if we’re recognized. We’re trying to lie low, remember? Wolfe and
Ollivander can’t find out.”

Clarke looked over to meet Lexa’s gaze again. She held Lexa’s eyes for a moment, and then she
shrugged. “That’s true. It’s not like we can do anything about it though. We’ll be off into the
mountains tomorrow morning, and we won’t see people again for a while. We can just have a quiet
word with John and Clive tonight; I’m sure they will find it thrilling to be included in the plot.”

Clarke stretched and threw herself down on the bed. It bounced slightly but was passably
comfortable. She looked back up at Lexa, who was still standing awkwardly in the middle of the
room. Clarke patted the bed next to her and wiggled her eyebrows, and was treated to the sight of
Lexa promptly turning red as a tomato. Clarke giggled.

“Come lie down, Lexa. I don’t bite.”

Lexa tentatively put her backpack next to Clarke’s in the corner and sat down on the bed next to
where Clarke was lying. Then she lay down slowly until she was lying parallel with Clarke. She
looked into the ceiling for a few moments before looking to the side to meet Clarke’s gaze. They
weren’t touching, but their arms were only an inch apart.

Clarke smiled at Lexa and was rewarded with a small smile in return. They held each other’s gaze
for a few moments. Lexa spoke first.

“So. How are we going to find the Yeti tomorrow?”

“Ah,” Clarke said, rolling over slightly to pull a small book out of her back pocket, “I was hoping
you would ask.” Clarke waved the small red book, which bore the title *Fantastic Beasts and Where
to Find Them*, in Lexa’s face. Lexa groaned and hid her face in her hands.

When Clarke woke up the next morning, it took a few moments before she realized where she was.
Pale light was shining in through the small window, blinding Clarke when she opened her eyes.
When her eyes adjusted she spotted Lexa’s sleeping face inches in front of her eyes, and her
breathing stopped completely.

Last night, after reading more about yetis in *Fantastic Beasts*, they had gone down to join the
research wizards for a drink in the communal areas in the basement. The basement had a pool
table, a sofa group, and a small bar. They were joined by the rest of the task force, about fifteen
wizards and witches, and the atmosphere had been relaxed. They were recognized by a handful
other people, but Clarke managed to get a hold on Clive before he told the whole world who they
were. Clarke had stayed close to Lexa the whole evening, rarely letting go of her hand. Holding
Lexa’s hand was quickly becoming one of Clarke’s favourite pastimes. At one point Lexa had
excused herself to go to the bathroom, and Clarke has been twining her fingers together until she
returned. While Lexa was gone Clive and a few friends had beset Clarke, trying awkwardly to flirt
and impress her with their Yeti stories, the majority of which Clarke was pretty sure were made up.
Clarke had tried politely hinting that she was going to talk to someone else, or look for Lexa, but they weren’t having it. Clarke had been moments away from outright telling them to fuck off when Lexa had reappeared at her side, flung an arm over her shoulder, and towed her away to safety. Clarke had shot her a questioning glance, but Lexa had just answered with her most charming smile. It had made Clarke laugh, and just then a large flash went off as someone took a picture. The photograph of Lexa having her arm around Clarke as Clarke laughed was now nestled in a side pocket in Clarke’s backpack. When they eventually went upstairs to go to bed Clarke had collapsed exhaustedly on the bed, and Lexa had lied down gently next to her. Clarke had fallen asleep to the sight of Lexa’s smile and felt like she was made of sunlight.

Now Lexa’s wavy brown hair, usually contained by braids, was spread out freely on the pillow. A lock was lying over her face and fluttered slightly with every gently exhale. Lexa had one hand under her head, the other lying between her sleeping form and Clarke. The light was coming over her shoulder, lighting her up from behind. She looked ethereal. She looked like a painting by Michelangelo, by Rafael. She looked like she belonged in the finest art galleries in the world. Clarke could feel her mouth go dry. The moment seemed to stretch on forever; Clarke felt like the rest of the world had ceased to exist, like nothing existed beyond this room they were in. Her fingers ached for paint and brush to immortalise the scene, but her chest refused her hands the opportunity to disturb the sleeping woman next to her, tightening until Clarke knew she had no choice but to lie still. Clarke was so preoccupied with admiring the sight in front of her that it took her a moment or two to realise when Lexa finally opened her eyes.

Green eyes met blue. In the quiet morning hush, it felt like the moment when a ball which has been thrown straight up reaches the top of its ascension, hanging in the air for an endless second and waiting for the world to turn. Lexa blinked slowly, still only inches away from Clarke. Clarke held her breath.

The ball drop came, inevitable as gravity. It came in the form of Lexa turning her head and pushing her face into her pillow, emitting a muffled groan. Clarke blinked, and frowned.

“Are you… ok?”

Another groan, in which Clarke could just about make out the words ‘too early’. Clarke blinked again as her mouth fell open.

“Lexa? Are you grumpy in the mornings?”

Lexa didn’t answer, only tilted her head slightly so that Clarke could see one of her green eyes peering at her over the pillow. She was squinting sourly. Then she mumbled, “I need more sleep.”

Clarke let out a disbelieving bark of laughter. “We were in the pyramid for days! How did I not know this?!?”

Lexa groaned and buried her head in the pillows again. Clarke was beaming gleefully. She didn’t know why this discovery made her so happy. Maybe it was the fact that grumpy Lexa was adorable. Maybe it was because the frowning and the groaning did nothing to make Lexa less beautiful than she had been in the moments before she woke up. Maybe it was because Clarke now knew what Lexa Wyvern looked like in the mornings. No matter what, it made Clarke’s chest almost burst, and the joy escaped out her mouth in uncontrollable laughter. One of Lexa’s arms shot out and pulled the pillow from under Clarke’s head, slamming it down on Lexa’s head to block out the sounds. Clarke let out an indignant ‘Hey!’ and grasped to get it back again, sitting up in the bed to get better leverage. She felt Lexa eventually let go and gave a victorious yell. It was cut short by Lexa suddenly sitting up and shooting her hand out to hit Clarke with a palm in the stomach, just where her lowest ribs met, trying to push her out of the bed. Clarke lost her balance,
but managed to grab a hold of Lexa’s elbow just before they tumbled; they both fell into a large pile of covers and blankets on the floor. Clarke emerged first, the gleeful smile never leaving her face, and dug down into the layers of soft fabrics. Soon she found Lexa’s face, deeply buried under the covers, looking up at Clarke with such a pitiful expression that Clarke dissolved into laughter again.
Chapter 23

Clarke was watching Lexa pitch the tent. She had lowered her fur-trimmed hood, and her nimble fingers were working out the knots in the strings and helping the poles find their way with expert precision. Lexa’s hair had escaped the braids Clarke had helped her put it in this morning, and locks were flying freely in the cold breeze. She looked completely focused on the job in front of her, hardly ever looking up. Clarke was glad. She didn’t want to be caught staring.

They had left the task force earlier, thanking them again for their hospitality and promising to check back in with them in a week’s time. Dressed in their new snow gear, they had walked out of Yadong together, apparating into the mountains and consulting their maps and trails to find a suitable place to pitch their tent. Clarke had very much let Lexa in charge of the tent situation; she could tell that the brunette was a very experienced camper by the way she talked. Clarke also thought she could sense that Lexa was a little anxious about the whole tent thing, judging by the sidelong glances she kept shooting Clarke and the way her hands became fidgety if they weren’t occupied. Clarke was happy to let her take charge, hoping it would ease whatever she was worrying about.

The tent site they had found was beautiful. It was in a clearing halfway up the side of the mountain, the only sizable area for miles which could be called vaguely horizontal. It was over the tree line and offered them a beautiful view of an untouched valley between the mountains. The trees down in it were covered in layers of frost which glittered in the light. It had started snowing as they had made their way into the mountains this morning, and the ground was now covered in a couple of inches of clean, white snow. Lexa had assured Clarke there would be more to come. The snow muffled every sound, and the sun just about shone through the thin cloud layer. Clarke could see snowflakes caught in Lexa’s hair and eyelashes as she worked. The view of the valley didn’t compare at all.

Eventually, Lexa straightened her back and looked over at Clarke. “Tent’s ready.”

Clarke walked up to her. Lexa’s shoulders were still tense. Clarke brushed the snow from them and watched them relax. She shot a quick smile at Lexa. Lexa bit her lip but made no move to enter.

“Am I allowed inside?”

Lexa seemed to shake herself. “Of course. Here, let me…”

Lexa walked into the tent, holding the flap open on the inside for Clarke to enter. Clarke followed gratefully.

Clarke wasn’t sure what she had expected Lexa’s tent to look like on the inside. Maybe like a training yard, with a manikin with a target painted on its chest tucked away in a corner. Possibly a large wardrobe of travelling equipment, wands and broomsticks, or a sizable chest filled with cloaks and rare trinkets acquired on the many travels Lexa had been on. If Clarke had given it any thought, she might have imagined a large world map taking up an entire wall, with colourful pins stuck into it and a red string connecting them, showing the locations of important items in wandology and colour coded to a chart to the side detailing their importance. Maybe a Spartan bedroom, a practical kitchen. In Clarke’s eyes, Lexa was very much a highly skilled witch of action, and she would have been hard pressed to have expected her tent to reflect anything but that.

She didn’t expect it to look like a cosy cottage. She didn’t expect the beaten down but comfortable looking sofa in front of a large fireplace. She didn’t expect the flower-embroidered cushions.
Clarke could feel her jaw go slack as she slowly walked around the small living room. On one wall was a large picture of about 50 children standing in front of a large log cabin. The inscription on the bottom read Unnuar Aok and a time signature of about five years ago. Closer inspection revealed a much younger Lexa standing on the back row, a large grin on her face and her arms around the shoulders of the friends next to her. On another wall there was a small bookshelf; Clarke skimmed over the titles with interest and was astonished to find only mundane books. There was an encyclopaedia of muggle flowers, and a collection of old Canadian folktales. There was what looked like a yearbook from Aok. The whole room screamed of domesticity, and as Clarke let her gaze drift over it one more time she realised that this tent wasn’t a travel necessity or even a luxury. It was a home. Lexa’s home. As she looked at it, Clarke felt like a missing piece of the puzzle that was Lexa was finally falling into place.

Clarke looked briefly into one of the two doorways leading from the living room. It led to a small bedroom with a queen sized bed, decorated with more pictures and warm colours. The other doorway revealed a small kitchen, a stack of cutlery and crockery left out to dry. Clarke knew without looking that Lexa was standing in the living room, twining her fingers anxiously and awaiting Clarke’s verdict. Clarke paused when she noticed a small bouquet of dried flowers in a vase on the kitchen table and thought she recognised the wild plants from the Rocky Mountains. It made Clarke feel like her heart was growing three sizes, and she had to bite her teeth together to keep her jaw from trembling.

She finally turned around. Lexa was standing with her legs a little apart, her hands folded behind her back, her chin raised slightly. The only thing revealing her anxiety was her widened eyes, which Clarke was sure was just an oversight. It was exactly the sort of controlled, authoritative stance which had had Clarke expecting the training manikin and the world map. Clarke took a moment to appreciate that the woman in front of her, who Clarke had seen blast Kneazles and Sphinxes without a second thought, was also the same woman who had taken time out in Colorado to pick and dry wildflowers.

“This is beautiful, Lexa,” Clarke told her, her face serious. Lexa smiled, and Clarke could see her shoulders lowering as she relaxed.

A few hours later Clarke was making her way down from a mountain top. She was struggling with her snowshoes, which had turned out to be much less stylish and way more inconvenient than Arctic spy movies made them seem. She was swearing loudly at the rising wind as it yet again tore her hood off her head.

She was not in a great mood.

She and Lexa had decided to split up as they started laying out traps. The traps were designed to give their wands a buzz if anything living disturbed them, and they had figured they could cover ground twice as fast if they split up. Clarke had gone uphill into the mountain tops and Lexa downhill into the valley below their tent site.

Clarke bitterly regretted the move to split up now. She had just laid her first trap on a trail leading up to one of the tops when the wind had picked up. She had laid another trap next to a river, and one in a hiding place behind a large boulder before the snow had started to fall thicker and heavier. When she tried to climb up on a ledge to lay another trap she had lost her grip and tumbled down in the snow, feeling the icy powder sneak its way down her back and into her shoes.

Clarke had used to love snow. It symbolised winter, and Christmas, and cosiness and warmth. She didn’t love snow much anymore.
She didn’t want to go back yet. She and Lexa had agreed to lay ten traps each, figuring that twenty in total would be a good place to start. Clarke was still two short. She was sure Lexa would forgive her for coming home a little short of the mark, but that didn’t make Clarke any less determined to succeed. She had convinced Lexa that going on missions together was a good idea, defying their masters’ instructions. She’d be damned if she didn’t uphold her half of the workload.

Clarke’s teeth clattered as she shuffled further down the trail. According to the map, there was a mountain ridge below her, where she figured she could lay the last two traps. She just needed to get down there. The snow inside her clothes had long since melted into icy water which was running down her back, her legs and into her shoes. It sent shivers through her body. She could feel the cold dampness squeeze between her feet with every step she took. When she looked up, the falling snow was blocking out almost the entire view, and Clarke could barely see more than ten feet in front of her. It was getting darker too, and she could tell that the wind was picking up. They might be in for a storm tonight.

She had just lifted her foot to turn around and start climbing down the ledge towards the mountain ridge when her snowshoe gave sudden and unrelenting resistance, having caught on a low bush underneath the snow. Clarke gave a yelp and fell forwards, trying to catch herself on the ledge but failing miserably; her body slid over the edge, and her foot gave a solid yank on the snowshoe, pulling her ankle painfully before relenting and coming loose. Clarke fell freely the four feet down to the ground before her body slammed into the next ledge, and had her breath knocked out of her. The snow did little to soften the blow, and Clarke’s hands jolted up to cradle her head as her body slid a few feet further but came to a stop before falling over the next ledge. Clarke rolled over on her back and gasped for air.

Clarke’s medical training kicked in, and even as she lay there gasping for breath she started self-diagnosing. Definitely a twisted ankle, she thought, trying to move it and wincing at the stab of pain which shot through her. Probably no other broken bones, though, she concluded, moving her limbs experimentally. A heavy blow to the back of her head, quite possibly a concussion. She tried to lift her head, and the whole world started swimming. Ok, definitely a concussion. She let her head fall back into the snow and sighed deeply. She rounded off her mental list nicely by adding ‘generally cold and sore’.

The snow kept falling as she lay there. Clarke had to close her eyes, and she felt the snow starting to fill up her hood. Even in her woozy state, it occurred to her how dangerous this really was. There were no magical threats here, just the elements, yet it was quite possibly the most dangerous place Clarke had ever landed herself. She was cold, she was sore, she had a twisted ankle and a concussion, and she was all alone. The night was falling fast. It made Clarke scared.

Lexa, she thought. Got to get back to Lexa. It took her concussed brain a moment to remember where Lexa was. The tent. She had to get back to the tent. She opened her eyes again.

Slowly, like Sisyphus rolling his stone up the mountain and with even more hopelessness, Clarke sat up. The world spun on its axis and for a nerve-wracking moment, Clarke thought the ledge was coming closer. Her ankle was beating painfully. Clarke blinked hard, trying to clear her head. Walking was definitely out of the question. She didn’t have anything to fly with. The falling snow and the onset of the night made laying still and awaiting rescue seem like an unparalleled bad idea.

Almost a worse idea than setting off into the Himalayas with minimal experience with snow in search of a Yeti. Clarke felt like an idiot.

That left apparition. Clarke wasn’t sure she had neither the energy nor the focus to do it right, and she shuddered at the thought of splinching up here. Yet, on balance, it seemed like a better
alternative than freezing to death. She got to her feet, trying to keep her weight off her injured ankle. She looked straight ahead, mustered all her willpower, and thought of Lexa. The resounding bang gave an echo on the mountain side.

Clarke fell out of the pressing feeling of apparition on the other side and immediately fell to her knees. In front of her, she could see nothing for a terrifying few seconds, only the falling snow and the darkness of night. Then a light appeared maybe fifteen feet in front of her, and Clarke recognised the sound of a tent flap opening. Relief flooded through her as the sound of her favourite voice in the whole world reached her ears.

“Clarke? Clarke!”

Clarke heard running footsteps and felt strong arms circling her, supporting her. A small smile spread on her face even as her head tipped backwards and the world turned black.
Chapter 24

Lexa was sprinting around the small tent.

Clarke had collapsed in her arms immediately after apparating, and Lexa had carried her in and laid her on the bed. Lexa didn’t know what was wrong with her. Lexa had no experience with medical magic. Lexa had no idea what you are supposed to do with people who have fainted.

Lexa was very, very close to panic.

She was picking up various items she deemed might come in handy as she stressed around the living room. So far she had amassed a bottle of pain meds, a tub of water, some fabric which could be used as a bandage, a hot water bottle, and a bag of oranges. She didn’t know what she was going to do with the oranges, but she’d be damned if she left out anything which might turn out to be important. Oranges might be important. Lexa didn’t have time t think any further.

A groan from the bedroom had Lexa unceremoniously dropping the supplies in a pile and change directions mid-sprint, heading at lightning speed back through the open doorway. The sight of Clarke trying to sit up in bed made her rush to the bed to physically restrain her.

“Clarke, no, shhh, lay down…”

Lexa had a solid grasp on her shoulders, gently but firmly leading Clarke back to the pillows. The blonde tried resisting, but her weak frame didn’t put up much of a fight. Panicked, Lexa realised Clarke was shivering. Grasping her head with a hand at each cheek, Lexa looked into Clarke’s face, trying to get contact. Blue eyes met hers through heavy eyelids.

“Clarke, what happened?”

Clarke blinked heavily a few times, the haze seeming to leave her mind. When she met Lexa’s gaze again, it seemed to be with a more conscious grasp of the situation. Lexa let out a tight breath, one hand shifting to stroke Clarke’s hair.

Clarke opened her mouth, seemingly to speak, but no sound came out. She raised her hand to cough into her fist, and Lexa reluctantly let her head go, sitting back on the bed and giving her some space. Clarke tried speaking again.

“I fell down from a ledge.”

Her voice was weak, thick with the grogginess of a beginning cold. It did nothing to alleviate Lexa’s panic. Clarke coughed again and looked up at Lexa with the beginning of a smile. Lexa wasn’t having it.

“You fell down?! Are you hurt?!”

“Nothing too bad.”

Green eyes met blue with a hard look. It held for a few seconds. Green eyes narrowed. Blue eyes rolled.

“Ok, fine. I have a sprained ankle, but nothing broken. I managed the apparition without splinching too. I think I have a concussion, though.” Clarke was interrupted by a coughing fit so violent that Lexa was tethering on the edge of the bed; if she had any idea about what to do or what to get to
make Clarke better Lexa would have been gone in a flash.

The coughing eventually died down.

“…and I think I might be getting a cold?”

Clarke looked up at Lexa with a sheepish expression. Lexa reached out to touch her cheek again, shaking her head slightly.

“We should never have split up. It was my idea. God Clarke, I am so sorry.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous.” Another coughing fit. “Maybe we should avoid splitting up in the future, though.”

Lexa nodded hurriedly. “So what do we do? Is there a doctor in Yadong? Maybe the task force can come get us-”

Clarke shook her head so violently Lexa almost reached out another hand to hold her head still and make her stop.

“I don’t need a doctor. The ankle will be good by tomorrow, the concussion maybe in a few days. The cold I can deal with.” She looked up to meet Lexa’s worried gaze again. “Seriously, Lex, I am fine. Well, I’m not, but I will be soon. I just have to wait it out.”

Lexa’s heart jumped slightly at the nickname. “I am not sure I believe you.”

Clarke smiled slightly. “Lexa, which one of us has medical training?”

Lexa bit her lip. Clarke continued.

“I’m in no shape to apparate anyway. We’ve got plenty of rations.” Her eyes had taken on the determination Lexa was used to seeing in them, which had temporarily dropped after Clarke fainted. “I will be fine.”

It was the logistics of the situation which eventually won Lexa over.

“Ok. So what do we do? What do you need?”

“I’m fine.”

Lexa’s eyes hardened again. “Clarke, recovering will take twice as long if you don’t let me help. Tell me what you need.”

Clarke rolled her eyes again, but Lexa thought she could see a small affectionate smile on her face.

“Nothing major. Just some water, maybe tea. Probably some painkillers too, if this cold gets worse.”

Lexa was up and out of the room before Clarke had even finished her sentence. She scooped up her pile of supplies from earlier, dropping the oranges in her hurry, and rushed back into the bedroom, dropping it all on the foot end of the bed and looking up at Clarke expectedly.

Clarke stared at the pile, and then stared at Lexa.

“What, no citrus fruit?” she said sarcastically.
Lexa running out and back into the room with the bag of oranges had Clarke laughing amid coughing fits. Lexa threw the oranges in a corner and sat down to fuss over Clarke again. Clarke, still laughing, unsuccessfully tried swatting her hands away.

“You know, Lexa, you might turn out to be a better nurse than I expected.”

Lexa shushed her and made lean on another pillow.

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It only took a few hours for Clarke’s cold to get serious. Lexa could only watch as Clarke started shivering and sweating. Lexa had diligently followed Clarke’s instructions in getting her everything she needed, but Clarke was getting less and less coherent as her fever got worse.

“Can I get a hot water bottle?”

“Clarke, you’re burning up. I am going to get a wet cloth for your forehead.”

“But I am so cold…”

The despairing look in Clarke’s wet eyes almost swayed Lexa, but she bit her teeth together.

Whenever the fever got better, Clarke would start coughing instead. She soon lost her voice completely and seemed to get a terrible headache, if the way she tried to hide her face from the one lamp in the room was anything to go by. It made Lexa ache, watching Clarke in such pain and feeling powerless to help. Lexa made Clarke lay down again and gently started massaging her temples, which made the blonde relax a bit. Lexa tried force-feeding her tea with honey and ginger against the coughing too, but whenever the coughing stopped the fever came back. Nothing seemed to break the cycle.

It was past midnight, but Lexa was too beat up to sleep. She had dragged a large armchair into the bedroom so she wouldn’t have to leave Clarke’s side. That’s where she was sitting now, leaning forwards and stroking Clarke’s back as the girl leant forwards over her own knees and lost herself in yet another coughing fit. When the coughing stopped, it took a while before she tried sitting up again, brushing away blonde hair sleek with sweat. Clarke was still hiding her face in her hands. When she tried speaking again, it was weak, and her voice broke several times.

“Can you read to me?”

Lexa’s hand stopped stroking.

“What?”

Clarke tilted her head backwards, staring at the ceiling and blinking hard to clear her head.

“I don’t think I will be sleeping tonight anyway. Can you read to me, so I can think of something else than how much I want to split my head open with a rock?”

Lexa was nodding, helping Clarke lay back down against the pillows.

“What do you want to hear?”

Clarke closed her eyes again.

“Anything.”
With one last look at her pained friend Lexa got up and walked into the living room to inspect her bookshelf. There wasn’t much there, it wasn’t as if Lexa was the biggest literature enthusiast in the world. It wasn’t empty either, though. Lexa eventually decided on the book of Canadian folktales; it was the book Anya had used to read to her from whenever Lexa had gotten sick as a child. She only owned a copy for sentimental reasons. Figuring it would do nicely she returned to the bedroom.

Lexa read to Clarke most of the night. Lexa had started by picking out her favourites, but soon gave up and just started from the beginning and read all the way through. Clarke kept her eyes mostly closed, but Lexa could tell she was paying attention; she was smiling in all the right places. The fairy tales only lasted a few hours, but Clarke seemed to enjoy them so much that when she reached the end of the book, Lexa started telling others from memory rather than getting a new one. When she ran out of those she could remember, she started making up new ones instead. Lexa started to get slightly tired as the night went on, but Clarke would always catch her if she started messing up the names of the main characters, though never catching on to the fact that Lexa was no longer reading from a book.

The blonde kept changing from coughing to feverish and back again. Lexa supplied her with tea and painkillers and hot water bottles and whatever else she could think of to help. Clarke kept telling her she was feeling better and that Lexa could go to sleep, but Lexa didn’t believe her. She might not know much about medimagic, but she knew what a stubborn bastard Clarke could be. Lexa kept reading. Clarke, between coughing fits and shivers, kept listening.

Lexa had gone into the kitchen to get some more tea when she noticed that the sky outside the windows was getting slightly lighter. She smiled to herself as the kettle boiled. The quiet morning hush felt infinite. Lexa could just about see that the ground outside was covered in over two feet of snow. It must have been snowing most of the night, Lexa thought to herself, though it seemed to have stopped by now. The peace and silence of the morning were interrupted by loud coughing from the bedroom, and Lexa quickly mixed the honey and water to bring back, one cup for Clarke and one for herself.

Clarke was sitting up in bed reaching for the cup in Lexa’s hand when she walked back into the room. She looked decidedly better, Lexa noted gratefully; her eyes were much clearer, and she was drinking the tea with fervour rather than the half-hearted resistance Lexa had been met with most of the night. When Clarke finished her tea, she closed her eyes and sat with a reverend expression on her face for a minute, revelling in the sweet taste.

Lexa sat down heavily in her armchair and leant back sipping her own tea. Clarke opened her eyes with a hopeful expression.

“More fairytales?”

It made Lexa smile. For a moment they just looked at each other.

“How are you feeling?”

“Better.”

“Actually better, or sure-Lexa-I’m-fine-I’m-just-going-to-cough-up-both-my-lungs-real-quick better?”

Clarke blushed.

“Actually better.”
Lexa’s smile widened. “I know. You haven’t coughed nor broken out in shivers for almost three minutes now.”

Clarke smiled back.

“Told you I’d be fine.”

Lexa snorted. “There’s fine, and then there’s looking like you won’t die for the first time tonight. You are not well yet, Clarke.”

Clarke’s smile fell. “I know.”

“Hey, it’s ok. Think you will be able to sleep for a bit, though? It would do you good.”

Clarke looked like she was going to deny it, but was overcome by a gigantic yawn. Lexa had to hide a smile. Clarke sank back into the pillows and closed her eyes, the energy she had for conversation clearly being spent.

“Only if you join me.”

Lexa almost dropped her tea cup.

“What?”

Clarke was already turning away from Lexa, leaning over to lie on her side.

“There’s only one bed, Lexa. And cuddling is a well-documented remedy for colds.”

Lexa leant over to put her still full tea cup on the nightstand, a small smile growing on her face as she climbed into the bed. Her hands felt a little shaky as she lifted the covers. The butterflies in her stomach were flying rampant through the streets of her intestines, but Lexa wasn’t about to give them a curfew.

“No, it isn’t.”

“Yes, it is,” Clarke said, stifling a yawn as Lexa slipped under the duvet behind her, “which one of us has medical training, Lexa?”

Lexa smiled to herself as she lifted her legs onto the bed and edged forwards. Her heart was pumping fast, but her head felt perfectly still. Lexa relished in the feeling.

“You do.”

Lexa had stopped about a foot behind Clarke, a little unsure about how close this invitation to cuddle actually gave her permission to be. Clarke solved the conundrum for her, reaching behind her for Lexa’s hand and pulling Lexa’s arm over her waist. Lexa shuffled closer with a beating heart, moulding her body to fit Clarke’s. Clarke was soft, and her smell was everywhere, and it overwhelmed Lexa’s senses. Lexa felt electricity emanating from everywhere their bodies touched. Lexa’s body worked mostly on autopilot as it snuggled closer, nuzzling her nose in the soft strands of hair at the base of Clarke’s neck. The butterflies in Lexa’s stomach seemed to be in open revolt even as her mind started to go blank with comfort and exhaustion. Lexa tightened her grip around Clarke, feeling the other woman sigh contently in her arms.

Lexa was moments away from sleep when she felt Clarke suddenly bolted out of their embrace. Lexa’s eyes flew open, seeing Clarke a foot or two away from her, half turned around to look at
Lexa with a fearful expression.

Lexa tried blinking sleep out of her eyes.

“What’s wrong?”

Clarke’s voice was hoarse when she answered. “You shouldn’t be here.”

The butterflies in Lexa’s stomach turned to cold dread. This could be it. This could be when Clarke told her they were getting too comfortable, too familiar. This could be when Clarke asked her to back off.

“What do you mean?” Lexa asked in a shaky voice.

“If you sleep here I’ll infect you. You’ll get sick too.”

Lexa stared at Clarke for a moment. Then Clarke closed her eyes and sneezed loudly, almost as if to illustrate her point. Lexa felt warm relief flood through her. She snorted and reached out to gently pull Clarke by the shoulders back to where she was lying before. Clarke didn’t fight it but seemed a little hesitant as Lexa once again settled in behind her. Lexa thought it was adorable. What a thing to worry about at a moment like this.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m Canadian; we’re all immune to colds.”

Lexa raised her head slightly to peer over Clarke’s shoulder to see her reaction. She had closed her eyes again, relaxing, and was smiling slightly.

“That’s not true.”

Lexa lay down again; burying her face in Clarke’s hair in a way she hoped wasn’t painfully obvious.

“It is. I swear it on my life.”

“You can’t be immune to colds. The viral strands mutate and change every season.”

Lexa felt her mind slipping into sleep again, Clarke warm in her arms. Where she should be.

“We all go through a ritual when we’re thirteen, and they put a sacred cold immunity spell on us. Ask anyone” Lexa replied with a yawn.

Clarke’s soft giggles were the last thing Lexa heard before she fell asleep.
Lexa woke up a few hours later, after convincing Clarke to let her stay in bed with her Canadian super-human immune system. There were no windows in the bedroom, but the door to the living room was still open, and Lexa could see daylight through it. Clarke and Lexa were still in the same positions they had fallen asleep in last night; Lexa’s arms were full of Clarke, her vision full of golden hair, and her entire sensory system took a moment to reboot to be able to deal with it all. When it resurfaced Lexa felt like the nerves in her skin were tingling all over her body. Her heartbeat was way too high for someone who had just woken up. She tried to stretch without moving, yawning silently into Clarke’s hair, gently giving her a squeeze because she couldn’t help herself.

Clarke groaned in her arms. Lexa stiffened.

“Clarke? Are you awake?”

Clarke turned half around so that she was lying on her back but still with Lexa’s arms around her. She looked up at Lexa. Her eyes were puffy and red, and for a moment Lexa thought she had been crying. Then she saw Clarke’s red nose and heard the slight wheezing of her breath.

“Wow. You look… not great.”

Clarke snorted, or tried to. Her nose was so stuffy that it sounded more like a car with motor issues. “Thanks.”

Clarke sounded every bit as stuffy as she looked, struggling to pronounce with a blocked nose. Lexa had to bite back a laugh, but it must have shown on her face. Clarke looked indignant.

“Don’t giggle at me, Wyvern!”

Lexa had to bite down hard on her lips as she quickly shook her head, her eyes large and the picture of innocence. Clarke scowled, and Lexa couldn’t do it anymore. She let out a series of giggles and had to hide her face in Clarke’s shoulder.

“Lexa, you’re the worse nurse ever.”

Regaining her composure a bit, Lexa looked up at Clarke again. She looked sad and miserable, and the whole picture made Lexa’s heart ache.

“What if I make you some more tea and get you some nose drops for that nose of yours. Will I still be the worst nurse ever?”

Clarke let her head fall down on the pillows again with a grateful smile, all misery forgotten.
"You’re the best nurse ever."

"Yes, I am."

Clarke’s cold lasted all week. She slept most of the first day, aided by Lexa’s supply of painkillers and cough drops. Lexa spent the time straightening out the tent; tidying up the mess from her supply run on the first evening and making an inventory of the first aid items she had. It suddenly seemed a bit more important that they were in the right order. Lexa briefly entertained the notion of going out to check on their traps while Clarke was sleeping, but decided against it; neither of their wands had been buzzing, meaning that nothing had visited the traps yet, and with Clarke out cold there would be no one to rescue Lexa if accident struck once more. Besides, she had promised Clarke they wouldn’t split up again.

Lexa felt very ready to deliver on the promise.

Clarke woke up again for a few hours in the evening and demanded that Lexa read her more stories. Lexa had been sitting in the large armchair, nibbling at her lip and trying to talk herself out of waking up the blonde just to make sure that she was still alright. At the first flicker of eyelids, Lexa’s heart had stopped completely, and when blue eyes finally opened and peered at her over the duvet Lexa’s heart had kick-started again at racing speed. Lexa had taken a random book out of the bookshelf to bring with her just for show but spent the time making new stories instead. She always liked making up stories; she used to do it all the time for the younger kids at Aok. It reminded her of home. She hadn’t had anyone to make up stories for in a long time. She also surreptitiously used it to check Clarke’s progress, weaving in fantastical and odd details and seeing which one’s made the blonde frown and which ones she didn’t pick up on at all.

Clarke only lasted until ten o’clock before she grew tired again and Lexa decided she should sleep. The blonde tried to protest, but when Lexa’s story was interrupted by a gigantic yawn from the girl on the bed for the third time in as many minutes, Lexa put her foot down. Lexa had to look away from Clarke to be even vaguely commanding; one look at blue eyes and she knew she would crumble. Clarke eventually obliged her orders of settling in for sleep and pulled Lexa into the bed with her. Lexa lay stiffly on her back, unmoving as an oblivious Clarke snuggled up to her. Lexa shifted slightly when Clarke laid her head on Lexa’s shoulder, bringing her own head down to rest against blonde hair. Clarke slipped an arm over Lexa’s waist, and Lexa’s breath caught. Clarke fell asleep while Lexa counted every gentle breath which flew by her collarbone, fighting sleep for as long as possible to not miss out on the torrent of emotion bombarding her senses.

Lexa spent most of the next day in the chair by Clarke’s bed, reading a bit to herself while Clarke slept and generally just keeping an eye on the recovering girl. Clarke was definitely getting better; though still tired most of the time her voice was a lot better, and she didn’t get fevers anymore. Lexa was glad, but still determined to not leave her alone for too long. Clarke still slept for the majority of the day. Occasionally she would wake up coughing, making Lexa sprint to the kitchen to make more tea. Lexa took her nursing duties very seriously.

On the third day, Lexa finally left the bedroom in the early afternoon. Clarke had been awake for a bit, chatting a little and generally looking a bit better, but the blonde had fallen asleep again and was now sleeping peacefully. Lexa got up of the armchair and walked quietly into the living room.

The sky outside the windows was dark but clear. Lexa leaned against the windowsill and saw the moon rising in the east, illuminating the valley below them in the pale light. The fresh layers of snow reflected the moonlight and lit of the trees. It was almost as bright as daylight, though in much cooler tones. Like looking at a sunlit landscape through tinted glass. It was eerily silent but unendingly beautiful. It seemed they were settling in for an unparalleled cold night; Lexa could
already feel the low temperature seeping into the tent.

She walked over to the fireplace and silently started building a small fire. It was therapeutic, really. There was a fireplace in almost every room at Aok, and Lexa had built enough fires in her life to be able to do it blindfolded. It was nice, letting her hands work on autopilot in the quiet tent. Between setting out on their quest for yeti hair, Clarke making her laugh almost every time she opened her mouth, and then more recently being worried out of her mind with Clarke’s cold, Lexa felt a little exhausted. It wasn’t that she didn’t enjoy Clarke’s company, because she did. Dear God, did she. But Lexa felt like she needed a quiet moment to herself.

Lexa needed to do some thinking.

She finished building the fire and lit it with a swift spell from her wand. Then she stood and stretched. Walking over to the beat down Chesterfield sofa she laid down on the extra pillows, long legs stretching out on the cushions, back reclining and head hitting the armrest. She looked sideways over at the flames which were burning brightly.

Lexa didn’t have a lot of friends. She had a large family; the kids from Aok had spread all over the world, and she knew she would always have people who cared for her. But she didn’t have a lot of friends. So when Clarke had shown up out of the blue, with offers of friendship and adventure, Lexa had grasped it with both hands.

Lexa tended to get cabin fever very easily, but these last three days bricked up in a small tent with Clarke had been among the best of Lexa’s life. She felt at peace. Lexa had thought that holding Clarke’s hand had been great, but that had done nothing to prepare Lexa for what it was like to sleep curled up next to her every night: every morning felt like she had been born again. Lexa hadn’t felt very at ease ever since she left Aok, and even before that she had been among the senior children and therefore given a lot of responsibilities, but here, with Clarke, Lexa felt like a carefree child again. Looking at Clarke made Lexa’s head spin. Feeling Clarke under her hands gave her goose bumps. Thinking about Clarke made her smile.

All this added up to one very real possibility, and Lexa was peering into the flames as her thoughts tried to avoid it.

She looked up as she heard padding footsteps coming her way. Clarke was standing, looking at Lexa, draped in the blankets from the bed. She didn’t look so sick anymore, only tired. She was lit by the gentle flickering light from the fire, and even in her recovering and dishevel state the sight alone made Lexa’s heart ache. A smile which was almost sad came to Lexa’s mouth.

“What are you doing out of bed?” Lexa asked in a gentle voice.

Clarke seemed to swallow and blink hard a few seconds.

“I woke up and you weren’t there. I came to find out where you had gone.”

Lexa met her tired gaze. This was it. This is where they were now. Sharing a small tent. Seeking one another out for comfort. Sharing their time, thoughts, imagination, and food. Sharing their body heat. Sharing everything. The seconds seemed to tick on infinitely as Lexa simply looked at Clarke. Her throat had gone dry. Clarke’s blonde locks caught the flickering light from the fire. Her eyes were clearer than they had been in days and bluer than they had ever been. She looked like a vision. She looked like a Madonna, like Joan of Arc, like Mona Lisa. Lexa had never been an artist, but she felt at that moment like she understood why people spent their whole lives learning to paint.
Lexa reached out and tapped the cushions next to her leg. Clarke smiled gratefully.

Lexa sat up slightly as the blonde climbed over her and collapsed between Lexa’s body and the backrest of the sofa. Lexa smiled and shook her head gently, laying still as Clarke nudged her way under Lexa’s arm to lay her head on Lexa’s shoulder and sneak an arm over Lexa’s abdomen. Lexa let her arm drop, holding Clarke around the shoulders as the blonde relaxed and moulded her body to Lexa’s. Their legs tangled as Clarke’s breathing evened out.

Lexa held her tightly, closing her eyes and pressing her lips together. It felt vulnerable, being like this with Clarke. Like Ollivander or the *Evening Prophet* or the yeti task force might storm in and break them apart at any moment, shattering the dream. Yet at the same time it made Lexa feel stronger than she ever had. It was a juxtaposition. Protective, yet soft. Fragile, but firm. Like the world might try it’s best to tear them apart, but Lexa would be damned if she didn’t fight her hardest to stop it.

Lexa was roused from her thoughts by a low voice emanating somewhere around the base of her throat, coming from the woman Lexa had thought was asleep in her arms.

“Thanks for taking care of me. I know I’m not a good traveling companion right now.”

Lexa’s eyebrows scrunched up and her eyes opened. She swallowed hard to find her voice again.

“Clarke, you’re my friend. Taking care of you is my privilege.” Lexa bit her lip before tagging onto the end, “one I wouldn’t lose for anything”.

Clarke didn’t reply. Lexa thought she could feel a small movement against her collarbone. The thought that she might be feeling Clarke’s smile against her skin made her unconsciously hold her breath.

“You’re my best friend, Lexa.”

Clarke sounded like she was moments away from sleep, but that didn’t make her words any less meaningful. Lexa slowly let out her breath.

“You’re my best friend too.”

Lexa pressed her eyes shut again, lowering her mouth to press a gentle kiss to the top of Clarke’s head. Her heart felt fit to bursting.

“Sleep well, Clarke.”

The lack of response told her Clarke already was.
Guess who's back! I'm sorry about the lengthy wait; life has been busy. I am now back at uni and though busy I've got more time than I did in the summer. I will absolutely finish this story, I have it all planned out in my head and have had since May. It will be longer between updates I fear, probably one every one or two weeks, but we will definitely get there. Thanks for sticking with it, and for all the comments and encouragements :) as always, come holla at me on geyranger.tumblr.com!

The flames had flickered and died.
The moon outside the tent had gone from one side of the sky to the other, its ascent and descent only witnessed by the patch of pale light on the floor.

Lexa hadn’t moved from her position since Clarke fell asleep. Her fingers were mindlessly tracing patterns in blonde hair, but her eyes were looking straight ahead. She wasn’t looking at anything in the tent, her gaze getting lost somewhere between her eyes and the dim canvas wall. The tent was perfectly quiet; the crackling from the logs in the fireplace had diminished to gently glowing embers, the winds outside slowed and stopped, and even the faint hum of the stars was muted and lost in the snow.

Lexa’s hair had fallen in front of her face. It had been several days since she had the time and energy to arrange it in her normal braids, and locks of gentle brown were falling down her temples, obscuring her vision and waving slightly with every exhale. The pendulum of stray locks was the only thing other than the changing moonlight which indicated time was passing at all.

Lexa took no more notice of it that she would of a typhoon on the other side of the ocean.

There was a storm raging inside her chest. Ships at sea, fighting the waves and the winds threatening to pull her under and down into the abyss. A maelstrom, drawing her into its black hole with unconquerable force. There was no sign of it, no outward indication other than a slight trembling in her jaw. Any observer would have been hard pressed to notice anything was wrong.

A deep breath through iron lungs.

A deep breath against the collected force of the sea weighing down upon her.

She blinked. Her eyes were wet.

Another breath. And another.

Her eyes flickered around the room like they were looking for escape routes. They found only the walls, so familiar to her but so strange at the same time. They eventually came to rest on the window, seemingly noticing the night outside for the first time. The gentle dunes of snow, the glittering valley, lower down. The stars. It held her gaze.

Another deep breath.
Her hand, which had been stroking blonde hair for hours, came to a stop. Golden strands rested between her fingers, their owner still peacefully asleep against her side. They seemed to ground her somehow.

One great inhale, eyes not leaving the window.

The moon shone. The stars glimmered. The snow lay quietly.

Lexa was in love with Clarke Griffin.

One final exhale between shaky lips.

The storm was still inside Lexa’s chest, but the rain wasn’t beating down on doomed ships anymore. Instead, it was turning into late summer torrential rain, gentle sunlight still peeking through it; giving new life to a summer everyone thought was ending. Thunder rumbling in the distance over fields of ripened corn, the rain falling with an intensity and vigour which would surely doom smaller plants but allow the larger ones to grow. Rain so hard and so intense it could never last for long, but instead grow smaller, and smaller, until gentle drops would let the sun reclaim its place in the sky.

Lexa shut her eyes tightly to prevent the wetness which had gathered in them from amassing into a tear and fall, betraying her to the world.

She allowed herself to breathe again a moment later, letting shoulders sag, and her body relax. She would open her eyes again when she was ready for it.

She had known for a while, she supposed, if she had only taken the time to think it through. She had known when she came running back to London to tell Clarke about her quest for yeti hair. She had probably known weeks before that, really, when Clarke came back through her own front door with a horrified expression and clutching the Daily Prophet. Maybe even before that, when Clarke suggested they grab a drink as they exited the pyramid in Egypt, seconds before they saw the stars for the first time in days and alarms sounded, unleashing hell. Lexa shook her head slightly, keeping her eyes shut. Then there was the time before that when Clarke came strolling into her shop in Portland, all smiles and wearing a beautiful blue shirt which made her eyes look like the same blue sky which was slowly replacing the rain in Lexa’s chest. Lexa had felt her heart stop and then restart with a new beat before either of them had even said a word. Before that, when Clarke’s anesthesia charm befuddled Lexa while Clarke stitched up her leg. When Clarke landed on top of her after their catastrophic snidget hunt. When she saw Clarke save the grindylow instead of disposing of it.

Lexa rolled her eyes without opening them. Hell, when she walked into the pub in Germany and saw a blonde figure sitting by the bar.

She took a deep breath and let it out again, but it didn’t feel like the waves were crushing down on her anymore. Her hand unbidden starting stroking golden hair again, and as she kept her eyes closed she could have sworn she could feel the sunlight on her skin for the first time in years.

Lexa smiled slightly, even though there was no one around to see.

She was in love with Clarke. It was plain for anyone to see. Admitting it to herself felt like taking a world of worry off her shoulders.

The world of worry she had recently dispositioned was however quickly filling up again with different questions. Did Clarke know? Did anyone else know? Had Lexa been too obvious, even
before she knew herself? Would this make their mission problematic? Would this kill their friendship stone dead? What was Lexa going to do?

Did Clarke feel the same way?

Lexa bit her lips together. That was the only question which mattered, suddenly. Lexa wasn’t an inherently optimistic person. She knew that about herself. She did pride herself on being a bit of a realist, however, and she could not, no matter how far she stretched her memory and imagination, remember any proof that Clarke would feel the same way about her.

There were indications, though. Tiny flickers of signs which Lexa allowed to fuel her hope for a minute. The way Clarke had hugged her when she promised to keep working together even after the *Prophet* article. The way Clarke held her tight through the night when she was shivering from the cold. The way she had held Lexa’s hand back in Yadong. For one long moment, Lexa let herself entertain the notion that Clarke maybe felt the same. That if Lexa woke her up with a kiss right now, Clarke would be delighted and respond in kind, giving the fireworks Lexa felt in her tummy just from thinking about it something to celebrate. That they could continue their work, together, in all meanings of the word.

Lexa only allowed herself that small moment; immediately after her mind filled with negatives and realism. Ollivander and Wolfe were unlikely to start liking each other more just because their unruly apprentices had fallen in love. Either Clarke or Lexa or both of them would definitely lose their jobs. And their jobs meant the world to both of them. Then there was the distance; maintaining a relationship between Portland and London was nigh on impossible, especially if they were hiding from their mentors at the same time.

And that was all assuming that Clarke even felt the same. Lexa had to hold back a shudder at the thought of trying to express her emotions without reciprocation. She could vividly imagine Clarke’s face; understanding turning to pity. Lexa knew Clarke would be trying to salvage their friendship, but Lexa herself would consider it a lost cause. Lexa would be losing a business partner, the most wonderful human being she had ever met, and her best friend, all in one go.

With a sinking feeling in her stomach, Lexa recognized that it wasn’t a sacrifice she was willing to make. Her heart beat against her chest in open rebellion as her mind made its decision; the reward wasn’t worth the risk. Expressing her love wasn’t worth the possibility of losing Clarke forever.

Lexa swallowed, and willed away the wetness which was welling back up into her closed eyes.

She took a deep inhale to try to still her beating heart, and the scent of the girl laying cradled against her side filled her nose, her mind, and her heart. All the thoughts flying around her brain stilled immediately and were replaced by the gentle and all-consuming knowledge that she was in love with Clarke. Lexa was *in love* with Clarke Griffin. The small smile from before slipped unacknowledged back onto her face and grew larger by the minute. Everything else aside, Lexa knew, she was lucky. Not everyone in the world got to be in love with Clarke. Clarke was golden, and magnificent, and beautiful. She was funny, and smart, and kind. She was Lexa’s match in almost everything, and so much better than Lexa in all the rest. Being in love with Clarke was as much a blessing as it was inevitable. Not everyone was lucky enough to be in love with Clarke Griffin, but Lexa was. And she was lucky enough to hold her at night, to share her tent and her work with her, share her joys and sorrows, see every smile and hear every story.

Lexa was smiling like a goof. She could spend the rest of her life pining after Clarke without a hint of reciprocation, and she would still consider herself the luckiest woman on earth.

When Lexa opened her eyes again, she could swear that the sky outside the window had started
turning ever so slightly brighter, hinting at the future sunrise.

Lexa was still staring out the window when Clarke’s eyes fluttered open. Lexa was so deep in thought that it took her a moment to realise that the gentle motion against her neck was Clarke’s eyelashes moving. When Lexa looked down to meet clear blue eyes, her heart stopped completely.

Clarke smiled. Lexa knew she could have died at that moment and still count it as a blessed way to go.

“What time is it?”

Clarke sounded better; her throat mostly recovered from her cold. To Lexa, it sounded like cherubs singing, like her favourite song on the radio, like the summer breeze through green trees on a summer’s day. It sounded like it always had.

“Early. Look, the sun will be coming up soon.”

Lexa indicated towards the window, and Clarke looked over to see the predawn hush Lexa had been observing for the last hour. The sun wasn’t up yet, but it was near enough that you could see where it would rise. The light illuminated the snow, making the morning seem much brighter than it should. Clarke, eyes still tired from sleep, squinted at it. Lexa smiled and felt like the sun had already risen.

“How are you feeling?”

Clarke turned away from the window, a large yawn stretching her body. In the process, she pressed harder against Lexa’s side, and as Clarke closed her eyes, she pressed her forehead against Lexa’s jaw. Lexa had to close her eyes to avoid shuddering.

“Better.”

Clarke was raising her head again, looking around the room and coming to terms with waking up on the sofa rather than in the bed. Her eyes were awake, inquisitive, and had none of the dimness which had held her captive as her cold wracked her body.

“You don’t have a cold anymore?”

Clarke smiled down at Lexa. “Nope!” She looked away again before Lexa could blush.

“Concussion?”

“All healed.”

“Twisted ankle?”

Clarke stretched her leg experimentally. “Not a trace of it. Think we can go and check on the traps today?”

Clarke was sitting up now, stretching her arms over her head and looking around for what Lexa assumed was breakfast. Lexa considered getting up too, but her limbs felt like jelly, and she decided not to risk it.

“I don’t know Clarke. You were near death not three days ago.”
Clarke rolled her eyes. “I was hardly ‘near death’, little miss dramatic. I’m better; I swear it.” When Lexa still looked hesitant, Clarke added with a playful smile, “you are going to have to let me out of this tent sooner or later,” before getting up and disappearing into the bedroom to find a change of clothes, leaving Lexa alone on a sofa with a Clarke shaped pocket of cold air at her side.

Lexa smiled after her, half happy and half sad, wishing selfishly that she never had to.
Chapter 27

It took two more days before Lexa let Clarke leave the confines of the tent. The decision had little to do with the revelation Lexa had during the night, Lexa was pretty sure, and more to do with watching her friend suffer through fevers and coughing fits almost unendingly the last few days. Lexa had developed a very healthy respect for colds. Clarke grumbled but accepted it in the end.

The two days were spent in the confines of the tent. Clarke no longer bedridden, the blonde was cheerfully tottering around the tent, chatting, looking at pictures on the walls, reading the first pages of the books in the bookshelf, examining the flowers on the kitchen table, and generally having a good time. Lexa was walking patiently walking behind her, picking up discarded books and wildflowers and putting them back in their proper place. Clarke laughed when she realised what Lexa was doing.

In the afternoons Clarke would sit at the table while Lexa cooked. The supplies Lexa had procured were finally coming in handy; Clarke had missed out on most meals while she was ill and was making up for it in appetite now. Lexa whipped up dish after dish, serving warm meals three times a day. Clarke would eat it all with fervour and then sit at the table, knife and fork in hand; looking hopefully around for more. And Lexa would laugh.

The evenings were spent lounging on the sofa. Clarke made jokes which at one point made Lexa snort hot cocoa out of her nose. Later Lexa was horrified to learn that Clarke had practically never played cards in her life, and took it upon herself to teach her all the Aok regular games. Clarke gave a shout of joy when she peeked into the drawer Lexa had produced the deck of cards from and found a wizard's chess set. She was tired of losing against Lexa in cards, she announced, and set up a chess tournament instead; Clarke was in the lead 7-5 when Lexa then Clarke herself fell asleep on the sofa. They awoke when the sun was shining the next morning, stiff necks and sheepish expressions, and laughed.

It didn’t feel any different. That was what struck Lexa the most. It was the same feeling as before, the same banter, the same laughs, the same pool of warmness and butterflies in her chest. Lexa had expected everything to be different after realising she was in love, expected to feel ashamed and uncertain and nervous, but it was as if nothing had changed. It was the same feeling of belonging, of satisfaction. The same butterflies in her stomach when Clarke smiled at her, the same rush of emotion when Clarke laughed at her remarks. The same breathlessness, seeping through every minute of the day; the same hopefulness when she woke up in the morning before she even opened her eyes. The same joy.

Lexa was eating it all up like it was ambrosia.

On the third day, a hesitant Lexa finally let herself be talked into letting Clarke leaving the tent. It was the combination of sulking, begging and downright blackmail which finally won her over; Clarke had found her secret stash of chocolate, acquired at the same time as the rest of the supplies but kept close to Lexa’s chest, and had refused to hand it over until Lexa ended the curfew. It almost ended in their first actual duel. Lexa had lasted an hour before giving in to Clarke’s demands, all the while muttering something about ‘negotiating with terrorists’.

Now she was nursing a block of chocolate and a sour expression as she followed Clarke up the hill towards the first trap. They were both in their winter gear, tightly done up with layers and furs despite the brilliant sunshine. Clarke was walking with a spring in her step, eyes soaking up the beautiful, snow-clad mountains, revelling in the sunlight and fresh air she had been bereaved of for the past week. Lexa was watching her steps, looking for any signs of the twisted ankle still causing
Clarke pain, without finding any. She was definitely not looking at Clarke’s ass.

She was still a little mad about the blackmail, but the sun was shining, the snow glimmering, Clarke was beautiful, and Lexa was in love. It was difficult to maintain the misery.

They had set out early in the morning, but it still took Clarke and Lexa most of the day to check on all the traps. The first trap Lexa had lain out down in the valley was surrounded by various animal prints. Lexa identified those she could recognise from her childhood; lynx, brown bears, black bears and wolves. They had all had their fill from the meat Lexa had left behind as bait. Clarke wondered around with her wand pointing at the ground and her nose in a book for a few minutes, identifying the ones Lexa didn’t recognise. Some of them were mundane animals, others were magical, but none of them was anything close to a yeti. Clarke looked up from her book after delivering the verdict, fixing Lexa with an enquiring gaze.

“Why didn’t your wand buzz when the other animals were here? Didn’t you prime it to notify you if anything touched the bait?”

Lexa shrugged but didn’t look away.

“I did. It was going off as crazy the first few days.”

Clarke looked horrorstruck.

“Lexa! Why didn’t you check on it? It could have been the yeti!”

“Well, it apparently wasn’t.” Lexa indicated the tracks on the ground. “Besides, we had decided not to split up again. You were in no condition to travel.”

And I was too worried about you even to consider leaving the tent, Lexa added quietly to herself.

Clarke seemed to be battling with a few different emotions for a while. Resignation appeared to win; she gave a deep sigh, pushed golden hair out of her eyes with a gloved hand, and made to start walking towards the next trap, but Lexa didn’t miss her small smile as she turned away.

Checking on the traps was time-consuming work; they had agreed not to apparate anywhere unless necessary, assuming the loud noise would scare all wildlife and the elusive yeti away, and the traps were spread out over miles and miles. The rest of Lexa’s traps, down in the valley, proved just as fruitless as the first one, all empty of bait and nothing but animal prints surrounding them. Traversing the coniferous forest in the valley was hard work too, Lexa and Clarke breaking through branches with well-aimed spells and bragging their snow shoes behind them. Clarke’s face was flush with colour from the effort, but the smile never left her face. It made Lexa breathless. Clarke must be really glad to be outside again, Lexa decided. That made it worth it.

The animal tracks grew scarcer as Lexa and Clarke made their way up the mountainside, past their campsite and up to where Clarke had laid her traps. The rugged mountains, the lack of vegetation for food and cover gave a much less hospitable environment than the comparatively lavish valley below them. The snow was less deep here, but not by a lot, and only because fierce winds whipped it up as soon as it fell. It wasn’t snowing right now, but the gusts still pulled flakes with it. Clarke and Lexa both pulled their hoods up.

The first trap up in the mountains was untouched, bait still intact. The second one was, judging by the tracks, taken by birds of prey. The third and fourth ones were untouched, the fifth one visited by a single snow leopard who had taken the entire bait. The sixth and seventh were untouched. Getting to the eighth and final trap required climbing the same small cliff Clarke had fallen from a
week ago; Lexa gave it dark looks and insisted they traversed it one by one so that the other could be ready with the wand and a quick levitation spell just in case. Clarke didn’t even roll her eyes, which Lexa took to meet she was glad Lexa had been the one to suggest it.

It was getting late in the day as they made their way up. The sun was dipping towards the horizon, unegotiable, painting the snowy mountains in orange, pink and red, fading to light blue and grey. Lexa was tired, and judging by the silence they had lapsed into, so was Clarke. They walked on.

“Where exactly is the last trap?”

Clarke took the lead as the path narrowed; walking in front of Lexa as they came around a bend in the trail they were following around the mountain.

“Right here…”

Clarke’s voice trailed off as she came to a stop. Lexa walked up behind her, looking over her shoulder.

In the centre of the cliff top was a dent in the snow, were Lexa assumed the bait had been. There wasn’t a scrap left of it and only one set of footprints leading up to it. The footsteps didn’t look like anything Lexa was familiar with, like part cat, part wolf and much too large to be either. Lexa took a sharp intake of breath as she realised just what it might mean.

Clarke turned her head to look at Lexa, mutual understanding burning in her eyes. Lexa was so used to them, to being so in tune, that the part of her brain which was always focussed on Clarke could pretty much operate itself by now. It noted how blue her eyes were, how red her cheeks. If she seemed happy or sad or pensive. How very, very close her face was to Lexa’s. It noticed all these things, wrote it down, and filed it neatly away somewhere Lexa could process it later. It gave the other, larger, more rational part of Lexa’s brain space to focus on the task at hand.

Deftly, Lexa slipped past Clarke and bent down to have a closer look at the tracks. They looked a bit human, in all honesty, but too circular and much bigger. Clarke came up next to Lexa, placing a hand on her shoulder and bending down next to her while getting her book out again. Lexa looked up at her, as Clarke read.

“Is this it?”

“Maybe. Possibly.”

“What does the book say?”

“It doesn’t know. No one has ever seen tracks and been able to prove conclusively that they are from a yeti, so it only speculates.” Her eyes skimmed to the end of the page, and then she turned to the front of the book, finding the key and trying to follow it to the end. “I can tell you, though,” she continued as she appeared to come up empty and closed the book, “that whatever made these tracks is apparently rare enough not to be described by magical or muggle literature.

Lexa looked back at the tracks. They came from the opposite side of the ledge, having followed the path in the opposite direction from Lexa and Clarke. They circled the ledge once, stopped by the hollow in the middle, and continued towards the mountainside where they simply stopped. Lexa’s eyes followed the mountain side upwards, ten, twenty, thirty feet, trying to picture the creature which could climb it.

Clarke had walked over to look around the next bend, in the direction the creature must have come from.
“Do you think we should track it?”

Lexa looked at her. She looked breathless, excited, but also a little spooked. Over one of her shoulders, Lexa could see the first star of the evening twinkling into view. The temperature had dropped suddenly when the sun set, and Lexa’s breath was steaming in front of her face. The mountain side was quiet, and sound from the valley below having been absorbed by the thick snows long before it reached them. Lexa felt like she could practically hear the icy silence.

Clarke was still watching her, waiting for an answer.

Lexa wanted nothing more than to say yes. A month ago she wouldn’t even have considered saying no, probably wouldn’t even have asked but simply set off after the yeti. But it was freezing cold, night was falling and they were far from their tent and further from any backup. Lexa blinked hard as she realised Clarke’s brush with danger had affected her more than she ever thought.

“Not tonight. It’s getting dark; I don’t want to risk it.”

Clarke glanced around and seemed to reach the same conclusion. She nodded. A silent understanding passed between them. Lexa wondered if Clarke had any inkling, any idea about what had changed in the night a few weeks ago, or if, as she suspected, she had simply started taking their safety more seriously after her fall.

“We’ll start as early as we can tomorrow.”

Lexa had the distinct impression that neither of them were very used to worrying about the safety of more than just themselves.

“Let’s hope it doesn’t snow tonight,” Lexa added as she stood up, her stomach filling with both anxiety and exhilaration at the prospect of tracking a yeti. “Do you have any bait left?”

Clarke was already reaching into her bag.
The next morning Clarke was staring out the window with a sinking feeling in her stomach. The snow was falling heavily, and as far as Clarke could tell it had been snowing for most of the night; even their tracks coming back to the tent last night were obscured. She could barely see ten feet out the window for the heavy fog and snowfall. The likelihood of finding the yeti tracks, let alone having any hope in following them, seemed slim.

Lexa walked over and stood next to her, trying to withhold a yawn. Clarke kept staring out the window.

“You can’t melt the snow with your withering looks alone, Clarke.”

“I can damn well try.”

Lexa seemed to bite back a smile. It soothed Clarke a bit, her frown lessening slightly.

“We should have followed it yesterday. We could have had the hairs by now.”

“No, Clarke. We shouldn’t have.” Lexa turned towards her, and Clarke tore her scorn away from the window to meet Lexa’s gaze. “It’s not worth it; the risk was too big. No prize is worth you getting hurt over.”

Clarke’s eyes narrowed, clearly not agreeing. Lexa gave a resigned sigh.

“Come on; you are supposed to be the sensible one. Which part of ‘tracking yetis in the dark with no experience and no backup’ sounds sensible to you?”

Clarke looked back out the window. Lexa undoubtedly had a point, Clarke wasn’t disputing it, but they had been so close. So close so achieving something very few wizards ever had. Clarke could almost taste it. She gave a long sigh, eyes not leaving the wintry scene outside.

“So I’m the sensible one, then?”

“Well, you’re certainly not the talented one.”

Clarke launched herself at Lexa and tackled her onto the sofa.

The ensuing wrestling-ticking-and-pillow fight was won 1-0 by Lexa when Clarke was pinned thoroughly underneath her on the floor. It ended mostly because when it came to brute force or ‘savagery’ as Clarke called it, Lexa could easily outmatch her. It also ended partially because when Clarke found herself pinned under Lexa she quickly got very distracted, and getting away from the
position was no longer top on her agenda. The whole scenario, almost willingly giving up a battle because she had lost the will to fight it was so foreign to her that she found herself a little dumbstruck. Luckily Lexa assumed Clarke was just shocked to have lost, and told her to get used to it.

Clarke brushed off her clothes after Lexa let her go again, trying to regain a bit of dignity and not dwelling on the feeling of Lexa’s body pushing her into the floor. She felt flustered, and she didn’t know why. She huffed and stomped into the kitchen.

Lexa followed her of course, leaning against the counter as Clarke poured herself a glass of water.

“I guess we should go back to Yadong then.”

Clarke froze, which was fortunate, because if she hadn’t, she most certainly would have dropped the glass she was holding. She turned back to Lexa.

“What?”

Lexa looked at her, uncomprehendingly.

“We go back to Yadong. Right?”

Clarke stared back blankly. No, she didn’t want to go back to Yadong. She didn’t want to give up on the mission, and she was dumbstruck as to why Lexa was even suggesting it. Every cell in Clarke’s body was screaming that they should stay, that they weren’t done. Frankly, Clarke would probably have been fairly happy never leaving the tent again. That thought caught her off guard; staying in the tent? That was definitely not how you caught yetis, which is why they were here and why Clarke was telling herself that they couldn’t leave yet. Still, it was undeniably true. With an internal jump, Clarke realised she had been happier this last week, cold and concussion and all, that she had been for years. It was nice, and good, and right, and she was damn certain she wasn’t going to let Lexa slip out between her fingers and go back to Yadong without a fight.

“Earth to Clarke?”

Clarke blinked. Lexa was waving a hand in front of her eyes.

“Sorry. Why do you want to go back to Yadong?”

Lexa gave her a funny look.

“Well, I don’t want to, exactly, but you and I are contractually obliged to do so. Remember?”

Clarke blinked again.

“No?”

“The permits we got from the task force. They give us up to a month in the mountains provided we check back in with them every week. It’s been seven days since we were there last.”

Understanding, at last, dawned on Clarke.

“So we’re just checking in with them? You want us to slip down to Yadong, say hi, and then come back?”

Lena raised an eyebrow.
“Something like that, yeah.”

Clarke nodded, trying to regain some grasp on the situation.

“Ah, well, then, yes, let’s do that.”

Lexus’s eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“You had no idea, did you.”

“ Nope!” Clarke agreed cheerfully, grabbing her glass more solidly and walking out of the kitchen. “I don’t need to when you’ve got such a solid overview of everything.”

She could practically feel Lexa rolling her eyes behind her back.

“At least one of us is paying attention to what we’re doing up here.”

“See, Lexa,” Clarke called over her shoulder, “that’s why you’re the secretary of the Chimera Crew. I handle plans, background knowledge, charm, looks, and talent. You handle the bookkeeping.”

A red beam of light flew over her shoulder, and the curse hit the wall and knocked down a picture. Clarke laughed.

Yadong looked much the same as it had last time they were there, unassuming sandstone coloured buildings making up much of the town, faded signs blowing in the cold breeze, a few people wrapped up in thick clothing making their way from house to house. The bad weather from their camping site hadn’t quite made it this far down, only evident by the brisk breeze and the odd snowflake falling from the sky. Clarke and Lexa had apparated into the small street behind the task force headquarters, out of view of the muggles milling around, and walked casually around the building and towards the front.

Lexa was leading the way up the stairs to the front door, looking behind her to keep up the conversation they were having. Clarke watched amusedly as Lexa fumbled for the handle to the door a little before finding it, never once turning to look where she was going as she opened the door and led them through.

Then Clarke jumped at a booming laughter coming from inside, and her eyes grew large as Lexa was scooped up from behind into a hug by a great big bear of a man.

“Lexa! They told me you were around, but I didn’t believe them! You’ve certainly grown up, Heda.”

Clarke could only watch as the man laughed and embraced Lexa, squeezing her tight, Lexa’s hands fumbling vaguely as her vision was completely blocked by his large beard, her legs dangling underneath her, a solid foot off the floor. The hug lasted for several seconds, with seemingly very little participation on Lexa’s part, and it was so tight that Clarke was becoming a little worried she might asphyxiate. The man was laughing throughout.

Eventually, he sat Lexa back on the ground, grasped her by the shoulders, turned her around and held her at arm’s length to have a look at her. Lexa blinked as if it was the first time she had seen daylight in months, but a smile was spreading across her face as she recognized the man.
“Gustus! You are a sight for sore eyes.”

She reached up to grasp his hand, Clarke watching as they gripped each other’s elbows. She could recognize the crinkle in Lexa’s eyes now, the skin creating beautiful small crow’s feet at the corner of the eyes, showing much more affection and emotion than a simple smile. Clarke had never seen it directed at someone other than herself before, but it made her heart skip none the less.

Gustus was positively beaming at Lexa.

“You know, they told me someone had shown up here, hunting yeti, and I said that it surely couldn’t be true. No one is *that* overconfident. But then they said she had introduced herself as Lexa Wyvern, had marched in like she owned the place and with a beautiful woman on her arm, and I thought to myself, you know what? That sound exactly like my Lexa.”

Gustus gave another booming laugh as Lexa turned bright red. She was however saved from turning around and facing Clarke, whose customary smirk was already in place, as a shadow with a big unruly mop of reddish blonde hair shot into Lexa with an excited howl.

“Aiden!”

“Lexa! It’s so good to see you!”

Lexa hugged the boy tightly as she fixed Gustus with a look.

“What’s Aiden doing here?”

Gustus chuckled.

“I went by Aok to take him with me for a small trip last time I was there. I figured it was time he got to see some more of the world too if you can call this godforsaken outpost ‘world’. And you don’t have to look at me like that, Heda, he’s older than you were the first time you got to come with me.”

Lexa gave him a half-mouthed grin as she squeezed the boy.

“How are you doing, big guy?”

Lexa loosened the embrace to hold Aiden at arm’s length and look at him properly. To Clarke, it seemed to mimic almost exactly what Gustus had done to Lexa not two minutes ago. It did funny things to Clarke’s insides.

“I’m great, Lexa! We just came from New Delhi the other day; Gustus is showing me all the best places!”

“Is he now? And what are your teachers at Aok saying about you missing classes?”

Lexa was clearly trying to be stern, but failing miserably; her fond grin was barely contained.

Aiden folded his arms in front of his chest, trying to seem tough.

“Those old idiots, they already know that I know more than all of them combined. They know I’m ready for bigger things.”

Gustus chuckled again and messed up Aiden’s hair with one of his massive palms.

“Yeah, that, or it is summer holidays now, and they agreed you could come as long as you are
staying on top of your spell practicing.”

Lexa grinned widely, and Aiden scowled. His disapproving glare fell on Clarke.

“Who’s that?”

Lexa looked over her shoulder and gave Clarke a smile. She took hold of Aiden’s shoulder and dragged him over to Clarke, Gustus following behind.

“Clarke, this is Aiden, my brother. He’s apparently replacing me as Gustus’ favourite kid at Aok.”

Gustus shrugged. “What can I say? New times, kid. You can’t expect me to give you special treatment forever.” His apparent disinterest was betrayed by a devilish grin. Lexa shook her head exasperatedly.

“Aiden, this is Clarke. We… work together.”

Lexa looked at Clarke with an eyebrow cocked up as she introduced them, and the last sentence was phrased more like a question. Clarke met her gaze briefly before redirecting her attention to Aiden.

Clarke took Aiden’s offered hand, greeting him like an adult, but whispering conspiratorially “that means she gets into trouble and it’s my job to get her out of it again.” It made Aiden giggle.

“Clarke, this is Gustus,” Lexa said, redirecting her attention to the bear of a man who was watching them. “He is… well, you know. I’ve told you all about him.”

Clarke looked up at the man she knew was the closest thing Lexa had ever had to a father. He was fearsome to behold; taller and more muscular than any man she had ever seen, it looked like he could pick Clarke up and break her in two as easily as he could swat a fly. His face was a different story, though, rugged and cracked from many years under the sun, but still kind and gentle. A gentle warrior, Clarke thought. It reminded Clarke of a certain small bouquet of flowers in a vase in a tent in the Rocky Mountains as its owner was off hunting for a Kneazle. She could see where Lexa got it from.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Gustus,” she said as she shook his hand. It engulfed her own hand completely.

“Pleasure is all mine, Clarke. Any person who would let Lexa drag her along up and down the Himalayas to look for yetis is someone I feel it worth getting to meet.”

The mischievous crinkle in Gustus’ eyes was back. Lexa surreptitiously smacked him on the shoulder, which Clarke assumed was the highest part of his body she could easily reach. Gustus laughed.

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The rest of the task force came out to greet them then. Clarke recognized most of them from the last time they had been there. Aiden was chatting excitedly throughout, telling Lexa about the places he had been with Gustus and how things were going at Aok. Clarke was holding back slightly, watching the scene; it gave her a weird feeling in her chest, watching Lexa and Aiden. It was pleasant and painful at the same time, like something was constricting her heart and warming it simultaneously. Clarke knew that this was Lexa’s family, as much as Clarke’s mother and father had ever been hers, and she was trying to keep her distance and giving them some space.
It took Lexa less than thirty seconds to realize what Clarke was doing and to take her firmly by the hand and keep her close to her side. Aiden didn’t even look up as Clarke joined the small group, his never-ending talking uninterrupted. It made Clarke swallow hard, several times, the bittersweet feeling making her chest fit to bursting.

They made their way to the back of the building and into what Clarke guessed was Gustus’ office. Gustus sent Aiden away to get some food for the kitchen with instructions to bring it back without eating it all first, and then led Lexa and Clarke inside, gesturing for them sit in the two chairs in front of his desk. He took his place behind it, fixing them with a stare.

“So,” he said, folding his arms on the table, “It turns out you two are the insubordinates gallivanting across the globe and stirring up trouble in the wand business.”

Clarke turned her head slightly to look at Lexa, who met her gaze. Lexa pushed her lips together and looked back at Gustus.

“You’ve been reading the prophet, then, I take it?”

Gustus didn’t blink.

“I didn’t have to. You guys are starting to get a bit of a reputation; the favourite gossip subject on every street corner in the magical world is who you are, where you are and whether you are a team or rivals. The prophet has even started a new reader’s column, devoted to taking accounts from witches and wizards claiming to have spotted you stealing this artifact or the other.”

Lexa looked over at Clarke again, and Clarke knew exactly what she was thinking. The public didn’t know if they were a team. That meant that they weren’t in trouble. Yet.

Gustus was still looking at them, waiting for a reaction.

“I take it you are a team after all, then.”

It was Clarke who replied.

“You might say that.”

Gustus leant back in his chair and clicked his tongue.

“I’ll be damned; Indra owes me five galleons. She was so convinced you were working alone, Lexa.”

Lexa gave a small smile.

“She always said I didn’t play well with others.”

“Rubbish, naturally. Indra never realized that you could fight the other kids one day, and be best friends with them the next.”

“Seriously, though, Gustus,” Lexa said, leaning forwards in her chair, “you can’t tell anyone. We could get in serious trouble.”

Gustus raised his eyebrows.

“Yes, I figured, when I got an owl each from both Ollivander and Wolfe, asking me in no polite ways to inform them immediately if either of you turned up with company.”
Clarke bit her lip.

“What did you tell them?”

Gustus grinned and grabbed two pieces of parchment with writing on them from one of the trays on his desk.

“Got two letters right here telling them both to go stuff themselves. Just waiting for the ink to dry!”

Clarke matched his grin. She liked Gustus.

Lexa smiled, but gently shook her head.

“That might not be the wisest course of action. Do you mind if I rewrite them, Gustus?”

Clarke looked at her.

“What are you going to tell them?”

Lexa met her gaze.

“That only one of us came, of course. No signs of a partner in crime.”

“Hmm, I like it. Maybe we should add that when the other one showed up too, there was a fearsome and hateful duel and that we kindly ask them to both to stop sending apprentices to Yadong.”

Lexa was grinning.

“Don’t you think that is a bit much?”

“Not at all. Downright realistic I would say, considering how we behaved the first few times we ran into each other. We’ll tell our respective mentors that each of us won the duel, of course.”

“Of course.”

Lexa and Clarke were grinning at each other. Gustus regarded them ponderously.

“Just promise me you're careful, Lexa.”

Lexa turned back to meet his gaze, surprised.

“Have you ever known me not to be?”

Gustus didn’t smile but continued looking at her.

“You are one of the most talented children who has ever been in my care, Lexa. And I am very happy that you have found someone to be a team with.” He indicated towards Clarke. “Just promise me you aren’t getting in over your head. You can do great things, with that mind of yours, but it’s not worth hurting anyone over, including yourself. Don’t forget that.”

Lexa and Gustus looked at each other for what felt like a long time. Clarke felt like she was intruding on a moment, and tried to make herself as small as possible, desperate to not interrupt.

Lexa quietly replied, “I won’t”.

Gustus nodded. They shared another long look, before Gustus smiled. He reached for a folder of
“Now, let’s get you two a bit closer to finding your Yeti.”

Then Aiden burst into the room with two trays of sandwiches and sandwich already held firmly in his mouth, throwing himself on top of Lexa and announcing in a muffled but happy voice that lunch was served.

After lunch, they went down towards the small lake at the edge of town with the promise of helping Aiden practice his spells. Gustus had pulled out every trick he knew to get close to Yetis, and a long list of them was now resting neatly in Clarke’s bag. He also helped them sign the necessary papers that said they had come to check in with the task force, thereby completing the reason they had come down to Yadong in the first place. They still didn’t rush to get back to the tent, though. The Yeti, they reasoned, would still be there tomorrow.

As they left the task force headquarters, the weather was clearing up. The wind was still noticeable, whipping Clarke’s golden hair around her face as she followed Gustus down the road. Patches of sun were coming through, hitting the grey stones and the rugged landscape, making it seem almost beautiful. Aiden was in front of the group, dragging Lexa by the arm to make her hurry up. Lexa was laughing.

The funny feeling in Clarke’s chest was back again at full force. It was indescribable, as changeable as the sunny patches disappearing and reappearing on the hills around them. Clarke didn’t know if it made her happy or if it made her sad, if it was the best feeling in the world or the worst. She never wanted to feel it again, but she also never wanted it to go away.

She gulped. Gustus looked over his shoulder and seemed to realize that she was falling a bit behind, slowing his pace until they were walking side by side.

“So, did you drag Lexa into this, or did she drag you?”

Clarke watched Lexa being pulled along by Aiden in front of them, too far away to listen to their conversation but close enough that Clarke could hear her laughter.

“It probably started out with me pulling Lexa, to be honest. Though at this point I’m not sure who is pulling who anymore.”

Gustus nodded.

“And what are you, exactly? Business associates?”

Clarke watched Lexa’s loose hair flying in the wind as she skipped on rocks and almost tripped, trying to keep up with her brother, and thought that she had never heard a term which described them any less.

“Friends.” *I guess.*

Gustus seemed to contemplate that.

“That’s good. She hasn’t had a lot of friends since she left Aok, too busy chasing promotions and favour with Wolfe.”

“Yeah, I know what that’s like.”
They walked a bit further in comfortable silence; Clarke lost in thought.

“What will you do once you get the yeti hair?”

Clarke had to grin.

“If we get the yeti hair, I think is a more realistic question.”

Gustus waved her correction away.

“Follow the maps I gave earlier, use your skills, and you will have no problem. But what happens after?”

“We go home, show off our prize. Wait for the next mission, then team up again.”

“For how long?”

The path was getting a bit rowdier and narrow, and Clarke walked behind Gustus as they followed it after Lexa and Aiden.

“Long as we can, I guess.”

“Until what? One of you gets caught and fired?”

“Hopefully it won’t go that far.”

“But it might.”

Gustus looked over his shoulder at Clarke, who met his gaze. He wasn’t aggressive, Clarke thought, just inquisitive. Clarke was beginning to think that maybe their plan wasn’t as well thought through as she had been hoping.

“So where does it end, Clarke?”

Unseen by Gustus, Clarke’s eyes narrowed a little.

“Why do you want to know so badly?”

The path widened again, and Gustus stepped to one side to let Clarke come up and walk side by side with him. His eyes were kind when he replied.

“If you ask Lexa she will say the best thing that ever happened to her was getting this job with Wolfe. It allows her to grow, to use her skills, and to send money back to Aok and do her share, which she so desperately wants to. The reason I am asking all these questions, Clarke, is because I want to know if you have realized that if the day comes when Lexa has to choose between her job and you, she will choose her job.”

Clarke didn’t reply. Gustus smiled at her, and then sped up to catch up with Lexa and Aiden, leaving Clarke trailing a bit behind.

Clarke’s first thought was that of course; Lexa would choose her job. She didn’t expect her to do anything else, didn’t want her to do anything else. Clarke knew very well how much the job meant to Lexa, just like her own job meant a lot to Clarke. That’s why they were careful, having fun sneaking around but never seriously putting themselves in danger of detection. So what if they were enjoying it, maybe a little too much? They were having fun, being young and carefree. And friends. Most importantly friends. Friends support each other. So why would Clarke ever put Lexa
in a position where she would have to choose?

Her second thought was that she really hoped they would never be in a position that would force them to choose.

Her third thought was that, if the day did come, Clarke wouldn’t choose her job.

Her steps faltered and stopped. Clarke was staring in front of herself, eyes unseeing. The thought had arrived suddenly and with no prompting, and Clarke wondered if it was true. She loved her job, truly she did. Still, visions of Lexa’s face swam before her eyes as she swallowed, and she didn’t know if she could ever make Lexa anything but her first choice. Her job meant a great deal to her, but maybe, just maybe, Lexa meant more.

Clarke blinked. This was becoming dangerous.

The sun finally emerged from behind a cloud and bathed Clarke in sunlight.

She was pulled out of her reverie by a shout from further down the trail. Gustus had gone ahead of Lexa and Aiden and was almost down to the lake, and by the looks of things Aiden had gotten a little too excited in trying to follow him; as Clarke watched the boy tripped and fell, landing hard on his back on the rocks. Lexa, halfway between Aiden and Clarke, broke into a sprint. Clarke followed as fast as she could.

Lexa reached him first. She kneeled down, checking on Aiden, and Clarke was relieved to see that she was smiling. Clarke lowered her pace, coming to a stop maybe ten feet from them. Aiden was groaning as Lexa pulled his head onto her lap.

“Are you hurt, big guy?”

Aiden let out a loud groan and, now that he had Lexa’s undivided attention, fell limp, closed his eyes and threw a hand dramatically over his forehead.

“Everything hurts, Lexa. I’m dying.”

“No, you’re not.”

“I am! I will never make it back to Aok.”

Lexa nodded seriously.

“I will tell Indra you love her.”

Aiden opened one eye to peek up at Lexa.

“Don’t you dare.”

Lexa laughed. She threw her head back, letting her hair cascade down her back as her shoulders shook. She was shaking her head as the laughter subsided, looking back down as Aiden quickly played dead again, one hand coming up to stroke his hair. Her grin looked too wide for her face, the sudden sunlight making her eyes shine. Then, still smiling, Lexa looked up to meet Clarke’s gaze.

It was like a switch was flicked in Clarke’s head.

It happened just like that. Suddenly, unannounced, and unremarkable. A switch was flicked in her head, and suddenly Clarke felt like a blind woman seeing for the first time. Every shade of brown
in Lexa’s hair, every freckle on her face was suddenly starkly visible as if they were written in ink on paper. Clarke felt like the sun was shining with a much greater strength than the second before, warming Clarke’s very soul from the inside after a long and frosty winter. As Clarke drew a sudden breath, it felt like a new-born drawing breath for the very first time.

Clarke knew, without a doubt in her heart, why.

That was what the switch had been; realisation. Who was to say how long she had been feeling like this, really. It might have been days, weeks, months. Years, even. Had she even known Lexa for a year? Clarke didn’t know anymore. She felt like there hadn’t been a time in her life before she knew Lexa. There might have been a blonde-haired fatherless Hogwarts student who had never heard of Lexa Wyvern somewhere in her past, but that girl wasn’t Clarke. This was Clarke. Running around the world, getting into trouble, side by side with Lexa. The newfound knowledge bloomed in her chest and anchored her to the ground with confidence.

Well. She would have to do something about this.

Gustus shouted something back at them about having found the perfect place for spell practicing, and Aiden was up and running down to him by the lakeside before the echo had even died down. Lexa was getting to her feet, still smiling at Clarke. Clarke might be smiling back. She didn’t know, and her brain had too much going on to be certain. Lexa started walking the few feet back towards her.

When Lexa took her hand, it felt like the world came back to normal, at the same time as it felt brand new. The things Gustus had said, which Clarke had been obsessing over for the past ten minutes, were burnt out of her soul like they were never even said out loud. Clarke was certain of two things, and two things only; one, she had never felt like this before. And two, she knew exactly what it was.

Lexa regarded her, silent but still with the ghost of the smile on her lips.

“Are you ok?”

Clarke met her gaze head on, more certain than she had ever been of anything.

“Better.”
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

I'm back!
This chapter goes out to dreamsaremywords on tumblr, who tagged me in a posts months ago which I only saw the other day and finally got inspired enough to complete this chapter. Your words are my law.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next week flew by.

The maps and notes Gustus had given them differed greatly from the older ones; Lexa and Clarke spent the first evening back in the tent hunched over them, lying on their tummies on the floor and plotting out a completely new set of traps in more strategic areas. They decided to avoid the low valley, reasoning that the complete absence of yeti tracks on their previous traps was enough of an indicator that the yeti preferred higher altitudes. Instead they tried to find mountaintops, high ridges, and hillsides which might provide caves and cover, circling them all on the maps scattered around the tent floor, discussing back and forth into the small hours of the morning.

The next day was spent in its entirety laying out the traps, in wind and snow which was two notches shy of a full-blown storm. The mountains were unforgiving; hidden ledges and small avalanches kept changing their surroundings, and Clarke was sure that without their ability to apparate they would have been chanceless in finding their way back to the tent. They kept getting split up and having to go back to the tent to regroup; the first time it happened Clarke nearly threw a fit, thinking she had lost Lexa in a snowstorm, frantically searching for almost an hour before remembering their backup plan of meeting at the tent site. When she apparated back, she was met with a panicked Lexa who thought the delay must have been because Clarke was hurt and lying helpless somewhere in the mountains. All in all the progress was slow. They weren’t done putting down the last trap before the sun had well and truly sunk and the biting cold of night was setting in. When they went back to the tent for the night, they barely had the energy to take off their snow gear before collapsing, one on top of the other, on the bed.

They woke up in the same position the following morning, light blushes and nervous smiles.

By the third day, their mission was back up and running. The traps were all set and primed, their wands notifying them of every little disturbance. Lexa made scrambled eggs for breakfast, and they spent a few intense hours playing cards and watching their wands, laid out side by side on the table. Clarke noticed Lexa’s eyes flicker to the wands at every small sound in the tent, distracting her, and Clarke utilized it to tap her feet strategically and beat Lexa six times in a row before Lexa caught on to what she was doing. Lexa retaliated by kicking her semi-hard in the shin and getting the winning card.

Clarke’s wand buzzed just as Lexa greedily collected the small pile of knuts they had been playing for, Clarke watching her gloomily. Both girls’ eyes were drawn to the wand, and for a small second, neither of them moved. Then, in a fashion so synchronized anyone present would have thought it was rehearsed, they both sprang into action; Clarke went for the winter clothes, throwing coats and hats to Lexa, who caught them in the air with one hand and gathered up the maps and
dumped them in her backpack with the other. They were out of the tent and jogging towards the mountain in less than a minute, and arrived at the trap site in less than fifteen.

The trap was empty when they got there. The clouds from the day before had disappeared, but the wind was unrelenting, whipping hair around their face as Clarke and Lexa stood side by side and looked down at the remainder of the bait. The bone was picked clean. Clarke suppressed a shudder at the thought of a creature which could have wolfed the whole thing down in such a short time. There were tracks all along, leaving little doubt that a yeti had indeed found their trap, but Clarke had trouble finding the start or finish of them; there were simply too many tracks, constantly crisscrossing with seemingly no rhyme or reason to it. In other places, there were no tracks at all, but large parts of the snow had been pressed down to create a hard cover. She pulled her hood up to shield her face from the biting wind and crouched down to have a better look.

Lexa put her hand on Clarke’s shoulder and crouched down next to her. Clarke felt warmth spreading from her cheeks to her fingertips.

“Multiple yetis or a single, very excited one?”

Clarke studied the tracks a little more.

“Hard to say. But if there were multiple of them they must have been running in a frenzy. I’d be surprised if they didn’t hit each other. It seems odd.”

Lexa leaned her weight on her hand on Clarke’s shoulder as she stood up. Clarke swallowed. Focus, Griffin.

“We don’t know a lot about yetis, I guess, but I’ve never heard of them traveling in packs before.”

Clarke stood up next to her.

“Just one yeti is my guess.”

Lexa looked unconvinced, scrunching her face up adorably as she looked around the trap site at the myriad of tracks. Clarke wanted to pinch her cheek. She had a hard time thinking how she could have thought Lexa was intimidating for so long, watching her standing knee deep in snow, hands dug contemplatively into her sides and with the facial expression of a child who has been as which came first, the dragon or the egg, for the first time. Confusion, with just a hint of suspicion that it was a trick question.

Lexa shook her head.

“I think there must have been more than one. Too many tracks for just one yeti.”

Clarke pursed her lips.

“No one has ever heard of yetis traveling in packs before.”

“No one has heard a lot about yetis, period,” Lexa countered.

Clarke could feel the old flame of competitiveness resurfacing in her chest, and couldn’t help a grin.

“If there was more than one they would have been competing for the bait, and the bone wouldn’t be in the same place we left the meat.”
Lexa cocked an eyebrow.

“If it were just one it would have taken the bait and left like it did last time.”

Clarke crossed her arms.

“If there were more than one yeti we should see evidence of a fight. Creatures that large don’t give up their food easily.”

Lexa gestured to the wild tracks zigzagging around the site, and Clarke held up her hands.

“More signs of a fight. Like blood stains, hair tufts, that kind of thing.”

Now it was Lexa’s turn to cross her arms, moving closer to Clarke. “Unless they hunt like a pack, and share the spoils. And I’m not saying there are twenty of them, just more than one or two.”

Clarke rolled her eyes, annoyed, but not backing down. “If there was a pack of yetis running around these mountains I don’t think there would have taken us this long to find them.”

They were eye to eye now, mere inches apart. Neither had raised their voice much, but narrowed eyes and gritted teeth left little room to doubt that they were having a fight. Clarke felt frustration running through every inch of her; frustration at being in the mountains for so long with nothing to show for it, frustration at having been out sick for a week, frustration at having Lexa so very close but unable to cross the gap between them. And it might be childish, she knew, but the frustration manifested itself as self-righteous indignation and an apparent inability to let this particular point about Yetis go without a fight.

Clarke had just gritted her teeth as she thought about what to say next and opened her mouth to deliver a biting remark when Lexa did something which made her lose track completely. Something small, easily missed, if Clarke hadn’t been so hyper-aware of everything Lexa did, and standing less than a foot away from her.

Lexa’s gaze, hard and determined, had flickered down to Clarke’s lips. Just for a small second, before it came back up to meet Clarke’s eyes. Anyone else in the world would have thought Lexa had the same expression she had had before, but Clarke thought she knew better. Clarke knew that face. She knew every emotion of the green eyes, every crinkle around the lips when Lexa smiled, every groove of worry on her forehead.

Clarke could have sworn that Lexa at that moment very much regretted her eye’s laps in judgment. And it might have been the frosty wind and the dry air, but Clarke thought she saw just a shimmer of pink on Lexa’s cheeks.

Clarke was so struck it made her take a step back on reflex. She didn’t mean to, and if her body had given her even the smallest moment actually to consider and come up with a plan, Clarke was pretty sure she would not have done it. Rather the opposite. Still, the jolt of realization hit her and propelled her feet into motion, and the moment was broken.

Lexa blinked hard and cleared her throat slightly as she turned away.

“Agree to disagree then, I guess.”

Clarke murmured her agreement.

Lexa kicked the bone on the ground tentatively with the tip of her boot.
Clarke waited until Lexa was turned around fully and walking over towards the edge of the clearing to inspect the tracks more closely, before burying her head in her hands.

Their wands buzzed again when they were on their way back to the tent. This time the trap was further away than the first one, and it took them almost an hour to walk to it. They were met with yet another bone, picked clean, the same confusing tracks, and a completely yeti-less trap.

The same happened not thirty minutes later. And an hour after that again.

The fifth time they were standing together on a mountain ledge, looking down at yet a fruitless and baitless trap, Lexa suggested they just stay where they were and wait for the next buzz. It might decrease travel time, she reasoned, and give them more of a chance of getting to the traps before the yeti was gone. Clarke gladly agreed; it was past midday, and walking and walking through knee deep snow was exhausting. Clarke longed for the days before they had agreed apparating was too loud to be employed in the field.

They sat next to each other on the ledge, legs dangling over the edge. The view was astounding; the whole valley was laid out beneath them, covered in white powder. The wind was picking up, though, and though it was still early Clarke thought she could tell it was getting darker as thicker clouds rolled towards them. They might be in for another storm.

Lexa produced a couple of granola bars from her backpack and handed one to Clarke.

Clarke looked at it for a moment before taking it, looking up at Lexa.

“We’ve come a long way from Germany, haven’t we?”

Lexa continued looking out over the view, but Clarke could tell her lips were pulling up into a small smile.

“Yep.”

The sixth time they were staring down at an empty trap Clarke was beginning to question whether this whole set up was as clever as they had thought it was.

The wind was getting worse now. Lexa had pulled her hood up and was looking contemplatively out on the surroundings with a scrunched-up nose. She turned to Clarke.

“What do you think? Abandon it for today and wait for better weather, or persevere for a few more hours of fruitless walking?”

Clarke had to hold a hand up to shield her face from the wind when she replied.

“It could be days before the weather clears up, and we know the yeti is in the area. We might not get a better chance than this in a long time. I say we continue.”

“Of course you do.”

“Don’t ask my opinion if you don’t want to know.”

Lexa rolled her eyes, but an idea had struck Clarke.
“Hey, can I have a quick look at the maps?”

Lexa shrugged off her backpack and produced one of the maps with the traps marked on it. She moved to stand next to Clarke, leaning on her, trying to shield the parchment from the wind.

Clarke got her wand out and made a red circle around the trap where they were standing at the moment.

“Which was the last trap we went to? This one?”

Lexa peered at the parchment.

“No, this one, I think.”

She pointed at another trap on the map.

“Right, and before that we went to these two…”

Clare drew a few more circles.

“And we started here and here,” Lexa pointed out.

Clarke completed the six circles.

One thing was immediately obvious to both of them; the yeti, or yetis, were moving practically in a straight line, perpendicular to Clarke and Lexa’s campsite. It was so clear that Clarke honestly felt a little embarrassed it had taken them this long to work it out. They had walked so far that they were almost out of the area they had been laying traps in. There was, however, one more trap in the direction the yeti was heading before it would disappear from the radar completely.

Neither Clarke nor Lexa’s wand had buzzed yet. Clarke looked up to meet Lexa’s eyes and saw the same idea reflected back at her.

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The storm had well and truly started when they arrived at the last trap, blowing snow in their eyes and reducing visibility to around ten feet, max. They still had made it there before the yeti, evidenced by the large lump of frozen meat still lying in the center of the trap site. Clarke walked up to it to make sure it was still untouched as soon as they arrived, and gave both herself and Lexa a small heart attack as she set off the trap and their wands started buzzing.

There was no sign of the yeti.

When they were laying out traps a few days previously, they had chosen this site because it was on a mountain ledge with a small cave next to it. The cave was only big enough to fit maybe three or four grown men, squeezed together and sat down, but Lexa and Clarke had reasoned that it might be an inviting cover from a storm for a yeti. Now, with the biting wind making Clarke lose feeling in her fingers and nose, she needed barely look at Lexa before they both headed for the cave.

They slipped through the narrow opening, and sat down side by side, pressed up against each other. The wind couldn’t get them here, and Clarke cherished the silence from the deafening howls. She almost jumped when she heard Lexa’s voice, whispering in her ear, “So now we wait?”

Clarke turned her head slightly to the side and saw that Lexa had leaned closer to her to ask the question as silently as possible. Clarke nodded, moving her feet to get a more comfortable position.
“Now we wait.”

Clarke awoke with a start. Immediately she felt soft gloves cradling her head, and Lexa’s whispered and soothing voice beside her.

“Shhh Clarke. Don’t’ worry; you just fell asleep a little.”

Clarke blinked hard a few times, shaking the grogginess, and peered out of the opening of the cave. Judging by the dimming light she had been asleep for more than just a little; it must be almost nightfall. Clarke reached a hand up to touch her cheek, where indentations from the shoulder of Lexa’s jacket were etched onto her skin.

“Shit, sorry. I didn’t mean to. Any sign of the yeti?”

Lexa shook her head.

“Don’t worry about it. But no, not yet. It might have been delayed by the storm, though. It might still come.”

Clarke could just about see the dark edges of the bait out on the ledge. She suppressed a yawn, trying to force her body to wake up without moving too much. It was nice and toasty inside her big jacket. It felt almost like a sleeping bag for her torso, and the temptation to lie back down on Lexa’s shoulder was strong.

Clarke looked over at Lexa and noticed how pale she looked.

“Lexa? Are you ok?” she whispered.

Lexa gave her a tight-lipped smile.

“Yes.”

Clarke’s eyes narrowed, and she pulled one of her gloves off. The freezing evening air on her warm skin was like cold water to her system, and the last grogginess of sleep left her as she reached up to check Lexa’s temperature. Lexa rolled her eyes but didn’t stop her, even when Clarke’s fingers slipped under the tight collar of Lexa’s jacket to find her pulse point. She couldn’t suppress a shiver thought.

“Lexa, you’re freezing.”

“I’m Canadian, Clarke. I don’t get cold.”

Clarke started to unzip her thick, snug jacket.

“Now who’s being hard-headed?”

Lexa watched Clarke as she pulled open her jacket, and her fingers moved over to expertly open the buttons at Lexa’s front too.

“I might not be an expert in medimagic, Clarke, but I am pretty sure you don’t counter beginning hypothermia by undressing further.”

Clarke began tugging at Lexa’s sleeve, urging her to remove her jacket.
“So you admit you are cold, then.”

Lexa shrugged off her jacket.

“Well, I certainly am now.”

Clarke opened her jacket for Lexa. Lexa looked uncomprehendingly at her. Clarke rolled her eyes.

“Get in.”

Lexa’s eyes opened so wide Clarke thought they might roll right out of her skull.

“What?”

“Shared body heat. It’s the oldest trick in the book. Now get in, before I start freezing too.”

Lexa looked like she was on the verge of protesting, so Clarke gave her a slightly stronger than necessary kick to the shins. The encouragement seemed to finally win the argument, and Lexa scrambled over on stiff joints and slipped inside Clarke’s coat. Clarke bit her teeth together to keep from hissing as Lexa’s freezing fingers found their way around her waist and her head came to rest on Clarke’s shoulder. Instead Clarke reached around the freezing woman in her arms to zip up the front, locking them both together in a cocoon of warmth.

Clarke could only revel in the impressions bombarding her senses. Lexa’s cold body molding to her own, held in place by the tight fabric around them. Lexa’s icy fingers seemingly unknowingly slipping beneath layers looking for warmth and finding it in the bare skin on Clarke’s back. Lexa’s breath on Clarke’s neck, warming up gradually along with the girl it came from. Clarke had stopped breathing, but not just because of the sudden drop in her body heat. She hugged Lexa tight to her body and pretended it was only to keep her warm, as she shut her eyes and bit her lips together to keep them from trembling.

God, she loved her.

The stiffness in Lexa let go as she warmed up, and after a few minutes, she was sighing contently in Clarke’s arms. It set goosebumps spreading from where her breath hit Clarke’s neck. Clarke hoped Lexa couldn’t see it in the dwindling light.

“Thank you, Clarke,” Lexa murmured. Clarke could hear the sleepiness.

“I’ll keep an eye out for the yeti, Lexa. You can go to sleep.”

Lexa was silent for a bit. Clarke rolled her eyes, but couldn’t keep a small smile off her face. Luckily Lexa was in no position to see it.

“Honestly Lexa, go to sleep. I’ll wake you if anything happens.”

A second of silence, and then Lexa comfortably exhaled. She tilted her head slightly, unseen by Clarke, until her forehead was resting against Clarke’s neck.

“I don’t deserve you, Clarke.”

Her breathing evened out almost immediately. Just as well, so she didn’t notice the lump in Clarke’s throat.

Clarke kept her vigil all night, just like she had promised. Outside their little cave the storm raged on, the wind howling and pulling icy snow with it, but it couldn’t touch Clarke and her sleeping
charge in their little cave. The storm got worse and worse, and Clarke couldn’t even see a foot outside the cave. Snow started building up at the mouth of the cave, and the slow and steady increase was the only measure Clarke had of time. In her arms, Lexa slept peacefully on.

The snow at the entrance to the cave was two feet high before the sky started turning lighter, letting go of the pitch black of night for a deep indigo, giving way to cobalt and finally to gold. The wind finally started to slow down, as if the promise of daylight and warmth was too much even for the forces of nature to handle.

Lexa woke up with the dawn.

Clarke only knew from the flutter of eyelashes on her skin. It was a minute before either of them spoke, both watching the sun rays through the thickly falling snow outside their little sanctuary.

“Anything?”

Clarke shook her head.

“Nothing that I could see. Though that doesn’t say much; the storm was pretty bad. The mountain could have come crashing down, and I probably wouldn’t have realized.”

Clarke cut herself off and fought not to blush at the implications of her words. She prayed Lexa didn’t notice.

They watched the golden light for a few more minutes before Lexa yawned. She tried to stretch, found she was restricted by the jacket, and accidentally pressed herself painfully close to Clarke’s body.

“Shit, sorry…”

Clarke could practically hear the blush in her voice, even as Lexa’s face remained hidden from view somewhere around her collar bone. Clarke stared hard at the cave wall and bit her tongue.

This wasn’t working. Something was going to have to give.

Soon, or Clarke might explode.

She used her free hands to undo the zip of the jacket, and Lexa awkwardly extracted herself from Clarke. It felt weird; Clarke thought they must have stretched her jacket overnight, or maybe her body had molded to closely to Lexa’s and now that she was gone it felt like it was missing a half. Either way, the vacuum Lexa left behind by moving three feet away felt so real Clarke half believed she could have reached down and touched it with her fingers.

Lexa finally stretched properly, and her back cracked in five different places all the way down her spine. Clarke shuddered.

“Please stop doing that. It’s like hearing nails on a blackboard.”

Lexa gave her a grin, and reached out her arms to crack her knuckles two inches from Clarke’s face. Clarke battered her away in disgust.

Lexa stood up crookedly to leave the cave, grabbing onto Clarke’s hand and dragging her along.

Once outside and blinking in the sunlight, it became apparent that the snow now reached them to mid-thigh. Lexa looked troubled.
“Quick Clarke, climb on my shoulders.”

Clarke looked up at her, perplexed.

“What? Why?”

Lexa met her eyes, worry in every inch of her face.

“You might drown.”

Clarke stared at Lexa. Lexa stared at Clarke. Clarke scooped up a handful of snow and tried to splash it in Lexa’s face, who unfortunately managed to duck away as her stoic facade broke into a teasing grin.

“You’re two inches taller than me, you harpy!”

Lexa giggled a safe distance away from a grumbling Clarke. Then she looked out over the pristine ledge they were standing on.

“Where’s the bait?”

Clarke raised herself to her full height, trying to regain some dignity, and raised her wand.

“Accio bait!”

A clean-picked bone shot out of the snow on the other side of the ledge and landed neatly in front of Clarke. There wasn’t a single scrap of meat left on it. Clarke and Lexa both stared down at it.

“…right.”

Clarke looked up to meet Lexa’s gaze. A twinge of regret materialized in her tummy.

“I’m sorry. It must have gotten here during the worst of the storm when I could barely see the ledge.”

Lexa shook her head and looked back down at the bone.

“Don’t worry about it. I was asleep; I am hardly in a position to place blame.” She looked back up at Clarke. “But I think it’s time we acknowledged that this plan isn’t working.

“I think you’re right.”

They were both quiet for a moment, contemplative. When Lexa looked at her again, she was smiling. Not just any smile; it was the same smile she had smiled when they had seen the Phoenix in Egypt. The smile which made her look like she was made of fire.

“At some point in the night, we were ten feet from a yeti.”

The same smile slowly spread across Clarke’s face too.

“Yes, we were.”

“We’re getting closer.”

This is what Clarke loved, she realized. The thrill of adventure, the wonder of exploration. Lexa made it all come true and made Clarke feel things she had only ever read about in books. All the
while being unaware of what she was doing, of what she was bringing out in Clarke.

Clarke had never felt so alive.

“Right,” Lexa said, turning back towards the ledge, hands coming up to rest at her waist, completely ignoring the internal reverie of the woman beside her. “We need a new plan.”

Clarke shrugged. “Undoubtedly. Your turn.”

“What do you mean it’s my turn?”

“I came up with the last, like, five plans.”

“Not true. It was my idea to put traps in the mountain instead of the forest, so technically it’s your turn.”

“Ah, but it was my idea to use the buzzing wand trick.”

“A week ago! And it was my plan to fulfill our contractual obligations and go back to Yadong, which you had completely forgotten about, which led to us getting new maps and formulating the new plan in the first place. Your turn. Besides, you are the one who is responsible for plans. I handle the.. you know…” Lexa vaguely waved her hand around, “pizazz.”

Clarke gave her an incredulous stare.

“Pizazz?”

Lexa shrugged.

Clarke grumbled. The sun was rising higher into the sky now, bathing the snow around them in dazzling whiteness. She pondered for a minute.

“Hey, Lexa? How many traps did we put down this time?”

“Ten, why?”

“And the yeti found how many? Six?”

Lexa was regarding her like she didn’t quite understand where she was going with this, but Clarke had an idea.

“Seven, including this one. What are you thinking?”

Clarke bit her lip. “Seven out of ten is a pretty good turnout rate for a beast which is only making its way through an area. Fair enough that it was walking in a vaguely straight line, but it is still impressive if it found that many by chance.”

Understanding seemed to dawn on Lexa. “You think it has realized that there are traps with bait in them all around, or rather, from its perspective, that there are chunks of meat lying around at odd places. You think it’s actively looking for them.”

“That’s exactly what I think.”

“Interesting.”

“Very interesting. Not sure what we can do with that information, though.”
Lexa thought about it for a little longer, before her eyes lit up.

“So, by that logic, we can assume that if we put down fewer traps the yeti would keep looking until it found it, correct?”

Clarke quirked an eyebrow. “I guess? No guarantees, though.”

“So, what if we stopped tracking it all together? What if we only put down a single trap?”

Clarke’s eyes opened wide.

“And let the yeti come to us! Lexa, you’re brilliant!”

Chapter End Notes

The story goes on... I have plotted out the rest of the fic and it will get written, but you might have to be a little patient with me about it. I'm 2k into the next chapter already though, so there's hope!

Has everyone seen the movie by now? I forgot it was coming out when I started this fic, but now I am so happy. I absolutely loved it, and it made it so much more fun to keep writing.

Holla at me at geyranger.tumblr.com!
Chapter Notes

I got caught up reading onemilliongoldstars's A Hand To Hold On To, which somehow both delayed this chapter and also motivated me to finish it. I had to split this in two though, as I was getting on 5k and it was just getting too long. You'll see what I mean. Enjoy :)

It was nearly nightfall before they finished setting up their final trap.

Lexa and Clarke had spent the day scouting for the perfect location. The sun was already sinking before they found the right spot; a wide ledge, near the top of one of the mountains, protected by a vertical wall on one side and a thirty-foot drop on the other. A vague path led straight through it, coming from around the bend of the mountain and leaving between the wall and a large boulder, four feet tall, perched closer to the drop. The boulder and the rubble of smaller boulders around it created a small, hidden nook.

They had decided on the site because there was only one clear route for the yeti to take; following the path, around the wall and through the site. This way, they reasoned, they could predict its movements fairly easily, and thereby have a better chance at escaping the encounter with a fistful of yeti hair and the right number of remaining limbs.

That was where the perks of the site ended. Lexa had let herself be lectured by Clarke about the wonderful location for almost half an hour before pointing out that if the creature had no option about where to go, it would feel trapped the moment it realized it wasn’t alone on the ledge. Nothing is more desperate than an animal which thinks it’s trapped. Then there was the drop behind them; it might be keeping the yeti where they wanted it, but if push came to shove, so to speak, the drop might hurt them a lot more than it would a yeti.

Their plan was simple. Lay out the bait, hide, and wait. Once the Yeti arrives, stay hidden and use a cutting charm or a tugging spell, whichever seems better, to get some hair out. Then collect it and get the hell out of there by apparition, preferably before the yeti realized what was happening. There were details, of course, such as putting protective charms on themselves and their nook to prevent detection, and checking out the bottom of the drop to see how much fresh and soft snow they could count on in an emergency, but in essence, the plan was very simple. Hide and wait.

Lexa liked it. It was the sort of rough, homemade solution she would have come up with herself, in the time before she met Clarke.

Not that she particularly longed for those times.

The first stars were coming out by the time they were ready. The bait, as well as the protective charms, were in place, they had gone over all possible outcomes of the plan, and Clarke was finally able to remove their tracks on the ledge with a quick spell from her wand. Then they made their way into the small nook behind the big boulder by wand light and prepared for a long night. Lexa sat down and leaned against the boulder, her ankles dangling over the edge. Clarke did the same next to her, before extinguishing her wand.
Lexa couldn’t see much, the dark of night shading the winterly landscape, but she could feel the icy air as she breathed. No doubt her breath was creating little clouds of moisture in the darkness. Like tiny little dragon’s breaths. She and Clarke sat there in silence, backs towards the boulders, hidden from view, watching the stars come out to dimly illuminate the snow.

“Lexa?”

Clarke was whispering. Lexa felt a small tremor at hearing her name spoken so softly, by that voice. They had put muting charms on their nook, but it seemed appropriate to whisper still. Raising their voice in the eerie scene felt like a crime.

“Yeah?”

Lexa kept watching the view, careful not to move too much; behind them and the boulder was the carefully laid out trap, and in front of them was a terrifying drop.

“What will you do when we go home?”

Lexa was silent next to her for a little while. She wondered if Clarke, like herself, could remember having a similar conversation when they were on their way out of the pyramid, and if Clarke, like herself, thought everything felt different now.

“Go back to Wolfe, I guess.”

Clarke looked over at her, and Lexa met her gaze for a moment. She could barely make her out in the dim starlight, but she was still beautiful.

“You guess?”

“I don’t really have anywhere else to go. The job is all I have.”

Lexa looked back out over the view in front of them. Clarke was silent long enough that Lexa felt she should continue.

“I mean, don’t get me wrong. I love it. Traveling the world, looking for adventure? What could be better? But yeah, it’s all I have. I wouldn’t know what to do with myself without it. All my friends and siblings have their own careers, their own relationships, in other parts of the world. This job is my life.”

Lexa had hesitated slightly before the relationship part. She hoped Clarke didn’t notice.

They were both still watching the view instead of each other when Clarke spoke up again, her whisper still loud in Lexa’s ears.

“A month ago, I would have thought the same thing. About myself, I mean. But now, I don’t know, Lexa… Sometimes I feel like I was meant for different things. I love my job, same as you, but the way Ollivander treats me like a child just doesn’t sit right with me anymore. I mean, here we are, hopefully about to accomplish something no witch or wizard has managed in living memory. We aren’t just apprentices anymore, Lexa. We’re too good at this.”

Lexa leaned her head back against the boulder and let it roll over so she could look at Clarke, who met her gaze. The night was so calm and quiet it was difficult to feel anything at all, yet Clarke’s words were hard to comprehend. And what she did understand filled Lexa with beginning dread.

“Do you think you’ll quit?”
Even saying the words out loud felt like a betrayal. Clarke rolled her head back to look at the view again, but Lexa couldn’t look away.

“No. Not anytime soon, anyway. I wouldn’t know what else to do just yet.”

Her words put Lexa’s mind at ease, however vague the promise was, and she gently let go of the breath she had been holding. When Clarke looked back at her Lexa could see silver points of starlight reflected in the blue depths, and it mesmerized her so much she almost missed Clarke’s crooked smile.

“Don’t worry, Lexa. I’ll still come with you on these quests, to get you out of trouble.”

Lessa wanted to mirror the crooked smile, but no matter how hard she tried her smile was nothing but infinitely fond.

“You better,” she whispered, as she turned back to look at the view. Whatever Clarke’s expression was at that comment, Lexa missed it.

There had been reasons, Lexa knew. That night she had spent lying awake on the sofa back in the tent, Clarke sleeping in her arms, when she had first come to grip with her emotions. There had been reasons, and lists, and rational decisions leading to the conclusion that she couldn’t act, couldn’t do what her heart so desperately wanted her to do. There was the risk of not being reciprocated, and the danger of being found out by their mentors. There was the sheer difficulty of maintaining a potential trans-Atlantic relationship. Lexa had thought about it long and hard all through that night and many times since, and concluded that fate was against it. But now, sitting on a dark mountain ledge miles from people with nothing but stars and snow, the thoughts and reasons and decisions didn’t make sense anymore. Fate didn’t get to have a say.

Something had changed. Maybe it happened the night she slept in Clarke’s arms in the cave. Maybe it was seeing Gustus and Aiden again, and coming to terms with what actually made her happy in this world.

Whatever it was, it made the few inches between her and Clarke seem like the vacuum of space, sucking her into it, and Lexa, like an astronaut looking at the stars, was letting herself succumb without a fight.

“Lexa...”

Lexa turned quickly back to Clarke, her pulse already speeding up, but Clarke’s eyes were focused on the horizon behind her.

“Look. The moon is rising.”

Lexa followed her gaze. A brilliant shimmering disc was rising slowly over the mountains, casting a pale light on the valley beneath them. Lexa’s gaze followed it, drifting over white mountain sides and down to the small specks of black trees far beneath them. It registered in her mind that the mountain ledge she and Clarke were sitting on were above some low hanging clouds, their white tops drifting like cotton candy in the light. The whole scene made it feel like the world had gone to sleep, or perhaps was holding its breath. It was the sort of stillness you only find when out at sea in a storm, and you finally duck beneath the waves, blocking all sounds and sight. It was like nothing else existed in the whole world.

Lexa’s hand was covered in fine gloves, long sleeves and finally thick woolen mittens, so it took her a minute to realize that when a light weight landed on one of them, it was Clarke’s own hand.
When she did, she forgot to breathe for what felt like an eternity. Then she swallowed hard and willed tears from her eyes.

The first couple of hours of their watch passed uneventfully. Clarke didn’t move her hand from Lexa’s for a while as they watched the slow ascent of the moon. When Lexa felt Clarke squeeze her hand slightly, she couldn’t suppress the shiver. Clarke apparently misunderstood the sentiment entirely and started digging out warmer clothing and a flask of hot tea from the backpack despite Lexa’s protests. Once they were both nursing a steaming mug in the freezing night air, they settled back into a light conversation.

The moon had reached its zenith and slowly started to descend again. Their conversation had gone from their usual banter to their favorite ice-cream flavors, to quidditch team loyalties. They had entertained themselves for quite a while by trying to outcompete each other in having the most embarrassing story from childhood, Lexa losing herself in every new detail she learned about Clarke. Now the light-hearted whispered conversation was rapidly deteriorating into an argument about the perks and merits of London versus Portland.

“Honestly, Lexa. London is the greatest city in wizarding history. Portland has got nothing on that.”

“Sure, Clarke, I’m not denying London has a great history. I’m just saying it’s a shame it peaked six hundred years ago.”

Lexa had to hide her grin. She didn’t believe a word of what she was saying, of course; she had no preference of either Portland or London. If it wasn’t Canada, it wasn’t Canada, in her opinion, and in the ‘not Canada’ category London was a better place than most. Frankly, if Clarke had tried to convince her that Yadong itself was a beautiful place where they should both spend the rest of their lives, Lexa would probably agree out of hand. But riling up Clarke was quickly becoming one of her favorite hobbies, so she wasn’t about to admit that.

God, she loved her.

Clarke threw her hands up in resignation.

“What about Diagon Alley? Where else in the world can you get potion ingredients, wands, robes and owls all in one place?”

Lexa pretended to mull it over.

“By mail? From literally anywhere in the world?”

Clarke shook her head and turned back to the view, clearly resigning Lexa as a lost cause. Lexa wasn’t quite done yet, though; this was too much fun to stop now.

“Seriously, Clarke. London is the epitome of fallen empires; everywhere you go you only see decay and memories of forgotten grandeur. It’s depressing just to walk through.”

“Lexa.”

“I don’t get it. There might be less stuff in North America; I’ll give you that, but at least you get the impression it’s on an upwards trajectory, you know?”

“Lexa-“

“You couldn’t pay me to live in Lon-“
Lexa was cut off; Clarke had, in lightning speed, got to her knees and pressed a mitten-clad hand to Lexa’s mouth. She was pressing hard on it, muffling anything Lexa was about to say, supporting her by another hand to the back of Lexa’s head. For a bizarre moment, Lexa thought Clarke was just a lot more passionate about London than she had realized, but Clarke’s intense stare only inches away on the other side of her hand, told her otherwise. Lexa’s pulse sped up at the proximity. Clarke shook her head ever so slightly, not breaking eye contact with Lexa, and gestured towards the boulder behind them.

That’s when Lexa heard it too. Gentle footsteps on the snow.

If Lexa’s pulse hadn’t already been racing with being inches from the girl she loved, it would have kicked into motion then.

Clarke took her hand off Lexa’s mouth, but her face stayed just as close. Emotions were wreaking havoc inside Lexa, and it took Clarke giving her a small yet firm nod and starting to move before Lexa could snap out of it, forcibly turning her mind back to the task at hand.

She needed to get a grip on that.

As gently as they could, Lexa and Clarke turned around and got up on their knees to peek over the boulder. There was nothing on the ledge, not yet, but Lexa could hear the approaching footsteps from the far side of the site. Suddenly she didn’t have trouble focussing any longer, and when Clarke inched closer to her it sent goosebumps down her spine, but her head was clear.

The creature came around the bend in the path. It was the yeti; there was no doubt; it was covered in long, white fur from head to toe, and stood twelve feet tall. It didn’t carry any weapon, but its neck and upper back were disfigured, with two large lumps of fur sticking to it. Its long front limbs hung past its knees and ended in fists twice the size of its head, topped with claws the length of Lexa’s forearm. Lexa could hear the gentle exhale of wonder from the girl next to her.

The Yeti seemed to notice the bait laying in the middle of the ledge. It appeared to get excited and walked towards it with surprising strength and grace. Lexa clutched her wand and got ready.

The Yeti stopped. It looked around as if something had alerted it or it felt the extra need to make sure the ledge was safe. Lexa stopped breathing. The Yeti seemed particularly on edge, but unable to place the source of the discomfort; rather than walking straight to the bait it circled around it several times and at different distances, checking to see if it was safe. Lexa didn’t know what had given them away, but it must be something; surely as soon as the yeti could place the threat, it would attack. Lexa readied herself and chanced a glance over at Clarke.

Clarke didn’t look worried; she looked fascinated. Lexa was about to step on her toe and motion for her to snap out of it when she followed Clarke’s gaze back to the ledge and saw that it was following the tracks left behind by the yeti’s circling. It was the same tracks they had had such trouble placing before, running seemingly without reason and purpose around the site. It dawned on Lexa that this must mean it did this strange, cautious dance every time it found bait, even when Lexa and Clarke hadn’t arrived until after the yeti had moved on. Which means that the Yeti hadn’t necessarily discovered them. Why, then, was it so worried?

Lexa could only watch, side by side with Clarke, as the yeti completed circle after circle around the bait, apparently looking for threats. When it finally came to a halt is sent one last look around the site, as if signing off on the paper that it was indeed safe. Then it reached up and plucked the disfigured lumps of fur from its back, placing them delicately on the snow.

Lexa was astonished. She had assumed those were malformed parts of its back. She looked on as,
one after the other, they unfurled and stood up.

They were little yetis. Yeti cubs. Baby Yetis. Lexa didn’t know the correct biological name for
them, but she recognized what they were just the same. Her mouth fell open.

They were like a mirror image of the larger yeti, but much smaller, perhaps the same size as Lexa
and Clarke, or a bit smaller. The larger yeti (their mother, Lexa realized with a start) stretched now
that its /her, Lexa corrected herself) back was free of the burden and walked over to the bait, sitting
down and starting to split the meat into long slivers with her claws. The children ran after her,
taking three steps for each one of hers, and tried to climb on her shoulders and arms to get closer to
the food. They were making squeaking noises, impatiently pestering their mother. The mother
finished slicing off a part of the meat and threw it ten feet away; the children scrambled over each
other to get to it first, as she continued to slice of another one.

Lexa thought she could almost see her smile.

The mother kept slicing and slicing pieces off until the children got tired of running after them,
instead opting to play fight with one another, giving her some time to eat a little herself. The
children rolled around, peppering each other with snow, and only a sharp bark from their mother
kept them from tumbling over the edge of the ledge.

Lexa finally understood why they had had such trouble interpreting the tracks in the other sites.

The mother kept feeding, and the children kept playing. Lexa lost all grasp on time as she watched
them; it was like a scene from another world. Familiar, yet unseen by human eyes. Lexa was awe-
inspired.

Eventually, the mother got up, discarded the now a clean picked bone, and started walking away in
the same direction she had been heading in. The children seemed to look up and clambered after
her. When they caught up, they reached for her arms and used them to climb back up on her
shoulders. In a daze, Lexa caught movement out of the corner of her eye; Clarke had lifted her
wand and sent off a quick cutting spell. In the moonlight, Lexa could see the spell hit target, and a
few strands of hair from the mother’s hip gently drifted off and fell towards the ground. Neither
she nor her offspring noticed, but continued walking on giant but gentle feet away from them. Lexa
cought the hairs with a levitation charm before they even hit the ground, and brought them over to
the boulder, landing them in Clarke’s outstretched hand.

The Yeti and her little family rounded a corner and were gone.

Lexa blinked hard, several times. She could hear Clarke letting out a puff of air next to her, saw the
small cloud of steam appear and drift upwards to the heavens out of the corner of her eye.

When Lexa turned around to look at Clarke she had to blink again. Clarke was sitting only a foot
away, bathed in moonlight, surrounded by frosty snow. Lexa could see what seemed like billions
of stars reflected in her eyes. She had never been more beautiful. And she was staring at Lexa like
she hung the moon, biting her lip to keep from grinning and with eyes that were brimming with
tears.

Lexa took a shaky breath. For a minute, they only looked at each other. Lexa could see frost
gathering on Clarke’s eyelashes and her strands of golden hair. She raised a hand up, still in its
glove, to gently brush them away from Clarke’s face.

Giving fate a chance.
Clarke leaned into her hand, and Lexa’s pulse stopped.

It was Clarke who leaned in first, Lexa following a millisecond behind. The strands of golden hair Lexa had so tenderly tried to brush away fell out of her grip as her hand curled around the side of Clarke’s face. A second later the golden strands were brushing Lexa’s own cheek, and their lips met.

Time stopped. The stars kept shining. The moon continued its slow decent towards the horizons. The vast eastern sky, unbeknown to either of the girls in front of it, was changing from midnight black to the deep tons of cobalt, signaling that not even this cold and dark night would last forever.

All thought of the yeti, the cold mountains, and the treacherous drop next to them were lost.

It was the most tender kiss Lexa had ever experienced. Clarke’s lips, chapped from the harsh mountain winds, were somehow soft as air. It set Lexa’s blood on fire. Her pulse, still from when Clarke had leaned into her hand, restarted with the vigor of ten wild horses and pounded her flaming blood through her body to rush in her ears, to make her dizzy, to set her lips and fingertips alive with the sensation of touching Clarke. Her other hand, independently of any rational thought and with the seemingly single motivation of being intensely jealousy of her other hand, came up to frame Clarke’s face. Clarke’s own hands came up to hold them in place, their lips working against each other with delicious, slow wonder.

They separated, though neither moved much, keeping their lips within an inch of each other. Lexa, eyes still closed, released a shaky breath. Clarke did the same and sounded, if that was possible, even more winded than Lexa. Lexa’s brain had just taken account of that fact and was gently simmering its way to think that may, just maybe, Clarke had wanted this as much as Lexa had when Clarke let go of Lexa’s hands. Instead, Clarke gripped Lexa’s neck and used the new-found leverage to crush her lips to Lexa’s again.

Lexa replied in kind. She let go of Clarke’s face briefly, to reach behind her and tug off her gloves. She slipped her newly bared fingers into Clarke’s hair; weaving through the gold, massaging her scalp. Loving every minute. Clarke made a sound which made all of Lexa’s blood rush to her head. Clarke’s fingers came back to brush against Lexa’s cheeks, gently pushing her few loose locks away. Lexa would have melted on the spot. Instead, she tightened her fingers in Clarke’s hair, holding on for dear life, strongly considering never letting go again. All the while Clarke’s lips were unrelenting, kissing Lexa again and again with the same desperation Lexa had felt building up within herself for so long. Lexa felt as if there was a fire within her that had been burning for ages. It was flared the night Lexa lay in internal turmoil and battling with her emotions in the tent, and now it roared with joy at every kiss. Kisses which were growing more and more frantic.

They broke apart when the need for oxygen demanded it. Lexa sat without opening her eyes, still as a statue, reveling in the moment, committing every detail of it to memory. Clarke, full of life and motion and gold, leaned her forehead against Lexa’s as her breath came in ragged and shaky breaths. Lexa didn’t move her fingers from Clarke’s hair. Clarke didn’t let go of Lexa’s face, holding her with an iron grip as if she was afraid she might drift away.

Eventually, Lexa opened her eyes. She was met with the glassy gaze of Clarke’s sky blue eyes only a few inches away. Lexa’s eyes fell to Clarke’s lips, chapped and swollen and beautiful as the sun, and she reveled in being able to stare without looking away. Clarke’s eyes never left hers. Lexa looked back up to meet them, and her breathing finally started to slow back down to normal. Clarke smiled. Lexa smiled back, a bit more shyly, and Clarke’s face broke into a wide grin. She gave a breathless laugh, closed her eyes and pressed her forehead to Lexa’s again. Lexa was grinning widely too, refusing to close her eyes anymore for fear of missing the small expressions of joy
which were passing over Clarke’s face.

Clarke opened her eyes again, looking into Lexa’s eyes with a smile for a moment, before glancing down to Lexa’s lips. The motion, even now, gave Lexa butterflies. When Clarke looked back up to meet Lexa’s gaze her expression had changed; it was still joyful, but there was something more to it now. It almost looked like a challenge. Like the two of them were in on something no one else knew about, which Lexa guess that yes, they were. Lexa could see continents and eons in Clarke’s eyes at that moment. Mountains and cities and beaches and forests, days and weeks and months and years. There was a future in those eyes. It lit Lexa’s heart on fire, but in a new way; there was still wonder, there was still joy, but this time there was confidence too.

When their lips met again in the middle, it meant more than Lexa could ever express.

The small part of Lexa’s brain which hadn’t yet short-circuited wondered idly if she could ever get used to this. If the feeling of Clarke’s soft lips on hers would ever fail to give her butterflies and goosebumps. She hoped it never did. Clarke was holding her tightly; her hands, which had been framing Lexa’s face, wound themselves around her neck and pulled her tighter. Lexa fumbled for Clarke’s waist, cold fingers struggling to find a hold on the large winter jacket.

It suddenly dawned on Lexa that there was way too much space between them; they were still sitting a foot apart, which was a foot of completely unnecessary distance as far as Lexa was concerned. Clarke seemed to agree, she thought, judging by the way she tried to pull Lexa towards her.

Against every instinct she possessed, Lexa broke away slightly to change her position, turning more fully against Clarke. Clarke did the same, shuffling closer on her knees, pushing away the snow between them and sending it falling over the edge right next to them, letting it fall the ten feet to the ground below. Lexa met her halfway, and as their lips met, again and again, their upper bodies, though still wrapped in thick clothing, were flush against each other.

Who knows how long they could have kept kissing each other like this. If Lexa had her say they would never have left the ledge, the handful of yeti hair in Clarke’s pocket never finding its way out of the mountains and into the hands of dismayed wandmakers. The world would never hear from them again, the Daily Prophet and its avid readers never getting the answers to the mystery of their identities. They could stay there forever, together, never worrying about the world or each other ever again.

And so they might have done, if Lexa hadn’t slipped.

It was like it happened in slow motion. The ground underneath her knee, which she had thought had been a hard mountain, gave way, tumbling down the drop in snowy boulders instead of rock. It took Lexa a moment more than it should to realize what was happening, and then Lexa was torn from Clarke’s embrace as she lost balance, falling sideways towards the edge. Her knee hit, hard, against the mountain side as her body fell, her hands scrambling desperately for something to hold on to and slow her decent. She could feel Clarke’s hands desperately fumbling to hold her back, but her gloves didn’t let her get a good grip. Lexa’s fingers found nothing, and she could hear nothing but Clarke screaming her name as she fell over the edge and plummeted into the abyss below.
Clarke apparated down to the landing below the drop the second after Lexa’s body hit the ground. She immediately fell to her waist in fresh powder; the wind from the previous day had piled the new snow up against the mountain wall, and she was standing on what felt like a cloud. She frantically made her way over to where Lexa had fallen, wading through the snow with the force of desperation.

Lexa had fallen three feet into the snow, and Clarke could only see the vaguely human-shaped hole in the whiteness until she was practically right next to it. It would have been funny it if wasn’t so mortifying. She melted the snow around the hole with a quick warming spell and knelt by the fallen woman, desperately trying to see if her eyes were open and if she was hurt.

“Lexa! Lexa, please, please…”

Lexa groaned loudly. The sound almost gave Clarke a heart attack. She snapped out of it and started tentatively feeling Lexa’s arms and legs, trying to gauge the scope of her injuries.

“Are you ok?!”

Lexa didn’t open her eyes, but her face took on an almost sheepish expression.

“Lexa, talk to me. Please.”

“Clarke, calm down. I’m fine.”

Clarke’s hands stopped their probing abruptly, and Clarke looked down at Lexa’s face. She was squinting through almost closed eyelids up at Clarke. Shocked, Clarke could see, but ok. Alive. The relief sent the tension out of Clarke’s body like a shower of warm water. She closed her eyes and leaned forward until her head rested on Lexa’s chest, taking a deep breath.

“Don’t do that to me ever again.”

Lexa chuckled, still hoarse from the impact, a hand coming up to pat Clarke’s head.

“The snowfall yesterday saved me, I think. There must be five feet of soft new snow here.”

Clarke gave a vague sound of agreement, head still resting on Lexa’s chest and showing no signs of planning to move.

“Remind me to sacrifice a goat to the Himalayan weather gods one of these days.”

“Will do.”

Clarke took another deep breath and raised her head, looking down at Lexa who had closed her eyes again. She wasn’t showing any signs of getting up. Clarke started probing up and down her arms and legs again.

“Are you actually fine? Or are you just trying to calm me down?”

“Both.”
Clarke gave her a suspicious glare, hands not ceasing their exploration. Lexa rolled her eyes.

“Seriously Clarke, stop fussing. I’m completely fi-“

The rest of her sentence drowned in a sharp hiss; Clarke's hands had reached her knee, and Lexa’s whole body had convulsed. Clarke looked at the knee, then up at Lexa. Lexa was looking at her own knee, surprised mixed in with the pain.

“Ok, maybe not so fine,” she admitted. “I think I bashed it on the mountainside on the way down.”

Clarke shook her head exasperatedly and got her wand out, running it up and down Lexa’s leg and in expanding circles around her knee. She didn’t at all like what she was seeing.

“Definitely broken. I can’t tell if it’s the femur or tibia, which is bad news because it might mean the break is in the knee itself.” She looked down at the wounded leg and bit her lip, before looking back up to meet Lexa’s eyes. “We’re going to have to apparate back to the tent either way. How strong do you feel?”

Lexa scoffed.

“I’m fine Clarke, relax.”

Clarke sat back on her heels and watched Lexa trying to get into a sitting position. She was biting her teeth together, clearly in a lot of pain. She struggled for a good minute, newer getting further than just about managing to support her upper body on her elbow, before lying back down. The sheepish expression was back. Clarke raised an eyebrow.

“Do you need some help, maybe?”

“…yes.”

Are you going to take your injuries seriously now?”

Lexa, despite the red tinge in her cheeks, managed to roll her eyes.

“Yes.”

“Good.”

With Clarke’s help Lexa managed to stand up, leaning heavily on Clarke and her remaining healthy leg. Clarke could see her gritting her teeth every time she accidentally put weight on the wounded knee, but she bore it nobly. Clarke flung Lexa’s arm over her neck and took as much of her weight as she could.

It brought her closer to Lexa’s face than she had been since before Lexa fell. She blushed furiously and tried to keep her mind clear.

“Ready to apparate back to the tent? I’ll lead, you just focus on not splinching.”

Lexa chuckled darkly.

“I’ll do my best.”

“---------------------------------------------

“Well,” Clarke said, sitting back on her heels and putting her wand away, “final tally is: your femur
is broken in one place, your tibia is broken in two places, all three breaks are within the knee itself. You also have a twisted ankle on the same leg, as well as two broken ribs and a slight concussion.”

They were back in the tent, a warm fire blazing in the fireplace. Lexa was sitting on the sofa, trouser leg rolled up to her thigh, wounded leg on a leg rest and wearing a slightly dejected expression as she watched Clarke work. Clarke herself was kneeling next to the leg rest, hovering over it with her wand and a set of potions she had produced from her bag. She gave the knee an experimental poke with her wand, making Lexa hiss.

“No apparent nerve damage, though.”

Lexa gave her a look.

“Can you fix it?”

Clarke hesitated.

“I can give you painkillers for the ribs and the concussion; those will sort themselves out in time. The knee… I don’t know, Lexa. I know the standard bone-healing spells, but it’s complicated stuff to mend joints. If I get it wrong, I could permanently damage your knee.”

Lexa met her eyes.

“I trust you.”

Clarke ignored the pang in her stomach.

“I’m not sure I do.”

Lexa nodded. She didn’t argue, didn’t try to push her. She simply understood.

“So what do we do? Go back to Yadong?”

Clarke scoffed.

“I said I didn’t want to try the bone-healing spells, Lexa. I didn’t say we need to go back to bloody Yadong. I’ve got some pride left.”

Lexa concealed a grin as Clarke started rummaging around her medicine bag which was lying open beside her on the floor.

“What’s the plan then, doctor?”

“The Wiggenweld potion.”

“The what?”

“Wiggenweld potion.”

Clarke rummaged for a few seconds longer, producing a number of small bottles which she put on the foot rest, sharing the space with Lexa’s leg. She glanced at Lexa and noticed that she was waiting patiently for Clarke to explain. God bless.

“It’s one of a range of bone-healing potions invented in the seventeenth century. They can do everything from regenerating old bone tissue to regrow bone completely from scratch. The Wiggenweld potion works by getting into the bone itself and healing breaks from the marrow and
out, so it can get to most tricky places which spells and ointments struggle to find.”

“Sounds like a miracle cure. You’d think I’d heard of it.”

“It’s not very popular because it comes with some caveats.”

Clarke finished her rummaging and carefully reread the labels of all the small bottles she had produced before expanding on her comment. Lexa waited patiently.

“Firstly, the potion is very unstable, more so the longer you let it stand and the larger the batch is; it quickly loses its effect and dissolves into a weird purple vinegar. You can imagine how that makes it hard to mass-produce and therefore make a profit from manufacturing. It can only be made to injury-specific order, really, that’s why few people have heard of it. Secondly, it takes upwards of a week to make, and a further three days after drinking it before it takes effect.”

Lexa scrunched up her face.

“I am going to be sitting here with a broken leg for ten days?”

“Not only that, but the side effects can be nasty. Aching, swelling, but also hallucinations and delusions. It’s not a pretty sight.”

Lexa, to her credit, didn’t waver.

“Ok.”

Clarke hesitated but met her eyes.

“Are you sure? We can go to Yadong instead, but they don’t have a magical hospital, so I don’t know how much more they will be able to do. Pluss we’d have to risk apparition and splintching again, which might make things even worse.”

Lexa’s gaze didn’t falter.

“I trust you, Clarke,” Lexa repeated. “If you think this is the best plan, then that’s what we will go with.”

Clarke smiled a small smile. Lexa met her smile for a little while, and Clarke blushed lightly, looking away. She fiddled a little with the bottles on the leg rest, unsure what else to say. It was strange being back in the tent; it felt the same as it had the last two weeks, but Clarke knew that everything had changed. Their waking night on the mountain ledge had changed everything. The Yeti encounter. The kiss.

Clarke’s hands cease their fumblings, her gaze landing on a random place on the opposite wall and her mind losing itself in new memories. Lexa’s hand touching the side of her face. Lexa’s lips on hers. Lexa’s fingers sliding through her hair. The kiss just speeding up, maybe heading somewhere when Lexa-

Clarke snapped out of it like a bow firing an arrow. Her eyes leaped up to land on Lexa, who was still sitting on the sofa, looking at her with a small smile. Clarke sent a small thanks to whichever god had decided not to make Lexa a legilimens.

Lexa gently tapped her hand on the sofa, inviting Clarke to join her. Clarke, through enormous strength of will and character, managed to wobble over on unsteady legs and sit down without embarrassing herself. Lexa gently put her own hand on top of Clarke’s on the sofa, which sent a
wave of nervousness through Clarke. Lexa looked at her for a minute, a small smile still in place, until Clarke couldn’t take the silence anymore.

“I should get going on the potion. Like I said, it will take a while to make.”

“Mhm.”

Clarke made no move to get up. Lexa made no move to get go of her hand. Lexa’s small smile widened slightly. Clarke thought maybe Lexa was moving slowly closer to her on the sofa, but it was hard to tell.

“Really. And it is very complex. I don’t want to get it wrong.”

“Sure.”

Lexa was definitely closer now, and it was doing funny things to Clarke’s ability to form coherent sentences. In addition, Lexa’s smile got wider the longer Clarke stayed, and it was at the same time infuriating and mesmerizing to watch. Clarke cleared her throat, unable to look away.

“It’s almost daybreak too. Some of the maturation needs to happen at night and must, therefore, be ready by sundown, so… I should really…”

Lexa was leaning in closer and closer, and as her hand came up to gently curl around Clarke’s face Clarke could feel herself losing all grasp on the world in general and language in particular. She had no choice but to abandon the sentence altogether. Lexa could definitely tell, but instead of widening her grin further her gaze flickered down to Clarke’s lips, and she let out a small puff of air, seemingly almost involuntarily. The notion that this might be affecting Lexa too gave Clarke the clarity of mind she needed to push past her own beating hard and dizzy feeling in her stomach to close the gap between them at last, meeting Lexa’s lips halfway.

It was electrifying, just like it had been on the mountain earlier. Clarke felt like her heart constricted with every languid stroke of Lexa’s lips against hers, like an invisible hand tightening around her chest, making it difficult to breathe. She felt lightheaded, yet when Lexa’s other hand came up to rest gently against her neck, she felt every movement, every atom of Lexa’s skin against her own with utmost clarity. She was so dazed it took her a good ten seconds before her hands realized they didn’t need to be clutching each other in her lap and jumped into motion, one fumblingly brushing Lexa’s hair away from her face, the other landing on Lexa’s good knee, slowly rubbing gentle circles onto the fabric. Lexa hummed. Clarke would have too if she thought her throat could be trusted to produce any kind of sound right then.

Lexa pulled away slightly, eyes closed but with the small smile back in place.

“You know, all the times I imagined how this might happen, I never thought I’d end up injured with a useless knee for ten days.”

Clarke couldn’t help the wide grin which was spreading across her face, the potential for teasing fuelling her previously incapacitated ability to produce language.

“You imagined this happening a lot, did you?”

Even through closed eyelids, Clarke could tell Lexa was rolling her eyes.

“Shut up,” she said, tugging Clarke’s lips back to hers.

Clarke was losing herself in the kiss, and she knew it. But it was the most delicious slow torture,
the sweetest perfection she had ever felt, and she would be damned if she was going to be the one to end it. Her mind vaguely registered that she would be very happy to spend the rest of her days kissing Lexa, but it was too busy memorizing the feeling of Lexa’s warm lips to do more than to file that fact away somewhere in the back of her brain. Clarke’s tongue slipped out, unbidden, to explore in more detail, and Lexa, drawing in a slightly shaking breath and holding Clarke’s face closer to her own, allowed it entrance.

Clarke could feel it in the pit of her stomach. Not just the electricity, or the feeling like she had jumped from a plane at 30 000 feet and was soaring through the sky and plummeting towards the ground simultaneously. Something more. It spread through her gut into her hands, her fingers, her toes, into every molecule of her being. She wanted Lexa. And she felt like she had been waiting for years. Her hand on Lexa’s knee started sliding slowly upwards, tentatively and trying and ready to retreat at the first sign that it wasn’t wanted. Clarke hesitated.

Lexa didn’t. As soon as Clarke’s hand had started moving, Lexa’s own hand moved from caressing her jawline to clutching at her waist, sliding around her and pulling her closer. Clare obliged gladly, sitting up straighter and following Lexa’s body as she leaned back against the sofa, almost pushing her into the cushions in her eagerness. Lexa, judging by her soft whimper and how her grip on Clarke’s waist tightened, didn’t mind at all.

Clarke was about to give up all grasp on cognitive sentience when Lexa suddenly tore away from her lips, and hissed. Clarke jumped backward, shocked by the hostile sound, and her brain went into overdrive. Lexa was pushing her away. Lexa didn’t want her. Lexa thought this was all a mistake. It took Clarke a second to calm down her racing thoughts enough to look at Lexa properly, and another second to correctly interpret the expression of raw pain on her face as she clamped her teeth together. A third second to look down at where Clarke’s hand had been resting on Lexa’s leg, awfully close to her knee, and Clarke had caught up.

“Shit, Lexa! Are you ok?”

Lexa answered through teeth tightly pressed together. “Yes.”

“Liar,” Clarke countered and dropped back onto the floor without hesitation to fuzz over her knee. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to lean on you; I got carried away.” She tried and failed to keep the blush from her face, focussing instead on putting a light anesthesia charm on the knee and avoiding eye contact.

Even without looking she could she the grin spreading across Lexa’s face.

“Some doctor you are. Do you do this to all your patients?” she replied, not quite able to keep the teasing out of her voice.

Clarke looked up at her and wiggled her eyebrows. “You don’t want to know the real reason I got kicked out of healer training.”

Now it was Lexa’s time to blush. Clarke counted that as a victory. Their eyes maintained contact for a moment more than necessary, before Clarke got up from the floor and sat down on the sofa again. Lexa was already leaning in, but Clarke stopped her with a firm finger to her collar bone. It didn’t stop the delighted and wide smile which spread across her face at Lexa’s eagerness, though.

“Ok. You and I need to establish some ground rules.”

Lexa’s eyes tore themselves away from her lips with apparent difficulty before she met Clarke’s gaze and nodded.
The potion turned out to be one of the most complicated ones Clarke had ever attempted. The recipe came from one of the many books she had personally smuggled one by one out of the forbidden section of the Hogwarts library the spring before she graduated because she thought they might come in useful later. The large-scale theft had taken several weeks and was a period which Octavia and Raven had dubbed ‘The Griffin Roosting.’ The heist had finally paid off now, and the large dusty tome was resting against a small cauldron on the floor in front of the sofa. It called for fifty different ingredients, all added at exact quantities and at exact time intervals, accompanied by complicated spells and wand motions.

Good thing Clarke loved a challenge.

She was sitting cross-legged in front of her cauldron, trying to focus, adding powdered leaves and eyes of newt. She had been at it for two days and so far without making a mistake, but that was hardly a reassurance. If anything, it felt like it made it more likely that she would mess up soon.

Lexa was still sitting on the sofa, wounded leg on the leg rest, watching Clarke work. It was incredibly distracting.

“You are going to have to stop that.”

“Sorry,” Lexa said immediately.

A moment passed.

“Stop what?”

“That. You. This general,” she waved her hand noncommittally in Lexa’s direction, eyes not leaving the book, “thing you’re doing.”

“But I’m not doing anything.”

“Your face.”

“My face?”

“Stop your face, please.”

Lexa grinned. Clarke huffed and gave her a glare.

“What did I just say?”

Lexa looked away but didn’t stop grinning.

The ground rules held, though barely. The main one was that Lexa was banning from doing anything physical, as Clarke had deemed her knee not to be put at further risk. She was allowed to wobble back and forth between the bed and the sofa, and to the kitchen table so she could instruct Clarke in how to cook more advanced meals than pop tarts, but that was it. She had taken to it remarkably well, chatting with Clarke when the process of making the potion allowed it, and silently reading books when it didn’t. She was working her way through Clarke’s spell books, having exhausted the small bookshelf in the tent while Clarke was out with the cold. Clarke found it all very impressive, remembering vaguely that she was ready to commit mutiny after two days of confinement in this tent.
No physical activity, they had both silently agreed, also included no heavy kissing sessions. Instead, they both tiptoed around each other, figuratively in Lexa’s case, careful not to get caught up in something which might carry them away and lose control of the situation. That didn’t mean they had gone back to the way it was before, thought. There were lingering touches, eye contact that lasted just a little too long, silences that, while not begin exactly awkward, were full of something unspeakable. The tent was filled to the brim with sweet tension.

It was driving Clarke mad, at the same time as she loved every minute.

The first day had been the worst. Clarke felt like there was a magnetic force in the room trying to pull her back to Lexa’s side, to make her go back on her decision. More than once she found herself reaching for Lexa, trying to get closer to her. She had managed to pull herself away every time, though barely. Her only lapse in willpower had come at night time, when she had supported Lexa as she limped over to the bedroom, yawning, Lexa’s body exhausted after the ordeal it had been through. Lexa’s hair spread out on the pillow, her green eyes tenderly watching Clarke through heavy eyelids, the dark room only lit by the light from the fireplace coming through the open door; it had all been too much for Clarke. Her hand had, unbidden as usual, come up to gently stroke Lexa’s hair. When Lexa leaned against it and closed her eyes, Clarke knew she was chanceless.

She had managed to keep it to just one kiss. One long, tender, world-consuming kiss which set her veins on fire and snatched the air from her lungs. Clarke wondered idly if she would ever get used to this feeling, these seemingly world-changing moments she got to share in. Lexa lifted heavy hands to hold Clarke’s head as she hovered above her, as if Clarke would even consider pulling back.

When the kiss finally ended, Lexa’s lips were swollen and her eyes glassy. She looked like a goddess.

“Are you coming to bed?” Lexa whispered in the quiet air between them.

Clarke shook her head slowly, not breaking eye contact.

“I can’t. There are ingredients going into the potion every hour through the night.”

Lexus nodded her understanding. Clarke bit her lips to keep from leaning in again. The eye contact didn’t break for what felt like days until Lexa’s face contracted and Clarke realized she was stifling a yawn.

She smiled.

“Sleep well, Lexa.”

Their goodnight kiss became a ritual in the days that followed.

The week it took to prepare the potion went by in a sleepless blur. Long hours of nothing to do but play cards and chat were intercepted by crucial periods of preparing and adding ingredients at the exact right moment. Clarke was doubling as potion maker, cook, housekeeper and doctor, working overtime to make sure Lexa had everything she needed at the same time as making the remedy. It was hard work, but Clarke threw her all her might into the process.

The problem was that the frequency of ingredients going in didn’t allow her much sleep, and as the days dragged on Clarke could feel herself getting sloppy. On the third night without Clarke getting any sleep, Lexa decided to stay up as well, keeping an eye on the recipe and stopping a sleep deprived Clarke from adding the wrong thing on multiple occasions. When Clarke tried to
apologize for Lexa having to stay up just to make sure her own bone healing remedy didn’t go awry, Lexa refused to hear it and just shrugged, calling it ‘just another of our adventures.’ It almost made Clarke cry. From then on, they took it in shifts, one sleeping while the other worked on the potion, and Lexa filling in for Clarke when she was making food or doing other things which required working legs.

Seven days after Clarke had apparated them both back to the tent, almost to the hour, the potion was finished. Clarke spent longer than necessary checking and doublechecking the colour and consistency, trying to make sure that they had done it right until Lexa eventually huffed and told her it was fine. Surely anything would be better than the frustration of watching Clarke fussing over a completed potion. In return she got a long lecture about all the ways this could go wrong, the disastrous consequences of it malfunctioning, and also that her knee was in a worse state now than a week ago because the bones had no doubt begun setting in the wrong position.

Clarke was, very obviously, stressed.

She made Lexa lie down on the bed, one trouser leg rolled up to her thigh, before talking her through the side effects of the potion once more. Swelling, pains, fever. Hallucinations, delusions, angst. It wasn’t a pretty package. Lexa took it all with barely a hint of hesitation, and when Clarke carefully brushed a stray lock of hair out of her face and quietly suggested that maybe they should try to get her to a real doctor, after all, Lexa shook her head and told her to bring in the damn potion.

It tasted live bloody hell, judging by Lexa’s expression, but she drank it all without complaining.

The next three days were among the worst of Clarke’s young life. She was sick with worry, and every time Lexa changed condition she assumed the worst. All of Lexa’s symptoms were exactly what was described in the book, so there was little doubt they had made the potion correctly, but it was still a horrifying sight to behold. Lexa started getting feverish almost immediately after drinking the potion and maintained that she was completely fine right up until she lost consciousness a few hours later. Her knee swelled until it was red and sore, and Clarke could see it pulsating gently in time with Lexa’s heartbeat as Lexa shivered through the first night.

The hallucinations began the next morning. Clarke had napped in the same chair Lexa had kept her own vigil in not long ago, but bolted awake when she heard Lexa talk. It was just a soft murmur, but Clarke thought she recognized her own name nevertheless. Lexa was still not conscious, but didn’t look like whatever she was seeing was pleasant; her brow was furrowing, and she was shaking her head from side to side at irregular intervals. As the day went on she started mumbling more, both inaudible sounds devoid of meaning, and names which Clarke could recognize. Clarke. Wolfe. Gustus. Clarke. Aiden. Anya. Octavia. Clarke. Indra. Titus. Clarke. Clarke. Clarke. Clarke. Clarke tried waking her as the hallucinations got worse, but with no luck; wherever her mind was, it wasn’t coming back before the potion had run its course.

The fever dreams didn’t slow down as the next night came and went, but when morning broke Lexa started thrashing around. She was throwing pillows, tearing at her hair, sometimes so aggressively that Clarke had trouble coming near her enough to try to restrain her and calm her down. It came in bouts of insane activity, interrupted by sudden stops and Lexa falling into a comatose sleep. The first time it happened Clarke honestly thought her heart had stopped. The thrashing became worse and worse as the day went on and turned into evening, and when the sun set, Lexa opened her eyes again. For a small moment, Clarke was relieved, thinking the worst must be over. However, it didn’t take her long to realize that whatever Lexa’s eyes was seeing, it wasn’t Clarke and the inside of their tent; they were full of tears, fear, and pain and her shivering got worse. It shook Clarke to the core. And when Lexa opened her mouth and screamed, Clarke was
crying with her.

When morning came on the final day Clarke was sitting in the chair by the bedside, face in one hand and a wet cloth in the other, trembling slightly. Lexa was sleeping, eyes and face dry after Clarke’s administrations, her body relaxing even when Clarke had lifted the full body bind curse she had put on. The swelling on her knee had receded. She looked peaceful.

Clarke did not. Her own tears had dried sometime during the night, but they had still left stains down her cheeks. Her lips were dry and cold, her eyes open but unseeing, staring at the floral covers on the bed. Her mouth was dry too, and her throat worst of all.

The tent lay bathed in daylight and complete silence. When a soft hand gently landed on her knee, she almost gave herself a heart attack.

Lexa was awake, looking at her from the bed with gentle eyes.

“Are you ok?”

Clarke laughed without humour. With her dry throat, it sounded more like an old man drawing his final painful breaths.

“Am I ok? Lexa, I thought you were dying.”

Lexa’s eyebrows shot up.

“Was it that bad?”

Clarke blinked at her.

“Don’t you remember?”

Lexa shook her head. Clarke shook her head.

“You don’t have to lie to me, Lexa.”

“I know that. And I’m not lying.”

Clarke bit her lip, eyes not leaving Lexa’s. She had no doubt Lexa would be the sort of person to withhold facts if she didn’t deem it necessary to share them. She would also undoubtedly pretend to be more fine than she was to reassure Clarke. She had done it several times already. But still, Clarke thought, she had never actually lied.

“You genuinely can’t remember anything at all from the last three days?”

Lexa shook her head.

“I mean, I remember getting a fever and falling asleep. That’s it.”

Clarke, for better or worse, decided she was truthful. She gave a deep sigh, her shoulders slumping.

“Good. That was traumatic. I cannot believe that potion is legal.”

“Might be why it was in the restricted section.”

Lexa made to sit up in bed, reaching for her hand. Clarke’s own hands shot out to keep her down.
Lexa smiled, but didn’t fight her.

“How is your knee?”

Lexa gave it an experimental bend.

“Fine, it seems.”

“Any pain? Soreness? Fatigue?”

Lexa shook her head.

“Nothing.”

Clarke barely listened, instead reaching out to gently touch and prod it, seeing the healing for herself. Lexa watched her, slightly impatiently.

“Give it to me straight, Doctor. Will I ever play the violin again?”

Clarke didn’t dignify that with a response.

“You need to take it easy, keep weight off it and so on. There’s no knowing how complete the healing is, though it does seem ok. For now.”

Lexa rolled her eyes but didn’t stop smiling. She tried sitting up again, and Clarke, just like before, forced her to remain lying.

“You need rest.”

“Clarke, I’m fine,” she tried once more.

“Well, I need rest then.”

Lexa’s only reply was to scoot over in the bed and lift the covers invitingly. Clarke sighed again and climbed in. It was reassuring, she told herself, to let her hands fell for themselves that her patient really was ok. It was reassuring to let them slide around Lexa’s abdomen, let her fingers find the place where Lexa’s t-shirt rode up and slip them under. Reassuring to rest her head on Lexa’s collarbone, hearing her sharp intake of breath, being surrounded by her scent, her warmth, her strong arms. Reassuring to let her fingers ghost over skin, feeling the softness and the goosebumps rising.

Lexa held her tight.

“Go to sleep, Clarke,” she murmured against her forehead. “You’ve barely slept for a week.”

Clarke could feel the exhaustion in her bones but wasn’t ready to let go.

“What happens now?”

Clarke could feel Lexa’s smile against her skin.

“Now that you have miraculously healed my knee, we go home triumphantly. Show our prize to Ollivander and Wolfe, who will both try to pretend like we haven’t accomplished a feat for the ages. Sell the rest of the hairs on the black market, maybe. We might get arrested for either trading in prohibited goods or just fraud, depending on whether the ministry believes us when we say we are certified yeti hunters.”
Clarke stifled a yawn.

“That’s ok, I’ve got a contact in the Auror office. That’s not what I meant though.”

“I know.”

Lexa started slowly stroking Clarke’s back. Clarke’s eyes drifted shut at the sensation. She would have fallen asleep then and there if Lexa hadn’t kept talking.

“Well, I personally think our plan from earlier is a good strategy to stick with.”

Clarke felt fingertips gently tilting her chin up, out of where it was comfortably nestled against Lexa. Eyes still closed, she only realized how close Lexa was when she felt her soft breathing, moments before she felt her lips. Slow. Soft. Gentle, and gone too soon. Clarke opened her eyes just enough to squint, and found Lexa’s face only inches away.

“Which plan?”

Lexa smiled.

“The one we agreed on when you got your cold.”

Clarke smiled back.

No more splitting up.

Chapter End Notes

I'm back! Christmas was busy, but hopefully updates will be more regular from now on. I hope no one thought the story was almost done, because there is more to come! I essentially planned the story around 3 'adventures', the first was Egypt and the second was Himalaya. So there is still one to go...
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

The massive positive feedback I got on the last chapter really boosted my motivation, and I was able to finish this chapter in about a quarter of the time I usually do! It's also twice as long as usual. There are a couple of stand-alone chapters before the next big adventure, but I think you guys will enjoy them. Come talk to me at geyranger.tumblr.com!

“At can’t be done, Lexa.”

Lexa stared hard at Clarke. Clarke was staring hard right back.

“It’s never been done before. I get that. That doesn’t mean it can’t be done. You’re just saying that because it’s hard to plan it with enough detail for you to be satisfied.”

“Lexa, I am saying that it can’t be done because it can’t be done! There is no humanly way possible, with or without magic, to accomplish this. It’s a lost cause.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do. I’ve looked at the schematics. I’ve looked at the planning approvals. I’ve checked the history books and the daily prophet archives. I’ve overheard every single goblin that has come in to Ollivander’s, trying to buy a wand illegally. It can’t be done.”

Lexa gritted her teeth together and looked away from Clarke. Her fingers were fiddling unconsciously with a quill, flicking ink drops across the empty bit of parchment she was supposed to be writing on.

“Gringotts really is that well protected, huh?”

Clarke seemed to deflate a little.

“I’m afraid so. Wherever we can steal it from, it won’t be from there.”

Lexa looked back at her.

“That’s probably exactly why they set us this mission. Give us an impossible task, watch us fail. We both know they don’t like us much.”

Clarke shrugged but didn’t contest it. The facts were hard to deny.

They, in this case, was Ollivander and Mrs. Wolfe, who, independently of each other, had once again given Lexa and Clarke the same mission. Their mentors, it seemed, had not been particularly impressed when they came back with the yeti hair. The reason was, first and foremost, there was no way of verifying the prize since yeti hairs for comparison were nigh on impossible to come by, and secondly, they were becoming suspicious of their rapid success in every mission they were sent on. Mrs. Wolfe, Lexa knew, was starting to think that Lexa was using illegal methods and means, specifically violence, blackmail, and fraud, to complete the missions. Lexa knew this
because the woman kept muttering it under her breath whenever Lexa came near her. Ollivander, on the other hand, seemed to just be of the belief that Clarke was getting way too cocky for her own good. Of that fact, he was not technically wrong, as Lexa liked to remind Clarke, but it was only a question of time until either or both of them realized their apprentices were not working alone.

The black market had been considerably more enthusiastic than either of their mentors when it came to the yeti hair. It wasn’t quite as good a price as what the scarabs might have fetched if they had managed to bring more out of the pyramid, seeing as the yeti is still an extant species, but a shady meeting under cover of darkness in the winding cobblestone corridors of Knockturn Alley had still given Clarke and Lexa a decent boost to their otherwise moderate income. Lexa had saved her part, but Clarke had immediately restocked on paint material and doubled the size of her private library. She had also insisted on taking Lexa on a tour of London and Diagon Alley in the summer sun, completed with a bouquet of flowers and a big old ice cream at Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour. To celebrate their success with the yeti, she said.

Now they were sitting in Clarke’s flat, which was where they had been for the past few days, trying to get a start on their new mission. They hadn’t made much headway. Clarke was sitting on the sofa, hugging her knees. Lexa was sitting across from her on the other side of the small table, on the floor, mirroring her position. The air was one of tired resignation.

It was a stupid mission. The fact that they had been given an impossible mission, just to make their lives difficult, could not be more obvious.

Their goal was a Flamel diamond. According to Clarke’s ‘A history of the Alchemic Arts,’ the Flamel diamond was one of the many fantastical, magical objects, along with the Philosopher’s Stone, produced by Nicholas Flamel during his long life. It was shrouded in mystery and enigma, rumoured to have mystical powers yet to be described by magical science. There were only three in existence that were confirmed to be the work of Flamel. Two were owned by fabulously wealthy families who refused to even comment on where they were keeping them. The last one was the property of the Ministry of Magic and was located in a high-security vault in Gringotts.

The frustrating thing was that there was no practical reason related to wandology that either Clarke or Lexa could think of why their mentor would even want the diamond. It was not suitable core material. It would be highly unwise to use as inlaid decoration, due to the undiscovered magical properties it possessed. Lexa hadn’t brought it up with Wolfe, but when Clarke mentioned it to Ollivander, she was told in no uncertain tones to mind her own business and not ask questions. Clarke had stomped home to where Lexa was waiting in her flat and ranted about what a ridiculous attitude that was to instill in an apprentice.

Yet the mission still stood, and this was what they had been contemplating for the last few days. Even to Lexa, notorious improvisational optimist, it seemed hopeless. She gave it one last half-hearted attempt.

“From the schematics alone it doesn’t seem that hard to get in, Clarke.”

Clarke snorted. “It’s not getting in that’s the problem. Plenty of people have gotten in undetected before. The problem is getting out. It would be incredibly difficult under normal circumstances, but we need to do it undetected, which is where the problems begin. There’s no use taking a diamond to Ollivander or Wolfe is the headline in the Prophet the next morning is going to be ‘precious diamond stolen from Gringotts.’ I’m sorry, Lexa.”

Lexa watched Clarke run a hand through her hair and get up to stretch. The summer sun had abandoned them since they had been given their new mission, and thick rain was falling heavily
outside. Lexa could hear the rumble of thunder through the open windows. Clarke walked over to the window to look out on the dark skies outside, her hands folded, her shoulders tense. Lexa got up and walked after her, letting her hand fall on Clarke’s shoulders. Clarke relaxed slightly, and Lexa started massaging her gently.

“We’ll find a way,” Lexa promised. “They can’t be the only Flamel diamonds in the world.”

Clarke huffed. “We’ll find a way to make Ollivander and Wolfe realise they are being asses.”

Lexa’s hands stilled, and she smiled into Clarke’s hair. “That, I cannot promise.”

Clarke leaned backward slightly, leaning the back of her head against Lexa’s forehead. Lexa felt the now familiar butterflies pool into her stomach as her hands felt to circle Clarke’s waist. There was no getting used to this feeling.

Clarke tilted her head so Lexa could see her face in profile, and Lexa could see that she was smiling. It took Lexa’s breath away. Clarke was still looking out of the window when she spoke again.

“You seem very sure we will find a way to do this. I would have given up immediately.”

“Please, Clarke. That would be an insult to the vision on which the Chimera Crew was founded.”

“Which is?”

“To be childishly stubborn, value dramatic irony, and to downright refuse the appropriate level of humility associated with being an apprentice.”

Clarke snorted. “I think you are refusing to give up just so that we will never leave this flat again. You are not normally this obtuse; you must be plotting something.”

Lexa grinned and tightened her hold around Clarke’s waist.

“I wish I was. I am afraid to say I am just generally obtuse.”

Clarke turned around, her arms coming up to rest on Lexa’s shoulders. Her fingers found a lock of Lexa’s hair, and Clarke’s eyes didn’t leave it as her hand gently combed through it.

“Is that so?”

Lexa nodded sombrely.

“Yes.”

The lock fell from Clarke’s fingers, and she looked at Lexa from inches away, eyes full of teasing and eagerness and confidence.

“No ulterior motive what so ever?”

Lexa was having a hard time thinking. Clarke was so close, grinning that small mischievous grin of hers. Lexa could see every individual eyelash and every shade of blue in her eyes which were currently crinkling with something indescribable.

“Well?”

Lexa had the distinct impression there was a question she was supposed to be answering.
“Yes?”

Clarke was coming ever closer. Lexa couldn’t look away from her lips, caving them with an almost animalistic intensity.

“Yes, what? Yes, no ulterior motive, or yes, you are up to something?”

“Who cares,” Lexa finally shrugged, and pulled Clarke in for the kiss.

The gloomy weather had left Trafalgar Square almost desolate of people. Traffic was as bad as any other London day, bearing witness to the fact not everyone had time to take a holiday. Though Lexa would hardly call agonising over where to find Flamel diamonds a holiday; she doubted anyone working nine to five put in half as much effort as she and Clarke did.

Right now they were making their way past the statue of the miserable looking Nelson and the National Gallery, heading in the direction of Great Russel Street. They were aiming for the British Museum; Clarke had declared that they had spent too long cooped up in the flat and that an excursion might help them think, and so they were taking the afternoon off. The rain was falling, but Lexa had a big umbrella in one hand and Clarke’s hand in the other, and the city of London at her feet. There had been worse days in her life.

The imposing facade of the British Museum loomed over the surrounding streets like a mountain. The weather had deterred most visiting tourists, it seemed, and Lexa and Clarke were let through the big front doors without having to wait.

“Alright then, nerd of mine, where are we headed first?”

Clarke huffed.

“Your disregard for historical artifacts really is shocking. This is one of the most famous museums in the world. I am not necessarily a nerd simply for enjoying it.”

“No, that is true. It is all the rest of your quirks, hobbies, interests and attributes and general personality which qualify you as a nerd.”

Clarke ignored her, but Lexa was fairly sure she was trying to conceal a grin.

“There’s the Egyptian wing, though ancient Egypt is obviously old news for us,” Clarke said, reading off her brochure. “There’s a new exhibition on Queen Victoria up on the upper floor, though, apparently they have got the crown jewels over from the Tower of London and everything. How does that sound?”

The brochure was titled ‘A Magical Guide to the British Museum,’ and was something they had picked up in Diagon Alley the previous day. Magical history was everywhere, apparently, though not on the official guide signs; you just needed to know where to look. Clarke was reading out loud from the guide as they wandered through the museum, vaguely heading for the upper floors. They passed fragments of the Temple of Athena, the Chinese ritual bronzes, and Easter Island statues. Clarke was watching the exhibition, taking in the historical sights and knowledge with passion. Lexa was watching Clarke, and while she learned a lot, not a single thing of it was about history. Instead she learned things like how Clarke’s eyes somehow got even bluer when she spotted something across the gallery she was about to drag Lexa over to have a look at, and that Clarke had no respect at all for ‘please do not touch’ signs. She learned that Clarke’s response to being found by security in places she was not meant to be, such as ten feet past the barrier and seconds away
from touching the sarcophagus of Sasobek, ignoring Lexa’s half-hearted scolding’s, was to take off at a run and hope they wouldn’t follow. She learned that both their bodies fit perfectly into an alcove under one of the main staircases, hands to their mouths to stop their giggling from reaching the security guards who were sprinting past their little hideout. She learned that Clarke’s kisses when she was breathless from running tasted even better.

The Queen Victoria Gallery was stunning, littered as it was with nineteenth-century artifacts, clothing, and antiques. Lexa even managed to tear her gaze away from Clarke to admire the exhibition as they strolled through the grand hall, and Clarke wandered down one side of the large room as Lexa went to the other. The few tourists who had made it to the museum seemed to be favouring the Egyptian and Greek exhibitions downstairs, and they had the gallery almost to themselves. They passed the clothes of Victoria and Prince Albert, including the dress the young queen had worn to her coronation. On the opposite side of the hall was furniture and dining sets retrieved from Buckingham Palace after her death. Right in the middle of one of the long walls was a large painting of Victoria herself. Lexa stopped in front of it, gazing up at the young face.

Clarke came to stand next to her, reaching for her hand. They were silent for a bit.

Lexa cleared her throat.

“How old was she when she became queen?”

“Just eighteen.”

Lexa looked at the portrait again, feeling something she couldn’t put her finger on.

“That’s a lot of responsibility for someone so young,” she said.

Clarke looked at her. Lexa looked at the painting.

“She bore it well, though. She championed reforms in welfare and labour rights, and led the UK to become, well, what it became.”

Lexa didn’t say anything.

“How old were you when you moved away from Aok?”

“Eighteen.”

Clarke hummed. “So you’ve been helping to pay for and raise the next generation of kids at Aok since you were eighteen.”

Lexa looked away from the young queen and met Clarke’s eyes.

Clarke smiled. “I’d say you’ve been bearing it pretty well too.”

Lexa smiled back. It was a fleeting moment, but it felt significant just the same.

Clarke looked back at the painting. “She had nine children.”

“Nine?” Lexa was horrified, and it must have been easy to see on her face because Clarke looked back at her and started to giggle.

“Seriously Clarke, nine? How does anyone even have nine children? How does your anatomy even allow for that without falling apart?”
Clarke laughed and shook her head, dragging Lexa away by the hand.

At the far end was the big case displaying the crown jewels. They were laid out in all their regality on a podium covered by a purple cloth, lit by spotlights mounted on the walls of the gallery. The podium was surrounded in a large clear glass structure and must have been fifteen feet across, and there were four armed security guards, positioned at a discreet distance at the four corners, facing the jewels. Clarke and Lexa grew a little quieter as the approached, feeling the gravitas of the items they were about to see.

Clarke used her free hand to open the guide again.

“The Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom are 141 historic ceremonial objects,” she read, “including the regalia and vestments worn by kings and queens of the country at their coronations, as well as processional and anointing objects, plate, and christening fonts. They are kept under close guard in the Tower of London under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain, but have been loaned to the British Museum on this one rare occasion.”

They were magnificent. Lexa was pretty sure there was more wealth gathered before her right now than she had ever seen before her in her life, even including the Egyptian catacombs. The various precious items glittered with gold, silver, and precious stones in every colour of the rainbow. There were so many ostentatious riches that Lexa didn’t even know where to begin to look.

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“The main feature of the crown jewels,” Clarke read as they slowly walked up to the display, “is St. Edward’s Crown, worn by the ruling monarchs of the British Empire at their coronation ceremonies since 1661.”

Lexa’s eyes fell to the centerpiece of the display, and sure enough, there was a large crown inlaid with gemstones. It looked heavy enough to break Lexa’s neck if she put it on.

“Another important crown is the crown of the Queen Mother, decorated with 2,200 precious stones including the Koh-i-Noor, one of the largest diamonds ever owned by Queen Victoria.”

Lexa could see it. It was hard to miss, to be honest. On a slightly smaller crown placed on the right side of St. Edward’s crown was a gigantic diamond in the center cross, almost three inches long. Clarke and Lexa stared at it for a very long moment. It was like an idea was hanging in the air, right in front of them, waiting for one of them to breathe it out loud.

“Clarke,” Lexa asked quietly, “what exactly are the magical qualities of a Flamel diamond?”

“There is some dispute,” Clarke murmured in reply, not taking her eyes off the diamond. “and it varies from diamond to diamond, that’s part of the reason they are so difficult to identify. One of them can influence the emotions of people who look at it while the two others can’t, for example. One of the others appears to be able to change colour seemingly randomly and crystallise everything it touches, but only some of the time. They are unstable that way. People have claimed all sorts of things they can do, but it’s hard to be sure.”

“So very subjective qualities, then. Hard to measure, or prove.”

Clarke nodded slowly. “The only thing everyone seems to agree on is that they are large and very impressive diamonds.”

Lexa lowered her own voice even more. “Can people make diamonds? With regular magic, I mean?”

Clarke shook her head. “Can’t even make much better fakes than muggles can. Nothing that would
stand up to close scrutiny, anyhow. Another reason the Flamel diamonds are so precious; they are
the only real diamonds that have ever been made with magic.”

Lexa’s gaze started to drift. Glass case, which was probably bullet proof. About ten CCTV
cameras in operation, all angled on the diamonds. The four guards, who presumably were there on
shifts around the clock. The museum itself was essentially a fortress, and built to be
unimpregnable, but was also very old.

One more thing.

“Is the ministry of magic in any way involved in running this place? Or is it all muggles?”

Clarke let out a slow breath.

“All muggles. At least on paper, the Ministry has no jurisdiction here.”

Maybe it could be done. Lexa was afraid to even think the thought out loud in her head, for fear
that the guards would somehow be able to hear her.

“Want to get out of here?”

Clarke was already pulling her towards the stairs.

“Absolutely.”

“This is madness,” Clarke said, scrunching up another piece of paper and lobbing it unsuccessFully
at the bin.

Lexa nodded appreciatively. She was sitting on the floor, legs straight out and back resting against
the wall beside the fireplace, hands folded contemplatively in her lap. “Stealing one of the most
famous diamonds in the world under the nose of the royal treasury and replace it with a fake.
Passing it off as an even more famous diamond, hoping that Ollivander and Wolfe won’t be able to
definitely tell that it isn’t what we say it is. Tell them we got it from a shady contact abroad, and
we can only keep it for a week. Sneak back into one of the best-loved museums in London and
place it back where we found it, without anyone in the whole world but the two of us realising it
was ever gone. Madness seems the best word for it, to be honest.”

Clarke stared at her.

“This is by far the dumbest thing we have ever considered doing.”

Lexa couldn’t argue that. “Probably. It’s also the first time we have stolen something belonging to
other people. Not counting stealing things from each other, that is. And it’s arguably an important
part of the cultural history of the United Kingdom.

At that, Clarke snorted. “Well, the UK stole it from Afghanistan, who stole it from Persia, who in
turn stole it from India, so I don’t really have moral inhibitions about it. Especially since we are
aiming to bring it back to them. I am more worried about the prospect of prison for life, which is
what will happen if we get caught by either the muggles, the ministry or the mentors.”

Lexa smiled. “True. We risked prison in Egypt too, though, so that isn’t a first for us.”

Clarke didn’t look convinced. “No one has ever stolen the Koh-i-Noor from the British before. It is
“No one has ever found Ruby scarabs before either. Or cut hairs from a living, breathing yeti. We are going to have to find out how good we are one way or another, Clarke; it might as well be this.”

Lexa smiled. Clarke’s face broke slowly into a beam. Then she reached for another piece of parchment to scribble on.

They had tidied Clarke’s flat from top to bottom before they started planning, but now it was filled to the brim again with books and parchment littered hazardously on every surface. They had filled the walls with large boards too, one for every element of their plan. ‘Creating a fake replacement diamond’ and ‘First break in’ was hanging above Lexa by the fireplace, while ‘pass off as real’ and ‘get it back from mentors’ were on the wall opposite. ‘Final break in’ was hanging on the window.

Lexa looked around, thinking that they had had such tunnel vision the last few days that they had barely had time to take in the full scope of what they were planning on doing.

“If we get caught we will have to have Octavia burn this flat to the ground. Every piece of evidence they need to condemn us is right here.”

Clarke nodded absently, finished writing on her parchment and blew gently on it for the ink to dry.

“You know,” she said, “they say the Koh-i-Noor is said to bring bad luck to any man who wears it. In all the time since Queen Victoria, it has only been worn by female members of the royal family.”

“Sounds like our kind of diamond,” Lexa replied. “How much is it worth, exactly?”

Clarke fixed her with a look, and Lexa rolled her eyes.

“I’m not suggesting we sell it, Clarke. It would be rather counterproductive to our plan if Ollivander or Wolfe realise the Koh-i-Noor is on the black market after we get it back from them. I am just curious.”

“They say it’s worth the wages of the entire planet for a whole week.”

Lexa whistled.

“Still,” Clarke continued, “I think it will only be the first break-in which will be really hard. We can make a fake diamond good enough to fool muggles, especially if they don’t expect it to be a fake, and once we have broken in once it should be easier to do it again. We might have to do some trial runs. As long as we can get the Koh-i-Noor out of the British Museum undetected, and it is enough to convince Ollivander and Wolfe, I think we should be ok.”

“Trial runs? Of a break in?”

“Yeah, scope out the guard rotation, test out protective spells, that sort of thing.”

“I am pretty sure every break in is a break in, Clarke. At least in the eyes of the law.”

Clarke shrugged, got up, and pinned her freshly written piece of parchment on the ‘first break in’ board which was hanging above where Lexa was sitting. It gave Lexa a wonderful look of Clarke’s bare legs, and she was literally sitting on her hands to avoid the temptation of reaching out to stroke them. Clarke took a step back and reached her hand out for Lexa. Lexa took it and let herself be pulled up from the floor and into Clarke’s waiting arms.
Clarke grinned, winding her arms around Lexa’s waist, her nose touching Lexa’s. Lexa grinned back. How long had it been since they had come back from Tibet? A week? Two? Five years? Still, there was no getting used to the feeling of Clarke in her arms. Lexa was in love, and the euphoria which came with it set her whole world on fire every time Clarke walked into a room. It was heavenly.

“What do you think?” Clarke said, nuzzling closer.

“About the plan? Ridiculous and impossible, but not beyond our skills.”

“No, I mean the note.”

Lexa tore her gaze away from Clarke’s lips and turned her head around to look at the parchment Clarke had pinned to the wall. She had put in on the ‘Challenges’ section of the ‘first break in’ board, and in capital letters, it read ‘STILL NOT AS HARD AS BREAKING INTO GRINGOTTS.’ Lexa turned back and whispered conspiratorially “I love it” against Clarke’s lips.

Lexa chased her, but Clarke kept leaning backwards teasingly. Lexa followed and followed, walking Clarke backwards until she hit the sofa. Clarke took a solid hold of Lexa’s shirt and pulled her with her as they both came crashing down onto the cushions, Lexa landing on top of Clarke.

Clarke beamed.

“Hello.”

Lexa smiled back.

“Hi.”

Their bodies touched in all the right places, and Lexa had trouble focusing on anything more than the halo of golden hair spread out on the cushion Clarke was lying on. Clarke made a motion as to lean up to capture Lexa’s lips, but this time it was Lexa’s turn to lean back. It took a lot of willpower, but Clarke’s petulant expression made it worth it. Lexa grinned and ran her hand up and down Clarke’s sides. The motion made Clarke’s eyes turn from insulted to glassy, and Lexa’s hands stilled.

It was surreal. It was magical. It was indescribable. The feeling of Clarke under her hands, under the weight of Lexa’s body, Clarke looking at her like she hung the moon. It took Lexa’s breath away. She swallowed hard. Clarke’s gaze fell to her lips, and she seemed to struggle with her breathing just as much as Lexa was. When their lips finally met again, it was like there were sparks of electricity in the air, making fleeting but powerful connections between them before their lips even touched.

It’s a strange thing, seeing a museum at night. The hallways, usually full of inquisitive minds, are hollow and empty, making every sound seem larger as it echoes against the old stones. The lights are dimmed to protect the revered artifacts from damaging UV radiation. The red lights of the CCTV cameras look like the angry eyes of wild animals as they flash in dark corners, hinting at the fact that even though you might think so, you are not alone. You are being watched.

People in museums during the day have a very particular way of moving. They drift here and there, go in whatever direction they see something interesting, with only a vague sense of purpose. From looking alone, one could think that no one in the world has more time than museum goers do.
That was not the case with the two figures which were now moving through the foyer of the British Museum. They were walking at a brisk pace, side by side, making their way through the room as their long shadows followed soundlessly behind. They were both dressed in dark, formfitting clothes, but if you look closely, you might notice a sort of glow emanating from the outfits. Hair tied back in plaits, small backpacks with rope and other equipment in it; there was little mistaking this for anything but a robbery.

The clothes had been Lexa’s idea. Clarke had originally suggested merely charming their clothes with an excess of magic, which tends to make muggle technology short-circuit, but Lexa had pointed out that if all the cameras from the entrance of the Museum to the Victoria Gallery cut out in a neat order, it wouldn’t take a genius to realise that the staff should check if everything was as it should be. And their fake diamond, nestled neatly in Lexa’s pocket, wouldn’t stand up to scrutiny by neither wizard nor muggle. Instead Lexa had suggested a spell she had read about in Clarke’s spellbook while Clarke worked on the Wiggenweld potion back in the mountains, a spell which, while not rendering objects invisible, instead made them highly reflective. It wasn’t foolproof, but as long as the room they were in was uniform and with the same colours it would take a lot of effort in spotting it on camera. And they were gambling that no one would have reason to look very closely.

When Clarke had realised that Lexa had solved their conundrum by using a spell she had read about, there had been no living with her for days.

The way to the Victoria Gallery wasn’t long, and they knew it well from the past few times they had been here at night. They had walked the exact route they now were taking so many times that it seemed like the museum recognised them, and was welcoming them back. As they jogged along long corridors as silently as they could, Lexa could feel the adrenaline coursing through her, heightening her senses, making her more alert. Her eyes flickered around, keeping track of every detail, looking for the unexpected, but she was grinning as well. It was something intoxicating about walking side by side with Clarke, about to do something monumental. It was a feeling Lexa couldn’t get enough of, ever since she first tasted it in Egypt what felt like ages ago. It was euphoric.

A quick glance over revealed that Clarke wasn’t exactly smiling, but watching their surroundings with eyes large and alive, filled with the same confidence and awe Lexa had admired and fallen for so many times before. It was better than smiling.

The Victoria Gallery was coming up, but instead of turning left from the corridor and go into it, they continued straight ahead. There was an alcove to the side of the hallway, on the opposite wall from where the entrance to the gallery was, about ten yards down the corridor. It gave them a nice view of the gallery through the entrance, while simultaneously hiding them. Lexa and Clarke crouched down in it.

Lexa silently took Clarke’s hand, gently turning it over so she could see her watch.

00.58.

Perfect.

The four security guards’ shift would end at 1 am exactly, but there was no new team coming to take over. The four guards who were supposed to be taking over tonight were actually in a pub in Camden, celebrating what they thought was a spontaneous night off given to them by their supervisor.

Clarke, Lexa had learned, was very good with confounding charms.
Of course, the four guards currently in the Gallery wouldn’t drop their guns and walk out the moment their shift was up. Clarke and Lexa stayed low, watching the clock tick its way past 1 am. There wasn’t a sound in the entire museum.

At ten past, they could finally hear footsteps coming out of the gallery, and a guard with his gun in a holster and a grumpy expression emerged. He walked at a brisk pace down the corridor, away from Clarke and Lexa, and disappeared around the corner. Protocol, they knew, stated that in the case of missing guards the current guards were to attempt to contact the missing one by the landline in the office, before contacting their supervisor. The phones of the missing guards were turned off and lay back in Clarke’s flat, and the offices were down by the reception. They would have at least twenty minutes before the guard would be back. Lexa silently cast a muffling charm on the doorway the guard had left through, just in case.

One down.

Next to her, Clarke bent down and opened up her backpack, extracting a peculiar item from it. It was a vase, expertly crafted to resemble the large Greek vases which were lining the corridor, standing on pedestals under the ornate arches. Lexa had made it herself. Clarke gave Lexa a look, before quietly getting up and tiptoeing down the corridor. About three-quarters of the way she carefully laid the vase down on the floor, sideways. Lexa got up as well and walked as silently as she could over to the entrance to the gallery. Clarke walked over to stand on the other side of the doorway, back against the wall. One more shared glance and Clarke lifted her wand and sent a silent spell towards the vase, jerking it into motion and making it roll along the floor, in the direction the first guard had disappeared. The sound of ceramics against stone floors cut through the silence of the corridor like a saw through bone.

The sound of muted voices drifted out from the gallery, and soon after another set of footsteps approached them. The guard walked out from the entrance at a quick pace, hurrying over to where the vase was still rolling on the floor with a worried expression. He carefully stopped it and put it upright on the floor, before giving a confused look at the other vases in the room, trying to work out from which pedestal the vase had fallen. Behind him, unseen, Clarke and Lexa slipped into the gallery.

Two down.

They immediately crouched behind the first exhibition of furniture, keeping out of view behind a tasteful nineteenth-century sofa. At the opposite end of the gallery was the crown jewels in their glass cage and the two remaining guards, both looking their way to see if either of their colleagues were coming back. Their slightly anxious footsteps were the only sound to be heard until the silence was shattered by the sound of one of their walkie-talkies.

“Sam, do you copy?”

One of the security guards got his walkie-talkie out from his belt.

“I copy. What was the sound?”

“One of the Greek vases from the wall display had fallen and was rolling around on the floor. Must have been destabilized when Frank went to get the phone or something. It doesn’t look damaged, but I’m no curator. Do we leave it where it is, or put it back? I can’t find which pedestal it is supposed to be on, though.”

Sam shared a resigned look with the only remaining guard before answering.
“Just stay put, I’ll come have a look at it.”

He put his walkie-talkie away and walked the length of the gallery before leaving through the entrance. He passed within five feet of where Clarke and Lexa were hiding but left the room without even turning around. Clarke laid a muffling charm on the doorway.

Three down.

The thing was, their plan was entirely reliant on not a single soul realizing there were intruders in the museum that night. That way, no one would have reason to suspect theft. If only that weren’t the case, they could have cursed the guards unconscious, hexed the surveillance equipment and just walked in. Instead, they needed to get as many guards away from the jewels as they could. And they’d done well; there was only one left. But there was no chance, both Lexa and Clarke knew, that he would leave the jewels completely unsupervised.

The thing with only being one guard, though, is that you can only look one way at a time.

Out of the corner of her eye, Lexa could see Clarke biting her lip. The next step was by far the riskiest part of their plan, but neither of them had managed to come up with a better idea. Lexa reached out and squeezed her hand reassuringly. Clarke squeezed back.

On the other side of the gallery, past the jewels and the guard, on the far wall, was a shelf with marble busts of the royal family flanked by magnificent curtains. Clarke raised her wand and aimed carefully. A strong gust of wind flew from it, crossed the gallery, and ruffled the curtains heavily.

The guard started. Understandably, Lexa thought; there were no open windows, no natural place wind could come from. The guard circled around the display and got out a torch, shining it at the curtains and trying to identify the source of the noise. Clarke sent another gust, ruffling the curtains once more.

The guard was hesitating and looked back towards the jewels multiple times. Then, with slow steps, he walked away from them, eyes trained on the curtains, turning his back on both Clarke and Lexa and the jewels.

This was it. Lexa got up and ran towards the jewels.

Her feet and shoes had muffling charms on them; her clothes made her invisible for the cameras. She had, according to plan, maximum twenty seconds before the guard would decide the ruffling wasn’t worth his time and turn around. Then there would be no hiding, and she would be in plain view. She slowed to a halt when she came to the glass case, her eyes falling on the diamond encased in its. It was so close. Five seconds. Six. She didn’t look up; keeping the guard busy was Clarke’s job. With a quick spell, she dissolved the glass in front of her, and with another, she loosened the decades-old pins keeping the diamond in place. Nine seconds. Ten seconds. As carefully as she could, and with the sound of her own heartbeat overpowering everything else, she placed the diamond carefully in her pocket and got the fake one out, placing it back in the empty hole in the old crown and bending the pins back in place. Fourteen seconds, fifteens seconds.

She looked up. The guard had reached the curtain and was lifting it up. There was nothing there, and Lexa watched him for a frozen second as he evidently gave up, shrugged, and started turning around.

Lexa had nowhere to hide.

Then something happened, and to Lexa, it seemed like it happened in slow motion. In the middle of the royal busts on the shelf by the curtains was a marble bust of Queen Victoria herself. Before
Lexa’s eyes, it seemed to shrink a little and grow fur. Then it sprouted four small legs, a flickering tail, and a small, snarling head. The guard hadn’t fully turned towards Lexa before the sound of loud hissing reached him, and he didn’t have time even to blink before the small, angry cat leaped at him.

The guard cried out, and the sound shook Lexa out of her frozen state. With a wave of her wand, she replaced the glass, got up, and bolted back towards where Clarke was waiting. The guard was shouting, trying to get the cat off him, but the little creature had its claws deep in the flesh on his hand. Lexa ran faster than she ever had before, jumped over the sofa where Clarke was hiding and landed with a muted thud on the floor half a second before security guard number two and three came bursting through the entrance to see what the ruckus was about. They sprinted down the gallery to help their colleague, and Lexa let Clarke pull her by the hand out from behind the sofa and through the open doorway behind them.

They threw themselves back in the alcove they had been hiding in before and collapsed against the wall. Lexa’s head was spinning, but she couldn’t help grinning like an idiot. Her breath was slowly turning back to normal. She let her head roll back to look at Clarke, who seemed to be in an equally messy state next to her.

“Nice work on the transfiguration.”

Clarke looked back at her and mirrored her stupid grin.

“With any luck, they’ll think it was the cat that tipped over the vase too.”

“That was some really quick thinking. I was so sure we were done for when the guard started turning.”

“Did you get it?”

From a pocket, Lexa pulled out the Koh I Noor and gave it a celebratory spin in the air. Clarke shook her head in awe, like she couldn’t believe it. Lexa carefully put it back in her pocket. From the gallery, they could still hear the sounds of the guards trying to subdue the furious cat.

“Shall we?”

“Let’s.”

Hand in hand, they ran. Down the corridor, through the dark museum. Down the main staircase and sneaking as quietly as they could with their beating hearts past the reception and the offices where the first security guard was still trying to get through on the phone. A quick spell on the main doors and they opened without a hitch and closed once Clarke and Lexa were out, quietly locking themselves behind them. Diamond in pocket and hand in hand, Clarke and Lexa ran victoriously out into the streets of London.
I stumbled across the clexa fanfic awards on tumblr and realised this little fic of mine got NOMINATED and I got so excited I basically wrote 5k words in one day. Thank you so much everyone who had a hand in that, and everyone who voted. It made my whole month, and I can't wait to share the rest of the story with you guys.

Also, don't get too excited about the rating going up just yet; it's for future chapters but I promise we'll get there ;)

As always, find me on tumblr as Geyranger!

The African Savannah is a place unlike anywhere else on earth. The plains go on and on as far as the eye can see, draped in golden grass, traversed by some of the most beautiful and exotic animals, both magical and non-magical, that exist on the planet. The sky, blue and beautiful now in the dry season, is somehow much larger than it is anywhere else. It’s the birthplace of humanity, where the very first of us ever picked up a rock and strapped it to a twig, and the first place someone else saw a devastating wildfire and wondered what it would take to tame it. It’s a place of history, belonging, and outstanding natural beauty.

It was not at all the worst place their adventures had taken them, Clarke thought to herself as she drove their land rover on its bumpy way across the savannah.

This mission was one of Lexa’s; Ollivander had become oddly reserved since the episode with the Koh I Noor, giving Clarke some more slack, but Mrs Wolfe was as relentless as ever.

Neither Clarke nor Lexa had even questioned the fact that they would be going to South Africa together, though. No more splitting up.

Clarke grinned to herself as her hands gripped the steering wheel harder and directed them around a particularly deep creek crossing the road without slowing down. Lexa was sitting in the passenger seat next to her, wearing khaki safari gear, complete with a tight-fitting beige shirt with the sleeves rolled up to her elbows, and a pair of aviators. She looked amazing. She was holding a map with one hand and holding onto the frame of the car with the other, keeping herself in place completely unfazed as Clarke sped across the savannah.

Their plan with the Koh I Noor had, perhaps predictably, not completely worked out. As Lexa said later, there had been too many variables for everything to go as planned; something had had to give. Clarke supposed she agreed with that, though it still made it a little sour that their diamond theft hadn’t been perfect. She comforted herself by pointing out that it wasn’t their diamond-thieving abilities there was something wrong with.

It was Ollivander, and his complete distrust of Clarke, which had made things complicated. He had been waiting for her the day she brought back the diamond, surrounded with a team of the best diamond experts in the world, including but not limited to the official magical precious artefacts inspectors of the magical authorities of France, Canada and Hong Kong. They were a group of grey old men, all with the same displeased expression and slim glasses as Ollivander. They all smelled
of mould and one had a wispy moustache which it took Clarke a bit of time to work out was actually his nose hair. Ollivander’s distrust of Clarke had been growing in the last months, undeservedly, as Clarke with Lexa’s clandestine help succeeded in mission after impossible mission, and now he was determined to call her bluff. Clarke had been standing in the corner of the shop for days, biting her tongue and bitterly regretting her and Lexa’s deception. Of course, it was the one time when she had decided to stoop to the level Ollivander thought she was already on that he decided to call in the troops.

The team of experts spent five whole days peering over the diamond, testing it in every way they could think of, trying to detect the magical properties which were the trademark of the Flamed diamonds.

Clarke’s skin, job, and dignity were saved by a very, very lucky coincidence. So lucky in fact, that Clarke had a hard time believing her own eyes when it happened. Because on the fifth day, when some of the grey and boring experts had already started to pack up, declaring with doomed inevitability that they could find no trace of magic on the diamond and Ollivander was watching Clarke like a hungry owl who had just spotted a blind mouse with a limp on the floor beneath him, the expert from Hong Kong found the impossible.

He found the magical properties they had been looking for.

The Koh I Noor, it turned out, was a Flamel diamond. The rumours surrounding it, such as that it would cause misfortune to any man who wore it, turned out not to be rumours at all but instead hints of the magical qualities it possessed. The team of experts flocked around it like flies to dung, and even Ollivander apparently managed to forget about his crusade against Clarke long enough to be fascinated by the discovery. Clarke had to school her features into one of slightly cocky assuredness, instead of struck-by-a-meteor levels of disbelief. That evening she had run back to her flat, barely managing to keep from shouting it at the top of her lungs, desperate to share the news with Lexa.

A week later, after letting Mrs Wolfe also have her time with the diamond, Clarke and Lexa had snuck back into the British Museum and placed the diamond back where they found it. They didn’t talk about it really, didn’t discuss the price a Flamel diamond would fetch on the black market, they just carefully and reverently placed it back on the crown with a sense of repaying their debt to the universe for being on their side.

Now Lexa shot her a look as they plunged through yet another hole in the ground, making the whole rover shake. Clarke controlled herself and lowered the speed a little.

“You know,” Lexa shouted over the wind and the roar of the engine, “we have been in mortal danger all over the globe. If I die in something as common as a car crash, I am going to come back and haunt you out of sheer disappointment.”

“You survived my cooking, Lexa. It will take more than a puny car crash to defeat you.”

Clarke, though eyes on the road, thought she could practically hear Lexa’s eye roll and half smile.

“How much farther is it?”

Lexa looked down at the map in her hand again. “We should be there any minute I think.” She looked back at the road and pointed at the road up ahead, where it took a sharp turn. “See, there’s the sign!”

Clarke looked where she was pointing, and sure enough, there was a large slab of rock cut into the
shape of Zimbabwe by the roadside. On it, in large white letters, it read ‘Welcome to Mosi-Ao- Tunya, home to the Victoria Falls.’ Clarke smiled and looked over at Lexa. Lexa grinned back.

They were of course not in Africa to look at waterfalls, though, as Lexa had pointed out, she wouldn’t put it past Wolfe to order her to steal a landscape feature. No, they had come all this way in quite another mission; Erumpent horn. An Erumpent is a huge beast which looks a lot like a rhinoceros, with a thick hide which can repel most spells and a single long horn. The horn famously contains a deadly fluid which cases whatever it is injected with to explode.

Trust Shikoba Wolfe to be mad enough to want to experiment with making new wands containing Erumpent horn.

This time it had taken Clarke and Lexa a considerable amount of debate to come up with a plan to get the prize, so much so that Clarke eventually had to give in to Lexa’s insistence that they were wasting time and should just go to sub-Saharan Africa to see what they would find, rather than sitting cooped up in the flat for even longer.

They felt fairly certain that they could kill an erumpent and carefully extract its horn. They had the tools and skills. They had sullenly looked at each other for a silent minute before agreeing that it was out of the question. The next option they came up with was to buy one on the black market, if necessary procuring something else rare to sell to raise funds, but, as Lexa had pointed out, that was essentially just paying someone else to kill an erumpent for them. It was hardly any better than their first idea.

And so they had gone to South Africa and spent a few days sitting in their hotel room in Cape Town in increasing frustration with intermittent breaks to explore the town. Clarke was reading through an encyclopaedia on sought-after magical artefacts, trying to find a hint, quietly cursing the author, the editor, the publisher and their mother for their incompetence in mentioning anything about a non-intrusive, non-illegal, non-morally grey way of procuring erumpent horns.

Lexa was leaving the research mostly to Clarke because she had, completely unexpectedly, started to take a liking to magi-zoology. They had visited the Cape Town Zoo on one of their breaks, just to do something different, and Clarke had been amazed to find that she had to drag Lexa away from each and every enclosure and sign to have any chance of making it through the zoo before closing time. Now, when they went back to their research, Clarke read about erumpent horns while Lexa was instead reading book after book on magical animals. Clare was leaving her mostly alone, worried that any disturbing might break her out of this new books and knowledge loving state. Clarke only watched as Lexa read one book after the other, only looking up to enthusiastically share something she had learnt about dragons or grindylows or merpeople. It made Clarke grin, and she couldn’t even put her finger on why. Clarke got so distracted watching Lexa, the way her loose hair fell over her shoulder, the way she would push her reading glasses back up only when they were in danger of falling off the tip of her nose, that Clarke was falling behind on actually researching the problem at hand. It was much more fascinating to know that she could reach out any time and brush locks of Lexa’s hair behind her ear, and Lexa wouldn’t even realise.

It wasn’t however until Lexa gave up on the magical beasts and started to read a muggle book on the fauna of Africa that she had an unexpected brainchild.

“Hey, Clarke?”

“Yeah?”

“You know elephants?”
“They are one of the animals in this world of which I am familiar, yes.”

Lexa had ignored her.

“They’re highly social, just like Erumpent are. Actually,” she said, scanning the page she had opened in front of her, “Erumpents have quite a few similarities with elephants when it comes to behaviour. They are matriarchal, matrilineal, and have really highly developed social relationships within the group. They even have been known to mourn their dead for a while, just like elephants do.”

“I don’t think we will be able to take an elephant tusk and convince Wolfe it’s an erumpent horn, Lexa.”

“No, that’s not what I am suggesting. I was just thinking…” She hesitated a little. “Do you know about elephant graveyards?”

Clarke carefully closed her book, eyes not leaving Lexa.

An elephant graveyard is, according to many unconfirmed observations, where the oldest elephants go when they know they are about to die. The rest of their group often come with them, covering the body in plant material, lingering around, lovingly caressing their dead leader, not moving on for days. There was even an occasion where researchers cut the tusks off a dead elephant at a graveyard and took them to their camp to study them, and the remaining elephants in the group raided the camp and brought the tusks back to the graveyard, reuniting them with the original body.

“Are you suggesting, Lexa, that Erumpents have graveyards too?”

Lexa shrugged, but Clarke could see she was biting her lip and guessed that she was downplaying it. “I am saying that I can see no reason why they shouldn’t have.”

Nothing of the sort was mentioned in any of their books, but as they discovered a few days later, scouting the savannah from above on their brooms, Lexa’s theory was one hundred percent correct. They had spent some time following different groups of erumpent, looking to see if any looked very old or ill or fragile, and in the end all they had to do was follow the group as they led them over one of the many uncharted and wild parts of the savannah into a shaded area behind some hills. Trying to disturb the mourning group as little as possible Clarke and Lexa had landed on the far side of the graveyard, found the most promising looking skull, and carefully extracted the horn before taking to their brooms again, heading back to Cape Town.

The whole thing took them less than three days.

There was nothing in Wolfe’s instructions about spending more time in Africa than necessary, of course. She had said nothing about going to museums and zoos, getting a taste of the culture and history which made South Africa unique, and she certainly hadn’t said anything about spontaneously renting a land rover and spending a few days driving north across the country and into Botswana and Zimbabwe, sleeping in sleeping bags under the open sky, heading for the Victoria Falls.

Clarke and Lexa had taken a bet about how many of the famous ‘Big Five’ animals they would see on their way when the owner of the car rental handed the keys to Clarke. Clarke had gone for three but Lexa, apparently high on her newfound love of wildlife, had gone all out and said five. Clarke was technically winning at the moment, which she liked to remind Lexa of every thirty minutes or so; they had taken multiple breaks on their trip, taking to the skies on their brooms and soaring to
the sky, and they had seen buffalos, leopards and rhinos and even elephants. That meant that they were still a lion sighting short of seeing all the big five. Lexa had gotten so excited about the elephants though that when they landed, Clarke had pushed her against the land rover and kissed her just to make her shut up about the behavioural ecology of African grazers.

It had worked like a charm.

Clarke had let the familiar butterflies pool into her stomach as she brushed Lexa’s stray locks out of her face. Lexa had been holding her tightly, but not so tight that Clarke couldn’t push closer still. Lexa’s body flush against her own, the heat of the savannah sun bearing down on them, skin covered in dust from the drive and just a little bit of sweat; it was enough to send Clarke’s head spinning.

They had been taking it slow so far, never getting much further than kisses and hugs. In the week and a bit since they came home from their yeti quest, things had been moving very fast; the British Museum, the diamond scam, the new mission to Africa, the erumpent graveyard, it all happened one right after the other and Clarke felt like she hadn’t had time to catch her breath yet. What was worse, she felt like she had barely had time to kiss Lexa properly, now that she was allowed to. Stolen kisses here and there, making out in Clarke’s flat or on the hood of a land rover; it was never enough. They were always racing, racing to find erumpent horns, racing to show off their prizes to Ollivander and Wolfe, racing to the Victoria Falls and on a quest for African wildlife. It felt like they were on a high, soaring towards the sky with no time to breathe or slow down, and Clarke felt like she was living like she never had before.

But, this all meant that they had not had the time to take it slow, to work out what they were, and at which pace their relationship could move. Relationship? Were they even in a relationship? They hadn’t talked about it, and Clarke felt the twinge of it in her stomach as she kissed Lexa against the truck. For now, they were flying high, high on life and each other. The time for talking would come eventually.

Clarke pushed herself harder against Lexa.

They rented a tent on the campsite next to the falls. It took over half an hour to convince Lexa that her tent was too conspicuous to risk a muggle accidentally walking into the wrong tent, and besides, the tents on the campsite weren’t all that bad. It was the sort of tent that came with several rooms, rugs on the floor and a real bed. It could be worse.

The falls were magnificent, of course. The sun was still high in the sky when they arrived, and Clarke and Lexa spent the remainder of the day exploring. They walked up and down the lengths of the falls. They went on a boat trip both upstream and downstream on the Zambezi river. Lexa talked Clarke into trying horseback riding. They stopped by the visitor’s centre, getting a crash course in the history of the falls by an enthusiastic guide. Clarke talked Lexa into trying rafting; Lexa was hesitant but warmed up to the thought considerably when Clarke showed up, complete with a bright orange, oversized life vest, and immediately fell into the river before she even managed to get into the boat. They both talked each other into and out of trying bungee jumping; Clarke was of the opinion that Lexa, being their token rugged explorer, should go first, but Lexa claimed that while she was plenty comfortable with adventure outdoors, she had had enough experience with flinging herself off cliffs to last her a lifetime. Eventually they even got back in the car and drove an inconspicuous distance away from the falls, where no one could see them surreptitiously taking off on their brooms and circling back towards the falls from a height too great for anyone on the ground to see them, admiring the roaring waterfall from above.
Evening found them sitting in the opening of their tent. They had propped themselves up on pillows and blankets on the floor and were watching the sunset across the river in front of them. The campsite was empty but for the two of them; the other occupants were off dining in restaurants or going on river cruises. There was even a wedding happening a little further down the river, but far enough away that no sound but the flow of the water through the grass on the riverside could reach Clarke and Lexa.

Clarke was leaning back against pillows, hands behind her head, watching the sun sink closer and closer to the horizon and feeling more relaxed than she had in what felt like weeks. Lexa was sitting next to her, cross-legged, reading out loud from a book about lions, now and then breaking off to try to philosophise about the likelihood of seeing a lion and winning the bet before they left to go back home in the morning. Clarke only interjected now and then to cheerfully inform her that there was no way in hell, grinning fondly at Lexa every time she shot her a glare.

Lexa eventually got lost in her book, growing quiet, and Clarke looked out over the landscape in front of them. There were acacia trees here and there on the other side of the river. Clarke thought maybe she could see the necks of a herd of giraffes slowly moving between them in the distance, but she couldn’t be sure. There was a pair of binoculars on the ground next to them, but Clarke didn’t feel it was worth it to go and get them. Instead, she just sat there, listening to the sound of the cicadas and the flow of the river as the light turned golden red and soft. Lexa read on. Clarke watched her fondly. Eventually, Lexa started to smile but didn’t look up.

“You are staring at me.”

Clarke schooled her features into a more teasing expression.

“That’s because I absolutely cannot believe that you, Lexa Wyvern, are reading a book instead of looking at what might possibly be the most beautiful sunset you will ever have the chance to see in your life.”

Lexa still didn’t look up, but her smile widened.

“It’s not like you are looking at it either.”

A lot of responses to this occurred to Clarke. I went to Hogwarts; I’ve seen better sunsets Lexa, or it’s not like it doesn’t happen literally every single day without fail, Lexa. Or even the sunset has got nothing on you, Lexa. She didn’t voice them, though. Instead, she just looked at Lexa some more, until she couldn’t take it any longer. She sat up properly, reached out to take Lexa’s book, closed it resolutely despite Lexa’s protests, and leant in to press her lips against Lexa’s.

Lexa seemed to forget about the lions and kissed her back without hesitation. Her hands came up to hug Clarke around her waist, and Clarke used it to lean back into the pillows, making Lexa follow and hover over her. Lexa kissed her slowly, languidly. Every kiss made Clarke want more, and she had to keep herself from whimpering every time Lexa’s lips left hers to change the angle or draw in a breath. Clarke couldn’t allow herself such a show of weakness; she wouldn’t hear the end of the teasing for days. Lexa was a phenomenal kisser, though; every time she made Clarke completely forget about the concept of time, space, or anything existing beyond what was happening right here, right now. Clarke couldn’t get enough.

Lexa’s finger slipped slowly down to where Clarke’s t-shirt had ridden up and set Clarke’s skin on fire in its wake. The fire seemed to spread until it covered every inch of Clarke’s skin, and everywhere Lexa touched her was like pouring petrol on a bonfire.

Clarke knew she wanted Lexa. She had known for a while. But she also had a sneaking voice in
her head, telling her she wanted to do this right. She didn’t want to rush it, didn’t want quick gratification in exchange for making their first time less meaningful. Lexa mattered to Clarke, and she wanted every part of this, them, to matter too. She didn’t want to take it slow, necessarily, especially when Lexa was kissing her like that but she wanted to do things in the right order. She wanted to take Lexa out for a meal, to the cinema, to the theatre. She wanted to show her that Clarke was committed. She wanted to introduce her to the rest of her friends, maybe even to her mother. It didn’t bother Clarke to take it slow if she would have the chance to do all that.

Well. It bothered her a little. Especially when Lexa’s long fingers drifted across her abdomen, dipping slightly under the hem of her shirt and leaving goosebumps everywhere they touched, and Clarke could hear how short of breath she was. When Lexa’s hand in Clarke’s hair turned into a fist and pulled as Lexa let more and more of her weight crush Clarke’s body into the pillows. When Lexa pulled away, eyes glassy and lips swollen, and Clarke wanted nothing more than to rip her clothes off and have her way with her.

Lexa let her eyes fall shut and leant her forehead on Clarke’s as their breathing started to slow down. Maybe they could just talk now, Clarke thought. Talk about it, them, what they were and what they were going to be in the future. Talk now, get that out of the way and then nothing on heaven or earth would stand in the way of Clarke pushing Lexa’s hands higher up under her shirt. Talk now, and then maybe even tell Lexa she loved her.

Because she did.

My god, did she.

She didn’t care about Ollivander anymore. She knew Lexa cared about Wolfe, wouldn’t want to give up her job, and it gave her a small stab to remember what Gustus had told Clarke back in Yadong; if it came to it, Lexa would choose her job. Clarke wasn’t going to make her choose, though. Maybe Clarke could move to Portland. Perhaps it was time for a change of scenery from London anyway, no matter how much Clarke liked it there. Maybe they could take some holiday together, and visit Aok. One way or another, they would make it work.

They just needed to talk.

“Lexa?”

Lexa’s eyes opened again, and she lifted her head slightly to look at Clarke. Clarke instantly lost her train of thought. Lexa was still a little out of breath, her locks falling to frame her face as she lay half on top of Clarke. Over her shoulder, Clarke could see the sun finally touching the horizon and the last light of the day shone on Lexa’s hair and made her look ethereal. And she was so, so close.

“Yeah?”

“I…” Where do you start? Lexa, would you like to go on a date with me? Not exactly what she meant, considering they had spent the last few days in only each other’s company. They were a little beyond dates at this point. Lexa, I want you to be my… girlfriend. True, but sounding way too stiff and formal. Lexa, what are we? Absolutely not. Lexa, I love you.

Maybe.

But Lexa was leaning ever so slowly closer, their noses touching, and the look in her eyes was making Clarke having a hard time thinking.
She tried again. “I…”

Damn it; she was supposed to be good at this. She wasn’t some inexperienced teenager, too shy to ask her crush to prom. She was Clarke Griffin, for heaven’s sake. But Lexa’s lips were barely touching hers, and her breath smelled like a forest after rain and Clarke’s favourite ice cream, and Clarke had to force herself to give Lexa a small push, making her pull back far enough for Clarke to see her face clearly.

Clarke cleared her throat, hoping it would clear her mind at the same time.

“She’s thinking…”

But then she heard something from the other side of the river. She broke off immediately, and the speed with which Lexa whipped her head around told Clare she had heard it too, all thoughts of their conversation forgotten. For a moment nothing happened, but then they heard it again; a roar, coming from the far bank. Lexa rolled off Clarke at lightning speed, her hands already reaching for the binoculars, but Clarke was faster, hands shooting out to grasp the binoculars and yank them away from Lexa. One hand keeping Lexa and her loud complaining away, Clarke used her other hand to raise the binoculars to her eyes.

On the other side of the river was a magnificent male lion, standing on a rock by the water, roaring majestically. From behind him, Clarke could see at least three, no, four lionesses in the distance, leaning their heads back and answering the call. Clarke groaned loudly and handed the binoculars to Lexa who was already yelling in victory.

Clarke couldn’t feel defeated for too long, though, as she watched Lexa get up to jump up and down with excitement. Lexa threw her hands up in the air, exclaimed a loud YES before grasping Clarke by both hands and pulling her up to join in on a spontaneous victory dance. The sun was setting, the lions were roaring, the river and the waterfall continue the same inevitable dance they had been doing for centuries, and Clarke was in love and happy and laughing.

They could talk some other time, she decided, as Lexa hugged her around the waist, and lifted her up to spin her around. The moment was too perfect to be interrupted.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

Huge thank you to DreamsAreMyWords who was the first to read this and gave it her coveted seal of approval; you are the best and I owe you my soul.

There was something especially beautiful with the way Clarke moved, Lexa figured. Something about the way the red silk of her dress would practically shimmer over her skin when she walked. The way her blonde hair piled on top of her head in an elegant bun for the occasion would bounce ever so slightly whenever she moved. The way her arms, decorated with glittering bracelets and rings would delicately hold on to her handbag, or gracefully take hold of Lexa’s hand to pull her somewhere. The way her lips, deep red lipstick and all, would smile and take another sip of the drink in her hand.

It was mesmerising to watch.

They were in Hong Kong. Specifically, they were in the American Embassy in Hong Kong, attending a party; the Ambassador was approaching retirement age, and in three short months he would be handing over the responsibilities to his son. Highly questionable principles of transfer of power, Lexa thought, but apparently the political elite of South East Asia had found it acceptable enough to attend so that they could meet, impress, or be impressed by the new man to see about American involvement in the territory of Hong Kong, and therefore by extension, China. It was a night to fly high and make an impression or to stay low and gauge out the new political player on the scene. It was a night where no one had arrived without an agenda.

Lexa had no idea how Clarke had managed to swing them the invitation, but she suspected creative use of confounding charms were involved.

There were chandeliers, beautiful dresses, and champagne all around them, but Lexa had a hard time taking her eyes off Clarke. She strode through the hall like she owned the place, smiling at some guests, making polite small talk with others, turning heads wherever she went. Lexa was glad Clarke kept a firm hand around her waist at all times, or she might have walked over to tell them to keep their eyes to themselves. That would hardly have made their infiltration any easier.

The ambassador was very fond of his son, that much was obvious; no expenses had been spared on the party, launching Mr Ambassador Jr.’s career with as much pomp and circumstance as any leader of state had ever had. The Ambassador himself was at the other end of the hall from Clarke and Lexa, shaking hands with various foreign dignitaries and introducing them to his son. There was an entourage of family members and other members of the American and Chinese political elite around them, being waited upon by bartenders and servers, all smiling their politically perfect smiles at the approved photographers who were present.

Lexa had had to talk Clarke out of going to meet him, on the basis that the assumption he would just smile and pretend like he knew who they were and that they were supposed to be there was not a good enough reason to endanger the mission, however funny it might be.

Lexa turned away from the congregation at the end of the room and followed as Clarke led them up the stairs. Even the way Clarke walked up the stairs was beautiful. The way the slit in her dress
opened to revealed a naked calf underneath, tanned from their short stay in Africa only a few days ago, perfectly complementing the red lace of her shoe wrapping around her ankle. Lexa was having a hard time remembering why they had come to Hong Kong in the first place, let alone why they were gatecrashing a party at the embassy.

They spent the evening munching on the fancy snacks which staff were carrying around on large trays, sipping champagne. Clarke was watching the party beneath them, clutching her delicate red handbag and paying particularly close attention to the Ambassador and his son’s every move. Lexa was watching Clarke. The way elegant strands of her hair came down to frame her face. The way her eyelashes, heavy with makeup, fluttered, her pupils dilated from the low light in the room. The way her dress dipped in the front to form a cleavage that was to die for.

The way her hand tightened around Lexa’s waist when the Ambassador excused himself from the Hall.

The way her hand fell from Lexa’s waist to instead delicately take her hand. The way she walked with purposeful footsteps to the end of the room, pulling Lexa along with her, opening a locked door with a silent spell and slipping inside it. The way she had memorised their previously agreed-upon route to the ambassador’s private office, and followed it silently, Lexa on her heels. The way she lifted Lexa’s chin with a gentle finger to kiss her, before opening the door and walking confidently inside.

The eyes of the Ambassador grew large when they walked in. He was sitting behind his desk, looking through some papers in a suitcase, two large bodyguards standing behind his chair. The bodyguards had already taken two steps towards Clarke and Lexa but hesitated when they weren’t given any specific instructions from the ambassador. Terrible bodyguards, Lexa decided. The ambassador should definitely fire them, though it made her and Clarke’s mission easier.

Clarke smiled a charming smile. “Hello, Mr Ambassador.”

Clarke was beautiful. She was beautiful when her smile turned ever so slightly poisonous. She was beautiful as she in calm and collected tones explained to the ambassador that they had come for a particular item in his possession. An item of only moderate economic importance, which he surely wouldn’t miss.

Lexa wandered around the room as Clarke spoke. There was a window on the wall to their left and a fireplace to their right. Behind the ambassador’s chair were two doors, one of which the blueprints back in their hotel room had informed them led to his living quarters. The other led to a corridor, but Lexa knew it was a door the ambassador had never used in all his years in office.

Lexa had done a lot of the preparatory work for this night. She had checked archive after archive until she found old records of the ambassador’s earlier days as a trophy hunter. She and Clarke had both been at the National Library where they had gotten hold of the blueprints to the embassy one quiet evening after closing hours. She had taken the sensitive photographs herself, the ones which were now in Clarke’s handbag. So it felt like a privilege, standing back and watching Clarke flawlessly execute this final phase of their plan.

She was just so goddamn beautiful. Lexa couldn’t get over it, couldn’t catch her breath. Clarke was beautiful as she indulged the ambassador and his tiresome tirade about how he was an important man to be reckoned with. About how two sweet girls such as themselves must surely have gotten lost at the party, and could not be trying to do what it seemed like they were doing. About how he was a strong man, who did not appreciate threats. Clarke was beautiful as she smiled sweetly, reached into her handbag and delicately pulled out the photographs. Beautiful as she elegantly placed them on the desk in front of the ambassador, and took a few steps back to stand side by side.
with Lexa as she finished her small walk around the room. Beautiful as she watched the ambassador pull the photographs closer, examining them.

The door at the end of the room led to a corridor, Lexa knew, and the corridor led to an inconspicuous underground passage. The passage was one that many ambassadors in the past had used to visit their mistresses. The current ambassador might never have used the tunnel, but his son had, and photographic evidence of what he had gotten up to on the other side was currently spread out on the ambassadors’ desk.

The ambassador was after all very fond of his son.

He paled as he flitted through the photographs. His mouth opened, but words had abandoned him. A more hot–headed man might have done something ill-conceived at this point, Lexa mused as she watched the colour drain from his face, like ordering his bodyguards to seize them. Not that it would have taken much effort on Lexa’s part to make the two baboons drop unconscious, but she was hoping to avoid it; it seemed particularly despicable to use magic to steal from muggles, and it was the sort of thing which could quickly catch the eye of the Ministry of Magic. But all their research had implied that the ambassador was a cautious man, who knew that silence could be bought, and it seemed to be the right impression as the man in question gulped and looked up to meet their eyes. He was proving to be a far more cautious man than his son had been.

“What’s your price?”

There. No reason to use magic when a little good, old-fashioned blackmail did the trick.

Their price was nothing major, or so it would seem to the ambassador. A hunting trophy currently stuffed away in the basement, obtained some thirty years ago on Borneo, in the form of what the ambassador had always thought to be a silver monkey. It wasn’t a silver monkey, of course. It was a demiguise, notorious for its precognitive sight and ability to turn invisible, but the ambassador didn’t know that. It looked a little like a cross between an orangutan and a sloth, with beautiful white fur, and was a right nightmare to catch.

Especially for apprentice wandmakers who just needed a few strands of hair each.

Clarke and Lexa had never been able to work out just how the ambassador had been able to shoot it in the first place. He had either surprised it by doing something spectacularly unexpected or, which Lexa thought was probably more likely, he had found a wounded specimen which couldn’t get away. It didn’t matter, though, as Clarke calmly explained the price of their silence to the ambassador.

The ambassador didn’t question it. He had been on the political scene too long to be fazed by motivations he didn’t understand, when a chance to achieve his own goals were within grasp. And so he snapped his fingers to one of the bodyguards, who left and returned with the taxidermied animal. Clarke kept smiling sweetly at the man as Lexa stepped forwards and carefully extracted ten or so strands of silver hair. The hairs went into Clarke’s handbag. The photographs stayed on the desk.

Lexa led the way out the room and was holding the door open for Clarke when the ambassador spoke again.

“How can you assure me these are the only copies?”

Clarke turned back, and even while only seeing the back of her head Lexa could imagine exactly what sort of expression Clarke was giving the ambassador. It was the same expression she had
worn as she thanked Lexa for the aspen twigs before disapparating back in Germany what felt like lifetimes ago. Funny how that seemed like a fond memory now.

“I am afraid, Ambassador, that you will just have to trust us.”

Then she turned around and took Lexa by the hand as they hurried down the corridor and tried not to laugh.

The rush of victory was coursing through Clarke’s head.

They had apparated out of Hong Kong before the henchmen the ambassador no doubt had sent caught up with them. The only thing Clarke and Lexa left behind them in the whole city was probably Clarke’s heels, which she had torn off and thrown in a bin as they ran hand in hand down the stairs from the embassy. Let them ponder over that one for a while.

The mission had been so easy. It only took them two days, total. Clarke didn’t know what had gotten into Ollivander; maybe he had run out of difficult tasks to give her. Maybe he was just trying to get her out of his shop as much as possible because he couldn’t stand her and her success. Either way, Clarke counted it as a win. And Lexa had been given the same mission too, so it was a double win. It was almost getting ludicrous, how well this was working out.

They had gone straight back to London, apparating into the silent alley behind the building where Clarke’s flat was. Clarke’s heart was beating, and she couldn’t hear, couldn’t see, could only feel as she immediately pushed Lexa against the sturdy brick wall, seeking out her lips.

She just tasted so goddamn good. She was still wearing her dress from the party and she had been giving Clarke that look all evening and Lexa’s phenomenal plan had just earnt them another milestone against their mentors and Clarke felt like she might explode if she couldn’t wrap her arms around Lexa’s body, letting her hands roam up and down her bare back right now. And so that was exactly what she did.

Lexa moaned into her lips, and Clarke felt like her ears might have caught fire.

They were both breathing heavily when they separated, and Lexa smiled that special smile of hers, the one Clarke loved, the one which started in her eyes and spread across her face and made Clarke feel like the sun was coming up. Lexa took her by the hand and tugged her around the building, heading for the front door.

Talk first, Clarke reminded herself as she breathlessly struggled to make the key fit in the front door to the building. Talk first. Ask to take her to a restaurant or something tomorrow. Maybe a breakfast date. Do it properly. Lexa stopped halfway up the stairs to kiss her, and it was getting hard for Clarke to keep focus. Talk first. Tell her the truth. Tell her what she means to you. Tell her you’ve never met anyone like her before, that no one has ever made you feel the way she does. Tell her no one has ever understood you like she does. Tell her that you don’t expect or want her to risk her job, but that you are happy to risk yours. Talk to her.

Yes. Clarke was going to talk to her. She couldn’t contain her grin at the thought. She was just going to push Lexa against the door to her flat quickly, and kiss her with passion for a second or two first, hand fumbling for the door handle, and then they would talk. Clarke could feel Lexa smile into their kiss as she took over for Clarke, hand finding the door handle with ease and letting them half-fall into the flat.
Something was wrong.

It took a second to register. Simple things, such as that the lights were on in the living room. That the smell was faintly different than it should be because the flowers Lexa had brought her after South Africa were still in a vase on the table, but the flat didn’t smell like roses. Then she noticed the bigger things. The shadows on the floor which weren’t cast by either Clarke or Lexa. The silence, which somehow was deafening rather than comfortable. The way Lexa, who had faster reflexes than Clarke, protectively tightened her hold on Clarke for a split second before letting her hands fall and stepping away.

Ollivander was standing in the middle of Clarke’s living room, watching them with a cold expression. Next to him stood an old woman Clarke had never seen before, but her icy stare fixated on Lexa made her identity easy to guess.

Dread. Cold air started to cling to her where Lexa’s arms had been a second ago. Clarke could feel the rush in her heart, the fire in her veins beginning to freeze up. It started in her fingers as they went numb, and only took a few seconds to travel through her entire body and reach her heart, leaving only frozen bones and dead tissue in its wake. Her brain, soaring with energy and thoughts just moments before, had gone completely silent. Clarke couldn’t breathe, couldn’t blink. Time stood still. She could only stare at Ollivander.

For a few seconds, no one spoke. Clarke watched Ollivander, Ollivander watched Clarke. Wolfe watched Lexa, and though Clarke could only vaguely see Lexa out of the corner of her eyes, she was sure she was watching Wolfe.

“Do you”, Ollivander said, with a voice as quiet and frosty as his expression, “care to explain yourself?”

Clarke tried to form a coherent sentence but didn’t know where to start. A bizarre part of her brain, which seemed to be watching the scene happening as if from outside of a window, idly noted that Ollivander didn’t seem triumphant, just frosty. She had expected him, if he ever caught them, to be triumphant that he had found her out. Defeated her. Had due reason to fire her, at long last. But instead, he just looked cold. Not exactly disappointed, not exactly mad. Just cold.

The woman, Wolfe, was shaking her head as Clarke failed to answer Ollivander. Where Ollivander looked cold, she looked hateful.

“I had hopes for you, Lexa. You had more potential than any apprentice I have ever had. And you throw it all out the window, like a child. For what? Her? Your own lack of discipline?” She practically spat the last word, sounding revolted. “You are nothing. You will amount to nothing.”

Clarke glanced sideways at Lexa. She looked shocked, her mouth hanging open, but at Wolfe’s words Clarke could see her face, usually so stoic and guarded, the face Clarke had studied and loved, fall. Lexa winced, ever so slightly. The hurt on her face, invisible to most people in the world, was as plain as day.

Clarke’s heart broke.

Clarke had known how importantly Lexa took her apprenticeship. Had known how much she treasured it, guarded it. She had known all the reasons why it mattered to her, had known how much pride Lexa took in excelling at it. And had Clarke cared? No. She had let the girl she loved walk headlong into risking it all. All for Clarke. She had been happy, grateful even, that Lexa was risking everything for her. Clarke had been so busy thinking about her own score with Ollivander that she had let Lexa throw away a life she loved dearly.
This was Clarke’s fault.

Clarke’s jaw started shaking, her eyes filling with tears. Don’t cry, she told herself. Don’t you dare cry. This is your fault. This is your responsibility. Fix this.

And she realised she had an inkling about how. In the middle of the shock, the angst, the tears almost spilling over and desperately trying to fight them down, she had a thought about how to fix it. She hated it, but with a strength she didn’t know she had, she decided she had been selfish around Lexa for long enough.

She allowed herself one last look at Lexa. A long, lingering look. Lexa’s eyes were still staring in shock. Her beautiful hair was falling down from the ornate hairdo she had been wearing it in, flowing down her shoulders, framing her face and making the hurt there stand out even more. Clarke loved that face. She never wanted to see it trying to hold in this much pain ever again.

Clarke took a shaky breath and clenched her jaw. Then she hid her trembling fingers behind her back. She could be strong. She owed Lexa that much.

She faced Ollivander, faking casualness as best she could as her shattered heart barely kept beating.

“This is nothing. We ran into each other in Bangkok tonight. We had drinks; one thing led to the other.” Clarke forced herself to shrug. “It doesn’t mean anything.”

Ollivander watched her silently, his frosty expression unchanged.

“I believe I expressly forbade you to associate with this girl. I made it completely clear that your job was on the line.”

“With all due respect, Sir,” Clarke couldn’t remember the last time she had called Ollivander sir, “you forbade me to involve her in any way on the missions I was sent on. And I haven’t; I had already made a plan to procured the hairs when I saw her tonight. Meeting her was coincidental.” Clarke could tell he wasn’t convinced. Well. Time to prove to him she was as awful as he thought she was. “This was just a bit of quick fun. Why else would I keep her around?” Clarke nodded in Lexa’s direction.

Clarke chanced a look at Lexa. She looked straight back at Clarke, and her face was guarded again. But Clarke knew that face. She knew the nuances, knew what to look for, and Clarke’s heart sank in her stomach as self-loathing flared in her chest; Lexa looked absolutely devastated. It was in the way her jaw set, in the faint tremble of her lips. In the way she swallowed, in the way her eyes looked like they might close at any second. Lexa always closed her eyes when she was feeling something very strongly, and right now it looked like she was fighting to keep them open.

Surely, she must know it was all a lie. She must know how much Clarke cared about her. The hurt, it had to be because of what Clarke had done, of what Clarke had let Lexa risk on her behalf. She had to set it straight. I’m trying to help, Lexa, Clarke desperately wanted to shout, I am trying to make it right.

Help me.

She turned back to Ollivander. “So, I haven’t actually broken your instructions,” she continued from where she had left off, eyes not betraying the storm within. “I was just having some fun.”

Ollivander didn’t reply, just maintained his frosty stare. After a second or two, Wolfe gestured to Lexa.
“You. Is this true?”

Lexa was the only person in the room who hadn’t spoken yet. And looking at her now, Clarke knew she wasn’t about to, either. After a few moments, finally looking away from Clarke and meeting Wolfe’s eyes, she nodded.

Wolfe huffed. “This is still unacceptable. You had orders.”

Lexa still didn’t say anything, and Clarke got the impression that this was what it must be like most of the time when Lexa was given reprimands by Wolfe. Accepting silence. Clarke recognised it from the many times she had been yelled at by Ollivander. It was what apprentices did. She still felt anger flare up inside her at watching it happen to Lexa. White-hot, flaring rage, fueling her when her broken and withered heart failed. For a moment, it almost quenched the self-loathing which was overtaking her. She tried to fight it down, desperately trying to keep up the charade of not caring.

Eventually, Ollivander spoke again. His voice was calculated, almost mechanical.

“As you no doubt have realised, Madame Wolfe and I set this up. We have been suspecting for some time that the two of you are cooperating, and when Madame Wolfe contacted me a week ago, we decided to send you on this mission with the aim of finding out for sure. Are you trying to tell me that our suspicions were unfounded, even as we are all standing here in this room together?”

Clarke realised with a start what Ollivander was doing. He was, subconsciously or not, giving Clarke a chance. If he wanted to fire her, he had plenty of reason to already. But he hadn’t fired her. Instead, he was grasping at straws, almost like he wanted her to convince him to let her stay.

Ollivander can’t have been hating her as much as Clarke thought. The realisation would have shaken her world an hour ago, but now it had nothing on the rage of emotions she was already trying to keep inside.

“Yes Sir. It’s not exactly unlikely that we ran into each other if you intentionally sent us to the same place.”

Wolfe was the one to answer her, condescending loathing in every word.

“You were sent for the same item, not to the same place. This is still highly suspicious. And from what Mr Ollivander tells me, the Flamel diamonds you brought back last week appears to share both their magical properties and the fact that they were undiscovered. Are you trying to tell me that those were not the same diamond?”

Clarke put on her bravest face and pretended to grimace.

“Lexa stole it from my flat.”

That, oddly, seemed to placate Wolfe a little. She looked over at Lexa again, who nodded minutely. Maybe Wolfe approved of stealing, as long as it was from Clarke. It made their story vaguely more believable, Clarke supposed. No emotional attachment. Just opportunity and benefits.

Wolfe continued. “And the demiguise hairs tonight?”

Clarke wiped all emotions from her face. “I was headed to Singapore to start tracking them, but I came across Lexa while I was resupplying in Bangkok. I figured she might be on the same mission as I was, so I followed her. When I realised she had already got the hairs, I figured, hey,” another fake shrug, “if I get close enough maybe I can steal them. That’s how we ended up here.”
Wolfe didn’t hex her on the spot, which Clarke took to mean that maybe she was buying it. The old woman turned back to Lexa.

“If you are lying…”

Lexa, at last, swallowed imperceptibly, squared her shoulders, and met Wolfe’s gaze.

“We’re not. You taught me well; people are there to be used when you need them and to be thrown away when you don’t. I heeded your instructions; I never involved her in my plans. But she did occasionally have her uses, so I figured, why not use her?”

Clarke knew she was lying. Rationally, logically, Clarke knew that not a word coming out of Lexa’s mouth was true. But still, hearing it said in that voice, the voice which had laughed with Clarke at their own stupidity in Egypt, which had sat with Clarke in a tent in the Himalayas and promised that they wouldn’t split up again, was worse than she would ever have anticipated. It drove a wedge of ice in between Clarke’s ribs, spreading frostbite from the centre of her chest.

Frost and pain. It was something about the way Lexa looked too, the way she held herself, which reminded Clarke about who Lexa had seemed like in the beginning, long before Egypt and Yadong and friendship and love. It was a Lexa Clarke had feared, a Lexa whose cold and calculating face had been terrifying to look at.

Lexa, with no way of knowing what her words were doing to Clarke, kept going.

“You value resourcefulness, Madame Wolfe. I was merely using the resources available to me. She might not be much of a competition, but she has occasionally been useful.” Lexa looked back at Clarke briefly, and Clarke could see only a hard metal wall in her eyes. “And gullible. Easy enough to trick into helping, both consciously and not.”

Wait.

What?

Lexa didn’t look like the same woman anymore. Her words felt like swords, stabbing Clarke and cutting through her vital organs one by one. Clarke’s rational mind shouted for Clarke to take a step back and make sense of the situation, but the larger, louder part of her mind, the one who had kissed Lexa against the brick wall like her life depended on it, screamed in pain.

Wolfe looked like she had heard enough, one way or another. She stalked past Clarke, her chin raised and not sparing Clarke as much as a look, simply sneering ‘come’ to Lexa. Clarke had no idea if she had believed them or not, no idea what her plans were for Lexa. Lexa turned to follow Wolfe. Clarke desperately tried to catch her eye, to get some inkling of where they were, if everything was ok. If anything was ok. Lexa met her eyes for a fraction of a second, but in them, Clarke could see nothing. No emotions, no silent communication, no thoughts. It was as if Clarke had never known her. Then the second was up, and Lexa turned to follow her mentor out of the flat.

Before she could leave and walk out of Clarke’s flat and life, Ollivander spoke again.

“One more thing, Miss Wyvern.”

Lexa turned around, the same emotionless expression on her face.

For the first time that night, Ollivander looked away from Clarke, and the silent rage Clarke had been searching for in his face finally surfaced as he looked at Lexa.
“If you ever set foot in London again, I will know about it. And I will see to it that you never again work in the wand business.”

Lexa’s expression never changed. She simply nodded once and turned around to follow Wolfe. Clarke’s eyes didn’t leave her back until she was out of view.

Then she was gone.

Clarke knew she had to turn back around and face Ollivander. Knew she would have to spend the rest of the evening lying through her teeth about the past few months, telling Ollivander Lexa was no one other than a competition, and a despicable woman. If Clarke wanted to have any sort of future, she knew she was going to have to play up to Ollivander’s dislike of Wolfe, pitting Lexa as her fiercest enemy and rant about how awful they both were. She could do it, she knew. She knew how to manipulate people, how to lie. It would be awhile, but Ollivander would forgive her. Or if not forgive, then at least pretend to forget about tonight. Clarke could do it.

But as Lexa’s receding figure disappeared from view, Clarke couldn’t tear her eyes from the empty doorway, feeling as if her heart had left with Lexa.

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Lexa was staring straight ahead, unseeing.

She was back in Wolfe’s shop in Portland, sitting on a box. Wolfe had disappeared into the back of the shop as soon as they came through the door, muttering angrily, and Lexa had carefully sat down on the box.

A moment longer, and she was pretty sure her legs would have given out.

Lexa was in shock. The events of the evening swam together in her mind until she could hardly tell which order things had happened in. Clarke, kissing her. Clarke, letting her fingers rake up and down Lexa’s back. Clarke, sipping champagne. Clarke, pushing her against the door to her flat. Clarke, talking sweetly to the ambassador.

Clarke, staring Ollivander in the face and swearing Lexa meant nothing to her.

Lexa had been working solely on autopilot since then. Her hands were shaking, even as she clamped them together in her lap, trying to make them stop. Her heart was beating strongly but erratically, trying to keep it together and sustain the rest of her body.

Lexa didn’t know what to think. She had thought… Well, she had thought a lot of things. A lot of meaningful things. But Clarke… Clarke wasn’t her girlfriend. She wasn’t her lover. If any of the things she had said tonight was even a little bit true, then Clarke wasn’t even her friend.

She was just everything Lexa had ever wanted.

Lexa’s jaw was shaking too. She hadn’t even realised. Her eyes stung. It was late, her brain tried to tell her, and she had visited three continents tonight. Midnight in Bangkok, early evening in London, midday in Portland; the very sunlight coming in through the windows in the wand shop felt like a violation of nature’s laws. Lexa was tired, jetlagged, and probably hungry too. She was still wearing her dress from the party, and she was cold.

And she might have lost the love of her life forever.

It was the look in Clarke’s eyes as she spoke to Ollivander. Clarke had been lying. Lexa knew that.
Lying about them not working together. But the way she said it made Lexa doubt everything she had assumed, every meaning she had put into the time they had had. Maybe it hadn’t meant anything to Clarke, or at least not as much as it had meant to Lexa. Hadn’t they agreed, long ago, to work together until it became too risky? They had certainly crossed that threshold a while ago. In Lexa’s mind a lot had changed since then, but maybe it hadn’t for Clarke. The places they’d gone, the things they’d seen. It had meant the world to Lexa; it was a long shot, she supposed, that it could have meant just as much to Clarke.

Lexa bit her jaw together until it hurt. Her heart was beating hard, trying to keep the cold at bay.

She didn’t feel like herself, and she hated it. She felt so weak. And Clarke, Clarke had made her feel so strong. And then she had taken it away. Lexa let her head tip back, her eyes closing, trying to recall how it what it had felt like. Travelling the world with Clarke. Breaking into pyramids, chasing yetis, blackmailing ambassadors. In love with the world, in love with her job, in love with every cell in Clarke’s body. That love had made her feel invincible. That same love still coursed through her, but now it was torturing her like molten metal burning through her veins, being fueled by her own beating heart.

Wolfe came back through the door she had disappeared through earlier. Her expression was still grim, even grimmer than it usually was. Lexa had no idea what Wolfe had in store for her, no idea if she still had a job, no idea if Wolfe would simply murder her for her failures and move on.

Wolfe stopped a few feet in front of her, looking down at Lexa. Lexa figured she probably mistook Lexa waiting on the box as a sign of pliancy, awaiting Wolfe’s judgement, rather than the shock and hurt it really was.

“Get up.”

Lexa got to her feet. The need to obey Wolfe was so deeply engraved in her that even her shaky and useless legs could pull themselves together enough to carry her weight.

Wolfe just watched her for a long minute. She seemed to be making up her mind about Lexa, and Lexa knew better than to interrupt her thought process. Maybe she’d be fine, Lexa’s brain thought idly, as if from a surreal distance, as she watched her future being decided before her very eyes. Maybe Lexa wasn’t fired, maybe Wolfe had realised she didn’t hate Ollivander as much as she thought she did. Maybe Wolfe liked Clarke a little bit. Maybe it would all be ok.

“I am not going to fire you.”

Lexa barely believed her ears. Wolfe didn’t look forgiving, didn’t look like she had decided Lexa was off the hook. If anything, she looked even more hateful than she had looked back in Clarke’s flat. Cautiously, Lexa replayed the words she had heard in her mind, making sure they meant what she thought they meant.

“I am not going to fire you, Miss Wyvern. But I do have a new mission for you, an opportunity for you to make good on your word.”

Lexa was already nodding. Not everyone was given second chances, and Lexa wasn’t going to waste hers. The sun outside the windows was finally looking a little brighter, convincing her heart to keep going.

“I don’t care how you do it. I don’t care when. But you are going to find Clarke Griffin again, and you are going to hurt her. Injure her, maim her; I don’t care. Kill her, if you must. But you are going to make absolutely sure that she never works in wandology again. It’s her or you.”
Wolfe kept talking, but Lexa wasn’t listening. All she could hear was the sound of her heart finally shattering in her chest.
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

And I’m back! Sorry for the lengthy wait. My ambition for this fic is to have it done within one year of posting it online, which will be in May. There are only 6 chapters to go after this, so I hope you all are ready for the ride.

As always, holla at me on geyranger.tumblr.com. Feedback makes the writing go faster! It's really fun to read all the comments and theories you guys comment with, and some of you are getting close to the truth. But there is a development in the last few chapter which none of you have guessed yet...

A loud rapping on the door to her flat made Clarke jolt awake. Looking around in confusion for a moment or two where she had fallen asleep on the sofa, she got up and hurried over to the door. One hand waving through her hair and trying to make it lie flat, the other rubbing at her chin to remove any trace of drool. Clarke was a little bit of a mess; there was no denying.

Lexa hadn’t come back.

It had taken Clarke three days to realise. Three days of placating Ollivander, intermixed with boring shopping missions around Diagon Alley. That was as far as Ollivander was willing to let her roam at the minute, it seemed. Three days of spending every free moment staring out her window, watching the rain and hoping she might see a familiar black coat heading her way. Three days of wallowing in her emotions, second guessing every word which had been exchanged on that fateful evening when the world had changed forever.

Three days before she had even remembered Ollivander commanding Lexa never to return to London, and Clarke realized she was waiting in vain.

That was two weeks ago.

Breathing deeply and trying to seem more put together than she was, Clarke opened the door and let Raven in. It wasn’t a surprise; Clarke had recognized that hard sound of her cane against the door, and besides, she had been threatening to come over for a while unless Clarke got it together soon.

Raven marched into the flat without waiting for an invitation, smiling widely at Clarke and making the world seem for a small moment like everything was fine. Raven’s smile could have that effect. She was followed in by Octavia however, whose concerned expression got Clarke back on the ground again.

Clarke glanced behind them, almost unconsciously. Just in case. Then she closed the door.

“So,” Raven said, clapping her hands together and turning around on the spot in the living room, surveying Clarke’s flat, “How is our favorite hermit doing these days?”

Clarke didn’t look at her, just wandered around the room and picked up stray pieces of parchment and putting them back on bookshelves and tables and other places they didn’t really belong.
“I’m not a hermit,” she replied in a low tone.

Clarke could feel Raven’s disbelieving stare in the back of her head.

“Yeah? When was the last time you went outside?”

“Yesterday.”

“Last time you went outside, not including going to work and slaving away at a desk at Ollivander’s.”

Clarke gave her a glare. “I’m fine, guys. Get off my case.”

Raven clicked her tongue and looked disapprovingly at Octavia. “Now she’s giving us lip as well. This is worse than I thought.”

Octavia still didn’t reply, just slowly and pointedly looked around the room they were standing in. Clarke followed her gaze. Her flat wasn’t at its best, it was true; coffee cups were littered everywhere, especially by the window where Clarke had spent many fruitless hours staring at the street below. The odd plate and food leftovers had ended up in weird places, such as on the bookshelf and under the coffee table, from the times when Clarke had actually remembered to eat. There was a plate in the fireplace. Clarke couldn’t remember how that had gotten there. The rest of the flat was in some general state of mess, parchment and clothes laying strewn around haphazardly. It was bad even compared to the state it was usually in. That was saying something.

Clarke turned back to the two women who were looking at her with matching expressions of I told you so.

Clarke ignored them.

“What can I do for you? Tea? Coffee? A kick out the door?”

Octavia gave her a measured look. “You know why we are here, Clarke.”

Clarke knew why there were there. It was the same reason Clarke and Octavia had all but broken into Raven’s house over the summer the year they were sixteen when Raven had lost all function in her leg in an accident and locked herself in her room and refused to talk to anyone. It was the same reason Raven and Clarke had practically moved into Octavia’s dormitory at Hogwarts when they were fourteen, when Octavia’s mother was arrested and sent to Azkaban.

They took care of each other. No matter how infuriating and annoying they could sometimes be, they were there for each other when they needed it.

Clarke glared at them, anger rising. At that moment, she hated them both. “Get out. Now.”

That was exactly why Clarke wasn’t going to accept their help. If she did, it became real. If she allowed them to comfort her, that meant that Clarke was falling apart and they were there to put her back together again. If Octavia and Raven were there for her, it meant that Clarke was really losing Lexa.

And Clarke wasn’t having that. Raven and Octavia needed to leave.

It wasn’t a big deal, she had told them. They were laying low. They were waiting for the storm to blow over. They would be fine.
Raven and Octavia were still looking at her, clearly having noticed that Clarke’s mind wasn’t right here and now, but they didn’t seem particularly fazed by her anger. Raven shrugged and wandered into the kitchen, rummaging through the cupboards for snacks, clearly having no plans of leaving. Clarke turned her back on Octavia, who was still looking at her carefully, and stomped over to the window, gripping the window sill and glaring at the world. She could hex them. She could apparate out of there. She could—

“You haven’t heard from her, then?”

Octavia’s voice was gentle, gentler than Clarke could remember ever hearing it. Octavia was many things, but she was rarely gentle. It was that tone, more than anything, which did her in.

Clarke didn’t let go of the window sill, but her shoulders sagged.

“No.”

Octavia walked quietly up to stand next to Clarke, staring out of the window as well.

“You know she can’t come back to London, Clarke. You told us Ollivander banned her.”

Clarke wished she’d never told them anything. Clarke wished she had told them everything, right from the start.

“I know that.”

Octavia wasn’t looking at her, wasn’t touching her, was just carefully looking out the window.

“Why haven’t you gone after her?”

Something welled up in Clarke’s throat, and she pushed herself off the window and walked back into the room, away from Octavia, to keep it from getting out. It might have been a scream. It might have been a sob. Who knows.

“Don’t you think I’ve tried?”

Octavia turned around but didn’t follow her. Clarke could tell by the lack of noise that Raven had stopped rummaging around in the kitchen and was listening. Clarke let herself fall down on the sofa and threw an arm over her face.

There. The world was easier to deal with when you can’t see it.

“You went to Wolfe’s? How did it go?”

Clarke laughed without humour.

“I didn’t go to Wolfe’s. I don’t have a death wish. But I sat in a café across the street from her wandshop for days. Days, Octavia! Lexa didn’t go out, and she didn’t come in, and neither did anyone else. She isn’t there. And I don’t know how to find her.” The last sentence had the sound of desperation to it, but Clarke pretended like it didn’t. “And now Ollivander has given me another mission, and I will have to leave London for a while, and if she was trying to get to me then she won’t be able to, but I don’t even know if she is trying. And I don’t…”

Ollivander had taken her aside a few days earlier and talked to her. He had been firm but surprisingly gentle as he levelled with her. He has said that Clarke has potential, that she was one
of the best apprentices he had ever had. That the wandbusiness was laying at her feet if only she
would step up to the job and devote herself to her training. And that, he had informed her in a tone
of voice which left no room for discussion but was still somehow understanding, included letting
go of Lexa. For Clarke’s sake, for Lexa’s sake. Everyone would be better off if Clarke would just
act as the apprentice she was supposed to be. It was the gentleness, the understanding, that for the
first time made Clarke question whether maybe he was right. Ollivander was looking out for her
and trying to help. And with that same tone of voice, he had given her a new mission, with the
clear subtext being that this was Clarke’s time to prove that she was ready to commit, and put this
whole episode behind her.

Clarke had gone home and started to pack. Books and pens and broom and potions. And Clarke…
And Clarke didn’t want to go on her own. There was nothing in it for her anymore, she had
realized as her hands came to a still over a stack of parchment. She was good at this, she knew she
was, but it wasn’t the same as it had been. The thrill of the chase, the reward of victory, it didn’t
mean anything on its own anymore.

Not without Lexa.

Clarke wasn’t ready to own up to that fact just yet, though. She lowered her arm again and stared at
the ceiling. She had been doing a lot of that these past weeks. Octavia was still standing by the
window but had turned around to watch Clarke. Raven had come out of the kitchen and was
leaning against the doorway, looking at Clarke with an unreadable expression.

“And are you sure you want to find her again?” Raven said. She never tiptoed around things, did
Raven.

Clarke bit her teeth together. “No Raven, I spent days essentially stalking her because I don’t want
to see her again.”

Raven raised an eyebrow. “It will mean your job, Clarke. You will lose your job.”

Clarke fixed her eyes on the lamp above her. If there were tears in her eyes, they didn’t fall.

“I don’t care.”

“And if she doesn’t want to see you? Because that will mean she will lose her job?”

Clarke took a moment to reply. She had been thinking about that a lot, thinking about the prospect
of just letting go and moving on. Thinking about whether that was what Lexa wanted.

“I just need to talk to her.”

“And tell her what, exactly?”

They both knew what. They knew Clarke; they had seen her like this before. They both knew
without needing to be told.

Clarke didn’t reply.

Raven sighed and walked over to the sofa, lifting Clarke’s legs and sitting down, pulling Clarke’s
legs back in her lap. Octavia wandered over and pulled one of the chairs closer, sitting down in it
and crossing her ankles. It was quiet for a while before Raven spoke again.

“You’re a mess, Clarke.”
Normally that would have fired Clarke up. It would have made her grit her teeth and square her shoulders and set out to prove Raven wrong. Now it just made her feel defeated.

“I don’t know what else to do. I’ve tried everything.”

“Where does she live?” Octavia asked.

“Above the wand shop. And she isn’t there.”

“Did you try writing to her?” Raven suggested.

“I don’t dare; she told me once that she didn’t put it past Wolfe to intercept her mail. If Wolfe didn’t fire her already, that would definitely be the final straw.”

“Have you tried getting in touch with her sister? The one you said she told you lived in Portland too?”

“I tried, but I didn’t get anywhere. I only have a name, Anya Wyvern, and Portland is a large place. And I don’t even know if she lives there anymore, Lexa just mentioned her moving there like a decade ago.”

“Have you tried,” Raven asked, a characteristically wide albeit uncalled-for grin slipping back onto her face, “asking your criminally clever and somewhat sloppy friends for help?”

Clarke snorted, and it only sounded a little like a sniffle.

“What, so you can pester me to death?”

Raven shared a look with Octavia. “No.”

“Bother me until I succumb to boredom?”

They shook their heads.

“Drug me into acquiescence? Because to be honest I don’t really need a repeat of that time in year five when-“

“Clarke,” Octavia interrupted, smiling now. “How did you find her last time?”

“Last time?”

“With the pyramids.”

Clarke stretched her neck to look at her. “I asked you guys for help. And you came up with a miraculous plan of stealing ministry equipment from the department of mysteries and tracing her illegally. But unless you have any other ideas for how we can cheat, lie or steal our way to finding out where she is then I don’t see how it’s relevant.”

“Well,” Octavia replied, a small smile still in place, “we don’t have a new plan, but we do have good news for you. Remember how you didn’t realise we were still tracing Lexa a good month or so after you needed to find her last? And you asked me to tell Raven to stop because you didn’t need it anymore.”

Clarke’s eyes narrowed. She didn’t reply.

“It seems that someone” Octavia gave a pointed look at Raven “decided not to remove the trace.”
Clarke turned to look at Raven so fast her neck hurt.

Raven shrugged. “What can I say? It’s brand new magitech; I wanted to know how long it would work for.”

Clarke stared at her. “You’ve been tracking her this whole time?”

Raven nodded.

“And you’re tracking her still?”

Raven reached into her pocket, rummaged around for a moment, and fished out a small piece of paper. Clarke could see several numbers and letters written on it. Raven held it out to Clarke and smiled her smile which made the world a better place.

“Go get the girl, Clarke.”

Lexa, as Clarke discovered after looking through every map she owned in a frenzy to try to locate the GPS position Raven had given her, was still in Portland. Same city, different part. The coordinates would change now and then, of course, Raven had explained to Clarke before she and Octavia left her flat to let her mull over her options. But the coordinates Raven had written down was somewhere that kept coming up again and again over the last few weeks. With a shrug, Raven had suggested she might as well start there.

The wandshop had been in the older part of Portland, where well established and upmarket shops could be found. The nice part, the one tourists went to. This new place was further out from the centre of town, towards the residential areas, in the middle of a park. It was a nice park. Big, green. Pretty, even. Everything that Clarke’s London wasn’t.

That was where Clarke, walking hesitantly around the wooden paths and looking for familiar green eyes, found her a few days later.

She was sitting on a bench by a pond. It looked so peaceful Clarke had to take a moment and just look at her. Hair in a couple of braids to keep it out of her face, but not in the full fieldwork hairdo she often wore. It shone like silk whenever the sun peeked through the clouds. She was looking out on the water, and a few ducks and swans had gathered near her on the bank. Lexa was holding what looked like a bag of seeds, throwing some of it into the water now and then.

Clarke blinked hard a couple of times. Her legs felt a little shaky, but she didn’t turn back. Her blood was rushing in her ears, no matter how peaceful a scene she was looking at. She was torn between running to her, jumping at her, or never to move again, forever contently just watching Lexa feed the birds.

Lexa didn’t see her yet. Instead, she got up and walked across the little footpath to stand closer to the water. Clarke watched her as she emptied the last of the seeds into her hand and chucked them as far as she could towards the other side. The birds all fell over themselves trying to get to the food, making an excited and loud mess. Lexa smiled.

Clarke willed her legs to keep walking. Thirty feet, twenty feet, fifteen feet. Ten feet.

Clarke opened her mouth, but no sound came out. Lexa seemed to have noticed the presence of the stranger coming up to her though, because she turned around, expression open and strong and free.
Then her eyes fell on Clarke.

Clarke held her breath. For a long moment, they just stared at one another. Clarke could read the emotions on Lexa’s face as clearly as ink on parchment. Shock. Disbelief. And for a split second, a mere glimmer of a moment, fear.

Clarke thought her heart couldn’t break any more. She was wrong.

But then Lexa’s face changed again, and shock wiped every trace of fear from her features and replaced it with wonder.

Clarke was breathing heavily as the moment dragged on. Clarke couldn’t stand it. She gave Lexa a small, hesitant smile.

And Lexa’s face broke into a smile too, and Clarke’s heart was beating for the first time in weeks.

Clarke stepped hesitantly forward, and Lexa met her halfway. Clarke didn’t know what to do, didn’t know whether to hug her or kiss her or if that would be too much. As she hesitated, Lexa made the decision for her, apparently without thinking about it at all, and grasped Clarke’s hands in her own. It was simultaneously both more intimate and familiar that anything else could have been, and not nearly enough.

Lexa smiled that smile of hers. “Hi.”

Clarke swallowed down a nervous breath and smiled back.

“Hey.”

They lapsed into silence after that. Clarke had so much to say, but no idea where to start. Lexa seemed to be struggling with something similar. She kept looking between Clarke’s eyes and her lips like she couldn’t make her mind up. Clarke opened her mouth, but it took a few seconds more to form a coherent sentence.

“Can we…” She gestured vaguely to the bench Lexa had been sitting on when Clarke first saw her. Lexa nodded, and let go of one of Clarke’s hand to tug her over and sit down. Once they sat Lexa let go of her other hand, instead grasping her own a little too hard. Clarke could see her knuckles go slightly white. Even in the warm summer sun, she missed the warmth.

It didn’t make it any easier to start a sentence though. Lexa looked at her closely for a few moments, then seemed to tear her gaze away, instead looking down at a few hopeful ducks which were swimming their way.

Relief at seeing Lexa again was still coursing through Clarke, but there was a wall between them still. Clarke couldn’t stand the silence for long.

“I got a new mission.”

Lexa looked back up at her, and for a moment Clarke couldn’t decode her expression. It looked almost like sadness, but it was so full of many other emotions that it was hard to tell.

“What’s the mission?”

“Dragon.”

Lexa’s eyes widened. “Dragon heartstring?”
Clarke shook her head. “No, just dragon horn. Heartstring is too difficult even for experienced wandmakers to extract successfully without help from an expert, apparently, but Ollivander wants to experiment with horn either as a wand core or inlaid in the wood. He was hoping some of the magical properties of dragons might still make it to the wand.”

Lexa nodded her understanding. They lapsed back into silence for a little.

“Will you come with me?”

Truth be told, Clarke had meant to build up to asking it. To talk about her feelings and all that, and about what had happened a few weeks ago. But her apparent inability to articulate her thoughts, paired with her mouth’s habit of blurting things out with little to no impulse control had gotten the better of her.

Lexa gave her a long look.

“What did Ollivander tell you?”

There was no need to ask Lexa what she meant. Clarke sighed, feeling some of the tension leaving her body.

“He basically told me this was my last chance. If I ever try to team up with you again, I’m out. He hasn’t let me leave Diagon Alley since, until now. But he didn’t fire me, so I guess that’s something, and now he’s trusting me with a mission again. What about Wolfe?”

Lexa looked away from her then, letting her eyes linger on the water in front of them. She was quiet for a little while, and Clarke thought she could practically hear Lexa trying to formulate her next sentence.

“Yeah, something similar.”

There was something there, Clarke knew. Something Lexa was intentionally not saying or wasn’t able to put into words. But they hadn’t seen each other in so long, and the air between them still felt fragile. Clarke decided to let it go. For now.

Lexa looked back at her, her expression fond but also a little tired. Amused, but a little sad. “And you’re still here.”

Clarke smiled at her, but the smile turned out to not be wide and dashing like she was planning, but instead small and genuine, and almost a little sheepish. “You know me. I was never one to let a rule stand unbent.”

Lexa smiled her sad smile back. Clarke desperately wanted to wipe it off her face and make her smile for real again.

For a few moments, they just looked at each other again.

“Lexa…” Clarke hesitated. “You know I didn’t mean any of it, right?”

Lexa’s sad smile fell away and was replaced by a piercing stare. Clarke wasn’t sure of it was better or worse. She soldiered on, not giving herself the space to stop talking.

“I was lying through my teeth. I was just hoping to save our skin and our jobs. I was just saying anything, and everything that fell into my head which I thought might help. You…” Clarke couldn’t look Lexa in the eye, but she reached out to take her hand and hold it in her own, firmly
and securely where it should be and looked at that instead. “You mean a lot more to me than that.”

Well. Clarke knew exactly what Lexa meant to her. But she was pretty sure now probably wasn’t the right setting to say it for the first time.

Lexa maintained her stare for a few more moments, then let out a breath and looked back at the water. Her free hand came up to brush through her hair and push it away from her face. “I know. I knew then, too. It was just hard to remember when Ollivander and Wolfe were looking at us like they were about… I don’t even know.” She didn’t meet Clarke’s eyes, but she gave her hand a small squeeze.

Clarke smiled. “Tell me about it.”

Lexa looked back at her then, and Clarke thought she could see her swallow “You mean a lot more to me too.”

Clarke bit her lip to keep it from trembling. She wanted to reach out, to kiss Lexa and hold her and physically force them back to the way they were before. The ease with which they had known each other, how naturally they had fitted together. Now it felt like there was a wall, an obstacle between them. It was to do with whatever Lexa wasn’t telling her about what Wolfe had said to her, but it was also to do with Clarke tiptoeing around it instead of just saying plain what she was thinking.

But still. They were here now. That was something. They could fix this.

When Clarke didn’t say anything else, Lexa eventually cleared her throat and looked down at their intertwined fingers. “How did you find me, anyway?”

“Homing pigeon.”

“What?”

“Raven still has the trace on you. Raven. Trace. Homing pigeon.”

Lexa snorted. No one else ever laughed at Clarke’s lame jokes. Hearing the familiar sound of laughter made one of the many pieces within Clarke which had fallen out, fit back into its place. She took a deep breath and looked up at Lexa.

“So will you come with me?”

Lexa looked at her for a few moments, the sad expression slipping back onto her face. Then she looked away, out at the water again, and took several deep breaths. She looked deep in thought.

“It feels really selfish that I want to say yes?”

Clarke felt a deep hum within her but tried to not dwell on the relief of knowing that Lexa still wanted to come. Instead, she narrowed her eyes slightly, trying to figure out the girl next to her. Why would it be selfish, when Clarke is practically begging her to say yes?

“There are many good reasons why you should come, though.”

“Like what?”

“I made a list.”

Lexa looked up at her in surprise, and Clarke gracefully pulled a scrap of parchment out of her pocket. Lexa took one look at it and threw her head back laughing.
Clarke couldn’t stop grinning.

Still chuckling, Lexa reached over to take the piece of parchment, tore it into pieces, and threw it over her shoulder.

“Hey! I worked really hard on that!”

Lexus, still smiling, just shook her head.

Clarke knew there was something weighing heavily on her still. She knew something wasn’t entirely right, yet. But Lexa was smiling now, smiling for real and without sadness, and Clarke could see that she was glancing down at her lips again. Clarke decided they would get to it in time.

“No more splitting up?” Lexa said, looking back up at her eyes.

Clarke smiled despite herself. She leant in slowly, giving Lexa plenty of time to pull away, but Lexa leant ever so slightly in instead, and when their lips finally, finally met Clarke could have sworn the world shifted on its axis. Lexa’s lips were soft and warm, and everything Clarke ever wanted. She sighed against them, relaxing for the first time in weeks. They moved against her own with gentle movements, and Clarke felt dizzy. She pulled back slightly to meet Lexa’s half closed eyes.

“No more splitting up.”

Lexa answered by brushing her lips ever so gently against Clarke’s again before pulling back an inch or two.

“Well then,” said Lexa Wyvern, “I know where we might find a dragon.”
Unnuar Aok was founded in 1905. Anti-wizard sentiment was on the rise in North America at the time, and powerful forces in society rose in public esteem by preaching segregation between muggles and wizards, inciting hatred on both sides. Even muggles noticed, though they weren’t sure what they were noticing; strange events, sometimes unexplained disappearances. They didn’t know who to blame, but fear of the unknown, and of people who didn’t seem to fit in, grew. The populist sentiments trickled down into cities and communities and families, and found their way even to the most rural of towns where old superstitions were still held in some regard. Communities where the old could remember a different time, when dark and dangerous cloaked figures arrived in towns now and again, and were followed by mayhem. Sometimes they would even steal a child, take it away to god knows where, and if the child returned many years later it too would be cloaked and talking of dark things like unknown forces and magic.

In these rural towns, now and again, a child would be… different. It would be able to do things no one else could, make strange things happen or even hurt other children. And people remembered the child snatchers of years past, and made the connection; if these children were allowed to roam free, then maybe the child snatchers would come again. As the hatred on the continent grew, more and more of these children were turned away. Sometimes they were toddlers, left out in the forest to die. Sometimes they were almost teenagers, and if it weren’t for the hurt and the trauma they had experienced they might have stood a chance at taking care of themselves. Often, they were taken from a grieving family, at the insistence of the community. Other times, parents were glad to rid themselves of the devil they thought had taken over their lives.

And so Unnuar Aok was founded, by a witch who found a lost child in the forest in western Canada, and connected the dots. The witch took the child in and brought it to the house she lived in with her siblings, far out in the forest and from prying and suspicious muggle eyes, and tasked every witch and wizard she knew with searching every town, every village and every farm, until every one of these children had been found.

The first year they found twenty children, all of whom were brought to the witch. She and her siblings built another house next to their first one, to fit them all in. The next year they found another ten, and the year after another twenty-five. As Grindelwald wreaked havoc around the world for wizards and muggles alike throughout the twenties and thirties the number of children continued to grow.

They named the home after the mountains around where the witch’s house was. In their native tongue, it meant Night Blood. A few years later some of the children had been hiking in the forest and swore they saw a dragon, and since then every child that came to them had been given the last name Wyvern.

All this were things Clarke largely had to find out for herself, because whenever she asked Lexa about it, she would go off on tangents about the friends she had when she grew up, about the field they’d play Quidditch in and the large lake where they could swim in the summer and ice skate in the winter. Not that Clarke minded; she lost herself in every detail she learnt, preoccupied with imagining a smaller version of Lexa running around with scraps on her knees. Besides, Clarke could tell that Lexa was still reserved, still holding back, and talking about Aok made her animated and bright and more like the Lexa Clarke knew. But Clarke still wanted to know about the place they were going to, and so she made sure to take a little time to do some research.

Even so, Clarke wasn’t sure what to expect. It sounded a little like Hogwarts, sure, but Hogwarts
was at the core of it a school. Aok was, according to everything she had read and everything Lexa had told her, primarily a *home*. Lexa’s home. And so, as she walked side by side with Lexa up the small country road toward it, Clarke was a little nervous, a little excited and incredibly curious.

The small group of houses were on top of a hill, on the border of the forest. There were five or six buildings, large log cabins, arranged in a loosely defined semicircle. The largest building was in the middle. At the bottom of the slope, in front of a magnificent view of faraway mountains, was the large, crystal blue lake. The forest snaked along the edges of the lake and all the way to the mountains beyond. The summer sun bathed it all in gold.

It was goddamn beautiful. Clarke could understand why Lexa loved it so much.

Lexa was walking with a spring in her step Clarke hadn’t seen since Lexa showed up at Clarke’s house with a mission for yeti hair. She was grinning from ear to ear, and it took Clarke’s breath away. Clarke wanted to stop her, to take her hand, to kiss her, but she didn’t; they might have talked, a little, but there was still something there, something between them that Lexa wasn’t telling her. It made Clarke hesitate.

As they walked closer, Clarke could see little faces in the windows. Curious eyes followed them as they approached, but as Clarke was just about to mention it to Lexa the double doors of the main building opened and a scrawny boy with a mop of red hair shot out of it and ran at top speed towards them. Clarke started laughing as Aiden once again shot into Lexa like a bullet, knocking her straight to the ground.

“Lexa! You’re back!”

“Aiden!” Lexa shoved him gently off her and massaged her side. “You are not as small as you used to be.”

Aiden glowed. “I’ve grown two inches since we saw you in Tibet. I’m taller than you were when you were twelve!”

Lexa’s eyes narrowed. She got up, grasped Aiden by the shoulders to make him stand still for a minute, and used her hand to measure his height against hers. He was taller than her shoulders now, not too many inches shorter than Clarke herself. Clarke could see the surprise on Lexa’s face, but she hid it well.

“That’s nice, Aiden. You should enjoy it while it lasts.”

“What do you mean?”

Lexa feigned surprise. “Well, it’s a well-known fact that no boy at Aok ever grows taller than five feet. I thought you knew.”

Aiden looked absolutely crestfallen for about two seconds, before his eyes narrowed. The expression was so similar to Lexa’s expression seconds before that Clarke had to hide a fond grin.

“What about Gustus? He’s like eight feet tall.”

Lexa picked up her bag again and started walking towards the buildings. “He’s an exception.”

“What about Titus? He’s as tall as you are. And Lincoln, he’s even taller.”

“Exceptions, all of them.”

Aiden kept protesting, but by now more people were coming out of the buildings, keen to greet
them. Smiles and laughter was everywhere, and Lexa was passed from person to person, hugging some, grasping hands with others, and exchanging fond words with everyone. Clarke kept back, not wanting to interrupt, but watching it all.

Eventually Lexa made it to a tall, brown-skinned woman. “Indra!” Lexa grasped her hand fiercely. “Lexa. It’s good to see you. Have you been well?”

“As well as any.” Lexa beamed at her.

“What brings you back, yongon?”

“Well,” Lexa seemed to realise she had lost Clarke in the crowd and looked around until her eyes found the familiar blue. She towed Indra by that hand over to meet her. “Indra, this is Clarke. She is a wandmaker’s apprentice, just like I am. We were hoping you could help us with something.”

They spent the day in and around Aok. Lexa showed her around, a smile on her face and never letting go of Clarke’s hand, and for the first time since they came back from Bangkok Lexa seemed completely herself again. Indra had listened to their story, ignoring Aiden’s excited shout when they said they were there to look for dragons, and then she had disappeared into a building to find some resources for them. Lexa wasted no time once she had gone, and towed Clarke around to show her everything. The main building turned out to be the dining hall and communal areas, with a large sitting room and a grand fireplace. The other houses were mainly dormitories, except two building at the end of the semicircle, one of which was for teaching and the other served as theadministrational centre and living quarters for the guardians looking after and tutoring the kids. Lexa’s bedroom was on the top floor of one of the dormitories, as she explained to Clarke that the oldest kids get their own rooms the last few years before they move out. Someone else had moved into it by now, of course, but Clarke noticed that everyone from Aiden to Indra still referred to it as ‘Lexa’s room’.

Aiden and his group of friends joined them as they headed down to the lake, running ahead of them and ambushing them with beams of water from their wands as they rounded a corner onto a small pier. Clarke watched as Lexa picked him up by the waist, ignored the beam of water coming from his wand which he desperately tried to aim down her neck, walked to the end of the pier and threw him into the lake. His friends laughed and hooted and immediately started throwing each other into the water too. Lexa, dripping with water and beaming from ear to ear took Clarke by the hand again and led her on to show her the quidditch field in the forest. The field wasn’t as large as the Hogwarts quidditch pitch, and was surrounded by tall trees; Lexa explained that bludgers and snitches often got lost in the forest, and they had to fly around and try to find them again.

“You used to chase snitches in a forest? That’s not real quidditch, no wonder you beat me to the golden snidget that time in France. You had an unfair advantage.”

“Please Clarke, that was just because I’m better at flying than you are.”

“You cheated.”

“You literally pulled me off my broom with your bare hands.”

The sun had peaked and was falling towards the horizon before they came back to the main buildings, bickering about quidditch and following a stream of kids heading in for dinner. By this point, Lexa was holding one girl who couldn’t be older than five on her hip, as another child led
her by the hand towards the buildings. She was talking to Clarke though, telling her about the day to day life of Aok, and Clarke was being led by two kids of her own and just trying not to lose Lexa in the crowd.

Dinner was buffet style, not unlike what Clarke had been used to at Hogwarts. The kids abandoned Lexa and Clarke to find their seats at the right table, divided up by age, and Lexa pulled Clarke with her to a table at the end where the oldest students sat. They were around eighteen, Clarke figured, so they would have been in their mid-teens when Lexa left Aok, and they all looked at Lexa like she had personally battled and defeated Voldemort. Eyes large and keen to talk but still shy, clearly thinking the world of their returning sibling, mentor, and friend. Clarke knew the feeling. They peppered Clarke and Lexa with questions throughout the meal, and Clarke could tell Lexa was fighting a grin the whole time she told about her work with Wolfe.

After dinner people started getting up and drifting towards the end of the large room, where a rubble of mismatched sofas and comfortable chairs were spread around the large fireplace. Lexa made to follow them, but Clarke took her hand and held her back a little. Lexa met her eyes with a curious expression as the space around them emptied.

“What is it?”

Clarke didn’t say anything for a moment, just let her gaze flick between Lexa’s eyes as she chewed on the inside of her cheek.

“I’m just trying to figure it out.”

“Figure what out?”

“What you aren’t telling me.”

Lexa’s expression changed in a heartbeat from relaxed comfort to guilt, and Clarke immediately regretted bringing it up. Lexa turned more fully towards her, her hand seeking out the one of Clarke’s hand she wasn’t already holding.

“Clarke-“

“No, Lexa, I’m sorry, this is a bad time-“

“Clarke.” Lexa’s tone of voice made Clarke close her mouth again. Lexa’s expression was tender as it met Clarke’s, but it was also full of regret, and just a little pain.

“Clarke. I will tell you, I promise. Just not now.”

“Why not?”

“It’s not bad. Well, it’s not just bad.”

That was hardly an answer.

“Then why won’t you tell me?”

Lesa met her eyes, and Clarke could read it plain as day.

Because it will change things.

Clarke swallowed under the intensity of Lexa’s gaze.
Because I just want to pretend for a little longer that this is normal.

Clarke was pretty sure she had never been less appreciative of her ability to read Lexa. Still, she nodded.

Lexa’s gaze fell to her lips, and she let out a shaky breath. Clarke swallowed again.

“And you’re sure it’s not all that bad, are you?”

“Well, yes, but…”

But I don’t think you will like it.

The words hung unspoken in the air between them, louder than a shout. Lexa’s palms felt heavy in her hands, but Lexa used them to pull Clarke closer, closing her eyes as their foreheads met. Lexa opened her mouth, but nothing came out of it. She closed it again as her eyes opened, and in them, Clarke could see a plea for understanding.

Clarke had just opened her own mouth, but if it was to concede or argue she didn’t know, when Aiden’s voice drifted over from the fireplace, where what looked like everyone who lived at Aok was gathering.

“Lexa! Come on, Indra is about to start!”

Lexa looked at Clarke with a sad smile. She let go of one of Clarke’s hands, walked backwards towards the fireplace, and used the other hand to gently drag Clarke with her.

Clarke followed. She would always follow, if Lexa wanted her to, in whichever direction Lexa would go. But she couldn’t shake the feeling that this was different, and that this, Canada and Aok and the dragon horn, would be their last assignment. She suppressed a shudder.

Storytime at Aok, Clarke quickly learnt, was a bit of a tradition. Usually the tutors would take turns leading it, whether it would be Indra with her veteran stories of the wizarding war, or Titus with his boring old tales of what he apparently deemed the ‘moral decay of today’s youth’.

However, old students and friends, and there were many of them, would often come to visit, and were always given to floor to bring news of the outside world to the relatively secluded society at Aok and to let their family know what they had been up to.

Lexa led Clarke to a sofa towards the front. Some of the younger kids slid closer on the floor to sit in front of them, one little girl leaning against Lexa’s legs, and another crawling into her lap without a moment’s hesitation. Aiden took the seat on Lexa’s other side, beaming with pride when Lexa ruffled his hair. Lexa didn’t let go of Clarke’s hand, holding on with what Clarke guessed was equal parts fondness and a hope to convince her to let their earlier conversation go. Clarke squeezed her hand. What else could she do.

Indra got up to stand in front of the fireplace.

“Settle down, bis. As you all know, Lexa has come home for a visit, and she has brought with her a pretty, blonde friend.” She paused to let the hoots from the kids quiet down a little. Clarke thought she could see a light dusting of pink on Lexa’s cheek, but it was hard to tell in the dim light. “They are here to look for the dragon our mountains. Tell us, Lexa, why?”

Lexa smiled. Clarke could feel her insides churn, in a motion which was both endlessly fond and a
little bittersweet. As Lexa started narrating their story to her family, Clarke watched her closely. The flames from the fireplace and the light from soft lamps flickered over her face and reflected in her eyes.

Clarke loved her so much. And Clarke felt like she might be losing her.

The kids were a great audience. Lexa started their story from the start, talking about the various missions they had gone on, both together and not. One boy on the other side of the circle audibly gasped and shot Clarke a dirty look when Lexa told them of that time when Clarke had stolen those twigs in Germany, all those months ago. Those children sitting on the floor crept closer and closer as Lexa went on, faces excited and scared and fascinated as Lexa told them about Egypt, and the sphinx, and the phoenix in the sarcophagus. One very small child looked like she might start crying when Lexa narrated how they had almost got caught by the Egyptian authorities when they came back out of the pyramid, but Lexa smiled fondly at her, lifted the child in her lap over to sit with Clarke, and lifted the little girl up instead before she continued the story. She then went on to tell them about Tibet and the Yeti, and was interrupted by Aiden every thirty seconds or so until Indra gave him a sharp look. The light on the faces around them when Lexa told them about how it hadn’t been one yeti, but a mother with children, was pure awe.

As she talked, something clicked into place for Clarke as she leant back against the armrest, the child in her lap falling asleep now, to watched Lexa. Clarke had always thought Lexa was a bit of a lone wolf, from the way she had acted when they first met, but she had been confused too, because that image didn’t quite fit with the Lexa she had come to know. The Lexa who was smart and fierce, and the best witch Clarke had ever met, but also gentle and sweet, caring for Clarke in sickness and health with such fierce devotion. As she watched Lexa talk about their travels with just a hint of pride, confidently sharing her story with the adoring family around her, expertly leading them from anecdote to anecdote without once losing their attention, Clarke finally realised that Lexa wasn’t a lone wolf at all.

Lexa was the alpha.

“And now we are here, looking for dragon horn.” Lexa finally concluded, and looked towards Indra, who was sitting in a large armchair by the fire. Lexa had told them almost everything, only leaving out choice bits of information such as their ongoing difficulties with Wolfe and Ollivander, and the more personal details of her and Clarke’s lives. Indra met her gaze and nodded slowly.

“Well, yongon,” she said, referring to the whole group around them, “where should they start? Where might they find a dragon here?”

There was silence for a few moments, before a boy sitting on the armrest next to Aiden raised his hand.

“There aren’t any dragons native to Canada, ticha.”

His friend, who was sitting next to him, elbowed him in the side. “Then why is our last name Wyvern, you idiot? There’s a dragon in the mountains, always has been.”

The first boy massaged his side with a sour expression. “There was one like a hundred years ago, sure. But only one, so it can’t have had any children, and it’s too cold for it to survive for too long. And no one has seen it since.”

The same thing had occurred to Clarke, to be honest, but Lexa had been so excited to be going back to Aok that she hadn’t even considered interjecting. Now Clarke kept quiet and watched as Indra expertly turned Lexa’s fascinating story and their new mission into a valuable lesson for the kids.
Clarke was starting to understand why Lexa always spoke about Indra with such respect.

“Maybe it lives in a cave somewhere?” It was one of the girls, a little younger than the boys, sitting by Indra’s feet. “Then it could stay warmer during the winter. Maybe it hibernates.”

The first boy still wasn’t quite ready to let it go. “It doesn’t matter if it hibernates. It still couldn’t live that long.”

The girl looked up at Indra. “How long do dragons live for, ticha?”

Indra didn’t say anything, just looked at Lexa. Everyone else’s heads started turning towards Lexa, too.

Lexa looked at Clarke, seemingly quite calm but with clear undertones of help me out here, please. Clarke smiled.

“Dragons can live until they’re over a hundred years old, but that still doesn’t mean a lot unless the dragon they saw all that time ago was very young.”

The boy seemed to take this as a clear admission that he was right. He looked at his friend again. “See? And since there’s only one of them, so it can’t have, like, laid eggs or whatever. There won’t be any dragons in the mountains.”

This declaration was met with silence. Clarke and Lexa exchanged glances.

“What about parthenogenesis?”

It came from one of the sofas towards the back of the room, from a lanky teenage girl with big bushy hair who looked like she probably was among the oldest of the kids.

Lexa looked confused. “What about what?”

“Parthenogenesis,” the girl explained. “It’s something reptiles can do, like if one gets washed up on a shore somewhere where there are no other reptiles of that species or whatever, then it can lay eggs on its own. Both lizards and snakes can do it, and a few other reptiles. Dragons are reptiles, too.” The girl chewed her lip. She was trying to look uninterested, but clearly wanting Lexa’s approval. Clarke had to hide a grin.

Silence again, but this time astonished.

“What’s your name?” Clarke asked.

“Luna.”

Lexa met Clarke’s gaze. Clarke gave her a look. Lexa smiled.

“Well done, Luna.” The girl beamed.

Lexa turned back towards Indra. “What do you think?”

Indra nodded slowly. With a long look towards Luna, she said “Yes, then it seems there may still be dragons in the mountains, if you are fortunate. How will you find it?”

“We’ll start looking in caves,” Lexa replied, smiling at the girl by Indra’s feet.

“It will still be quite cold for a dragon,” Indra said hesitantly. The children watched them silently,
some whispering to their neighbours.

Clarke spoke up. “Is there any seismic activity around? Dormant volcanoes, hot springs, that sort of thing?”

Numerous kids started talking over each other. Clarke smiled. Lexa squeezed her hand.

“It’s settled, then. We’ll leave tomorrow.”
It was already light outside by the time Clarke wandered out of the building the next morning. She had left Lexa snoring lightly on one of the sofas by the fireplace, where they had both been sleeping, and headed out. There weren’t many people around, just the odd person walking between buildings. Clarke spotted Aiden coming out of one of the dormitories, yawning, and she headed over towards him.

“Morning, Aiden.”

He beamed when he saw her. “Hi, Clarke! Where’s Lexa?”

“Sleeping still. Where is everyone?”

He gave her a funny look. “Well, it’s six in the morning. I assume they’re mostly sleeping too.”

Clarke’s eyebrows met in confusion. “Seven? That can’t be right; the sun us high in the sky. I thought it was almost noon.”

Aiden brightened. “You’ve never been to Canada before, have you? We’re so far north here that it doesn’t get very dark at night in the summer. The sun sets around ten and raises again around two or three in the morning. It’s pretty cool.”

Clarke looked around, astonished. The sun was high above them, and the reflection in the lake was so brilliant it was almost blinding. The birds were singing. “Is it really just six o’clock?”

“Yep.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever woken up this early in the morning, and definitely not without an alarm. This is incredible.”

Aiden seemed to glow a little at having his home complimented. “I know. I mean, it’s as dark in the winter as it is light now, though. Now we only have four hours of night every day, but at midwinter, we’ll only have four hours of daylight.”

“I’ve never been anywhere like this before.” Clarke took a minute to let it sink in. Now that she knew, she could notice how the world was very quiet. Birdsong and the rustling of the wind in trees in the forest behind them, but nothing else. No voices. No cars, or sound of people or activity.

It was remarkable.

“What are you doing up so early then, Aiden?”

His face fell. “Nothing.”

Clarke gave him a look.

The boys bit his lip. “You won’t tell anyone?”

She was intrigued. “Not a soul.”
“Not even Lexa?”

Clarke grinned. “Not even Lexa.”

Aiden squinted at her for a minute, but apparently decided she was worthy of trust. “I’ve fallen behind on my spells a bit. I didn’t practice a lot when Gustus took me travelling, and now the others are better than me. I was going to go into the forest and practice before anyone else wakes up.”

“Oh,” Clarke said. “I see. Do you want some help?”

Aiden was surprised, but nodded fervently. His gratitude was written all over his face, and Clarke could appreciate how he carried his emotions on his sleeve. They walked into the forest together, chatting amicably, and found a meadow to practice in.

Clarke asked if there were any spells in particular he was struggling with, and got a quick rundown: some summoning charms, some anti-jinx spells and a few levitation hexes. Nothing Clarke would have been embarrassed about not knowing at the age of twelve, but Aiden and the other kids, she suspected, held themselves to a pretty high standard. Still, she was more than happy to help.

They practised the spells together for a while, Clarke giving helpful pointers on technique and pronunciations. After making Aiden promise not to tell Lexa either, Clarke even let him in on the stupid rhymes she had made up for herself when she was in school, to make it easier to remember the more complicated-sounding charms. Aiden was doing very well: he followed instructions easily, and didn't hesitate to try his own ideas too. It only took them an hour or two until he could have performed every spell on his list blindfolded. After that Aiden begged her to teach him duelling spells, which apparently weren’t taught at Aok, and Clarke couldn’t even pretend to say no.

Clarke had lost track of time when she spotted Lexa behind Aiden, leaning against a tree on the edge of the meadow. Her arms were folded, but she looked relaxed and watched them with a small smile. Her eyes, though, were full of emotion which Clarke couldn’t quite decode over the distance. The sun glittered in her hair, and even from far away Clarke could see how the undergrowth of the forest brought out her green eyes. Clarke felt like the floor fell out of her stomach, and Aiden finally managed to sneak past her shield charm with a curse which knocked her on her back. Aiden gave a yell in surprise, and rushed forward to see if she was ok. She was already sitting up before he reached her, massaging her side.

“Clarke! I didn’t mean – I mean I didn’t think – I’m so sorry! I didn’t think I could actually hit you!”

“That’s ok, Aiden. I think we have bigger things to worry about.” Clarke nodded towards Lexa, who hadn’t moved but was watching them with an even bigger grin. Aiden’s eyes grew large as Lexa started walking over to them.

“What is going on here, then?”

Clarke sat up and straightened her back, trying to regain some dignity. “We were practising duelling before we were rudely interrupted.”

Lexa nodded understandingly. “I see. Was this Aiden’s idea, by any chance?”

“No, it was wholly my idea,” Clarke said, giving an elaborate wink to Aiden. “I talked Aiden into joining when I found out that they don’t teach duelling here.”
Lexa sat down on her heels, facing Clarke and pretending like she couldn’t see that Aiden was trying to hide behind her.

“I see,” Lexa replied. “And when you came up with this plan, did Aiden mention at all that duelling is not only never taught, but is in fact forbidden at Aok altogether?”

Clarke turned her head to look at Aiden, who had gone red and was studying the grass at his feet very carefully. Clarke turned back to Lexa.

“Well, obviously I knew that already, Lexa. I committed this crime knowingly and with intent. I am only sorry I corrupted Aiden in the process.”

Lexa did a poor job of fighting her own grin. “I see. No use in me reporting Aiden to Indra, then, if he was only an innocent bystander. But, Clarke, in the future, please refrain from including my siblings in your devious plots. They don’t need to be led down a route to a life of crime.”

Clarke looked back at Aiden. “I make no promises.”

Aiden beamed.

Clarke looked back at Lexa. “To be honest Lexa, I think Aiden would have a talent for balancing scholarly pursuits and some light crime on the side. I might kick you out of the Chimera Crew and replace you with him, actually.”

Lexa’s face fell. Only minutely, and only there to be seen if you knew her face as well as Clarke did, because Lexa did her best to hide it. But her face fell all the same, her smile shrunk and disappeared, and her eyes, which had been alive with a glow from watching Clarke and Aiden, lost their light.

Clarke’s eyes narrowed in confusion. Clarke had obviously been joking; Aiden was twelve, and living and Aok, and barely getting started with his education. Besides, Clarke and Lexa were a team. They worked together, lived, laughed and loved together. The idea of anyone getting kicked off the team was ludicrous, so why would the notion be enough to upset Lexa? Unless…

Unless Lexa was planning to leave.

Clarke could feel her mouth falling open, just a little.

Aiden was watching them curiously, looking between them and trying to understand what was going on. Lexa only let her composure fall for a small second, before smiling at him. Clarke doubted anyone but her would have noticed that the smile was a little forced.

“I’m still going to have to lead you back to Aok, I’m afraid. It’s time I stole Clarke away so we can begin looking for our dragon.”

Aiden brightened instantly. “Can I come?”

Lexa shook her head as she got up and reached a hand out to help Clarke. “No.”

“Why not?”

“Well, for one thing, I just saw you attack Clarke, completely unprovoked, in a remote location where you didn’t think there would be any witnesses. I can’t allow that kind of dangerous behaviour on the team.” Lexa pulled Clarke up to her feet, but let go of her hand as all three of them started walking back towards Aok.
Aiden didn’t falter, so Clarke was pretty sure he never really expected to be allowed to come anyway. “You won’t tell on me though?”

Lexa smiled down at him, more genuine this time. “No, I won’t. Not living at Aok any longer has the perk that I don’t have to follow the rules anymore.”

Aiden grinned back at her. “Where will you start looking for the dragon?”

Lexa shrugged. “Don’t ask me. But Clarke swallowed a library before we came, so she probably has some ideas.”

Clarke glared at her. “It’s called being prepared, Aiden. Don’t let Lexa fool you into thinking that reading isn’t cool.”

Aiden, who Clarke was confident regarded Lexa as the coolest person to ever walk the face of the earth, just made a noncommittal sound. “Couldn’t you have just bought a dragon horn and brought it back to Ollivander?”

Clarke shook her head. “Besides being mind-bogglingly expensive, dragon horn is listed as a Class-B tradable material by the ministry of magic.”

Aiden scrunched his face. “But you can still go and get it? Just not buy one?”

It was Lexa who replied. “Well, we’re not technically trading. We are harvesting it from nature, and then gifting it to Ollivander. It’s ok as long as we don’t receive pay for it.”

Aiden seemed to accept this as fact. Clarke had been kidding earlier, but to be honest she could imagine Aiden becoming very good at the kind of work she and Lexa was doing. He was smart, resourceful, a quick learner, and seemed to understand the mind-set it took to get around rules when you needed to. The three of them emerged from the trees, and Clarke saw that there were a lot more people milling around the buildings now; they must have been gone a while. Aiden saw a few of his friends, and said goodbye to Lexa and Clarke before heading over to meet them.

Lexa turned towards Clarke. “Is there any laws against harvesting it from a wild dragon? I never asked.”

Clarke shrugged. “None that I could find, but I got the distinct impression that it is only because they didn’t expect anyone to be stupid enough to try.”

Lexa gave her a grin which made Clarke’s insides melt. “Well, they clearly never met us.”

Clarke was flying. She and Lexa had decided to take separate routes to cover ground more quickly, Lexa heading towards the mountain and Clarke scouting out the forest. Now Clarke was flying low over the treetops, looking for the hot springs.

They had left Aok, Lexa apparating them away, and set up camp on the far shores of the lake. The lake was big enough that they couldn’t even see Aok from their tent, the cluster of buildings lost to the forest and the distance between them. Their tent site had been beautiful, though; a meadow in the forest, surrounded by proud pine trees, right by the lake. The tall trees shielded them from the elements and the world, but the view across the lake was still breath-taking. Clarke was sure they probably could have stay at Aok and used it as their base, but it felt more right to have their own place to operate from. Time to think, time to plan. Not only that, but it felt more remote, like it was further away from London and Ollivander and all the things Clarke didn’t want to think about. It
was a place which lent itself very well to pretending Lexa and Clarke were the only two people in
the world.

They had unpacked, and got to work.

Now the sun was almost touching the horizon, which Clarke guessed meant it was almost 10 pm. They had been scouting all day, visiting the different hot spring sites Indra had marked out on their map, looking for any sign of a dragon. The forest was massive; Clarke had flown as high up as she dared, trying to see where it ended, but it was almost uninterrupted from horizon to horizon, with no trace of another human being. The only treeless areas were the various lakes, and the large mountains Lexa had headed towards. Still, Clarke never said no to a challenge. She had been using every skill she had learned about tracking and reading the environment, and she felt pretty good about it; a few months ago, she wouldn’t even have known where to start. Now, after spending time looking for scarabs and yetis and lions and erumpets with Lexa, Clarke felt like she knew what she was doing. She knew to start by the water holes, because all animals need water, and then narrow it down from there. After identifying the sources of freshwater, usually ponds or rivers, she tried to find sites which would give shelter from the weather, warmth to survive the sometimes harsh Canadian environment, and somewhere remote enough that a dragon could have lived there undisturbed for decades.

She hadn’t found anything yet though, and as she landed next to a small pond she had spotted form the air, Clarke knew that it would soon be too dark to keep looking. The golden hues of the sunset was colouring the forest around her orange. It was beautiful, but also a sign it was time to go back home. Clarke looked around the little pond. It was only 15 feet or so across, but surrounded by thick spruce forest, too dense even for the smallest of dragons to be able to move through without trouble. Clarke sighed to herself. Dead end. She peered through the trees, squinting to see if maybe she was missing something.

She almost had a heart attack when she spotted a silvery shape leaping gracefully towards here through the trees, but she recognized what it was a moment or two before it reached her. A patronus. Clarke took in a sharp breath of air. It was in the shape of a wolf, but it was larger than any normal wolf Clarke had seen. Clarke had admittedly not seen a lot of wolves up close, but the patronus was almost the size of a bear. Clarke knelt down as the patronus slowed down, and walked towards her. There was something in its face she recognised, something about the distance between the eyes and the size of its ears. It looked so strong, and yet calm and loyal. Clarke felt a sense of wonder but not a bit of surprise when it opened its mouth and spoke with Lexa’s voice. It sounded hollow, like patronus messages usually do, but there was no mistaking its identity.

“Clarke I think I’ve found something. Come find me.”

The wolf turned around and set of back into the forest. Clarke got back on her broomstick and followed it.

 Lexa was waiting for her halfway up the mountain side, walking down to meet her as Clarke landed and stepped off her broomstick onto the stony surface. Lexa looked out of breath and cautiously excited as she took Clarke’s hands in greeting. Clarke ignored the pang in her stomach at the contact.

“Did you find it?”

Lexa bit her lip, and started tugging Clarke along with her up the mountain side before answering in a low tone. “I’m not entirely sure, but I think so. You’ll see in a minute.”
Clarke noticed the numerous hot springs giving off steam that they passed as they walked upwards. It didn’t take long before they came to a vertical wall of stone, with a narrow passage through it in the middle, like a cave with no roof. It looked cold, bare, and not at all inviting; Clarke couldn’t put her finger on it, but something about the passage made her instincts scream that they weren’t alone.

Lexa led them to the entrance of the passage, then stopped and looked at Clarke. “Do you hear that?”

Clarke could hear it. It sounded almost like wind at first, deep gusts of wind blowing through trees, first this way and then the other, but it was too rhythmical and repetitive and besides there were no trees this far up the mountain. It sounded almost like…

Breathing.

Clarke’s eyebrows shot up. She could only imagine the creature which would be big enough to make such a sound simply by exhaling and inhaling. Lexa bit her lip and indicated towards the passage. Clarke soundlessly followed.

The passage let out halfway up the side of a massive crater. Clarke and Lexa got down on the floor, crawling quietly towards the edge to look down into the sheltered space below. Clarke gasped, and her hand shot out to take Lexa’s elbow.

It was a dragon, alright. It was one of the biggest dragons Clarke had ever seen.

In good news, the dragon definitely had horns. It would have bees disappointing, Clarke’ mind idly observed while her body was paralyzed in shock, to have come all this way and find the legendary dragon of Unnuar Aok, only to discover that it was a Swedish Short-Snout or one of the other dragon breeds without real horns. In bad news, the dragon had a lot of them. It had horns in a long line all the way down its back, in a crown around its head, and two large ones on its snout. Its scales were a beautiful dark green colour, and it appeared to be sleeping, curled up at the bottom of the crater. Its head was angled towards them, and Clarke could feel the gentle gusts its breathing, even all the way up the side of the crater.

Clarke met Lexa’s eyes, and they mirrored her own awe, with just a twinge of fear. Clarke’s mind, unbidden, wondered if this was the last time Clarke would ever stand side by side with Lexa as they found wonders like this. Then Lexa smiled at her, and made her forget about it once again.

Lexa peered back towards the dragon, and shuffled closer to Clarke so she could whisper in her ear. “It doesn’t look like any breed I recognise, I think it must be a mix. Welsh green and Peruvian vipertooth, maybe.”

Clarke nodded, but didn’t take her eyes of the dragon. “That might explain how it’s been able to survive in this environment. Animals with more genetic diversity is generally better at adapting than purebreds are.” She paused for a bit. “It’s massive though. I’ve never seen a dragon of this size before.”

“Most reptiles grow they whole lives, so the bigger they are the older they are,” Lexa replied. “Maybe this actually is the same dragon they saw all those years ago.”

Clarke tried to picture it, the possibility of this being the same dragon who had been roaming the forest more than a hundred years ago.

“Let’s get back to the tent. We need a plan.”
The sun had sunk beneath the horizon by the time they made it back to their camp site, but the warm hues of the sunset still coloured the landscape. Clarke stepped off her broomstick, and took a moment to look out over the view on the lake. The light reflected perfectly in the still surface, lighting up the forest in orange, pink and red.

Lexa landed just after her. She lent her broomstick against a tree, walked past Clarke, and sat down just by the water.

Clarke took the hint and did the same.

They sat in silence for a little bit. It wasn’t uncomfortable; Clarke couldn’t remember a silence between them ever being uncomfortable. Hostile, sure, all those months ago, but never uncomfortable. But there was something special about this silence all the same. On one hand it was beautiful; the lake, the nature was breath-taking, and Clarke was sitting about a foot away from the girl she loved more than life. On the other hand, they had found the dragon now, and their adventure was well underway. Their last adventure, possibly, if the pit of dread in Clarke’s stomach was right. There was no vague promise of going dragon hunting together anymore, an optimistic plan for their future to spend more time together. No, now it was actually happening, it was all business and Clarke and Lexa would be doing what they did best. And there were no promises for what would happen after. It was bittersweet. It was desperate.

Next to her, Lexa started taking off her shoes. It was enough to distract Clarke, and she watched as her socks came off next. Then she focused on Lexa’s face as she slid her feet into the water, and she could see the initial shock at the temperature, and then a slow smile as she let her feet dangle a little. The way her smile widened and she closed her eyes was something Clare would remember forever. No matter what happened.

“How are we going to get the dragon, then?”

Clarke had been so enthralled in watching Lexa and fighting the ache within her that she jumped when Lexa spoke. It took her a moment to reply.

“I don’t know. Dragons are some of the mightiest beasts in magizoology. They’re next to impossible to kill.”

Lexa opened her eyes again, and looked out over the water, still smiling. Clarke could see the light from the water reflected in her eyes. “We don’t have to kill it though.”

Clarke tore her eyes away from Lexa. It was too hard to look at her, too hard to keep her mind on their mission when all Clarke could think about was the prospect of Lexa leaving. Leaving Clarke. She looked out over the water instead, hoping that the tranquillity of the view would find its way into her heart too and replace the fear. “No, we don’t.”

“So, the real question is, how do we get the biggest dragon in the world to lie still while we saw off one of its horn?”

Clarke snorted, despite herself. “Distract it, maybe? Make it look the other way?”

Lexa rolled her eyes. “Your turn, then. The British Museum was enough for me, and that was just the prospect of being caught by four muggles, not a massive dragon.”

Clarke conceded the point.
Lexa seemed to ponder it a bit more. “Can we drug it?”

Clarke looked at her with an incredulous expression. That was a mistake; as soon as she met those green eyes, dread started seeping into her again, accompanied by that bittersweet feeling. She looked back at the water before replying.

“Drug it? Can you imagine the rampage that dragon could go on if it took a hallucinogenic? Your family is just an hour or two’s flight away from here.”

Lexa stared at her. “I meant drug it, as in, sedate it.”

“Oh.” Clarke knew better than to look back at her. “I don’t know of any potion strong enough to knock out a dragon, Lexa.” Her name tasted different in Clarke’s mouth, somehow. Clarke tried not to think about it.

Lexa looked back out over the water too. “What’s that one which people used to fake their deaths with muggle doctors? Draft of the Living Death?”

“Yeah,” Clarke replied, “But that’s meant for humans. You would have to make it drink a swimming pool full of the stuff to have it be enough to affect a dragon, and that’s just accounting for its body weight, not its magical defences.”

“Could you make a concentrated version, somehow?”

That made Clarke stop. Could you make a concentrated version of a potion? “Maybe, I guess. Who knows how that would change the effect, though?”

Lexa looked back at her, and Clarke couldn’t keep herself from meeting her eyes. Her small smile was enough to make Clarke have to bit her teeth together. Wasn’t this supposed to easy? “Worth a shot?”

Clare tried to smile back. “As good a plan as any.”

Lexa’s eyes flickered down to her lips. Lexa could sense her mood, Clarke was sure. It was hard to conceal, and hard to miss. Lexa looked up to meet her eyes again, and Clarke could see her swallow. There wasn’t a lot to say about it; Lexa didn’t want to tell her what was happening, and Clarke had her suspicions as to why. Where Clarke had thought there was a wall between them, it now felt more like an abyss.

Lexa looked away first. Clarke was surprised. She had thought she would be the first to cave. It didn’t reassure her though; if Lexa couldn’t hold her gaze, what did that mean? Guilt? Instead, Lexa took her hand and looked at it, as she played with her fingers. Lexa was still looking at them when she spoke. “It will be ok, Clarke.”

The way Lexa said her name, almost like a prayer, almost did Clarke in. Clarke looked at her until Lexa met her eyes again. “How do I know that?”

Lexa’s gaze flickered down to her lips then, and her expression changed into one which was a bit weary, a bit resigned, but above all else, calm. “Have faith.”

Clarke looked back out over the water. That wasn’t good enough. “If the potion doesn’t work we can find some other way to get to the dragon.”

It was an abrupt change of subject, and they both knew it. But Clarke wasn’t up for debating it right now; she felt weak, and tired. She just wanted to sleep, wrapped up in Lexa, and pretend that
everything was fine. Lexa let it drop.

Clarke looked out at the lake again. The light hadn’t changed much, though the sun had now been
down for a while. “Does it ever really get dark?”

Lexa turned Clarke’s hand over to look at her watch. “No darker than it is now; it’s midnight. This
isn’t the sunset any longer, it’s the sunrise.”

Clarke found herself unable to reply to that. It was so, so beautiful, the view and the light and the
distance from the world. It was a gentle balm on Clarke’s scared heart.

Out of the corner of her eye, Clarke could see Lexa watching her. She looked at Clarke with love,
with sadness, and with a wish to make things better. Clarke didn’t know which part hurt the most.

“We can sleep outside tonight, if you want to? The sky is clear, and it won’t get colder than this.”

Clarke met her eyes. “You know you will have to tell me eventually, right?”

Lexa’s face was serious, but still somehow peaceful. Like she had made her decision, come to
terms with it, all without consulting Clarke. “I know.”

Clarke looked at her for a moment longer, then shifted her gaze back toward the lake and the light.
“Ok, then.”

Lexa let go of her fingers as she got up and went over to the tent. When she came out again she was
carrying a large plastic canvas, which she laid down on the grass by the water, beneath the trees.
Then she went back in again and returned a minute later, dragging the mattress from the bed.
Clarke took a deep breath and got up to help her.

It was one of the best places Clarke had ever slept. The sky was just dark enough that one or two
stars could be seen through the trees, and the only sound in the whole was the gentle lapping of the
small waves against the shore. Lexa had fallen asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow, clearly
exhausted from the long day. Clarke was too. Still she couldn’t fall asleep; instead she curled
herself around Lexa and held her so tight that she half expected her to wake up, and buried her face
in her hair. There. If only they could stay like this, unchanging, then it would be ok. Maybe Lexa
couldn’t slip from her grasp, if only she held on tightly enough. Above them, the sky slowly got
brighter.

Chapter End Notes

Not gonna lie, I finished this chapter like two weeks ago but I’ve been agonising over it
ever since. Only 3 chapters and an epilogue left now... Also, I have intentionally tried
avoiding mentioning things like Hogwarts houses, patronuses and animagus forms in
this fic, because there is so much debate about it in the fandom, but
DreamsAreMyWords and I have now decided that between ourselves we have the
power to pronounce hp!Clexa things canon. Feel free to discuss our choices in the
comments!
Listen, I know I said I wanted this done by May, but I didn't say what year.
This is for the witch day of Clextober, though I didn't get to post it on the right day,
and for DreamsAreMyWords, who reminds me how much I like writing this story.

The cauldron was bubbling away. It was probably the biggest cauldron Clarke had ever seen; the opening was almost five feet across, and it was as high as Clarke’s hip. It looked like something out of a muggle story about witches meeting on the sabbath and dancing around in their undergarments. It was a cauldron which was hard to take seriously.

Lexa and she had spent their first morning in the forest sitting on a blanket outside the tent, hunched over some books and trying to calculate how much sleeping draft they would need to knock out a dragon. Lexa had been looking up the facts, and Clarke had noted them down and done some maths as they went along. One batch of Draught of the Living Death was usually administered for one adult human. So, assuming the dragon in the crater was roughly the size of fifteen-ish elephants, and one elephant weights probably around the same as thirty to forty adult humans, and one batch of the draught was about a litre in volume when it’s completed, Clarke worked out, that is about two large barrels worth of potion needed to proportionally drug a large dragon. Lexa had doublechecked her calculations and flown back to Aok, returning later with some difficulty, the massive cauldron dangling by ropes from underneath her broom. She had landed ungracefully in the middle of the clearing, barely having time to flash Clarke a confident smile before falling over when the cauldron tipped on its side, dragging both Lexa and her broom six feet towards the lake before it came to a stop. Clarke was doubled over laughing.

Now they were twenty-four hours into the process, and Clarke was reasonably happy with their progress. Making the draught was a complicated process in and of itself, N.E.W.T. level potion studies at Hogwarts, but their experimentation to try and make a concentrated version made it even more unpredictable. Clarke was pretty much just adding ingredients at about four times the regular concentration, trying to avoid liquids and drying out everything before it went in. Currently the potion looked a lot like wet tarmac, bubbling almost ominously in the bottom of the pot.

Lexa walked up next to Clarke just as some dark purple smoke started rising from the potion, and peered into the cauldron. “How’s it going?”

“Decently enough. As far as I can tell it looks sort of like what is described in the recipe, just a much more gross and solid version. We might be in luck.”
Lexa looked up at her and smiled. Clarke felt the familiar pool of butterflies in her stomach. It was easier to be around Lexa when they had a mission to keep their minds and hands occupied. Clarke smiled back. “Which is good, I guess, because we don’t have a way of testing it. We only get one shot at this.”

Lexa nodded pensively. “I guess so. You don’t think we could slip some to a moose or something? To see how it reacts?”

Clarke looked back into the concoction. A large bubble rose slowly, breaching the surface of the gravel-like substance like a whale coming up for air. “I’m pretty sure this stuff could kill an army, so that depends entirely on how many wildlife crimes you want on your record.”

“A whole army?”

“Pretty much. We are compensating for its weight, and its natural magical defences. This is potent stuff. Let’s just hope the ministry doesn’t get wind of this; I don’t think it’s explicitly outlawed, since it on technicality alone is still a sleeping draught, but I’m sure that’s just because no one has tried making it before.”

Lexa raised a perfectly arched eyebrow, making Clarke squirm. “Is there a chance we might be about to poison the centuries old, much loved, infamous Aok dragon?”

Clarke gave her a sheepish look. “Not intentionally.”

“I see. That’s fine then, I am pretty sure that you can’t go to jail for murder, as long as it was unintentional.”

Clarke grinned at her. “Exactly. And I’m sure no one would think this is premeditated; all we’ve done is spend hours and days on carefully crafting the murder weapon, before intentionally feeding it to our victim.”

“Speaking of which,” Lexa said, “I mean no offence to your ever-improving culinary skills, but this doesn’t look like a particularly appealing meal. Any ideas about how we are going to convince the dragon to eat it?”

Clarke shrugged. “A giant martini glass and a straw?”
Lexa shook her head exasperatedly, but Clarke didn’t even have to look up from the cauldron to know she was hiding a smile. Still, her breath hitched when she felt Lexa’s hand wrap around her waist.

“Did you learn anything more about the dragon?”

Lexa had spent the last few hours on her broom, scouting out the crater and following the movements of the dragon while Clarke worked on the portion. Now Lexa’s cheeks had a fresh light red colour to them, and her hair was escaping her braids and framing her face in wild curls. It was very distracting.

Lexa didn’t stop pulling her closer as she replied. “A little. She went out flying in the morning, but came back to the crater by midday.”

“She?”

“Just a guess. But female reptiles usually get bigger than male ones, so it’s an educated guess. She went out again when the sun started setting, so my best guess is that the crater is a permanent den, and that she’s crepuscular.”

Clarke blinked at her. “Crepuscular?”

“Means that she’s active during twilight, and sleeps during the day and the night.”

“Right. I keep forgetting that you have turned into an expert on wildlife behaviour in the last month or so.”

Lexa blushed a little, and Clarke revelled in it. She turned to face Lexa more fully, leaning in slightly as Lexa’s other hand came up to grasp at her waist as well.

Lexa looked at her lips, and swallowed distractedly.
Clarke grinned. “How ready are you?”

Lexa looked up at her with wide eyes. Clarke would never know how anyone could look so fierce and so adorable at the same time. Her smile grew wider.

“Because the potion will be ready in an hour or two. Are you ready to go?”

Lexa blushed slightly again, but started smiling too.

“I am just awaiting your orders, Clarke. I’m ready to go when you are. You’re the boss.”

“Am I?”

Lexa blushed more deeply as she evidently realised the full extent of what she was saying. The flush of colour in her cheeks made Clarke’s heart speed up, and her fingertips felt tingly. She wanted to let them wander, let them touch and embrace and search until they could peel layers away and find the skin they craved.

“No. Shut up.”

Clarke laughed. Lexa sighed deeply, and took a step back. Clarke let her go, and turned back to the potion, smile still on her face. The unpleasant feeling in her stomach, caused by Lexa getting more and more distant, was easy to forget about when she could still feel the burning sensation where the warmth of Lexa’s hand had gone through the fabric of her shirt. “Maybe we could use some bait.”

“Bait?” Lexa was moving away from her. Clarke tried not to read into it.

“Yeah, get some sort of bait and submerge it in the potion, then feeding it to the dragon.”

Lexa was nodding, partially, Clarke suspected, to help move the conversation on. “Yeah, good idea. I’ll see what I can find.” With that she turned around and jogged over toward her broom, which was leaning against a tree at the edge of their clearing.
“Hey, Lexa?” Clarke called after her.

Lexa turned her head back, but didn’t stop walking. “Yeah?”

Clarke looked her up and down. There were many things she wanted to say in that moment. Too many, really, so she settled on the easiest one. “Don’t be gone too long.”

Lexa gave her a wide grin which didn’t reach her eyes. It made Clarke’s heart beat faster, but not in the delicious way Lexa’s grin usually did.

“Never.”

Lexa was only gone an hour or so before she came back, dragging a large sack of dried meat with her. Clarke debated not even asking where she got it, but curiosity got the better of her.

“I raided the Aok pantry.”

Clarke gave her a funny look. “You stole food from Aok?”

Lexa got a surprised expression on her face, which quickly turned pensive, like she hadn’t even considered that what she was doing could be labelled ‘theft’. “I guess so. In my defence, I do pay for it all, because I send most of my pay checks here. I’ll square it with Indra before we leave, though.”

Clarke couldn’t help laughing, though she tried not to.

Lexa gave her a look. “Oh, please. Like you don’t take food from your mom’s kitchen when you go to see her.”

“I don’t, actually. She’s a terrible cook, usually only has empty takeout containers in her kitchen.”
“Wow, I never knew that was inheritable.”

Clarke smacked her shoulder, and Lexa massaged the wounded area, smiling.

“Besides, I hardly ever go to see her.”

Lexa looked saddened at that. “You should, Clarke. She’s your mother.”

Clarke picked up the bag of meats and started pulling it towards the cauldron. They had talked about Clarke’s somewhat strained relationship with her mother before, but it was always a conversation which made Clarke vaguely uncomfortable. Not exactly what she needed more of right now. “I know. I don’t have a lot of free time though, and neither does she.”

Lexa bend down to take the other side of the bag, and between them they managed to drag it all the way. They reached into the bag and pulled out chunks of dried meat to put into the cauldron. “Still,” Lexa said between chunks, “you both live in London. You should go see her after we’re done with the dragon. I’ll come with you.”

Clarke almost dropped the heavy piece of meat she was lifting, which would have crushed her toe completely. “You will?”

Lexa, apparently not noticing Clarke’s shock, lifted the bag, which was now mostly empty, and shook the last few pieces of meat into the cauldron. Only then did she look up at Clarke, and apparently caught on. She hesitated. “I mean… If you want me to. Of course.”

Clarke stared at her.

Lexa stared back.

Clarke cleared her throat and rummaged around in her elixir kit for the last few ingredients. The Draught of Living Death was almost done. She couldn’t afford distraction.

She couldn’t afford feeling hopeful.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

Surprise, bitch, bet you thought you'd seen the last of me.

I was only able to finish this because @Zaxagra made me sit down in a locked room with a laptop and some wine and wouldn't let me leave. She's a fantastic beta, a fantastic writer, and my best friend. Her fic Between Two Lines (Wayhaught) is one of the best fics I've ever read, and I can't recommend it highly enough.

And now, a mere twelve months after the last installment...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke had been raised on her father's muggle fairy tales. There had been knights slaying dragons, wizards slaying dragons, damsels escaping dragons on horseback and armies fighting dragons led by heroes swinging swords.

Not once, Clarke reflected, had those dragon-defeating heroes been flying broomsticks, dangling a sleep draught-infused moose carcass below them.

Lexa had reportedly watched the dragon leave its lair in the crater just before sunset, seemingly confirming her theory that it was mostly active during twilight and dawn. Clarke had accepted it with a small nod, sparing a thought to the magizoologists of the world. They would probably have given their wand arm to be in their place and learn the things they were learning.

It was now just after midnight, and Clarke and Lexa were transporting their bait back to the dragon's den.

The plan was simple. Step one: infuse the moose carcass with sleeping draught. Step two: leave the bait in the dragon's crater. Step three: have the dragon eat it when she returns at dawn, sending her into a deep sleep. Step four: gently saw off one of her horns and get the hell out of there.

The moose carcass had been laying in the sleeping draught for hours, and as far as they could tell it had absorbed a great deal of it. Step one was completed. Now they were flying laboriously with the heavy carcass tied between them. It was too heavy for one of their brooms to carry on their own. They could only hope that the dragon wouldn't call it a night earlier than normal.

The flying was hard enough without the prospect of a dragon descending on them from above. On balance, Clarke figured it wasn't the best plan they had ever concocted. But it wasn't the worst one either.

Lexa was flying silently beside her. Clarke realised she had only been watching her other side, being so used now to Lexa having her back.

That wouldn't do. Lexa was avoiding the topic, but Clarke wasn't dumb; Lexa was leaving. Whatever had passed between her and Mrs. Wolfe after they got caught, it had changed everything. Lexa was treating her differently. Every kiss, every touch, felt like Lexa was putting everything into it because it could be the last.
Lexa was leaving. She was most likely just waiting for the right time.

Clarke bit her teeth together and focussed on her breathing. They had a dragon to handle.

They touched down in the crater without problems, and Lexa used her wand to cut the ropes anchoring the carcass to their brooms. Then they flew back to the rim of the crater, to the other side of where Lexa had seen the dragon leave that evening. Clarke put muffling charms on them both while Lexa put their standard array of protective spells around their hide out. It was like second nature to them by now. Clarke tried not to think about it. Instead she idly mused over whether Lexa's protective spells would have any effect on a dragon. If any witch's magic were good enough to stand up to a dragon, Clarke figured, it would be Lexa's.

They were sitting with their back against a boulder, facing the crater from the west with a good view of their moose carcass - and waited.

It would still be a while before dawn, even here in the North where the sun rose so early. Above them, the few stars visible in the light northern night were shining brightly. The moon was behind Clarke and Lexa, descending slowly. The blue of the night was turning milder, a gentle hint of white just visible on the horizon in front of them.

It felt very similar to when they had been perched on that cliff in Tibet, Lexa waiting for the yeti, and Clarke waiting for the perfect moment to kiss her. Yet even after everything that had happened since then, the moments they had shared, Clarke had still felt closer to Lexa before ever kissing her than she did now. There was a wall between them, and it was making it hard to breathe.

Clarke blew out a frustrated breath and reached into her bag for the thermos.

Lexa's eyebrows raised. "I didn't realise you brought cocoa".

"We all know I'm the brains on this team. Don't get high ideas about yourself just because you've read a book or two now."

Lexa winced. Clarke closed her eyes. She hadn't meant for it to come out sounding that harsh. Why couldn't she hit the perfect level of playful and flirty with Lexa anymore? It had been second nature to her a few weeks ago.

She filled the thermos cup and handed it to Lexa as an apology. Lexa took it and blew on the steam.

They settled back in silence again. It was suffocating.

Eventually Clarke couldn't take it anymore. She let her eyes flicker around the crater in front of them and the forest beyond, searching for something, anything, to talk about. "What will you do after this?"

Lexa drew in a sharp breath, and it was Clarke's turn to wince. Definitely not the right subject to breach right now. It was a subject they had discussed on the way out of the pyramids, and on that shelf right before they got the yeti hairs. It had been triumphant and hopeful both times. Now, however...

Lexa avoided the question like a pro, and for once Clarke didn’t mind. "Do you think Ollivander will be pleased with the dragon horn? Or will you still be on probation, so to speak?"

Clarke shrugged. "Who knows. This was supposed to be my chance to prove myself, but I don't know if that man is ever going to be happy with me again. I've had it up to here." Clarke finished
with touching her fingers to her brow, before letting her hand fall down in frustration. The whole situation, this life that she loved and the wall between her and the woman sitting next to her, was getting the better of her.

Lexa on the other hand bizarrely seemed to perk up. "Yeah? You never said exactly what he said after… you know."

"I got yelled at, I got told off, I was treated like a child. I don't know what else to tell you."

"No, I know that," Lexa insisted, looking at her, "but what did he say? Is he still going to teach you?"

Clarke met her gaze, not understanding and with no more patience to pretend like she did. "Why would I tell you? You aren't telling me anything."

For once, Lexa didn't look away. She held Clarke's gaze, but seemed to struggle with getting the words out. "I… We… Things won't be the same anymore. After I… I won't be your partner the way I was."

Clarke blew out air in frustration. "What's that supposed to mean? What aren't you telling me?"

Lexa looked at her for a long time. "When I tell you, everything will change." Lexa found her hand and grasped it tightly. Clarke got the feeling she was trying to hold on. "I… I just want to pretend like everything is the way it was, just for a little while longer."

She looked back at the horizon in front of them, where light blue was turning even whiter in anticipation of the dawn. Lexa took Clarke's hand in both of her own then. "I know it's selfish."

Clarke felt tears in her eyes, and she blinked them away angrily. There was only so much heartbreak she could take. Clarke would have preferred Lexa being angry, being stupid, being anything other than this woman who selfishly wanted to love Clarke for a little longer before the inevitable end.

It would have made it so much easier if Lexa wasn't… well, Lexa. Living for a little longer in their bubble of the world seemed like heaven, but Clarke needed to know. "Tell me."

The sun came up in that moment.

It was right in front of them, bathing them both in golden light and warmth. Lexa had never looked more beautiful. Clarke had never felt sadder. She turned fully to Lexa, watching her watching the dawn.

"Lexa, I…"

Lexa turned towards her fully, too.

Clarke tried again. "Lexa, I need-". The light in Lexa's eyes was flickering. In fact, the light on her whole face was flickering, as if something was moving between her and the sun.

Clarke whipped her head back towards the rising light. It was hard to make out against the dawn, but it was just about possible to see it. Clarke got up, pulling Lexa with her.

"There. She's back."

The silhouette of the dragon grew larger as it got closer. Lexa didn't let go of Clarke's hand.

Clarke's head was a mess and her heart a wreck, but she still couldn't miss the majesty of the sight in front of her. The dragon looked so huge it shouldn't be able to fly. And yet, bathed by the rising sun, it gracefully got closer, circled above them, and landed in the crater. Clarke stood next to the
woman she loved and watched one of the rarest beings in the world settle into her lair. For a moment Clarke felt bigger than herself. Like all her troubles and woes were fading into the background, bested by sheer awe.

The dragon spotted the carcass and sniffed at it. It seemed a little agitated, dashing its tail around excitedly. To Clarke's surprise, the dragon soon enough seemed to get over its suspicion and gobbled the bait down whole. Clarke supposed you didn't have much of a reason to fear anything when you were the only dragon on the continent.

Then it laid down to sleep.

Clarke stared at it, transfixed, but cautious. "It goes to sleep every dawn, right? When it comes back from hunting or whatever it does at night?"

Lexa, equally focussed on the wonder in front of them, nodded.

Clarke thought about it. "So, we don't actually know if the sleeping draught worked. It could be regular sleep, or it could be magic sleep."

Lexa looked back at her, a smile playing on her face. "That's true. I trust your potion skills, though. And besides, this isn't any stupider than what we've done before."

It dawned on Clarke that she could hold her ground on this. She could make Lexa stay on the edge of the crater with her for hours still, under the pretence of wanting to make sure the potion had worked. She could even say that it wouldn't do, they needed to be sure that it had worked, their plan wasn't good enough and they needed to go back to camp and think of something else.

Clarke felt like Lexa's hand was burning in her own. Suddenly she wanted nothing more than to be done with it all. She wanted to pack her bags, get the hell out of Canada and not look back.

She dropped Lexa's hand. "Ok. But just so we're clear, this is your family sigil. If we die today than you definitely had the stupider death out of the two of us."

Lexa picked up both their broomsticks and handed one to Clarke. "One day I will take you to see a griffin and I will make you eat those words."

They flew down to the dragon. The dragon's breath, even in sleep, was so strong that it made it a little harder to fly. They landed next to its tail, as gently as possible. The dragon had horns everywhere; two large ones on the snout, a crown on the head, and a row of them all along her back and down her tail.

They chose a horn about halfway down the dragon's tail, far enough down the length of the dragon that they could reach it while standing on the ground. It had seemed a no-brainer that it would be smarter to try to get a horn from her tail than her face when they had planned it back at their campsite, but even so, Clarke didn't feel particularly safe nor smart as she got her wand out. She stepped up to the dragon. She knew she should be more careful, move more cautiously, but the pent-up emotions from the last few days were pounding through her veins. They would still be covered by the protective spells Lexa had covered both of them with earlier, but who knew how they would work on a dragon.

Clarke vaguely remembered a million years ago, when she had stunned a grindylow in Wales and taken its horn. It had been one of the first proper missions Ollivander had sent her on. Lexa had stolen that horn form her room at the inn, she thought. Now they were standing side by side and taking one from a dragon.
The same cutting spell which had cut the grindylow horn clean off only made a little chip in the dragon horn. The dragon stirred.

Clarke and Lexa were both watching its head, but it only shuffled a little in its sleep.

Clarke tried the same spell again, and the chip got a bit bigger. The dragon stirred again, but Clarke didn't and couldn't care. She only wanted to get out of there as fast as possible.

She could feel Lexa behind her getting agitated. Clarke didn't let it faze her and kept chipping away at the horn. This time, the dragon shifted its tail slightly, moving more than before, but Clarke ignored it.

"Clarke…" Lexa whispered.

Clarke rounded on her. She didn't say a word, but she let every bit of her frustration and her anxiety show on her face. Clarke grit her teeth together, willing the tears in her eyes not to fall.

Lexa looked at her, and her face slowly turned from weary to sad, and finally into showing a distraught acceptance. She wordlessly and soundlessly stepped up next to Clarke, and together they chipped away at the horn.

The dragon shifted more and more. Its tail started slowly drifting back and forth. Lexa held Clarke back from pursuing it when it moved away, but Clarke shook her hand off. Lexa wordlessly took her hand again, not meeting her eyes but keeping Clarke from following the tail, and didn't let go.

When the tail slowly moved back towards them, they both had to take several quick steps backwards to they wouldn't get hit. As soon as it stayed still, they started chipping away at the horn again.

The dragon was moving its head. Even from this angle they could tell that its eyes weren’t open yet, but the dragon stretched its neck and laid down again as if it were sleeping in an uncomfortable position. Clarke's breath sped up.

They both started chipping away at the horn even faster. Lexa kept restraining Clarke from following the tail as it moved again and again. Clarke grit her teeth. She hadn't wanted to curse Lexa since they were in Egypt what felt like an eternity ago, but Clarke could feel those exact feelings starting to resurface.

Eventually the horn came off in Clarke's hand. She turned to Lexa, holding it up, half thinking to give it to Lexa, and half thinking to stab her with it.

Then the dragon woke up.

Clarke and Lexa froze, Clarke still holding the horn in front of her.

The dragon was looking around. Then it turned its head back towards its tail, exactly where Clarke and Lexa were standing completely without cover.

Its large eyes blinked, each of them almost as big as Clarke herself. The pupils dilated, trying to see through the magic protecting Clarke and Lexa. Lexa's spells must have held. Clarke didn’t breathe, but she couldn't help looking over at Lexa in admiration.

Then the dragon looked away from them, still unseeing, and spotted its damaged horn. It roared a deep sound of hurt, and in a flurry of movement it whipped around, trying to reach the wounded area.
The ground moved beneath them. The stones they were standing on trembled and shook and started coming down as the dragon dashed around. Lexa knocked Clarke over, pushing her out of the way and protecting her with her own body from the massive legs of the dragon threatening to trample them. Clarke, thinking quickly from underneath Lexa, shot off a protective enchantment to shield them from the boulders that were falling all around.

In the chaos Lexa must have managed to accio their brooms. She and Clarke scrambled to get on them, and before Clarke knew it they were holding on for dear life as they rapidly ascended out of the crater. Clarke shot a glance behind her, and saw the dragon sullenly licking her damaged horn, paying no mind to the landslide coming down around her. Being hit by boulders which would have crushed Clarke and Lexa seemed to barely register with the dragon.

Lexa flew next to Clarke and met her eyes. It was there again, that fire which Clarke loved. The burning passion. Clarke knew that even though her pulse was still racing from fear, she would never forget that look.

The adrenaline was pumping through Clarke, and she suddenly felt incredibly free. She threw herself down on her broom, and raced Lexa back to their camp, overtaking her at an incredible speed. Lexa laughed, and chased after her. Clarke was holding the dragon horn in one hand though, and when Lexa zoomed past her, she snatched the horn from her grasp. Clarke laughed too and pursued. Lexa dipped down, heading for cover in the trees, but just as she reached the top of the tallest pine, Clarke had caught up with her, and snatched the horn right back. Lexa dashed for her, but Clarke threw the horn over her, ducked beneath her on her broom, and caught the horn again on the other side of Lexa. Lexa shouted indignantly, and Clarke laughed.

When they reached their campsite, they were both breathless. Lexa's hair was dishevelled and wild, her eyes full of laughter, and Clarke was breathless from something other than flying.

Clarke looked around at their campsite, with their fire and their tent and the mattress they had been sleeping on outside, and the laughter died in her throat.

She looked at Lexa, who quieted as well.

It was time to go home.

Clarke looked at her again. Lexa stood sheepish, broom in one hand, the ghost of a smile leaving her face. Clarke loved that face. She never wanted to leave it. Lexa was standing right next to the lake, facing away from it. Facing Clarke.

The time had come to talk.

She drew herself up to her full height, steeling herself. "Whatever it is you don't want to say Lexa, I think it's time." She met her eyes. "We're at journey's end."

Lexa looked at her with a pleading expression, and took a step in her direction, but Clarke took a step back. "No. I'm serious. Tell me the truth." Clarke suddenly had to bite back something which might have been a sob. She took a moment, then soldiered on. "You're leaving."

Lexa looked perplexed. Whatever she had been planning to say seemed to die on her tongue. Her eyes were searching Clarke's face. "I'm not leaving."

Clarke was taken aback. "You're not?"

Lexa shook her head, looking serious. "Leaving you? Never."
Clarke could only blink. "But you said… about not being partners any more…"

Lexa squared her shoulders, clearly gathering some courage. "Clarke, I have quit my apprenticeship. After we came back last time, after Wolfe and Ollivander… Wolfe asked something of me which I could never give. I walked out, and I didn't look back."

Very little of that made any sense to Clarke. "But why does that matter? Why didn't you come to see me? Are you saying you were able to go back to London this entire ti-"

Lexa cut her off. "We aren't colleagues anymore. You will have your missions. I will have to get some other job. Who knows where? And I still can't come back to London; Ollivander would fire you in a heartbeat. And you love London." Lexa looked at her, hard. "You can't do the job you love, live the life you love, with me in it."

Clarke stared, comprehension slowly dawning, and with it, surprise. Lexa was standing in front of her, cards on the table, and looking at Clarke like she had just delivered the final evidence in a piece of research that showed that the world was ending imminently.

Clarke had to try several times before she was able to start her next sentence. "Lexa, I hate my job."

"What?"

Clarke shook her head. "I hate it. Being bullied around by Ollivander, being belittled when we do stuff like this –" she raised the dragon horn above her head, giving it a shake as if to prove her point, "on a weekly basis? What I love about this job is being with you. Travelling with you, being on adventures with you. If you can't be a part of it, then my job means nothing to me. It isn't what I love."

Lexa blinked, like she couldn't understand the words. She was standing tall, beautifully silhouetted by the lake and the light. Lexa soon found the words to answer, though. They seemed simple, here at the end of everything, and Lexa said them with simple honesty. "What I love, is you."

Clarke dropped the dragon horn, ran at her, and launched herself at Lexa. Lexa's back hit the lake as their lips met.

Clarke didn't care. The lake wasn't very deep so close to the shore, and the water wasn't too cold now in the summer. Lexa soon found the bottom. She sat up, water reaching up to her abdomen and lips never leaving Clarke's. She pulled Clarke into her lap, kissing her fiercely.

Clarke straddled her. She could have sworn she had never kissed anyone before in her life; that's how brand new it felt to kiss Lexa again. Brand new and ancient. She pushed herself as close to Lexa as she could, eliminating all space between them, and Lexa held her like she would never let go again.

Her fingers tried to brush Lexa's hair out of her face, but it was too wet. Clarke cradled her neck instead, holding her head so she could kiss her better. Kiss her harder.

Lexa's fingers found their way between layers until they found the skin on Clarke's back. Suddenly Clarke was on fire, even in the cold water. She pulled away from Lexa, letting their foreheads meet and breathed shakily.

Lexa's eyes were closed, but Clarke's were open. She could see that Lexa was breathing heavily too, and the arms around Clarke's waist didn't let go of their death grip. Lexa's fingers were digging into the skin on her back, and Clarke had never felt a sweeter pain.
"You're really not going to leave?"

Lexa opened her eyes, meeting Clarke's.

"Never."

Clarke kissed her again and started shoving Lexa's wet jacket off her shoulders.

Lexa, with apparent difficulties, let go off Clarke just long enough for Clarke to push the jacket off her arms. "You really don't care about losing your job with Ollivander?"

Clarke shook her head, reconnecting their lips. Lexa started to pull at Clarke's shirt, and Clarke's forgot to breathe. She disconnected their lips just long enough to grasp the hem and help Lexa pull Clarke's shirt up and over her head, throwing it vaguely back towards the shore.

Clarke was watching Lexa closely. Lexa looked down her torso, from her neck and down to where the lake water came up to her waist, and she swallowed heavily. She looked up again at Clarke's face, and Clarke could swear her eyes were wet. Then Lexa reached around Clarke and hugged her fiercely, so tightly that Clarke could barely breathe. Clarke buried her face in Lexa's wet hair, letting pent-up tears mix with the lake water.

Clarke didn't know how long they held each other, but it felt like a long time. The lake water was starting to give her goose bumps, but she didn't care. Eventually Lexa spoke, her voice muffled from where her face was buried in Clarke's shoulder.

"What about London? You love London."

Even in the middle of what was possibly the most emotionally loaded moment of her life, Clarke had to laugh. "No one loves London, Lexa. People tolerate London, at best."

Lexa chuckled hoarsely. The sound was heavenly. Clarke slipped her hands under Lexa's shirt and found cold skin. Lexa's breath hitched, and she disentangled herself from Clarke to help her unbutton the shirt and throw it the same way her jacket and Clarke's shirt had gone.

Lexa gently cradled Clarke's head, and looked at her with something Clarke could only describe as reverence.

Lexa leant in to kiss away the remaining tears at the edge of Clarke's eyes. Then she kissed her eyelids, her cheek bones, the tip of her nose. Then she kissed her jawline, making her way down to Clarke's neck. Clarke hung on to her for dear life, one arm around her waist and another at the back of Lexa's head, as Lexa's teeth grazed her skin.

Clarke's head was spinning, but that didn't stop her reaching down into the water to try to unbutton Lexa's trousers. The soggy material wasn't easy to handle though, and her frustrated shoving soon made Lexa giggle against her neck, breaking the moment.


Lexa removed her lips from Clarke's neck, clearly biting her lips together in an attempt not to laugh. She tried to remove Clarke's trousers instead, but didn't have much more luck, fumbling with the wet cloth. She looked back up at Clarke. "I can't believe we're wearing jeans."

Clarke gave up on the material, and instead let her fingers trail up Lexa's abdomen and around her waist, pulling her closer. "Today's legwear is the stupidest decision we've ever made. And that is saying something."
Lexa nodded with faux-seriousness. "Definitely."

Clarke gave her a look. "Even stupider than not telling me you had quit your job."

Lexa opened her mouth, but Clarke shut her off with a kiss to take the blunt off it. "I understand why," she said against her lips, "but don't do it again. You've been killing me."

Lexa opened her eyes, gaze boring into Clarke's. "Did you really think I was going to leave?"

Clarke could only nod.

Lexa swallowed hard. She closed her eyes as her brow furrowed, and she leant her forehead against Clarke's. "Clarke, I am so sorry. If I knew, I would have told you much sooner."

"Why didn't you tell me, anyway? Did you think I was going to cut you out of my life because you're not an apprentice like me anymore?"

Lexa looked a bit sheepish. She nodded.

"Lexa, that is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. No wonder I am the brains of this team."

Lexa looked indignant. "It wasn't just that. Being with me would have made Ollivander fire you the moment he found out. I was trying to help, to make it easier for you. I didn't know that you didn't care about working for him."

Clarke shook her head exasperatedly, arms winding around Lexa's shoulders. "You could have asked."

"I know. I should have." Lexa gave her a half-smile, her hands giving up on Clarke's jeans and instead drifting around to grab Clarke's behind.

Clarke's goose bumps were back, but this time it had nothing to do with the temperature. "I'll quit. I should have done it months ago, to be honest."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am. Lexa?"

"Yeah?"

"I would choose you every time."

"Over the job with Ollivander?"

"Over everything. You already chose me over your job, remember?"

Lexa met her eyes, and Clarke could swear they were getting wet again. Clarke repeated what Lexa had done earlier and kissed away the forming tears.

"Lexa?" Clarke asked again, resting her forehead against Lexa's.

"Yeah?" Lexa's voice was a little shakier this time.

"I am going to remove your bra, and I want you to stop talking about Ollivander."

Lexa threw her head back and laughed. Then she hugged Clarke close to her body and stood up.
Clarke yelped, and tightened her legs around Lexa's waist. She didn't need to worry though; Lexa was supporting her every step of the way as she carried Clarke out of the lake and onto dry land, kissing her the whole time.

Lexa's bra was discarded somewhere along the way.

Lexa gently laid her down on their mattress outside their tent. The gentle sunlight filtered down through the leaves above them and reflected off the lake. Lexa, at last, was able to unbutton Clarke's trousers and pull them down her legs, before easing herself down on top of Clarke.

Lexa kissed her gently, supporting herself on her elbows. Clarke easily knocked Lexa's elbow away, making her crumble and fall down, and allowing Clarke to use the moment of confusion to roll on top of Lexa. Lexa's hands, shaking slightly, came up to carefully cradle Clarke's head.

Clarke stopped for a minute and rested her chin on Lexa's sternum, looking up at her and enjoying the moment of Lexa being completely unguarded. Clarke swallowed heavily. She felt drunk, she felt high, she felt like her fingertips were tingling and the bottom of her stomach had fallen out. She had seen Lexa in many different settings, but this was definitely her favourite so far.

Clarke sat back on her haunches and started pulling Lexa's jeans off. Lexa lifted her hips to help, but as soon as Clarke threw the wet material away Lexa sat up and pulled Clarke back into her lap. Clarke had to speak between kisses. "Will." Kiss. "You." Kiss. "Stop trying." Kiss. "To take over?"

Lexa smiled against her lips, before turning around to once again trap Clarke against the mattress below her. "Not a chance."

Clarke gasped as Lexa let her full weight rest on top of her. "We both know I could take you in a fight."

Lexa's teeth once again grazed her neck, and Clarke instantly forgot what they were talking about. "That claim is unsubstantiated. Besides," Lexa said, panting slightly against her skin, "I think I am going to combust soon if you don't stop talking and find something else to do with your mouth."

Clarke gave up and gave in to the feeling of Lexa's naked body against her own. Her blood was rushing in her ears, and she barely registered Lexa worshiping her neck as she removed Clarke's bra. When Lexa gently cupped her breasts and let a thumb flick over a nipple, Clarke could feel her eyes roll back into her head.

Clarke laid on her side, flushed against Lexa, foreheads meeting. Lexa looked so peaceful. Her eyes were closed. Her arms were around Clarke's waist, holding her close to her body, fingers tracing invisible patterns against her back.

Clarke knew she could stay like this forever.

Lexa must have felt her looking, somehow. She opened an eye, and smiled when she saw Clarke looking at her. There were no words, Clarke reflected, that could fill the space between them any better than the loving smile Lexa gave her.

"I can't wait to tell Ollivander I'm going to quit."

Lexa grinned. "Are we allowed to talk about Ollivander again, then? Moratorium over?"
Clarke rolled her eyes. "I personally consider him to be somewhat of a mood-killer, but if you want to talk about him in the bedroom, that is something we can consider together in the future."

Lexa's eyes narrowed. "That is the single grossest thing I have ever heard."

Clarke laughed.

Lexa kissed her gently, before laying her head back down again and smiling at Clarke. "What are we going to do next?"

It was somehow the most wonderful question Clarke had ever heard. "I don't know. We'll have to get jobs."

Lexa hummed. "Or we can just stay her and take up hunting and gathering."

It was Clarke's turn to grin. "I bet we'd be good at that too."

Lexa nodded. "Speaking of things we are good at, maybe we could continue studying wand lore. Independently, I mean, without the worst tutors in the history of the trade to torture us."

Clarke scrunched her face up. "I was never very good at that, to be honest. I was brilliant at getting the items Ollivander wanted, but I was never very good at the theory bit."

"I thought you were supposed to be smart."

Clarke gave an indignant sound. "I am smart! Wand lore is just the worst!"

Lexa grinned and closed her eyes, pulling Clarke closer. "Alright. No wand lore."

Clarke settled into the embrace. "Maybe we could sell stuff."

Lexa opened an eye to peek at her. "Eh?"

Clarke was thinking while talking. "We could like, continue doing some of the stuff we're doing. But then we could sell it instead of giving it to Ollivander and Mrs. Wolfe." Clarke was getting more excited as the idea was starting to take form in her head. "Bet we could make a good chunk of money as well. Some of the things we've been procuring are lucrative."

Lexa seemed to be considering her proposal. "That's not a bad idea. Lexa smiled at her, starting to mirror Clarke's growing excitement. "We'd be going into business together."

"As international bounty hunters, no less. I must warn you, I have every intention of mixing business with pleasure." Clarke said, as Lexa rolled over to trap her against the mattress again.

Lexa's smile grew wider. "We'd have to be a bit more selective with what we sell though. Dragon horn is, as I believe you pointed out to Aiden, a Class B untradeable item according to the ministry."

Clarke rolled her eyes and was about to reply, but it turned into a quiet moan when Lexa dipped down to kiss her neck. She had to pull herself together to form a coherent response. "Obviously we'd try to stay mostly on the right side of the law. But like, yeti hair? Ruby scarabs? We'd be rich." Lexa started making her way down Clarke's front to her clavicle, and it was getting harder for Clarke to think, let alone speak. "Like, I know we can't sell it, but can you imagine what the dragon horn would go for? It would--"

Clarke cut herself off suddenly, fear in her voice. "Lexa!"
Lexa jerked her head back from the soft skin on Clarke's breasts, looking at her with concern. "What?!"

"Where did the dragon horn go?!"

Lexa stared at her. Clarke frantically tried to explain, "I dropped it when I ran for you and we fell in the lake. It could- " Clarke tried to get up, but Lexa did not move, and the weight of her body was trapping Clarke against the mattress.

"The dragon had like fifty horns, Clarke." She gave Clarke a faux-stern look, before impatiently bending back down and letting her teeth graze Clarke's nipple. Clarke's half-hearted protest died in her throat, and her head fell back against the mattress. "We're going to be international bounty hunters. We'll get another one."

It made Clarke laugh. The absurdity of it. The love with which Lexa caressed her. The sun above them and the lake and the dragon and everything else. Clarke laughed, and laughed, and laughed, until Lexa shut her up with a kiss.

Chapter End Notes

Just an epilogue to go now... I promise you won't have to wait three more years for it xx
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

And so we come at last to the end... I can't believe that it's been over three years, almost as much as I can't believe I ever actually finished it :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two years later.

The front door of the shop opened, making the little bell above it ring.

Clarke poked her head out of the office on the first floor, trying to see down the stairs and identify the visitor. Lexa was already at the landing, sitting down and with her legs dangling between the bars of the banister. She must have been sitting there for a little while already. Clarke carefully walked down the few steps and joined her, trying not to make a sound. Lexa caught her hand as she sat down and gave it a quick kiss in greeting.

It was a bright day, and the sunlight streamed in through the open windows down below. The shop was Clarke's favourite place in the world; just the right balance of well-lit and modern, with the charm of an old library and fancy furniture you might find in a regular wand shop. The counter was down on the ground floor, as well as a seating area for when there was a queue. Their conference room, where they met customers to discuss the details of the various missions, was accessed from behind the counter.

The dragon horn, which they had found right where Clarke had dropped it on that fateful day in Canada, was displayed in a place of honour on the wall of the staircase.

Clarke still couldn't see the customer clearly from the landing, nor Aiden behind the counter, but at least she could hear what was going on.

Aiden, cheerful as usual, piped up diligently. His voice drifted up the stairs to where Clarke and Lexa were sitting. "Welcome to Wyvern and Griffin's, how can I help you?"

The customer, whoever it was, seemed to hesitate. "I have business with the owners of this establishment." The voice reminded Clarke vaguely of Ollivander, and she started imagining an equally wizened old man down at the counter. She shot Lexa a grin as the customer continued, "Can I talk to Ms. Wyvern or Ms. Griffin?"

Clarke could only too clearly imagine Aidens apologetic face when he replied. "I am afraid Mistress Wyvern and Mistress Griffin are otherwise preoccupied. Perhaps I can schedule you in for..." Aiden paused, and Clarke could hear the pages turning in their visitor's book. It was all for show, she knew; Aiden knew their schedules by heart, but he still played the role of service-oriented desk clerk with impressive commitment. "Perhaps Thursday next week?"

Their potential customer seemed to get a little bit eager. "They aren't here? Where are they? I read in the Daily Prophet that they had been observed returning to Diagon Alley a few days ago, from
Aiden cut him off expertly. "I am afraid I am not at liberty to discuss the current whereabouts of Mistress Wyvern and Mistress Griffin. Now, if you would like an appointment…"

Clarke met Lexa's gaze on the landing and winked. Lexa shook her head exasperatedly, but smiled none the less. The opening of Wyvern and Griffin's had in no way diminished the press' interest in the renegade wand apprentices from the episode with the pyramid, who seemed to have gone on to become professional treasure hunters. That was exactly why they had stopped answering the door themselves, and roped Aiden in as a seasonal temporary receptionist as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

Aiden was a natural. In a quiet voice Clarke whispered to Lexa "What are we going to do when he goes back to Aok after the summer?"

Lexa shook her head, and replied in a whisper, "I have no idea. He's been a lifesaver."

Down below they could hear Aiden setting up the appointment with the customer to meet Clarke and Lexa and discuss the mission. He went over contact details and made sure the customer was aware of the significant financial commitment that would be required. The customer seemed keen enough, if anything only further intrigued by the apparent absence of the shop's owners.

Clarke reached up to play with a lock of Lexa's hair. The curly brown lock was infinitely more fascinating than the conversation below. "I was thinking that we could rat out Raven and Octavia to the ministry about the trace thing they did. They would probably be fired, and we could pressgang them into doing shifts here."

Lexa met Clarke's eyes and smiled a warm smile. "You know they're both up for promotions. If we cost them their jobs, the only reason they would come work for us would be to kill us in our sleep." Lexa reached up to gently touch Clarke's face. "Anyway, it seems a harsh payback for the people who are responsible for you finding me again. Twice."

Lexa's simple earnest beat Clarke's playfulness every time, and Clarke leaned into her hand. Lexa leant in and kissed her gently. Clarke savoured every second.

It hadn't taken them very long to save up for this place. A few couple of months' worth of missions, albeit with the shadier clientele of Knockturn Alley, and they quickly had enough for the deposit. Now they had their shop on Diagon Alley, with a bedroom, an office, and a library for Clarke's books on the first floor.

Clarke had loved every day of it so far.

She was pulled out of the reverie of kissing Lexa by a disgusted sound from down below. She looked down the staircase, and saw Aiden standing on the bottom step. He was holding a piece of parchment.

"Guys! You promised not to be all gross when I'm here!"

He had grown a couple of more inches since they had last seen him in Canada, and Clarke thought his voice sounded like it might start breaking soon.

"Well," Lexa tried to reason with him, "You weren't here until just now."

"When I'm in the shop," Aiden pointed out with a distressed voice. Clarke laughed. "Besides," Aiden continued, "Shouldn't you be planning your next trip? Can I come?"
Lexa ignored him. "Who was that man? What did he want?"

"That was Mr. Blotts. As in, *Flourish and Blotts* ."

Clarke gave an appreciative whistle, and Lexa met her gaze. *Flourish and Blotts* was four hundred years old, one of the most established shops on Diagon Alley. If the owner was visiting them, it meant that they were really making a space for themselves. "What did he want?"

Aiden rolled his eyes, clearly resigned over the fact that Clarke and Lexa had missed most of what had been going on below. "He wants you to get the Dead Sea Scrolls. Or at least a copy of the content. Apparently there have been whispers in scholarly circles of them containing some really, really old spells which have been lost since biblical times." Aiden held up a finger, clearly expecting their next question, and looked quickly down at the piece of parchment in his hand. "The Scrolls were found in a cave complex decades ago. The scrolls that have been excavated from the cave so far are in the hands of the Israel Antiquities Authority, who only released fragments of the content to the public. The Scrolls are not on display. Current whereabouts are kept a closely guarded secret. There are still a few unexplored caves in the same complex which are suspected to contain more scrolls."

Clarke and Lexa looked at each other. Lexa turned back to Aiden. "And he's coming back to talk to us about it on Thursday next week?"

Aiden nodded.

Lexa looked back at Clarke. "What do you think?"

Clarke shrugged. "We can always hear him out. And if we get a shift on, we might be able to fit in that trip to Delphi to look for that hallucinogenic potion before we have to meet with him."

The potion had been a request from an eccentric but wealthy wizard with an interest in Greek mythology. He had visited their shop two weeks ago, and had more than a healthy dose of conspiracy theories concerning the possible magic origins of mythology. Clarke and Lexa had promised him they'd look into it.

Their clientele, as it were, was varied, and so far there hadn't been any problem getting enough business to make their shop go around. Arguably the most satisfying episode had happened only a month ago when they had been visited by a Mr. Arthuro Caphalopos, a notable wandmaker who had come all the way from Portugal to see them. He had tasked them with getting a list of items that he required for his wands, that were nigh-unfindable on the markets.

Clarke and Lexa had skimmed down the list he gave them. Half of the items they already had in stock, left over from earlier trips for Ollivander and Wolfe. The other half of the list took them less than a day to complete. Arthuro had looked at them in disbelief when they told him to come back in a few hours, but that afternoon, suitcase full of magical artefacts, he had left singing their praise.

Lexa had to talk Clarke out of anonymously tipping off the *Daily Prophet* so that they could really rub it in Ollivander's face.

Lexa nodded. "Alright then. Aiden, pack your bags."

Aiden immediately perked up. "Really?"

Aiden had been brilliant on their recent trip to look for Mackled Malaclaws at the stony shores of Dorset. Clarke and Lexa had already talked about it and decided he deserved another trip as reward for his faithful service at their front desk, since the summer would soon be over and he'd head back
Lexa smiled at him. It made Clarke's heart warm. "Really."

Aiden bolted off to his bedroom behind the counter.

Clarke looked at Lexa. "You know, if we're seriously going to start taking on apprentices, we can't do much better than him."

They had talked about it for a while now. Their little business venture was growing quickly, and it was all they could to do keep up with demand. So far they had handled everything themselves, but having Aiden around this summer had really showed them how helpful it would be to have more hands on board. They were thinking of hiring a desk clerk, an accountant, and yes, possibly even taking on an apprentice or two. The apprentices could help with the more mundane missions, like the Mackled Malaclaws, and Clarke and Lexa would have more time to take on the more challenging tasks.

Lexa smiled at Clarke. "I know. He won't be of age for a few years yet, though. I can't let you convince my brother to quit school and go gallivanting around the British countryside in search of magical lobsters, no matter how good he'd be at it."

Clarke and Lexa were already packed and ready to go, their bags sitting in their office. Still, Lexa got up, and pulled Clarke with her, not letting go of her hand as she climbed the last few steps up to the first floor. Once there she grasped Clarke by the waist and pulled her in for a long kiss.

It took Clarke's breath away, as it always did. Clarke played with the hem of Lexa's shirt, and pulled away a fraction of an inch. When she spoke her lips still touched Lexa's. "How long do you think it will take Aiden to get ready?"

Lexa grinned wickedly at her, and pulled her back into the kiss.

The bell above the door rang again, but it didn't even occur to Clarke to stop what she was doing. Muffled voices drifted up the stair from below as Aiden greeted whoever wanted a bit of their time.

Clarke started pushing Lexa, making her take backwards steps towards their bedroom. Lexa went willingly, tugging Clarke by the waist. As if Clarke wouldn't follow.

Wherever Lexa went, Clarke would follow.

They didn't quite make it to the bedroom door before Aiden reappeared at the bottom of the stairs clutching another piece of parchment, this time looking a bit more alarmed.

"Lexa! Clarke! …it's Ollivander. He says he needs to talk to you about procuring some wand materials. He looks pretty sullen."

Clarke couldn't believe what she was hearing. She hadn't seen or heard from her old master since she had walked out of his shop after quitting, head held high as he mumbled curses after her. It had been one of the top ten most satisfying moments of her life.

Lexa squeezed her had. The glee started in Clarke's chest, and she had to work hard to keep a wide smile off her face.

She looked over at Lexa, who for all the world to see looked neutral, but Clarke could tell she was hiding a smirk.
"What does he want, exactly?"

Aiden looked down at his piece of parchment. "Some wand-wood from a tree called Banyan that is native to Equatorial Guinea, a Nogtail foot, Graphorn skin, Doxy wings, three Chizpurfle legs, and a hair from a Manticore." Aiden looked up at them. "From the lion part of a Manticore, he said."

Clarke raised an eyebrow. "How helpful of him."

Manticores were beings that have the body of a lion, the tail of a scorpion and the head of a human. They were some of the most dangerous creatures known to magizoology. Clarke wondered if Ollivander thought they would have tried to pluck one of its eyebrows or something.

None of the items on the list, except for the Manticore hair, were particularly difficult for them to get. They could probably do it all in less than a week. The Manticore, on the other hand, had the potential to be a really fun challenge.

Clarke remembered clearly that Ollivander had promised to make Lexa's life hell if she ever returned to London. He had promised that she would never work in wandology again. Now here he was, clearly desperate, and being made to wait below as they decided what to do with him.

Clarke looked over at Lexa, saw her slightly swollen lips, and remembered what they were doing before Ollivander waltzed into their shop. Lexa met her gaze, a broad smile finally taking over her face.

They replied in unison, "Tell him we're busy".

Chapter End Notes

From the bottom of my heart, thank you all so much for following. Thanks in particular to DreamsAreMyWords who inspired me so much, and Zaxagra who saw me through to the end.
This fic has been a part of my life for a long time. I can't believe it's over.
It's been a wild ride! Thanks for reading xx

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