the business of caring

by coldmackerel

Summary

a public service announcement: the campus police would like to politely remind all students, well-wishers, and supporters of the university during this time of serial vandalism that painting on buildings without permission is still illegal. this has not changed no matter how 'cool' you think it is. vandalism has never been nor will it ever be 'radical', 'sick', or any version thereof.

-supervisor lexa woods

[complete]

Notes

if any of you are here wondering why the fuck i haven't updated my drunk project, this (and my inability to commit) is why. unlike my other fic, i wrote this almost completely sober so i have no excuses.

good news: this is a nearly finished fic. its about 50k words give or take, and i'll be updating every few days or so as i get around to it.

bad news: the show's canon is currently burning in hell

cheers.
See the end of the work for more notes.
“Campus police, Supervisor Woods speaking.”

“Check Yik Yak, someone’s bragging about the time you broke their arm when they tried to fight you. They’re calling you ‘that hot campus police boss’. I’m dying.”

“Griffin, this is a departmental line. Can’t you walk down the hall to bother me?”

“No. Oh my god, how many people have you assaulted on duty? This feed is gold.”

“What the hell is ‘Yak Yak’ and why am I on it?”

“I love when you try to say social media names. Say another.”

“Is this the only reason you called?”

“Pretty much. I’d die happy if you got a Facebook.”

“I have no interest in the Face app or people’s Books or whatever. I’m hanging up now. Get back to updating the crime blotter.”

Clarke was laughing too hard to get another word in before Lexa hung up on her. She’d call again when she thought of some other reason to ruin Lexa’s life.

She always did.

Everyone knows that nothing good ever happens after 2 a.m. What most people don’t realize is that ‘after 2 a.m.’ includes everything proceeding 2 a.m. up to and including the other 23 hours until 2 a.m. rolls around again. Basically: everything is terrible always. Just do nothing, ever.

11 a.m. was no exception apparently - and as it turned out, it was as good a time as any to reconsider every single decision ever made in one’s entire life and regret all of them. Casually, though. Lexa was typically more of the 3 a.m. regretter, but the clear-headed, bitter ruminations native to 11 a.m. were seriously underrated.

She had been doing fine until Clarke called, but now she was distracted. There was an inordinate amount of paperwork tipping dangerously into her elbow space and nobody to help her with it. However, Lexa didn’t have class on Tuesdays, she was only making $11 on the hour, and she was alone in an office where the toilet flooded more frequently than their paychecks cleared. Maybe she could afford to let her mind wander.

So Lexa leaned back in the rickety office chair slowly, lest it snap beneath her weight, and spun in lazy circles while indulging in her regularly scheduled regret for dedicating her college years to the campus police. Realistically, she wouldn’t have changed anything if she could have gone back and done it over. Her memory couldn’t reach back to a time when she didn’t have a mildly crappy job to distract her from the mundane blue-collar fortune stretched out along the path of her astrologically foretold mediocrity. She was born for the ordinary.
Boredom always made her a little dramatic, though.

Spinning in office chairs wasn’t exactly ‘supervisor behavior’, but she worked afternoons alone until all of the night shifts started up after classes so nobody would be the wiser. Clarke was down the hallway in the communications center of course, but she’d call if she needed something.

What was the harm?

The office spun by as she rotated: mix-matched and patched up office chairs, two grimy coffee pots, rusty file cabinets filled with nonsense, a large table covered in old takeout containers, and the giant yellowed map of campus tacked up on the wall. When she stopped spinning, her gaze fell on the massive closet at the back of headquarters.

It was open. It wasn’t supposed to be open.

But that was a dumb rule anyways. There was little the ramshackle department owned that wasn’t semi-broken, old, or downright dangerous to operate – no real value would be lost if someone took their pick of the equipment. What kind of chump had decided the closet should stay closed and locked during the day?

(Lexa had. Two years ago. The chump was her.)

Even through the two small, grimy windows nestled near the tops of the outside wall – the only ports through which their basement prison could enjoy the outdoors – Lexa could tell it was a nice day. It was as brisk as any day in February, but the sun was bright and the breeze was dormant enough to fool you into not freezing to death. The hazy sunlight, even dampened as it was by smudged windows, beckoned to her. Perhaps just this once she could allow distraction to tug her mind from closing cabinets and filing paperwork and scrolling crime watch tips.

Lexa blew off closing the cabinet and resumed her slow spinning. Nobody needed the campus police at 11 in the morning on a Tuesday anyways. The paperwork would get done whenever she got around to it.

“Now I know why our incident reports back up so quickly.”

Lexa halted her spinning abruptly. One of her least favorite things was getting caught being… whimsical. Or fun.

“I was just, uh, looking for something,” Lexa muttered, making a show of shuffling papers about and surveying the tiny dungeon they worked out of. It was a pointless display, though. Giving Clarke fuel to tease her with was like giving a territorial Rottweiler a steak. Except the steak was usually made out of Lexa’s pride.

Clarke hummed. Menacingly.

“I was!” Lexa insisted, swiping a random report from the stack at her elbow. “I was told that this report takes precedence. Stop distracting me.”

Distracting. That’s what Clarke Griffin was.

“You may be a supervisor, but you’re not my supervisor. Communications Center operates outside the sphere of your influence. Besides, if I had known my efforts to distract you were being upstaged by a chair I never would’ve bothered.”

“Yes you would have.”
“Yeah, I totally would have.” She eyed the chair Lexa was sitting in with narrowed eyes. “How can I compete with a spinning chair? Maybe I should just accept that your focus is unbreakable unless I let you sit on me.”

“Uh.”

Clarke paused, mentally chewing on her words, and looked up from the takeout containers she was sweeping into the trash bin. It only took her a moment to catch up to Lexa’s discomfort. “Er, in a not-weird way…if there is such a thing. Please don’t sue me.”

Lexa’s face was probably doing something equally weird, but she attempted a professional nod of acknowledgement while her traitorous ears burned red. “R-right,” she stuttered, spinning back to face the report she had grabbed. “You don’t have to clean that. Night patrol knows better. I’ll just have to start writing people up for not cleaning their shit up.”

“Swear jar.”

“Shit.”

“Alexandria.”

Lexa flashed Clarke a glare before tugging her wallet out of her back pocket and jamming two bills into the giant jar above her desk. The unit must have been nearing a couple of thousands of dollars in unwilling donations by that point. Rather than the loss of $2, Lexa was more upset with Clarke’s persistent habit of refusing to use her name properly. God only knew they were stuck together enough. Clarke could’ve used the last few years to practice her goddamn name.

“Isn’t a swear jar a little juvenile?” Lexa grumbled for what was likely the millionth time that month. Sometimes she just needed a reminder so she didn’t crack the jar over Clarke’s head and eat the contents. Of the jar. (Not Clarke’s head.)

Clarke dutifully responded as always: “Swearing in the office leads to swearing over the radio. We have to keep transmissions professional. My radio, my rules, Woods. We have standards over in dispatch.”

Funny enough, the answer hadn’t changed from the last million times she had heard it. Even funnier was the assertion that anybody working for the campus police had anything resembling ‘standards’.

“I may not be your supervisor, but I am theirs. So as always, Griffin, I remind you that the only rules that matter in this office are mine.” She drove her point home with a haughty smile, tipping her chin up to give Clarke a superior look.

“May I remind you that before evening shifts you’re the supervisor of yourself, a bunch of empty chairs, and a whole lot of paperwork. Not much power to trip on, Woods.” Clarke adjusted her headset and fiddled with the volume control on her battery pack, taking up a more casual stance with her hip propped against Lexa’s desk. “Spin in your chair. Relax. Don’t worry, you’re still cute even when you’re not posturing in front of the new kids.”

(Distracting.)

The only one who had been with the campus police as long as Lexa had was Clarke. As the sole daytime dispatcher and self-proclaimed anti-swearing crusader (and frequent nighttime dispatcher), the two spent an unnatural amount of time together - Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. to be precise. Plus the overtime when the contracts for special event security picked up and
understaffing caught up with them, of course. Having only three dispatchers left them in that predicament frequently. Sometimes Lexa swore she could hear Clarke’s tinny voice fizzling over a non-existent radio when she was trying to sleep at night like a parasite in her tired brain.

They spent way too much time together.

“I do not posture.” Lexa turned her chair to watch Clarke as she moved to sift through the old radios in the equipment closet. Lexa’s own earpiece wasn’t making any strange noises, so Clarke was fiddling uselessly to pass the time. Even if the radios were on the fritz, there wasn’t much the budget could help them with. She must’ve been as bored as Lexa was.

And if there was one thing Lexa Woods was not, it was cute.

Clarke’s muffled laugh filtered out through the partially open closet. “Whatever you say, Woods. We basically live together in this hellhole and I’m telling you now: you posture.”

“I’m just being professional,” Lexa defended. If she hadn’t been so bored that day, she wouldn’t have risen to Clarke’s teasing. It was the dispatcher’s favorite way to kill time when neither of them had class to attend or service calls to respond to. “I’m the only supervisor since our budget tanked. Not being chummy with the others is the least of my worries.”

Clarke gasped. “Wait, are you serious?”

“Serious about what?”

“You’re a supervisor? When were you going to tell me?” Clarke tried to hide her stupid grin behind her stupid hand, but her stupid white teeth peeked through her stupid fingers. Weaker people had fallen victim to Clarke’s easy charm, but Lexa Woods would not be one of them. Not if she could help it.

Lexa pulled her wallet back out and shoved another dollar into the jar above her desk. “Okay, my professional, supervisory opinion is that you can go fuck yourself.”

Clarke stopped pretending to cover her grin. “Well hey, you’re the supervisor. You gonna supervise me while I do that?”

(Don’t you fucking wink, Griffin.)

“So you require my supervision?” Lexa snapped.

Clarke just winked.

(God damn it.)

There was nothing Lexa could do about her red ears or her inability to look Clarke in the eyes (yet again), so she just huffed an annoyed sigh and turned to read the report she had randomly assigned priority to. The joke was that essentially none of the incident reports filed by or with Campus Police were of any pressing urgency. They were all just routine thefts and service waivers from the roadside assistance teams. But Lexa could just feel Clarke taking on smugness like it was a fucking full-time job from across the room, so she allotted the incident report in her hand temporary urgency. For a cause.

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Generic University - Auxiliary Police Department

Incident Report

Case Number: 066420          Date: 02/16/16
Location: Observatory, Lot JJ     Time: 2350
Classification: Damage to State Property

Public Safety Rep Responding:
Blake ID 678 / Blake ID 768
Vehicle 31

Public Safety Supervisor:
X____________________________

Report:

On routine 10-31 of Lot JJ behind the Observatory, 678 and 768 observed an unidentified individual in dark clothes of average build. Before confrontation, the individual fled with a large black bag into the Nelson Lake Woods. Without cause, the individual was not pursued. Upon closer inspection, the Southern wall of the Observatory had been defaced with a large mural. Several paint cans were left at the scene.

No description of the vandal available.

Photograph of vandalism attached.

Disposition:

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Sure enough, several photographs were printed and stapled as addendums on the back of the Blake siblings’ report. Vandalism was one of the most common crimes on campus, so it wasn’t exactly a provocative incident report. College students were frequently gripped with sudden, crippling urgency to slap phallic imagery across every available surface on campus. Without catching someone in the act, there wasn’t much they could do except file their report and deliver copies to Facilities Management and Financial. They would cover costs for the damage and Facilities would clean it up when (or if) they ever got around to it. Case closed.

The graffiti itself was unusual, though.

Lexa brought the photograph closer to her face to study the admittedly impressive work. She could’ve been wrong, but it looked like a rather beautiful rendition of the sunrise over Nelson Lake. As a frequent morning jogger around the lake path, the scene was all too familiar.
“What’s that?” A strand of blonde hair tickled the side of Lexa’s face and she started at the other girl’s proximity. It was useless trying to hide the report if Clarke had been standing over her shoulder for as long as Lexa suspected.

“Vandalism, apparently. Don’t you have radios to babysit?”

Clarke tucked the errant strand of hair behind her ear, but made no move to clear out of Lexa’s personal space. “You’re the only other one on the channel right now. Technically, I’m just supposed to be babysitting you. That’s pretty bizarre graffiti.”

“You’re only authorized to babysit me over Channel 4 and only when I request it. And you seem to have taken the ‘sitting’ part a little too literally. Get off me.” Lexa swiveled around in her chair hoping to drive Clarke back a few steps, but she stayed exactly where she was. The plan backfired horribly. Clarke had no qualms about being practically nose-to-nose with her not-supervisor.

“Can I help you?” Lexa whispered in a poor attempt at sounding menacing rather than panicked.

“Show me the report, I want to see it.” Clarke smiled that easy smile and held her hand out. “We haven’t had anything interesting in months.”

Lexa considered being childish and holding the report out of Clarke’s reach, but that would have been decidedly below her rank and position.

Actually, no.

That was exactly what she was going to do.

Lexa twisted her arm to hold it far behind her own head, out of the nosy dispatcher’s reach. “Top secret, I’m afraid,” she quipped.

Clarke laughed and reached for the report, with the unfortunate side effect of grabbing the arm of Lexa’s chair and practically climbing into her lap to take it. That stupid piece of hair fell against Lexa’s cheek again and she resumed regretting everything that had led up to her life currently, the top of the list being Clarke’s perfume and her disregard for personal space.

“I have to approve the reports too, dumbass,” Clarke argued, reaching again for the paper.

“Language, Griffin.”

“Put it on my fucking tab, Woods. Give me the report.”

Clarke’s previous threats about sitting on each other were nearly fully realized by the time Lexa decided she had to put an end to their struggle. Clarke was just…too much. At all times. Unrelentingly so.

“Fine,” Lexa conceded breathlessly when Clark placed a hand against her collar for better leverage and reach. If the others could see her right then they’d never afford her the benefit of authority again. “Pay up to the swear jar and you can have the report.”

“You got it, champ.”

Of course, the swear jar was located above Lexa’s desk. All Lexa really achieved with her compromise was driving Clarke to make their positions infinitely worse.

“Is there some primal part of you that needs to be taller than me for once?” Lexa snapped, pushing
Clarke away with a palm to her stomach. This did little to relieve their awkward positions as Clarke had decided the best way to reach the Swear Jar was by standing on the chair with a foot directly between Lexa’s thighs. Lexa’s involuntary reaction was to try leaping out of the chair with Clarke still hovering over her.

“You’re gonna make me fall!”

“Get off me!”

They scrabbled against each other for another moment until Clarke won with a knee to Lexa’s sternum and a hand on her shoulder as she deposited her contribution to the Swear Jar. Lexa just kind of let it happen in the end. The less she struggled the sooner it would be over and she could scrape her dignity back off the floor from under Clarke’s feet (as usual). It was a good thing that they primarily worked together when nobody else was in the office. The girl did bad things to her professional image.

When Clarke finally dismounted Lexa’s chair (or rather, dismounted Lexa), she snatched the report away and skimmed it. As for the whole ‘retrieving her dignity’ thing, Lexa didn’t feel confident doing so until Clarke was two, maybe three thousand miles away.

“Have you talked to either of the Blakes about this yet? How could they not have gotten a description?”

Lexa shrugged and fiddled with the pen in her shirt pocket. “I wasn’t on duty Saturday night. This is actually the first I’ve heard of it.”

“You gonna investigate, Officer?” Clarke teased, handing the report back.

Lexa rolled her eyes. “Don’t call me that. I’m as much an officer as the guards at the mall. I’m a mall cop at best. At worst, I’m a paid traffic cone.”

Clarke laughed at that. Lexa didn’t often get treated to a non-antagonistic laugh from Clarke Griffin or one that was a result of Lexa’s humor rather than her misfortune. She stealthily filed it away for the next time she considered having Clarke assassinated in the auxiliary parking lot as a form of self-restraint.

“Oh, please. Look at your cute little uniform shirt and your fancy pens.” Clarke leaned forward and flicked at her pocket, eyes twinkling. “I bet you iron your shirt twice a day. You can’t be a mall cop when you care that much.”

“I am the supervisor. Ironing one’s shirt isn’t exactly above and beyond the call of duty. And I’m not cute.”

Clarke held her hands up defensively. “Have it your way then, supervisor.”

“So if I’m not a mall crop, then I’m a traffic cone, I suppose?”

“You’re a traffic cone,” Clarke confirmed. “And I’m the traffic cone whisperer.”

Before Lexa could stop her, Clarke keyed up on her headset.

“Dispatch to ID 77”
Lexa glared at Clarke who waved back cheerfully. The county police kept an open channel to their dispatch in case they needed an actual police presence, so she had little choice but to keep her responses semi-professional. Even though the damn dispatcher was sitting two feet from her and was being unjustifiably annoying. And unprofessional.

“77, go ahead.”

Lexa released her mic and sat back in her creaking chair. Two could play at that game.

“Everything Ocean King, 77?”

Lexa rolled her eyes and mouthed ‘really’ at the girl. Pain in her ass.

“10-69 and a big 10-4, dispatch. I’m Ocean King.”

Clarke stifled her laugh into her hand.

“10-9? I didn’t quite catch that 77. Was that 10-69?”

Clarke waggled her eyebrows suggestively. 10-69 was an utterly useless 10-code that conveyed little more than a simple 10-4 would have covered. The only reason they ever used it over the radio was as a joke or a big ‘fuck you’ to their correspondent.

Lexa gestured angrily into the silence required of their transmissions while Clarke continued laughing quietly into her hand.

“Static must be bad today, dispatch. I’m Ocean King over here. Could you please write an incident report for the transmission static? The radios are acting up again and I want to keep track of it.”

Clarke blanched, opened and closed her mouth several times, then leveled a furious look at her. Lexa just grinned back, caught in the rare position of having bested the dispatcher.

Clarke fairly spit her response into her mic.

“10-4, 77. Case number for the report-”

She glanced down at her phone.

“Case number 066439.”

“10-4, thank you dispatch.”
“Jerk.”

Lexa’s grin only widened. “Don’t play if you’re not prepared to lose, Griffin. Don’t you have a report to write?”

“Yeah, now I do. Thanks, Alexandria.”

There was something uncanny about Clarke’s ability to make a mouthful of a name sound sexy and effortless. Lexa herself was pretty sure she’d never been sexy or effortless in her entire life, so maybe she was just easily impressed.

“If I thought there was even a remote chance you would listen to me, I would suggest that you stop biting off more than you can chew.” She knew she was pushing her luck, but those rare days of victory over Clarke always inflated her ego a bit.

Clarke collected the last few leftover takeout containers and dropped them in the rusty trash bin before making her way to the dispatch room. But Clarke Griffin was not someone accustomed to being denied the last word. As she passed by, she leaned down and murmured close to Lexa’s ear, “When I bite, I bite off exactly what I can chew, Woods.”

As per usual, Lexa was left scowling and bewildered and, alright, just a little turned on. But that wasn’t her fault. College kids weren’t meant to be cooped up in offices for weeks in and out without some form of inappropriate, dangerous outlet to ruin their lives over. It does things to you.

Luckily, she wasn’t afforded the opportunity to dwell on it. The office phone started ringing and she tried to ground herself again before answering.

“Campus Police, Supervisor Lexa Woods speaking.”

“Hello, this is Maya with the school newspaper. I was wondering if you had a few minutes to comment on the Mural Marauder?”

“The what now?”

The girl – Maya? – giggled into the phone. As though this were the time or the place for giggling. Honestly.

“I have sources telling me that Auxiliary Officers were the first to respond to the graffiti done to the old Observatory on Saturday night. The painting? Everyone’s talking about it and we’re running a story tomorrow morning on it.”

Fucking perfect.

“It’s just vandalism,” Lexa said defensively. “It will be handled like any other incident of destruction to state property, whether it was the Mona Lisa herself or yet another phallic scribble.”

“Will there be an investigation?”

Lexa tapped her nail on her desk, agitation setting in quickly. “There’s nothing to investigate. And we don’t exactly investigate – we’re not even sworn officers. We’re just public safety representatives.”

“Did you catch the Mural Marauder, then?”

“What? No. We were unable to apprehend a suspect.”
“So the Mural Marauder has outsmarted the campus police?”

“So you will be investigating?”

“Fine! Yes. I will look into it. We’re investigating.”

“How exciting!” Maya giggled again like it was a fucking game. Newspaper rats. “Would you call this the biggest criminal showdown of your career with the Campus Police? Do you have any suspects? Sources speculate it’s an inside job and the Mural Marauder is actually an Auxiliary Officer. Can you confirm-“

“Alright, I’m hanging up now. Don’t quote me on anything and tell your sources to keep their mouths shut. Nice talking to you Mary.”

“Maya.”

“Whatever. Have a wonderful day,” Lexa snapped, slamming the phone back on the receiver.

Lexa herself was having a distinctly not wonderful day.

Grabbing her jacket and turning her radio up, Lexa retrieved the keys to vehicle 32 and headed for the door. “Griffin!” She called, halfway out the door. “Man the fort. They’ve just added ‘investigate harmless crimes’ to my job description without sending me a memo.”

“I thought that was your job description. And we stopped pretending anybody reads memos years ago. Where are you going?” Clarke called back and poked her head around the corner. “I thought we were getting tacos today.”

Lexa rolled her eyes. “To stare at a wall, apparently. I’ll bring food back when I’m done. If the newspaper calls, don’t answer. And if you accidentally answer, tell them I died and they can’t have a statement. And then actually kill me.”

“I could kill you now and cut out the middle man,” Clarke offered.

“The middle man signs our paycheck, so let’s leave him in the equation. Don’t let the office burn down.”

Clarke probably saluted or flipped her the bird, but Lexa was already slamming the door and stomping out to the truck for her daily dose of pointless stupidity. It was never in short supply on campus.
The mural was nice. Pretty, even.

Still vandalism, though.

Lexa stuffed her hands in her pockets and surveyed the area again, but there wasn’t much to see. The only thing the vandal left behind was a couple of empty spray paint cans and a dirty towel covered in paint. There had been a surprising amount of students and faculty in the area, taking pictures and generally gawking like they’d never seen graffiti before. Lexa didn’t really need space to investigate, but she shooed them away regardless. Their interest annoyed her.

It wasn’t much of an investigation, but then, Lexa wasn’t much of an investigator. She gave the wall all kinds of suspicious looks and nodded sagely a few times – typical investigation stuff. All she could really do was talk to the Blake siblings when they came in that night for patrol and see if they had anything else to say about the incident. That was as much ‘investigating’ as Lexa was willing to be bullied into. The newspaper could run their damn article, but it wouldn’t change the fact that it was a dead end.

Martha could just shove it.

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“So there are some new one-time contract shifts posted over there on the wall. We’ve got shifts for some security watches for the site of the new Math building – overnight stuff. Also, the shifts for the Winter Formal are posted so get on that.” Lexa glanced down at her clipboard to make sure she hadn’t missed anything. “Weather tonight’s gonna be cold as usual, so layer up. Other than that, I’m going to go ahead and remind you guys – again – to check that the emergency brake is released before you drive around campus smelling like your entire car is on fire. I don’t know who keeps doing it, but these cars already have one foot in the grave. Let’s not tempt them to commit.”

The younger Blake sibling, Octavia, leaned across the center table and raised her eyebrows at Harper. When Harper caught the girl’s knowing look, she made a strangled noise of protest. “One time! The last few times weren’t me!”

“I don’t care who did it,” Lexa sighed. “Let’s stop it from happening again. If your partner is driving, just double-check their emergency brake for them. Two sets of eyes are better than one, alright?”

The outer door slammed open before they could answer, ricocheting off of the back wall and causing a pile of dead flashlights to crash to the floor off the filing cabinet. It might’ve startled them all if the outbursts were anything except routine. Raven Reyes was nothing if not dramatic entrances, loud noises, and needless fuss. She tossed a blackened rag over her shoulder and pointed dangerously in the general direction of the group. “Which one of you sorry fucks was grinding the emergency brakes again?”

“Ah yes,” Lexa said flatly, “I was so hoping to have this conversation twice. I forgot to enjoy it the first time.”

Raven ignored her. “Hot tip, guys: there’s a goddamn indicator on your fucking dashboard for this shit. You know: the dashboard that’s right in front of your face when you’re all cozy behind the wheel.” She ran a hand through her hair, creating a huge black streak of grease across her forehead. “For future reference, lower your eyes approximately six inches and you may be treated to the sight of your motherfucking dashboard indicators. If you see the bright fucking red letters that spell out ‘BRAKE’, then it means you should check your fucking brake. Wild, I know.”
“Swear Jar, Reyes,” Octavia said cheerfully. It was a pointless venture, though. Miller even muttered something that sounded suspiciously like ‘good luck with that’. The only one who could get Raven Reyes to pay up for her unflinching use of the fuck word was Clarke, for whatever reason. They had a strange relationship to say the least.

Raven placed a hand over her cold, dead heart. “Oh, excuse the fuck out of me. I get a little lightheaded when I have to spend my evening balls fucking deep in the dumpster rejects this department calls ‘motor vehicles’. Somewhere with my head up 34’s ass I must have gotten a little low on oxygen while I was massaging it’s ungrateful, rusty prostate—“

“Raven!”

Speak of the devil.

Raven ceased her mission to rub as much grease across her face as possible and brightened considerably when Clarke swept into the room to retrieve a stack of signed reports from Lexa’s desk. “Clarke! And here I thought my day was lodged firmly up the anal cavity of no goddamn good. Come here.”

“Swear Jar, Raven,” Clarke laughed, making her way over to give Raven a hug. Every time Lexa had to bear witness to their greeting hugs she felt like she was watching someone give in to the urge to hug a half-ton grizzly bear. Never in her entire time working with Raven had she seen her be physically affectionate with anyone else. She had, however, witnessed Raven snap a guy’s clavicle in half when he drunkenly tried to put an arm around her shoulder. Lexa was no boyscout, but she had the survival skills to recommend a healthy diet of *not* initiating physical contact with Raven to anyone who wanted to live to see graduation.

Raven nodded ruefully. “Right, gotcha, Clarke. No swearing.” She pulled her wallet out and handed Clarke $5. “Got a little carried away. I swear they started it, though. You know how they test me.”

Clarke gave her a sympathetic look before taking the old rag from Raven’s hand. She turned it to a clean edge and began wiping the black streaks from the other girl’s forehead. Raven leaned into it, staying still and smiling a dopey smile.

“I’m sure they did.”

When she finished, Clarke handed the rag back to a grinning Raven and squeezed her shoulder once before depositing the contribution in the Swear Jar and departing for the communications center. Lexa watched the interaction with the same bewildered acceptance as everyone else in the room. People had long since given up trying to figure out how Clarke had tamed the beast. Blackmail probably.

“Isn’t she great? Clarke’s great,” Raven said fondly. “What was I saying? Eh, never mind. Sorry, boss, floors all yours again. I’m gonna go drop the hood and lock up.” With an almost friendly smile, Raven departed the way she had arrived, but with significantly less banging and yelling.

(Definitely blackmail.)


Harper slapped a hand against the table. “It wasn’t me!”

“It was probably you, O,” the older Blake sibling muttered, drumming his fingers against the stack of waivers he had taken from the printer. “You’d forget your left arm if it wasn’t attached.”
Miller let out a single, quiet huff of laughter but was instantly assaulted by Octavia and her flashlight. He grunted when she stabbed him in the spleen with it, but otherwise fell silent again.

“Anyways,” Lexa cut in. “We’re sending out vehicles 36 and 33 tonight. All building shifts are running, so feel free to check on the folks doing rounds and see if they need anything. Most of the vehicles are low on waivers, so take some with you when you go. Temperatures are going to drop around midnight, so stay warm.”

Raven rejoined them and plopped into a chair to hear the night’s assignments.

“Octavia and I will take 36,” Bellamy said, standing to collect his things. “Are the jump-packs charged?”

“Should be,” Lexa shrugged. “Take the big one.”

“Bell’s wound way too tight to take the big one,” Octavia chortled.

Bellamy sputtered and his face took on a blotchy, red tinge while the others howled with laughter. “Wh- that’s not – stop.”

“Can’t you at least wait until you’re out of the office to be inappropriate?” Lexa asked warily. “Just five minutes of professionalism – that’s all I want.”

They acquiesced just long enough for Lexa to pair Harper and Fox on foot patrol and stick Miller and Raven in 33. The illusion was shattered, though, when Raven was digging through traffic wands and came up with an old, admittedly phallic model that she held up and asked Bellamy if he wanted to start smaller before working up to ‘the real big one’. The jump-pack lay abandoned on the floor as they all took turns brandishing the new and improved 'big one'.

Lexa tried to ignore the potential lawsuits happening behind her and called them in service for the night.

“77 to Dispatch.”

“Go ahead 77.”

“You can hold IDs 699 and 754 as well as vehicles 33 and 36 10-8 for the evening.”

“10-4, have a good shift everyone.”

Lexa released her radio and turned to the other squabbling auxiliary officers. Raven was trying to stab Harper with ‘the big one’ while she deflected with a flashlight. “Alright, now get out of here before I start filing some Title IX’s. Not you, Blakes. I need a word.”

The rest filed out (Raven waving ‘the big one’ over her head while Fox tried to steal it), but Octavia and Bellamy remained looking slightly apprehensive – Bellamy, potentially because of his fears of ‘the big one’. Lexa didn’t spend a lot of time considering men’s anal cavities, but Octavia’s diagnosis regarding the size differential between Bellamy’s rectum and the old traffic wands didn’t seem all that far off. It was…too big, probably. But then, she didn’t profess to be an expert or even a halfway decent estimator of rectal elasticity or the power of good old-fashioned perseverance.
Octavia rushed to fill the silence. “If this is about last Thursday, Reyes dared me to and it worked so I don’t think I should be punished.”

Lexa stopped perusing the report in her hand and glanced up. “What? No, that’s not – wait, what happened last Thursday?”

“Nothing you can prove.”

“Okay, we’re definitely coming back to that, but I just wanted to check in about the incident report you filed on Saturday. The graffiti at the Observatory?” Lexa handed them the report she’d been looking over and pointed to their names scribbled across the top.

Bellamy grinned. “Oh, yeah, pretty cool, right?”

Lexa frowned. “Vandalism isn’t ‘cool’, Blake.”

Sometimes Lexa found herself saying things that she had no hope of ever living down or recovering from. If her career in law enforcement didn’t pan out, she was positive she’d have a halfway decent Sesame Street audition from her years spent becoming a giant wet blanket propped up by a stick in the mud.

“Right, and we can print that on t-shirts tomorrow, but did you see the mural? It was decidedly cool, Woods. Everyone’s talking about it.”

Oh good. Everyone was talking about it.

“It’s still vandalism, no matter how ‘cool’ it may seem,” she grumbled. “Your report said you don’t have a description even though you saw the person at the scene. Are you sure you didn’t see anything?”

Octavia nudged her way in front of her brother, though he still towered behind her. “What does it matter? Is something going on with the case?” Something about her tone sounded like she knew exactly why it mattered. And though Lexa wished she could say otherwise, the incident had already grown much larger than she thought it would.

“I got pressured into looking into it,” she admitted. “I just wanted to double check that you didn’t leave anything out of your report.”

Octavia’s eyes shone with excitement, but Bellamy placed a restraining hand on her shoulder to stop her from firing questions at their supervisor. “It was dark. We only saw them from a distance and they were wearing dark clothes with a hood pulled over their head. All I could really tell was that they were pretty average in size - five and a half feet tall, give or take. Who’s pressuring you?”

Lexa sighed and collected a stack of freshly signed reports from the previous week. “Just some reporter doing a story for the school paper – Marla or something. Apparently it’s becoming somewhat of a ‘thing’ now. The last thing we need is more bad press. Our job is hard enough without people throwing bags of flaming shit at our windshields when we drive by.” Lexa didn’t even wait for admonishment before depositing a dollar in the Swear Jar.

“Could be good press,” Octavia said thoughtfully. “Maybe we can catch them next time. Just picture the headlines: Campus Police Take Down Mysterious Mastermind – Mural Marauder Behind Bars. Alternatively: Auxiliary Supervisor Sacrifices Life in Dangerous Shootout with Mural Marauder.” She held her hands out in the shape of a cinematic screen, trying to convey the
grand drama of her headlines in actual print.

Lexa wasn’t seeing it. “What? Why do I have to die in this scenario?”


Bellamy laughed and passed the report back to her. “You’ll be missed.”

That seemed unlikely. Her car had been vandalized three times over the last four years and the number she gave out to students for emergency rides home received more prank calls than the poorly named ‘Sausage Hut’ restaurant two towns over.

“Right. This is all assuming the vandal even strikes again. It was probably just a one-time thing. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

+++ 

It was not a one-time thing.

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“Campus Police, Supervisor Woods speaking.”

“Hello again. This is Maya with the school newspaper. We spoke last week about the Mural Marauder case. Do you have any comment on the second mural found outside the library this morning?”

“Excuse me, the what?”

“The second mural? There’s been another incident of highly detailed vandalism around the back of the library. Can you comment on the vandalism and its personal message?”

“Oh, fuck me.”

“Er, is this your department’s official statement?”

“Yes.”

“Does your department have any new leads?”

“I’m hanging up, Mona. I’ve got a Swear Jar to feed.”

“It’s Maya.”

“Bye.”

+++
“Griffin!”

Lexa swung the door open to dispatch, blowing over the house of cards that Jasper was struggling to keep upright. Cards flew everywhere while he loudly lamented his loss. Jasper was the only other dispatcher the university could afford to keep on payroll besides Monty. And truly, at the rate of $8.50 an hour, the department got what they paid for.

Clarke made no move to turn from the monitors where her feet were propped comfortably. She just glanced over her shoulder regally, trying for all the world to look like her crappy office chair and computer monitors were her kingdom and not just a dusty bureaucratic nightmare. “Alexandria?”

“What’s all this about more vandalism at the library? Were you working last night?”

Jasper dropped his head onto the desk and moaned into the remains of his card house. To be honest, Lexa hadn’t even realized he would be working that afternoon. She had grown rather accustomed to it being just she and Clarke, though she did vaguely recall Clarke mentioning that she was trying to get Monty and Jasper to pick up some afternoons that semester. Clearly, they hadn’t made it past the training stage, even though the responsibilities were barely different between night and day shifts. Clarke was a bit of a control freak (kindred spirits, in that sense - mortal enemies in every other sense).

“Nope. But I did hear about it. Jasper and Monty took me to see it this morning. Everyone’s talking about it, Woods.”

Lexa blanched. “They are? Oh god.”

“You really need to get out more,” Clarke said critically, turning around and letting her feet drop to the ground. “And that’s coming from me.”

“It’s awesome!” Jasper chimed in, lifting his head from the desk. “It’s this huge mural of the inside of the Chapel. It’s sick!”

“It’s vandalism,” Lexa snapped back. Luckily, she restrained herself from saying something embarrassing like ‘vandalism isn’t sick’ (stay in school, kids).

Clarke just shrugged, panning through a security feed of the loading docks behind the student union. “I’ve seen better. The stained glass windows weren’t exactly right and they smudged the pulpit.” When Lexa gave her a suspicious look, she held her hands up defensively. “I used to be an art major, alright? I’ve seen better.”

“You try painting with spray paint,” Jasper accused. “Looked pretty damn good to me. And besides, they started this online donation site. When they reach a certain amount, they’re going to do another mural. So cool.”

“Now there’s a website?” Lexa tried to keep her tone neutral, but the whole thing was spiraling out of control. Facilities Management was going to be on her ass – Financial too. Hell, everyone was going to be on her ass. Her ass had an awfully long week ahead of it. “How far from their next goal are they?”

“Almost reached it already,” Jasper said around a mouthful of almonds. “People are really into this. The newspaper’s having a field day.”
“I bet they are,” Lexa seethed. Marla was making her life a fucking nightmare. “Do we have an incident report on it yet?”

“Negative,” Clarke said, scrolling through the logs from the previous night. “Patrol was off duty by the time it was discovered. You’d better go check it out and write one. And seeing how the newspaper says you’re ‘working the case relentlessly’, you’d better get on that ‘relentless working’. Of course, they also said that most of your statement had to be redacted. Please tell me your statement was wildly inappropriate.”

“This is a nightmare.”

Jasper spewed almond crumbs across the table when he opened his mouth to say, “if this is a nightmare, I never want to wake up.”

Clarke hummed and wiped the crumbs from the edge of her desk. “I never want you to wake up either, buddy.”

+++ 

The new mural was pretty too.

Still vandalism, though.

Nobody ever really went around the back of the enormous campus library unless they were trying to smoke pot or climb the hill to the art building (those populations often overlapped). It wasn’t hard to imagine how the vandal had been able to work uninterrupted. Unlike the last scene, though, there was a large crowd loitering around the mural rather than the handful of passing gawkers at the last scene. Everyone seemed determined to get a picture with the mural. Clarke had warned as much, citing everyone’s need to post ‘selfies’ to their ‘Instant Grams’ or something.

Lexa wasn’t usually one much for throwing about her limited power of authority, but when she saw the crowd that had gathered, she turned her lights on and drove straight down the grassy hill. Roads were for people who hadn’t exhausted the last of their patience. She pulled up close to the crowd and tapped the PA mic against her hand a few times to test for volume.

“Campus Police, clear a path please.”

There were various friendly responses of ‘fuck the 5-0’ and ‘fucking mall cops’, but the crowd split down the middle and slowly pushed towards opposite ends. Lexa maneuvered the truck between hostile groups and parked directly in front of the mural to dissuade anyone else from getting too close. Hopefully she wouldn’t end up in anyone’s Instant Grams.

The hecklers faded into background noise while she surveyed the scene. Like last time, though, there wasn’t much to survey. Besides the mural itself, there were a few paint cans of the same brand from the Observatory. What really stood out was the message printed in blocky letters several inches below the mural:

YOUR MOVE AUXILIARY
Alright, now it was personal.

+++ 

“Where’s Tweedle Dum?”

Clarke stood from where she was crouched at the radio docking station. “Huh? Oh, Jasper? He had class or something.” After a beat, Clarke turned, one eyebrow raised. “Was that a joke?”

“What can I say, I’m in a foul mood,” Lexa muttered, tossing her jacket over the back of her chair. “Won’t happen again.”

“What’s got your BDU’s in a knot?”

“They called us out.”

Clarke frowned. “Who called us out? And which ‘us’? Nobody called me out.”

Lexa slumped down in her creaking chair and allowed her forehead to drop unceremoniously onto her desk. It definitely wasn’t supervisor behavior, but as Clarke had pointed out numerous times, Lexa was not her supervisor. Besides that, Clarke didn’t really count.

“The vandal. They wrote ‘Your Move Auxiliary’ under the mural. Didn’t you see it?” Lexa lamented into the desk, uninterested in whether Clarke could actually hear her or not. “It’s no wonder the newspaper is up my ass about this. My cousin works with the county police and she called just to laugh into the phone for three minutes.”

“Yikes. Sorry, Woods.” For once she sounded like she might have meant it. “Those newspaper rats are a bunch of punkass, type-fucking ink huffers. The Swear Jar will forgive you your sins just this once. Let it all out. I won’t tell anyone.”

“Good, because I feel like I need some alone time with just myself, a giant echo chamber, and every form of the word ‘fuck’.” Lexa groaned into her desk at the prospect of fielding phone calls for the rest of her life. “I’m never gonna hear the end of this.”

Clarke squatted down next to her so they were at eye-level and set her fingers lightly on the edge of the desk. The gesture was enough to get Lexa to turn her face to the side and spare her a tired glance. But she wouldn’t lift her head off the desk. That was too much to ask.

“You know what would make this easier?”

“What?”

Clarke placed a comforting hand on Lexa’s slumped shoulder. “You really want to know?” She asked gently.

“Yes.”

Clarke’s hand trailed up to tuck a loose strand of Lexa’s hair behind her ear. Lexa was a million percent positive they weren’t even close to being at that level of intimacy, but she was way too
exhausted to fight about it. In all honesty, the action was kind of comforting after her week of disappointment and hostile telephone calls. Even if it was probably intended to piss her off.

“Griffin,” Lexa grumbled when Clarke fell silent, fingers lingering on Lexa’s shoulder. “What would make this easier?”

Clarke lowered her voice to a tender whisper. “If you weren’t so awful at everything.”

Apparently *that* was enough for Lexa to pull her head off of her desk along with a variety of spluttered indignity. Clarke was laughing too hard to respond to Lexa’s fury and she was gripping Lexa’s shoulder too hard to be shoved away. Even through the haze of her outrage, Lexa could appreciate the well-laid trap Clarke had set. Hook, line, and sinker.

“Your face!” Clarke gasped. “You’re so easy, Woods.”

Lexa crossed her arms and scowled at Clarke’s gleeful expression. “You’ve done the impossible: you’ve made this day worse against all odds.”

Clarke tried to quell her laughter, but the grin remained. “I’m sorry. I was going to say that I would get us lunch, but I couldn’t resist. You were looking at me like I hung the moon or something and it made me want to ruin your life.”

Lexa scoffed. “I wasn’t looking at you like anything.”

“Hey, don’t get defensive. I’m pretty charming.”

In a final, desperate bid to get some of her alpha status back, Lexa leaned forward and narrowed her eyes. Clarke didn’t budge. “You think you’re so pretty don’t you?”

Clarke shrugged cheerfully. “Kinda.”

“Well-“ Lexa faltered.

Fuck.

“Well you – okay, yeah, you’re pretty. You might be pretty but that’s, er, that’s all you are. You’re pretty. You’re really pretty. Like, wow.”

(Fuck, you’ve established that. Oh god, abort mission.)

“But I hate you. Even if you’re pretty. I hate you.”

 Fucking smooth.

“You want to say I’m pretty one more time? I might’ve missed it the first dozen times,” Clarke said with a completely uncalled for wink.

“I can say I hate you one more time. I haven’t exhausted that yet.”

Clarke shook her head. “No, no. Let’s go back to the other thing. I was enjoying that.”

“Griffin.”

“Okay, fine, ruin my fun why don’t you. What do you want for lunch?”

Lexa was treated to free sandwiches and half-priced malicious flirting for her troubles. Considering
their typical conversations, Clarke was actually rather merciful with the embarrassing amalgam of words that Lexa had allowed to leave her own mouth that day. She only brought it up about once every few minutes while she pointed out all of the mistakes in Lexa’s astronomy homework. It had long since stopped being a question whether Clarke would aid Lexa with whatever homework she was undoubtedly doing wrong.

“I thought this would be an easy science credit,” Lexa sighed, erasing another mistaken calculation about how much she would weigh on a planet she would never actually find herself on. Who really cared how much she weighed on Mars? She’d be fucking dead. “This is nonsense.”

“No, no, you’re just not conceptualizing it right,” Clarke said, leaning closer to trace Lexa’s messy work with her index finger. “Math’s an art. If you just go through the motions and force it, you’ll never find a solution – just a number.”

“Oh, that’s beautiful and all, but I have no idea what that means.”

Clarke rolled her eyes and laughed before launching into some poetic explanation. Lexa propped her head against her hand and turned her attention from the scrawling numbers and confounding formulas to better watch Clarke. She was far more gentle and attentive when teaching. Strangely enough, she was most entrancing when she was doing homework of all things. And there should have been nothing entrancing about homework.

Lexa had never been all that smart, truthfully. Her grades had always been just south of average, particularly with her tendency to completely freeze up during exams. It certainly hadn’t endeared her to her parents in all of their high and mighty private school degrees and scholarship funds. Maybe they had never considered that they’d just emptied the gene pool for the rest of the Woods family. Asking questions and seeking help would have helped, but there was something inherently more terrifying in being treated like she was stupid than in wrestling drunk football players. Pride wasn’t an easy thing to swallow.

Clarke was different, though.

It was probably just the fact that Clarke already knew the worst of her, but Lexa didn’t entirely mind being dumb around her. At least a handful of her professors would never have passed her without Clarke’s freely offered assistance. They didn’t talk about it most of the time – like most things. It was a silent agreement in which the two pulled Clarke's head out of the clouds a bit and Lexa tried to see beyond the ground. Or something poetic like that.

“You’re not listening,” Clarke accused, tapping her finger against the paper more insistently. “I know it seems difficult, but I promise I can teach you.”

“You’d be the first,” Lexa muttered.

They didn't spend a lot of time talking about their pasts or anything, so the look Clarke gave her could probably be chalked up to confusion and discomfort. But the look had something a little more melancholy than Lexa was equipped to deal with.

“You’re smarter than you give yourself credit for. Just because school work is hard for you doesn’t mean you're - it doesn't mean anything. School work's a skill, not a measure of intelligence. Please let me help you.”

“Sorry, I’m listening. Go on. Uh, go back to the setup stuff.”

Clarke didn’t seem convinced, but she returned to her explanation. Her work was much more
organized and smooth across the page. Briefly, Lexa wondered what it must be like to be smart in that way – to have thoughts and solutions flow seamlessly through your head. She should ask Clarke sometime.

“Did you get all that?”

“Yeah, totally.”

If by ‘all that’, she meant the way she looked slightly left and up towards the ceiling when she spoke, then yes. If she meant the way one of her eyebrows would raise critically during the harder parts of her explanation, then yes. If she meant the way she’d alternate twirling the rings on her fingers and a lock of hair every time they made eye contact, then yes. If she meant the way her shoe absently tapped Lexa’s own when she was deep in thought, then yes.

Yes, she got ‘all that’.

If she meant the numbers crap, then no. She got none of that.

“You liar.”

Lexa shrugged apologetically. “I’m just distracted.”

“By how pretty I am?”

“You’re really never going to let that go, are you?”

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Chapter End Notes

alright, i got a vote for a quick and dirty rundown of 10-codes used in this fic so here ya go

10-4: basic acknowledgement / affirmative
10-8: in service
10-9: repeat last transmission
10-10: fight
10-31: special check of (an area)
10-69: affirmative / fuck you, this 10-code sucks and im immature (lol sex number)
ETA: estimated time of arrival
Ocean King: OK / im doin just dandy
'25 with me' : short for 10-25 which is 'meet with me at this location' or 'get your ass over here i've fucked something up'
'what's your 20' : what's your location, basically. 10-20 is location.

that should about do it for now. idk, i tried to keep it light on technical stuff.
other than that, thanks for all the support and stuff, it means the world.

cheers, pals.
The phone call had ended some two hours ago, but Lexa was still exactly where she had been at the conclusion of it. Her forehead was still planted firmly on her desk and she could sense that the reports under her face were going to be stuck there whenever she chose to get up. Well, if she ever decided to get up. Dying and rotting right there in her chair might not be a horrible idea.

“Okay, so I was trying to find a way to help you out of this mess,” Clarke said, walking into the office without preamble, “and I got some less than satisfactory answers.”

“Answers from who?”

Clarke dropped a takeout bag beside Lexa’s head. “Google obviously. Should I be concerned with the amount of time you spend lately with your head on your desk?”
“Probably.” Lexa turned her head to the side to check the logo on the takeout bag. On the upside: it was from her favorite salad joint. On the downside: she wasn’t much in the mood for anything healthy. On the double downside: the sign-in sheet was stuck to her forehead. “Did Google have any answers?”

Clarke pulled a chair up and sat down, arranging both of their meals to try and coax Lexa into eating. She even went as far as to peel the sign-in sheet from Lexa’s forehead and set it aside. “Well, I Googled the odds of you just dying in your sleep. That’d solve your problems.”

“I hate you.” When Clarke just shrugged and tucked into her food, Lexa relented. Maybe dying in her sleep wasn’t the worst way to escape her looming judgment. All things considered, it was more help than Clarke usually provided. “What are the odds?” She asked, trying not to sound too resigned to the option. Or too hopeful.

“One in six thousand.”

“Not great.”

Clarke nodded. “Yeah, I wouldn’t bet on it. And considering you never sleep, your odds are probably lower than the average person.”

That was pretty rich coming from Clarke. The girl split her time between dispatch, an evening internship at a local hospital, and mountains of pre-med homework. She was probably the only person on the planet who managed less sleep than Lexa did.

“We really don’t have lives, do we?” Lexa mused. Neither of them had gotten much of ‘the college experience’ since they had been hired during their first years of college. Four years later, they were more married to each other than their social lives. Forced marriages never work too well.

Clarke’s protest was weak and perfunctory – a mere product of their inability to resist taking jabs at each other. “Speak for yourself.”

“I’m not trying to be mean. It’s just kind of sad that you have to spend all of your free time with someone you don’t even like that much.”

“What? I like you,” Clarke denied. “Wait, you don’t like me? God, no wonder you’re miserable. We’ve been basically living together for two years.”

Lexa paused with her fork halfway to her mouth and fixed Clarke with a bewildered look. “You… like me?” And of course it came out unbearably juvenile and insecure. Pull it together, Woods.

“Not anymore. I can’t believe you’ve just been tolerating me all these years! And here I thought you were a terrible liar. Jokes on me, I guess.” The joke fell kind of flat when accompanied with her sad smile. It turned out that the only thing more difficult than an antagonistic Clarke was an upset Clarke. In the wide world of public safety responsibilities, Lexa excelled at them all – all of them except comforting sad girls. What were you supposed to do when you upset a pretty girl? Hurl yourself off a bridge? Move to another country?

“I’m sorry,” Lexa tried. Yeah, she really reached for that one. “Very sorry?” Narrative antagonism aside, Lexa was trying her best no matter how unfortunate it sounded. The anatomy of an apology was a skill set long lost to the Woods family.

Clarke’s frown deepened and she propped her head on her hand. It wasn’t working at all like it was supposed to. Apologies were supposed to be easier than that, were they not?
Lexa dropped her fork back into the bowl and leaned forward, allowing her guilt to show plainly. “I just kind of assumed you didn’t like me. Most people don’t. Of course I like you— even when I hate you? Er, not that I ever actually hate you. I guess I never thought about it? But you’re kind of— well, you make me all off-balanced and I can never say the right thing to you. Like right now.”

Clarke nodded sympathetically. “Is it because I’m pretty?”

“Yes. Er – I mean, no. See? Stop that,” Lexa warned, pointing a stern finger at her.

Clarke laughed and held her hands up. “Stop what?”

“That!” Lexa gestured at Clarke’s entire being. “Stop that. Take all of that and put it somewhere else that isn’t in front of me.”

“I’m not doing anything!” Clarke’s leaned back in her chair, hands still raised in surrender, laughing at whatever awkward face Lexa was probably making. “I can’t stop being pretty any more than you can, Woods. It’s not my fault you can’t talk to pretty girls. I figured it out ages ago.”

Lexa jabbed her finger in Clarke’s direction again. “See? You say things and then I get all stupid and awkward. Then you try to help me with homework or something and it’s all very distracting. It kind of makes me want to fight you. Maybe we should just have it out in the parking lot and I can get over it.”

“Hey, I’ll have it out with you any time, any place, Alexandria.”

The accompanying smirk she offered only made her want to fight even more. It was either fight the aggressively pretty girl or do something infinitely worse. And it would be a cold day in hell before Lexa Woods kissed Clarke Griffin.

(But then again, hell just wasn’t what it used to be.)

“Stop! See? You keep saying my full name and putting sentences together that…compromise me. Is that what you want? Do you want to compromise me?” When Clarke just offered her a gleeful grin in response, Lexa backtracked quickly. “Oh god, no. Not – no, not like that. Fuck. This- this is all your fault.”

Clarke reached forward and took Lexa’s drink without asking. “Au contraire mon frère. You set yourself up. Also, swear jar.”

“I don’t speak Italian,” she grumbled, tucking another dollar in the swear jar. “Is that a ‘no’ to fighting me?”

“French, actually. And you know as well as I do that the French don’t fight anyone as long as surrender is on the table. So if it’ll make you feel less compromised, I’ll pretend you’re not cute. My gift to you.”

“Well good. Because I’m not.” Lexa snatched her drink back and swiveled her chair away from Clarke to resume her lunch.

Clarke looked ready to argue, but suddenly the closet door whipped open and banged against the back wall. Lexa was horrified at the high-pitched yelp that escaped her own mouth as she essentially flew back out of her chair, nearly climbing into Clarke’s lap in her surprise. Clarke herself didn’t fair much better as she shrieked and overturned the rest of her salad all over Lexa’s lap.
For whatever goddamn reason, Raven climbed out of the closet and gave the two a withering look. “Jumpy fuckers,” she muttered. Door etiquette and the art of tactful entrances were not skills that Raven possessed.

“Oh my god how long were you in there?” Clarke had one hand pressed firmly over her heart and the other gripped Lexa’s shirt like a lifeline. “We’ve been in the office for hours.”

Raven shrugged, swinging a frayed cable over her shoulder. “Not as long as you were in the closet. Hah, got ‘em,” she added, with the unmistakable motion of giving herself a high-five. “Fell asleep fixing lockout kits and jumper cables. By the time I woke up, you guys were already being grossly inappropriate and I thought I could hide in there until you guys finished, but jesus christ.”

“G-grossly…inappropriate?” Lexa was well aware that she was practically in her co-workers’ lap, so she made an effort to distance herself. “We were just eating lunch.”

“And talking.” Raven shook her head. “I’d rather pull up a chair, have a few domestics and watch you two fuck each other to smooth jazz than listen to you try to hold a conversation.” Raven turned to Clarke with an apologetic look. “I tried to ride it out, Clarke, I really did. That was too fucking much for me, though. It’s like watching a dog try to fuck his own reflection in a mirror, but he’s blind and someone already cut his balls off.”

Clarke laughed, but Lexa shook her head in mute horror. “I’m – I’m really not sure what that metaphor is trying to convey.”

“Something truly horrifying,” Raven said assured her. “Sorry, boss. I call it like I see it.”

“Truly, you perceive the world in a horrifying way,” Clarke said dryly, finally releasing Lexa’s shirt from her death grip. “Sorry to put you through such a traumatizing ordeal.”

Lexa narrowed her eyes. “Are we going to ignore the fact that you’ve been hiding in the equipment closet all day? I’m fairly certain I should write you up for that.” While jarring, Raven’s tendency to linger in the office at odd hours to fiddle with equipment wasn’t all that unusual. They weren’t the only ones without social lives.

“Aw what?” Clarke came to Raven’s aid, standing between the two with her back to Raven to shield her from Lexa’s wrath. “Don’t do that. She was just fixing stuff.”

Raven wrapped her arms around Clarke’s waist from behind, setting her chin on Clarke’s shoulder. “Yeah, I was just fixing stuff, boss,” she pleaded with a wicked grin. “Don’t let her get me, Clarke.”

Lexa glared over Clarke’s shoulder at Raven’s smug expression. “You are shameless, Reyes.”

“She’s so mean to me, Clarke.”

“She’s just doing her job.”

“She doesn’t love me like you do,” Raven sighed, giving Clarke another squeeze around her stomach.

Clarke nodded. “Nobody loves you like I do.”

“Enough.” Lexa massaged her temples. “Just – just go, Reyes. I’m probably going to be fired over this mural business anyways. Thanks for patching up the kits. Although next time, I would prefer not going into cardiac arrest over it.”
Raven released Clarke and snatched her backpack from the closet with a salute. “You got it, Woods. Be gentle with Clarke, you hear? She’s made of pudding and good intentions. Don’t make me fuck you up, boss.”

The last thing Lexa wanted was for Raven to ‘fuck her up’. The last thing anyone should want was for Raven to fuck them up.

“Hey don’t worry, we’ll just be in here fucking to smooth jazz,” Clarke assured her, pulling her chair right up next to Lexa’s and fluttering her eyelashes in Raven’s direction.

Clarke apparently didn’t care whether Raven fucked her up or not. The swear jar must’ve been feeling a little neglected in light of their gratuitous talk of fucking and being fucked up and all the glorious ways one might employ the verb form of ‘fuck’.

“Shit, I’ll get the domestics. Just promise me you won’t start talking again. I’m a fragile girl.”

That wasn’t remotely true.

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Working traffic was one of Lexa’s least favorite things in the world, but she didn’t trust anyone else to handle the big road closure for the basketball game. Dads in minivans always wanted to fight people who wouldn’t bend to their fatherly wills. It took a special kind of underpaid, sadistic jerk to keep them in check. Lexa was the exact underpaid sadistic jerk for the job – always had been.

To make matters worse, her cousin had decided to drop by during her shift to lean against the hood of her patrol car and make stupid remarks about the way Lexa handled traffic. To the untrained eye, it was friendly inter-departmental cooperation. Lexa had a very trained eye, though, and Anya was just being a pain.

“Why don’t you just shoot them?” Anya suggested, giving Lexa an innocent look over the lid of her coffee cup. The suggestion had been posed numerous times in the last hour and it was becoming harder and harder to decline.

Lexa glared over her shoulder as another student tried to run her over on his way to the gym. After explaining to him that ‘making mad gains’ didn’t count as an emergency, Lexa watched him drive off with his middle finger hoisted proudly in the air like a true patriot.

“Trust me, I wish,” Lexa sighed. “If I had a gun, I might consider it.”

“Want me to shoot them, kid?”

“Yes.”

Anya laughed and shook her head fondly. “I don’t think I like you enough to go to jail over it, but I’ll consider it for your birthday.”

“You don’t even know when my birthday is.”

Opening her mouth with a no doubt witty retort, Anya seemed fully prepared to prove her wrong until her eyebrows scrunched up and she shut her mouth again. She looked toward the dull, sunless
sky in search of an answer, but was unable to find anything. “Shit, you’re right. Wow, I kind of suck.”

Lexa shrugged and gestured obnoxiously for an angry parent to turn their gigantic SUV around and get lost. Anya was kind of an asshole, but the birthday thing didn’t bother her. Nobody had remembered her birthday in years and she had long since stopped caring. It was a dumb, arbitrary milestone anyways. One year closer to adult diapers or whatever.

“When is your birthday?”

“Thirtieth of February,” Lexa called over her shoulder. A minivan was making a valiant effort to kill her, but little did they know that Lexa welcomed death. Do it, asshole.

Anya nodded for a few seconds, mentally recording the date. She had never been the sharpest tool in the shed. A few weeks from then, she’d wake up in a cold sweat at the realization that Lexa was even more of a punk than initially assumed. The calendar would skip from February 28th to March 1st and Anya would send a box of live cockroaches priority mail to Lexa’s apartment.

The Woods children had never been particularly classy.

“So are you dating anyone?” Anya tried to look casual when she asked, but she had always enjoyed finding ways to tease Lexa relentlessly. A cautious approach was always best when it came to familial interrogations.

“Why do you always ask me that?”

Anya shrugged innocently. “I dunno, isn’t that the kind of small talk we’re supposed to engage in? We haven’t talked in a while. Uncle Gus is the only weirdo I know who likes talking on the phone – he’s such a girl.”

Lexa spared Anya a critical look before pulling out her cell phone and scrolling through absently in an attempt to put an end to the conversation. She’d never really been the dating type. Either she was too busy, too distant, or too uninterested.

“Fine, that’s the last time I try to be civil. Back to the basics, then: did you fuck that dispatcher chick yet? She’s hot.” Anya leered over the top of her coffee cup.

“Clarke?” Lexa frowned. Anya was a pig. “Can you not be gross?”

“What?” Anya gestured vaguely with her coffee cup. “She’s the most consistent thing in your sad life. You’re doing a disservice to gays everywhere, loser. Next time I’m near your office, I’m totally getting her number.”

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“No wonder Clarke had been upset at the idea that they weren’t friends. Maybe Lexa wasn’t seeing things clearly. Had they always been friends? Shit.

“Besides, Clarke’s going to be a doctor or whatever. She’s way out of my league.”

“Not my league,” Anya snickered, giving Lexa an absolutely ghastly look of delight. “I’ve given you almost 4 years of space. Think she’d bottom or is she gonna fight me on it?”
“Knock it off,” Lexa hissed. “She’s not a piece of meat, Anya.” Before she could stop herself, she elbowed Anya hard in her side, elbow knocking against the firm ridge of her Kevlar. “Don’t talk about her like that, alright?”

Anya’s face went through a weird series of confused and piteous expressions before she fell into something slightly unsettled. “Aw shit, sorry kid. I was just playing – Clarke’s always a doll when I stop by for the monthly reports. I didn’t mean nothin’ by it.”

Lexus grunted and went to pull the cones aside to let one of the state vehicles past the roadblock. No matter how much Lexa knew Anya didn’t mean her constant heckling, certain things just got to her sometimes. Anya certainly hadn’t been the first person to objectify the pretty dispatcher and she wouldn’t be the last. Plenty of new hires thought they had a chance. Somebody who worked as hard as Clarke did deserved better than weird sexual comments and lewd admirers, though.

“Shit, you really like her don’t you?”

Lexa frowned and shot another glare in Anya’s direction while she replaced the cones before anyone could slip past her. “No – I mean, not like that. I don’t know, it doesn’t matter anyways. She’s just really smart and it pisses me off when people act like she’s just a pretty face, alright?”

“Fine, fine, you’re right. I’m a jerk. But you totally like her.”

Rolling her eyes, Lexa leaned against the patrol car and mirrored Anya’s stance. “Nothing I say will change your mind, so believe what you like.”

“You should ask her out,” Anya continued, ignoring Lexa and proving her point in one phrase. As much as Anya enjoyed hearing the sound of her own voice, she really didn’t enjoy the sounds of other peoples’ voices. Most of the time, she shut them out entirely.

“Nah.” Lexa grabbed Anya’s coffee cup right out of her hand and downed the rest of it before tossing it in the open window of her patrol car. “I’m way too dumb for her. My parents were assholes, but they weren’t wrong: I’ve got nothing special. I’m not being dramatic – I’m fine with it.”

“Lex,” Anya sighed, “that’s not true. Bad grades don’t mean you can’t be happy, idiot. Look at me: I’m a fucking moron and I’m awesome. Hell, I didn’t even go to college.”

Huffing out a single laugh, Lexa shook her head and gave Anya a tired look. “You make a good point. I’m not looking for sympathy, though. All I’m saying is that Clarke and I are very different people.”

“Good,” Anya countered. “If I ever met myself, I’d probably fucking murder me. Being similar isn’t a requirement of being compatible. If I’m ever going to make it work with someone, they’ve got to be the furthest fucking thing from me.”

Lexa snorted, but privately agreed. If Anya didn’t have the basic human ability to recognize her own reflection, she’d probably try to fight it every time she passed a mirror. “I guess my parents just thought I’d be able to escape the family law enforcement tradition like they did and become a hotshot lawyer or something. The second I told them otherwise, they barely spoke to me until they bit it.”

“Not to speak ill of the dead, but they kind of sucked most of the time.”

Lexa shrugged. “Yeah, kind of. I’ve got Uncle Gus, though.”
“And me,” Anya protested.

“Don’t remind me.”

Anya leaned through her open window and came back holding another, full coffee cup as if to validate every stereotype about cops she possibly could. Thankfully, she didn’t come back with a donut as well. It was so undeniably Anya, that Lexa couldn’t even bring herself to poke fun.

She crossed her arms and tapped an index finger against the lid of her coffee in thought. "I don't know why you wouldn't live with me or Gus after it happened. I'm still salty about that, kid."

It was a conversation they'd had many times - too many times for Lexa to humor it anymore. "If it wasn't that, you'd find something else to be salty about," Lexa muttered. "It's just easier to be alone. And before you make fun of me for being dark and brooding, let me save you the trouble: I know."

“Well as long as you already know," Anya begrudged, shifting her coffee cup to pull at her stiff kevlar and readjust. "What are you going to do about that vandalism bullshit?"

Grimacing, Lexa offered a weak shrug. “I have no idea. Nothing, maybe.”

A car drove up to the barrier and laid on the horn for a solid ten seconds, the wail going in one of Lexa’s ears and right out the other. She didn’t even bother reacting to their invitation for an altercation. When the noise finally ceased, they continued their conversation as though they’d never been interrupted.

“Want to know what I’d do?”

“No.”

Anya ignored her and gestured at the general area of the campus with her coffee. “I’d go big or go home. Flush the bastard out, Lex.”

"I don't want to go big. I'd much rather go home."

A static voice buzzed from Anya's shoulder mic, requesting her presence at some financial dispute across town and Anya passed her second coffee off to Lexa as she climbed back into her patrol car. She responded in the affirmative, gave dispatch an ETA, then turned to Lexa with a critical look. "I don't care that you want to go home, loser. Figure out a way to put an end to all this shit. Time to grow up."

"I don't want to do that either."

Anya gave her a flat look, tipped her shades back over her eyes, then sped off with a completely unnecessary screech of spinning tires.

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“Griffin, I have an idea.”

“I’ll alert the press.”

Lexa had been standing in front of the giant map of campus for more than an hour, mulling over
her predicament and the recent promise of a third mural from the vandal. Anya’s words had been bouncing around her head and her blood was pumping fast, pulling her towards action. It was time to do something about the vandalism and the chronic headache her existence had taken upon itself.

The second Clarke had reentered the office to grab the previous night’s equipment checkout log, Lexa sought out her opinion.

“That’s…fair, but I don’t think I have many options open to me,” Lexa said warily, eyes sweeping across the map again and again. “I’ve decided that we need to have directed patrol tonight. I’m going to stay for overtime and patrol out in the truck all night to supplement the patrol teams. We can catch this guy if we’re proactive.”

Clarke hummed her unenthusiastic acknowledgement while she shuffled papers about. She rarely withheld her opinions, which was concerning in itself.

Lexa turned to look at her. “You don’t think it will work.”

“It’s not that,” Clarke said slowly. “I don’t know. It’s a big campus, so they could pretty easily avoid you. Maybe increasing your efforts and putting on a show is what the guy wants. There’s no game if you don’t play it, Woods. You still have some control here.”

Lexa scoffed. “I wish that was true. It seems I’ve already entered the game, regardless of my intentions.” She sighed and shook her head while her eyes continued picking apart the map. “And it’s been a long time since I’ve had any control here.”

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“We, uh, have a bit of a situation here. Could you 25 with us in Lot 1a?”

“When?”

“We... um... negative?... kind of.”

“..... 10-4, ETA 6 minutes.”

+++  

Chapter End Notes

i never got a chance to wish my patriots a happy memorial day. i hope you made better decisions than i did. in other words, i hope you did literally anything other than take
boiling shots of tequila.

as promised: your biweekly rad tunes

thanks for your comments, kudos, bookmarks, and telepathic rage - all signals received, all appreciated, looking forward to more

cheers, pals
Raven was waiting outside of vehicle 34 when Lexa arrived, pacing nervously on her bad leg. Her brace creaked with each step while her hands were busy tugging anxiously at her radio cord. The lot was usually well lit past dark, but the lights didn’t seem to be working.

“You’ve got me nervous, Reyes,” Lexa called, hoisting herself out of the seat of her truck. “I don’t like being summoned without an explanation. What didn’t you want dispatch recording or county hearing?”

Clarke may have had the experience to censor embarrassing transmissions from official records, but she wasn’t pulling overtime like Lexa was. Jasper was the dispatcher on duty that night and he couldn’t be relied upon for discretion – professionally or otherwise.

Raven ceased her pacing. “Er, I might have lost Octavia?”

“Is that a question?”

Raven grimaced. “I guess not. I definitely, uh, misplaced Blake Junior. Not to be dramatic, but there’s a decent chance she’s fucking dead.”

Taking deep, calming breaths, Lexa outwardly slipped into supervisor-mode (though Clarke would insist that was her only mode). Internally, the voices of the damned were screaming.

“What happened?” She asked calmly.

“Oh, so we were being super professional and working really hard and stuff. We were doing extra laps around Lot 1 because the lights have been going down a lot around here, but then we see the Facilities shed over there and its got a visitor. We figured it’s kind of strange for staff to be there at 1 in the goddamn morning.” Raven pointed to the large shed at the corner of the lot where they kept traffic cones and gardening equipment. A number of covered golf carts were chained to racks around the side of it. “We leave the car here and approach on foot. But of course, the dude sees us and fucking bolts.”

Without waiting to see if Lexa was following, Raven started hobbling off towards the shed. “You ain’t gonna like this, boss,” she called back over her shoulder.

Lexa followed at a constrained pace, attempting not to pressure Raven into walking faster. The shed was cast into darkness in light of the unlit street lamps and technical malfunction. She didn’t
really need light to see the problem, though.

Well, she was right. Lexa did not like it.

I mean, sure. It was pretty.

Still vandalism.

Lexa pulled her flashlight from her belt to get a clearer view of the mural on the side of the shed. This one was a sweeping, slightly less detail-oriented painting of the view from the top of the football stadium.

“Fuck.”

Raven nodded. “Yeah, for real. Anyways, the guy bolts and we don’t really get why until we see the mural. Even though he’d already gotten a good head start by the time we figured it out, Octavia just took off into the woods after him. On my best day I run like I’m in a three-legged race tied to the entire fucking rock population of Stone Henge, so I didn’t follow her. I couldn’t have kept up anyways.” She rubbed anxiously at the back of her head and gestured into the woods on the edge of the parking lot. “Gettin’ kind of worried here, boss. Those woods are a fucking maze at night.”

Raven wasn’t wrong. Some of the stoners or more rebellious students of the university would hike up into the woods to hide from the Campus Police and smoke. Unfortunately, by the time they’d hit their highs, they were incapable of finding their way out again. Either patrol would shepherd them out in the morning or they’d stumble out on their own when the haze lifted. Even sober, it was easy to get lost if you weren’t careful.

“Shit. I’m going after her. You stay in the car, Reyes.” Though she knew it wasn’t exactly her fault, Lexa couldn’t help the slight glare and clipped tone she leveled in Raven’s direction. “You know how I feel about separating from your partner. As an unarmed unit, all we have is each other.”

Raven at least looked properly chastised. “Hey, I tried to get her to stay here - I used my most creative cursing. Octavia gets tunnel vision when she catches a scent, though – girl’s like a bloodhound. She’s probably already chewing on the Masked Douche’s bones by now. Give her a call.”

Or she was dead.

Lexa shook the thought from her brain and grabbed her mic.

“77 to 768”

“—68 g- -------“

“768 you’re breaking up.”

“-----said go-------ss”

“768 what’s your 20? Are you Ocean King?”

“Can’t h----boss. Could use ----- but----kay.”

“Stay put, I’m coming after you.”
In the end, Lexa took Raven with her at a slow pace. After losing one of her responsibilities, Lexa wasn’t too keen on leaving behind the other. So they stumbled along, sweeping their flashlights and calling for the missing girl at a painfully slow pace. The moon was nearly done waning and provided little light to see by. Their only company was the skittering of squirrels and their own chattering teeth.

“Blake!”

“My main bitch, where you at?”

“Blake!”

“I fucked your brother!”

“Um.”

Raven held her own flashlight under her face with a wicked grin and a conspiratorial wink. “I didn’t,” she whispered. “Just…appealing to her familial senses.”

“Oh thank god. Octavia!” Lexa made a frustrated noise and stopped to appraise their surroundings for a few moments. Raven slowed to a stop when she noticed Lexa falling behind with a final, long creak of her brace.

“Well, I didn’t fuck her brother yet anyways,” Raven corrected, wiggling the squeaky hinge of her brace experimentally. “Man, I sound like the fucking Tin Man tonight. Oil can. My kingdom for an oil can!”

Lexa considered calling for Octavia again, but her voice was going hoarse and Raven was making enough noise for the both of them.

“Blake Junior! Say nothing if you’d fuck me-“

Lexa shushed her when she caught onto the distant noises from the east. She shined her light at the source only to stumble back a few paces. The approaching figure could have been Octavia. Of course, it could just as easily have been some kind of swamp monster.

“I’ve never been so happy to see you two,” the swamp monster groaned, jogging the last few steps to reach them. “I fell in a creek.” It looked more like the entire creek had fallen on her. There were bits of twigs, cigarette butts and grass poking out of the sludge smeared across her ruined uniform and clinging thick in her hair.

Raven laughed and stepped back a few feet to prevent the imminent embrace. “No shit. I take it you lost the Bitch Bandit? Way to go, loser.”

Octavia hung her head and sighed. “Yeah. That makes twice I’ve lost the bastard. But in my defense, we haven’t had nearly enough rising action for this to qualify as the climax of the story. Next time, I’m just gonna shoot him.” She wiped some mud from around her eyes and smeared it down the front of her swampy uniform shirt while her shoes squelched as she shifted uncomfortably.

“We don’t carry guns,” Raven pointed out.
“For good reason.” Lexa gave Octavia a once-over to check for injuries, before herding them back the way they had come. “Did you get a better look at him?”

“No, but he left his bag behind.”

It wasn’t a smoking gun, but the bag was a decent consolation prize.

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“Son of a fucking bitch!”

Somewhere, approximately three miles away on a dirty office shelf, a large, glass swear jar wept a single tear.

Raven lashed out, kicking the unyielding wall of the defaced shed. When her good foot made jarring contact, she fell into a fresh bout of cursing. “Punk-ass fucking paint jockey – with the – fucking son of a – ninja fucker – son of a fuck!”

Octavia looked devastated – too devastated even for swearing. She was shivering violently and shaking her head at the sight before them.

The bag was gone. And if they had required any further evidence that the vandal had circled back around to the shed when they were all in the woods, the new message scribbled under the mural was proof enough.

BOTH EYES OPEN, AUXILIARY

‘Son of a fuck’, indeed.

Lexa shook her head slowly, allowing the crushing weight of failure to sink fully into her weary bones. Not leaving someone behind with the mural – not calling another patrol team to watch the scene had been a mistake. They had been so damn close.

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“Campus Police, Woods.”

“Hello, it’s Maya with the school newspa-“

Lexa slammed the phone back on the receiver and spent the next hour with her face buried in one of the more embarrassing reports of the year.

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“Auxiliary communication center, Griffin speaking.”

“Clarke.”

“Alexandria.”

“Ugh.”

“Wait, aren’t you in the office? Six feet from me?”

“Ugh.”
“Alright, I’ll bite. What’s wrong? You know, besides your crushing failure the other day. Sorry... was that insensitive?”

Lexa mumbled unintelligibly into the receiver.

“Out with it.”

“Maura won’t stop calling me.”

“Am I supposed to know who that is?”

“She’s with the newspaper and she won’t quit calling about the vandalism. If I’m on the phone with you, she can’t get another call through. I’m dying, Griffin. Will I die or will I get fired first? We’ll know soon enough.”

“Well, at least you haven’t resorted to being dramatic.”

“Hey, don’t try and convince me things could be worse.”

“Me? I would never.”

“Ergh.”

“Wait, are you looking for…pity? You? Pity?”

“I’m mourning, Clarke.”

“I enjoy this.”

“Wow. Thanks.”

“No, no. What I mean is that we’ve finally hit the point where you don’t care about embarrassing yourself with emotions in front of me. We’ve come a long way, Woods.”

“It’s not my fault you bring out the worst in me.”

“That you would think your emotions are the worst part of you isn’t nearly as surprising as it should be. And I suppose your emotions are my fault too.”

“Your words, not mine.”

Clarke laughed and Lexa was surprised to find her bad mood lifting slightly. But because Clarke was six feet away and behind two doors, Lexa allowed a small smile to turn up the corner of her mouth.

“So what, am I just supposed to stay on the phone with you until this case blows over and your pride comes back from the war?”

“Your idea, not mine.”

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Luckily, Lexa had managed to avoid tearing the phone line out of the wall the entire day. That was partially credited to Clarke for chattering endlessly on the other line while Lexa plowed through paperwork and homework under her careful, verbal guidance. Together they conquered Lexa’s abysmal handling of intermediate statistics and most of the backlogged paystubs from the previous
week. After that, Clarke had a conference call with County dispatch to go over digitizing old records. That left Lexa to her previous game of trying to smite the school newspaper office relying solely on willpower and ill intent.

It didn’t work.

But the day wound to a slow, painful close and Lexa bolted out the door to indulge in her bimonthly trip to the worst bar near campus. The Hall was the kind of bar that nobody actually went to, but rather they might just kind of end up there on occasion. Lexa hated herself enough to purposefully go there, but only because it was the only place that she was unlikely to be recognized in. It was just another joy of working for campus police.

The real joy was what always happened around her third drink – right after the gin and tonic, preceded by the seven and seven.

“I’m not late am I?”

Lexa smiled into the dregs of her second drink and shook her head without looking up. “Nope. You never are.”

“Double whiskey, neat,” Clarke called to the grumpy bartender scrubbing dust out of one of his grimy glasses. She threw a few bills on the counter and sank into the seat next to Lexa. “My timing is impeccable.”

“You realize that even though you never owed me, you’ve definitely payed off whatever debt you perceive between us.” Lexa pushed aside her empty glass and watched the bartender swipe Clarke’s money from the table with a suspicious look. It wasn’t like they’d been doing the same damn thing for more than a year.

Clarke pulled one of the cocktail napkins towards her, retrieved the pen from the front pocket of her scrubs, and began doodling nonsensically on it. “Yeah, I know. This isn’t about what you did for me anymore. Somebody’s got to buy you drinks.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because you put up with a lot of shit and never hear a word of thanks,” Clarke said simply, accepting the drink the bartender slid towards her. She passed it wordlessly to Lexa and returned to her drawing.

Lexa took the drink with a murmured thanks, studying Clarke out of the corner of her eye without detection. The drinks started as Clarke’s way of paying her back for a messy incident two years prior involving a rowdy bar, a drunk, angry boyfriend, and some minor stalking. Lexa had gotten him charged and had her Uncle Gustus intimidate the guy into dropping out of Clarke’s life. All of it was discreet and none of it needed thanks.

At the time, they had hardly known each other as more than acquainted coworkers. But who wouldn’t want to get the last word in on some tool that had threatened to kill your career for kicking him out of a bar? Her second job as a bouncer, back before her promotion, hadn’t made her a lot of friends. But fuck that guy, for real. And fuck that job at the end of the day, too. She’d lost it for her troubles, but as far as Clarke knew she had quit to accommodate being a supervisor. No real loss.

Clarke didn’t like to talk about any of it, understandably, so she did the normal human alternative and tirelessly researched Lexa’s schedule to stalk her at some obscure bar and buy her a drink
every other Wednesday. Completely normal.

They typically pretended like the whole thing had never happened, which worked just as well for Lexa. Water under the proverbial bridge and all that.

“I don’t need thanks,” Lexa said into her glass. “That’s why I get a paycheck.”

Finishing her drawing, Clarke tapped the end of her pen against her head and gave Lexa a critical look. “No, you get a paycheck for the basic stuff. But I know for a fact that you don’t get a paycheck to give out the personal number of your second cell phone to students so they can call you if they’re in a bad place and don’t want to call the 411 number.” Lexa made to protest the (completely true) evaluation, but Clarke wasn’t done. “And I also know you don’t get a paycheck to pay for cabs to get drunk students home when you’re off-duty and unable to pick them up. So yeah, I’m going to keep buying you drinks because the whole goddamn campus should be conspiring to make sure you never pay for your own drinks again.”

“Well, why does that have to be your job?” Lexa kept her eyes firmly on the contents of her glass, though she could feel Clarke’s incredulous look boring into the side of her head.

“Woods, you’re everybody’s person. You’re the one people can just call – like a get-out-of-jail-free card. Everyone needs a person. But if you’re so busy being everybody’s person, who the hell is going to be your person?”

It was a fair question. Lexa didn’t really have a person. She never really had.

“I don’t know,” she mumbled. “Myself, I guess. I can multi-task.”

“Wrong. I’m going to be your person,” Clarke said firmly. She tapped the counter in front of Lexa’s drink to draw her attention and leveled her with a serious look. “When you need to just call someone, you can call me.”

Lexa shifted uncomfortably and busied herself with another small sip of whiskey. It was always strange when Clarke’s sincerity took a front seat to her usual teasing.

Those things may not have been strictly in her job description, but her job was, in the grandest sense, keeping students safe. She took her job seriously - it was the one thing she was good at. Providing the occasional ride home off-duty or cab fare wasn’t an act of grand selflessness.

But Clarke looked at her like it was, so maybe she’d just leave that be.

Clarke pushed the napkin she’d been drawing on towards her and started in on a fresh one while Lexa studied the old one. She smiled at the drawing: a sketch of the campus newspaper’s office going up in flames. Somehow, the drawing lifted her mood immensely. Arson, as always, was as therapeutic as any coping mechanism.

Maybe having a ‘person’ was a good idea.

Just one, though.

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Even without Lexa’s statement, the newspaper went ahead and published a handful of stories on the vandal over the next few days. Lexa avoided reading any of them, assuming that one of her coworkers would tell her if there was something important. According to Jasper, the vandal was close to their next donation goal, but until they reached the magic number, efforts to catch him
were put on hold. So Lexa tried not to seem too annoyed when the entire patrol group met back at
the office with their dinners to take their break. They were supposed to stagger dinner breaks, but
nobody had really followed that rule in years.

“I think the next mural should be one of me,” Bellamy boasted, puffing his chest out and offering
his coworkers a charming grin. “Something with me shirtless, I think.”

“Wouldn’t work,” Murphy drawled, twirling his fork.

Bellamy frowned and deflated slightly. “Huh? Why wouldn’t it work?”

“You’re just,” Murphy trailed off, waving his fork in thoughtful circles. “You’re just the furthest
thing I can imagine from a work of art.”

Raven and Octavia howled with laughter, the latter thumping Bellamy on the back while he gaped
at Murphy. Betrayal burned hard and open in his eyes, but Murphy was too focused on his dinner
to notice or care.

“Oh, Murphy,” Raven sighed, wiping a tear from her eye. “I love to hate you.”

“But – but I’m-“ Bellamy gestured helplessly.

Murphy shoved a forkful of noodles in his mouth and shrugged. “Sorry dude. I wouldn’t hang you
up above my mantelpiece.”

Clarke emerged from the radio room with her own dinner. Apparently nobody was going to stay
focused that night. But Lexa couldn’t complain too much when Clarke deposited one of the bags in
front of her as she passed Lexa’s desk. Over the past two years they had tangled themselves in an
impossible trade pattern of not knowing who still owed whom dinner. They both just always
brought enough for two.

“I’d hang him above my mantelpiece,” Clarke laughed, leaving Lexa behind with a friendly
squeeze to her shoulder, trailing her fingertips along her shoulder blades as she passed. “Hell, I’d
hang him above my marriage bed. Look at his cute nose. And have you seen him shirtless?
C’mon.”

Lexa frowned at her night log. Had Clarke seen him shirtless? Inexplicably, she found herself
liking Bellamy Blake a whole lot less.

Bellamy re-inflated and beamed up at Clarke as she took a seat between him and Murphy. “Clarke
gets it. She loves me best,” he said, offering Raven a pointed look.

“Over my dead fucking body,” Raven hissed. “She’s mine.”

“Swear Jar, Raven,” Clarke admonished.

“Fine, over my dead gorgeous body. Clarke’s mine.”

Lexa’s frown deepened. Inexplicably, she found herself liking Raven Reyes a whole lot less too.

Clarke just laughed and held up her hands as a peace offering. “Ladies, gentlemen, calm
yourselves. I love you all deeply. Though we all know that I love Murphy the most.”

Without looking up from his dinner or changing his facial expression, Murphy reached up to meet
Clarke’s offered high-five. It was way too fluid to be a rare occurrence. And if Lexa had held any
love for John Murphy, she would have inexplicably lost that as well.

Surely, Clarke loved her best…in a strictly platonic, antagonistic way of course. Clarke never brought anybody else dinner. Clarke never stayed into overtime without pay to help anyone else pass their Gen Eds despite having her own, much harder classes to study for. And Clarke certainly didn’t stop by the townie bar every other Wednesday night to buy anyone else their third drink (double whiskey, neat) before heading to her internship.

It’s the little things.

“I’ll never know what you see in him,” Octavia muttered, and Lexa silently agreed. Murphy was rude, crass, dry, and unfriendly. Clarke was the only one who didn’t seem to mind him besides Bellamy. Unlike Bellamy, though, Murphy was almost nice to Clarke – nice for John Murphy, anyways.

“Did you get the goods?” Clarke asked, leaning towards Murphy.

Wordlessly, he pulled a small cup of potato salad from his dinner bag and passed it over to her.

Clarke snatched the cup and whooped. “This is what I see in him,” she declared. “Nobody makes potato salad like John Murphy.”

“Holy shit, you just smiled. It wasn’t even a smirk.” Bellamy looked between Clarke and Murphy in open awe. “Holy shit.”

“Nope,” Murphy countered, shoveling more food into his mouth.

Clarke nodded. “Please, Bell. Get your head out of the clouds. Also, swear jar.”

Despite her opinions on Murphy, Octavia leaned forward and swiped some of Clarke’s potato salad with her fork. She looked almost offended by the taste, which probably meant that it was really good. “So what are we going to do with the generous contributions to the Swear Jar? It’s getting full.”

Conspicuously, Clarke covered the rest of her potato salad with her hand. The protective gesture drew another almost-smile from Murphy, who was definitely not invested in the conversation. “I haven’t really decided,” Clarke said. “Maybe we’ll replace some equipment or throw a party or something.”

“Party.” The response was nearly unanimous.

Lexa grunted. “No parties.”

“Tell your wife she’s boring,” Octavia griped.

Clarke rolled her eyes, but Lexa’s stupid brain already had wedding bells on full fucking blast. “No parties,” Lexa repeated firmly. Her thoughts were still throwing rice and flower petals and shit at her mental bridal party, but she would not be swayed on this matter – even if she’d lost her damn mind.

“Technically, my wife lets you guys all eat together instead of staggering breaks like I know you’re supposed to. I wouldn’t push it, Octavia,” Clarke advised.

Lexa would have supported the statement if she had any confidence whatsoever that she could open her mouth without the words ‘I’ and ‘Do’ coming out.
Raven pushed herself in front of Octavia to interrupt her conversation with Clarke. “Woah, woah, woah. I don’t like all this talk of marriage. Nobody’s good enough for my Clarke. That means you, Woods.”

There was only one thing left to do.

Lexa was going to have to kill Raven.

(No. God, no. What the fuck?)

(Oh shit. Oh shit, she’d gone and done it.)

(...feelings.)

Fucking shit. Lexa was fairly certain she'd been vaccinated against that at some point.

“Woods can take you, Raven. I’d be careful.” Clarke turned towards Lexa and offered her a stupidly pretty smile. Nobody had ever accused Clarke Griffin of playing fair, though. “You’ll fight for my honor, won’t you Alexandria?”

Yes. Unequivocally yes.

“No.”

Raven laughed and pumped her fist in victory. “Ha! That’s honestly a relief, because I’m pretty sure she’d break my other three limbs if we had it out.”

They fell into some argument about who would win in any given fight between Auxiliary Officers and Dispatchers. All Lexa could really catch was that no one wanted to fight her and Murphy refused to rise to Raven’s bragging that she could murder him even without the use of one leg. She turned in her chair to watch them argue, vaguely amused at their antics. Clarke captured most of her attention and yepp she was pretty. She had this way of talking more with her hands than her words. She never controlled the conversation, though. Her interest seemed to lie solely in what others had to say and making sure everyone else appreciated just how interesting they should find each other. When her hands weren’t busy talking, though, her fingers twisted the rings on her fingers in absent circles.

Lexa was staring.

It was weird having to share Clarke with others.

When Octavia moved to actually take her uniform shirt off, demanding Bellamy fight her in the back parking lot, Lexa managed to shake herself back into professionalism.

“Hey, knock it off,” she ordered.

Octavia looked ready to blame her brother, but Clarke shushed them, one hand cupping her headset.

“Campus Communications Center, non-emergency, how can we assist you?”

Clarke began nodding and scribbling on a notepad, while she packed up the rest of her uneaten food and headed for the door.

“Alright, we can send a vehicle team out right away. Are your keys in your car? And where are you located?”
Lexa watched her depart. Unbidden, and unwelcome, one of Bellamy’s favorite teasing farewells to Clarke leapt to the front of her mind: ‘hate to see her leave, but love to watch her go’.

Fuck. Was she leering? That was exactly what she had accused Anya of doing in all her righteous fury. She couldn’t betray her fury like this, especially not when it was so goddamn righteous.

“Alright, back to work.”

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“Campus Police, Supervisor Woods.”

“Hello, please don’t hang up.”

“Um, okay? This is a non-emergency number, if you have an emergency, hang up and dial 911 for the County Police.”

“No, this is Maya with the newspaper. Please don’t hang up.”

Lexa sighed heavily into the receiver.

“What can I do for you, Marley?”

“Maya, actually. Miss Woods, you don’t have to say anything if you don’t want to. Just listen. We had an art major call in this morning who claimed that she recognized the style of the murals—”

“The vandalism,” Lexa corrected.

“Right, the vandalism. The caller said it matched the style and signature of one of the paintings hanging in the west hallway on the third floor of the student union – the hallway leading to the study abroad offices.”

“I’m listening.”

“It may not be much help, but I figured you would want to know. I’ve decided not to publish this particular speculation. I try not to mislead my readers.”

“Right, wouldn’t want to speculate would we?”

“I realize that perhaps I haven’t considered the ramifications my stories have had for your department, so I’d like to assure you that if I receive any additional information that I feel might help your investigation, you have my word that I will share it with you before my readers. And I’d like to apologize for any perceived slight on my part.”

“Uh, right. Thanks, I guess.”

“Would you like to give a statement on the Mural Marauder meeting their next donation goal?”

“Not really.”

“Do you have a plan to increase security? Any new tactics you will be employing during the next week?”

“Yeah, we’ve actually set up giant, hidden bear traps all over campus. Sure, we might snap a few innocent ankles, but the price of justice isn’t a cheap one.”
“Bear traps?”

“Yes, like the giant ones with thick metal teeth. We may kill him before we get a confession, but you know how it is.”

“A-are you serious?”

“Absolutely. Sorry, Martha, I’m going to have to cut this conversation short. I just heard one of the traps in the church lot across the way snap closed. It’s either the vandal, or my dispatcher back from lunch. If it’s the vandal, I’ll give you a call. Bye.”

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

thank u to all visitors, well-wishers, and distant relations

in other news, i too would absolutely vaccinate myself against feelings if the option presented itself.

i’ve come to deliver the tunes - this week brought to you by a band i saw at a festival on saturday opening for cold war kids and they were superb, adorable, and humble. not always a soft rock kind of gal, but PHOX deserves a plug, so here it is: give their debut album a shot.

happy monday y’all
As the days dragged on, the vandal’s donation goal having been met and tensions high, Lexa began to seriously consider the bear traps. She had been working doubles nearly every day, spending her days staring at Clarke (you know, like a creep), trying to figure out when exactly she’d gotten so fucked. Her nights were spent driving around like a maniac and snapping at patrol teams to check every dark corner of campus. She could count her hours of sleep that week on two hands. Frankly, she was becoming a little neurotic. She kept telling *jokes* and calling Clarke by her first name. Things were strange.

Around day 6 of crazed patrolling, the lieutenant she answered to at County headquarters called her and told her she wasn’t allowed to work overtime for the next two days. They couldn’t afford it. And though she wasn’t often forced to confront her own mortality, she needed sleep in the worst of ways. Clarke had been saying unidentifiable words to her in the office the previous day while they ate lunch and, in her exhausted haze, Lexa had reached up to tuck an errant piece of hair behind Clarke’s ear. Luckily, Clarke had the good grace to tease her only as far as her sleep deprivation deserved, but it was past fucking time for a night off.

Hell had been starting to freeze over, per her joking predictions, and it was time to reevaluate from the safety of unconsciousness.

When she left that day, Lexa ordered Jasper to keep a close eye on the security cameras. Bellamy would be able to take charge in her place, but she made sure to leave detailed instructions for patrol routes and areas of interest. He would have made a semi-decent replacement for her when she graduated if it weren’t for the fact that he too would be leaving after the semester. It was rapidly approaching a critical timeframe for which she needed to appoint a new supervisor – time was not on her side.

She was much too tired to think about any of that, though.

Her chin had practically dropped to her chest by the time she stumbled home to the small apartment complex she lived in just off campus. It was a sad, characterless closet she lived in, but the rent was cheap and she didn’t have to share it. If she had been less than half dead, she would have noticed the fire trucks and crowd gathered there. She wouldn’t have noticed it at all if she hadn’t bumped into the back of her landlord when she tried to get into the building.

“Huh? Oh, sorry Mr. Rico. Long day,” she offered around a yawn. When she tried to scoot around him, he reached an arm out and held her still.

“Woah, there. Not a great time to go in.”
Lexa stared down at her restrained bicep in confusion, unsure why her landlord would try to keep her from sleeping. Finally, she looked around and was able to process the scene around her.

Firefighters were loitering about, hauling equipment and taking reports while fire marshals weaved between them with notepads and radios and looks of general disgruntlement. Students and residents were milling around babbling nervously to each other and trying to snag a fire marshal to interrogate. The smell of burning drywall and singed, precious belongings hit her nose far later than it should have.

Not good.

“What’s happening?” She asked dumbly.

Mr. Rico shook his head, looking almost as tired as Lexa. He was a squat Latino man with thick arms and a consistently apologetic smile. Either he knew how sad his apartments were, or he was just sorry that Lexa's life was so persistently terrible at every inconvenient turn. “Gas fire in 22A. We won’t be allowed back inside for hours.”

“Hours?” Lexa whispered, eyes stinging. She didn’t have hours. She had seconds at best before Mr. Rico was going to have to hold her while she slept and whisper sweet nothings about renters insurance and utilities costs in her ear.

Mr. Rico breathed out heavily through his nose. “Unfortunately. Although, 22A and 11A below them probably won’t be livable for a few days until I can get the contractors to fix the damage.”


Eyes wide, Mr. Rico ran a nervous hand through his thinning hair. “Aw, shit. I’m sorry Miss Woods; I forgot that’s you. I can get you a temporary unit tomorrow, but…damnit. Do you have somewhere to stay tonight? A friend?”


If Mr. Rico was concerned by her unusual behavior and inability to form coherent thoughts, he didn’t show it. “I’m really sorry. Your renter’s insurance will cover it and the temporary unit will be without charge. Just give me one night to figure this out.”

Without any real words left, Lexa nodded and allowed Mr. Rico to leave her to speak with one of the fire marshals. She stumbled away from the smoldering building and pulsing crowd to find a seat on the curb. Maybe she could just sleep there like a goddamn vagrant.

Who could she even call for the night? Anya was the only family she had nearby, but she lived nearly an hour away. Her uncle lived even further. Working and going to school full time certainly hadn’t leant itself to many friendships over the years. Her friends were her coworkers, but as their supervisor, she really couldn’t put them on the spot like that.

She had nobody.

Not a single person to…

Well, maybe one person. Her person.

Before she could think too hard, Lexa scrolled down her contacts and tapped on one she rarely dialed. They were, after all, often in the same building.
When the call rang several times and went to voicemail, Lexa ended it and sat there wondering what people would think of her if she curled up in the gutter and clocked out for the night. Before she could resign herself to that, though, her phone went off and she scrambled to answer it.

“Woods,” she sighed into the receiver.

“Sorry, I had to get away for a moment to call you back. To what do I owe the pleasure, Alexandria?”

“What?”

“You, uh, kinda called me?”

“Oh, yeah. Yeah, I did that.”

“Just to hear my beautiful voice?”

“Yeah. Uh, I mean no. No. Not because of that. Strictly.”

“You okay? Oh my god, are you drunk? Aren’t you working?”

“No. I can’t work anymore overtime this week. Clarke, My house is on fire.”

Clarke fell silent on the other end for a moment.

“Clarke, are you there? My apartment is on fire.”


“Imbecile?” Lexa frowned down at her shoes.

“Please tell me you’re okay.”

The open concern and supplication in Clarke’s voice jammed the words in the back of Lexa’s throat for a few moments. When she pushed past her surprise, it was like uncorking the pressure and stress from the last few days. Words poured unfiltered and unbidden from her mouth.

“I’m okay. I’m...yeah, I’m really okay. Sorry, I’m really tired and not making any sense. I haven’t slept since Tuesday and someone who lives above me set their apartment on fire and I don’t know who to call because I don’t have a life and my only friends are people I supervise because I’m apparently even more of a gigantic loser than even you probably would guess, but as you never fail to point out, I’m not your supervisor and I know you live close to campus and I really need to sleep because I’m pretty sure I’m dying and you said the other day that you don’t hate me so I figure—“

“Alright, slow down. You need a place to stay tonight?”

“Yeah. My bed’s probably on fire.”

Clarke laughed softly into the receiver. “I’ve never heard someone say that in such a sad voice.”

“Why would someone be happy about their bed being on fire?”

“Er, you know. Like, in a metaphorical sense?”
Lexa nodded sagely. “Ah yes. Unfortunately, my bed is on fire in the literal sense. If there’s anybody copulating in my bed right now, be it me or otherwise, then may they pass from this earth in good grace and good fortune.”

“Are you sure you’re not drunk?”

“Clarke, please.”

“I’m sorry, you’re right. I live in Building 4 of the Crown block apartments – room 2303. I’m at my internship pretty late, but just go ahead and make yourself at home. There’s food in the fridge and spare blankets in the closet – actually, you know what, just go ahead and sleep in my bed. My bed’s awesome and you sound like you could need it.”

“Oh thank god. I could honestly cry right now.” She hadn’t intended to say that out loud, but whatever.

“Aw, don’t do that. The world isn’t ready to see that. Oh, also you can borrow clothes from my closet. Who knows how much of your stuff is on fire - in a literal way, no less.”

“You’re on fire.”

(Holy shit.)

It was exactly that kind of manic pass at flirting that was going to lose Lexa the opportunity to not be homeless for the night. What the fuck was wrong with her?

“Holy shit,” Clarke agreed. “Go. Before you lose your mind entirely. Don’t mind the cat, he’s fat and useless but he’ll probably love you just because you exist. Seriously, what’s mine is yours. I live alone, too, so no awkward roommate encounters.”

“I love you.”

(Holy. Shit.)

(Stop, fucking hell.)

“Love you too, now go. My supervisor’s coming. Text if you need something. Sorry, Patrick I just had-“

The line went dead and Lexa sat there shaking her head.

(Clarke loved her too.)

Stop.

(He fucking said it.)

Fuck. This was awkward – that call had been awkward – she was awkward. Stop.

+++
constant contact without finding this out was miraculous. The building was old, but clean and Lexa had little trouble locating the room and the spare key. Hopefully it was the right room. If not, some unsuspecting strangers were about to have to engage in physical combat to stop Lexa from sleeping on the first horizontal surface she spotted. Desperation breeds…well, criminal trespass apparently.

Fortunately, the only stranger in the apartment she let herself into was a fat black cat with white ears, waiting in the entryway like Lexa had been expected. Clarke must’ve called ahead.

“Hi.”

The cat just flicked its tail and stared.

“Thanks for having me,” Lexa mumbled, inching around the cat and toeing off her shoes. She left her boots behind and padded into the dark apartment with the cat on her heels. It was a tiny one-bedroom with a cramped kitchen spilling into the living room that had little space to spare for the floppy couch and television. The only thing Lexa could really conjure a thought about was that Clarke sure liked potted plants.

(But she loved Lexa.)

(Fuck.)

The cat circled her ankles where she stood and gave her a knowing look. Was she that obvious? Probably.

Trying to stem her awkwardness for five minutes, Lexa headed towards the single bedroom to locate something more comfortable to wear. Any other day, she might have just dealt with the discomfort of sleeping in her uniform, but her stiff work shirt and BDU’s weren’t exactly a treat to sleep in. Taking Clarke’s advice, she dug around the other girl’s closet until she came up with some sweatpants and a well-loved university shirt. The less she thought about the situation, the better.

It felt like an invasion of privacy, but Lexa couldn’t help sparing the room another glance before heading for the couch.

Like the rest of the house, Clarke’s room was filled with potted plants. There were dozens of them silently judging Lexa's intrusion like they weren't also giant fucking freeloaders. It was kind of a strange obsession for someone who spent little time at home. At least plants weren’t prone to getting lonely. Her walls were decorated with pictures of people Lexa occasionally recognized from work. There was even one of the two of them at the Auxiliary banquet. Actually, there were a lot of them from Auxiliary events. They were surprisingly good pictures.

Between the photos were collections of scribbles and landscapes crowded across the free space and overlapping at every juncture. An old oak desk sat in the corner with a rickety piano bench parked in front. Stacks of old reports, medical textbooks, and cups of pencils and brushes teetered dangerously on every surface, nearly toppled at one point by a large book bag thrown against the bench. It was cluttered in a way. But it was an efficient clutter – a place for everything.

When Lexa’s prying eyes fell on Clarke’s bed she was a goner. It was more of a nest than a bed, what with the messy pile of soft comforters and furry throw-blankets strewn across the mattress. Would it be weird to sleep in Clarke’s bed? She had offered. A real bed. Some temptations are too great even for one so reserved as Lexa Woods.

Well, fuck, she’d already placed a deranged phone call and hysterically confessed her attraction to Clarke that day, so what was one more act of unhinged friendship?
Resigning herself to the ensuing awkwardness, Lexa unbuttoned her work shirt, discarded her thick belt and all the gadgets hooked onto it, and shucked off her pants. No part of her wanted to exert the energy, but she forced her hands to retrieve her work clothes and fold them neatly on the bench with her belt curled on top. Her dignity was gone, but she’d go down with wrinkle-free clothing.

Clarke’s clothes were soft and loose when she pulled them on, but not as soft as the dip of the mattress or the collection of blankets she threw over her weary bones. Lexa had never had an orgasm half as good as climbing into that bed at that very moment. And that was meant in no way as an insult to her previous sexual partners.

The cat jumped up onto the bed and curled up beside Lexa’s hip with a soft purr and only a slightly judgmental look. Clarke’s bed smelled like clean cotton and scented pinecones – kind of like a really homey craft store. Was that what Clarke smelled like? Yeah, she supposed it was. It was nice.

How embarrassing.

+++ 

Lexa jolted awake at the muffled clanging in the next room and took a moment to reorient herself. When she remembered where she was, she checked the alarm clock next to the bed. Perhaps she had slept through the entire week.

No. Just until nearly midnight.

Though she could have easily slept until the next midnight rolled around, Lexa slid out of the bed (a crime, really) and shuffled towards the kitchen. Either Clarke was home or Lexa had an intruder to fight off. Either way, her company was owed. The cat jumped down from the bed and trailed behind her, tail twitching. The smell of food reminded Lexa that she hadn’t eaten since her early lunch. Before she could come up with something intelligent to say to Clarke’s back, her stomach loudly announced her arrival.

Clarke turned and offered her an apologetic smile. “Sorry. I was trying not to wake you and went ahead and dropped a skillet. Real smooth.”

“No worries,” Lexa dismissed, her voice rough with sleep. Clarke had already turned back to her cooking, though, as her concoction started to boil over slightly. It smelled wonderful. She must not have gotten home long ago, because she was still dressed in scrubs from her internship at the hospital. It had come up in several conversations that stemmed from Clarke’s switch to pre-med after her freshmen year, but Lexa didn’t really understand exactly what the job entailed. All she knew was that Clarke was smart and well on her way to ruling the world or whatever.

“I’d ask if you’re hungry, but I think I can already hear the answer to that,” Clarke teased, pulling two bowls down from the cabinet. “Hope you like whatever the hell this is.”

“No worries,” Lexa dismissed, her voice rough with sleep. Clarke had already turned back to her cooking, though, as her concoction started to boil over slightly. It smelled wonderful. She must not have gotten home long ago, because she was still dressed in scrubs from her internship at the hospital. It had come up in several conversations that stemmed from Clarke’s switch to pre-med after her freshmen year, but Lexa didn’t really understand exactly what the job entailed. All she knew was that Clarke was smart and well on her way to ruling the world or whatever.

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“I’d ask if you’re hungry, but I think I can already hear the answer to that,” Clarke teased, pulling two bowls down from the cabinet. “Hope you like whatever the hell this is.”

“Thank you,” Lexa said quietly. The ease with which Clarke had welcomed her into the bubble of her personal life was actually quite touching. Without anything further to contribute, Lexa pulled out one of the two seats at the bar and waited with her hands folded on the counter.

“Sorry about your, uh, house being on fire? That’s rough.”
Lexa shrugged. “It is what it is, I guess.”

While Clarke scooped whatever the hell she had cooked into bowls, Lexa studied the collection of notes stuck to the refrigerator. Most of it seemed work-related, both from the communications center and the hospital. Study and class schedules and notebook paper filled with notes and mixed with detailed doodles filled every surface. It was just a little chaotic.

Clarke dropped a bowl in front of Lexa’s folded hands along with a spoon. “There you go. It took three years to get you over to my home and when I finally do, you can’t even give me enough time to make sure I have something decent to cook. Go figure.”

“I apologize, Griffin. You’ve done more than enough for me.”

Clarke laughed. “Please. Do me one kindness and don’t use my work name in my home. I spend so many hours between the hospital and the office that I’m beginning to forget my first name.”

“Um, right. Sorry.”

“Besides, you’re wearing my clothes and sleeping in my bed. Pretty sure we’re beyond work names – not to mention you’ve met my father,” Clarke said around a mouthful of stew.

Lexa froze, her spoon inches from her mouth. “Your father?”

At that moment, the cat leapt onto the small counter, weaving between their bowls. It was a rather impressive maneuver considering the cat’s girth. Clarke just laughed and shooed him away. “Speak of the devil. I’d introduce you, but you’ve already met Jake. Uh, right – er, I always forget this is weird. Jake was my dad’s name, but he passed away a few years ago. This was his cat, which he thought would be hilarious to name after himself? He was a weird guy. He used to call the cat ‘your father’ when we talked.” Her voice dropped to a poor, faux-masculine impression of her dad. “‘Clarke, if you forget to feed your father again, I won’t trust you with my car. Also, don’t forget to feed the cat’. Or my favorite: ‘Clarke, your father keeps leaving dead mice on my pillow’.”

A small smile tugged at the corner of Lexa’s mouth. “I apologize, in that case.”

“For what?”

“For sleeping with your father.”

Jake gave Lexa a hard stare, but Clarke’s hearty laughter stole the entirety of Lexa’s attention.

After that they fell into easy conversation – easier even than their conversations at the office. Fresh from her comatose sleep, Lexa was perfectly content to just listen while Clarke recounted stories from the pediatric unit where she was interning. She also had some interesting stories from the vacation she had taken with Jasper and Monty during the last summer break. Lexa couldn’t help but remember those few weeks regretfully, considering they had to leave Raven in the communications center and she was, frankly, awful at dispatch. But the stories Clarke told about their adventure across the country made her thankful that the three of them had come back at all.

Whatever Clarke had pulled together for their late dinner was good. Clarke called it ‘chef’s surprise’, to which Lexa inquired what the surprise was. According to Clarke, the surprise was that she wasn’t a chef. Having sampled Clarke’s cooking on numerous occasions in the office, though, Lexa was disinclined to believe that.

“I was honestly surprised that I didn’t come home to you sleeping on the floor,” Clarke teased, collecting their bowls. “Sometimes I’m not sure if you actually sleep like a normal human or if you
just stand in your charging station while you iron your uniform all night.”

Lexa felt her traitorous ears heat up. “Sorry, I was a little out of it.”

“Hey, don’t sweat it. You were so cute curled up with Jake and my irresponsible amount of blankets. I would’ve joined you if I didn’t think you’d ninja-snap my neck in your sleep. That and I’ve got a massive paper to finish.”

“R-right,” Lexa said to the countertop. This was weird, wasn’t it? Being in Clarke’s home. Wearing Clarke’s clothes. Eating her cooking. Sleeping in her bed. Maybe she had just gotten too imbedded in routine with her, sticking stubbornly to shared lunch and office conversations. They were close, though, weren’t they? In a sense? The better question was why Lexa found she suddenly cared.

Clarke interrupted her thoughts, stopping her from chasing her own brain in useless circles. “What’s on your mind?” She continued washing dishes with her back turned, but Clarke was never not paying attention.

Lexa decided to go with honesty. “I guess I just feel bad that our only interactions for the last three years have been at work or at the bar. Then out of the blue I call you asking for a favor like I’ve somehow earned that from you.”

“What? You don’t have to earn favors from your friends. Besides, I told you to call. I’m your person.”

Lexa rubbed the back of her neck, fingers snagging in her tangled hair. She must’ve looked like a mess. Few people were privy to the non-pressed version of herself that was sitting in Clarke’s cramped kitchen. “Friends, huh? We are friends, aren’t we?” The information was more of a revelation than it probably should have been.

(After all, Clarke loved her).

(Fuck).

Clarke just laughed, swinging a dishtowel over her shoulder. “This would be super awkward if we weren’t.” She paused, turning away from the dish rack to fix Lexa with a fond, if not mischievous, smile. “I know you’re gonna fight me on this, but your refusal to acknowledge our beautiful friendship is as adorable as it is frustrating.”

Lexa spluttered momentarily, knuckles white against the countertop where she gripped it. “I’m – what? No. You-“

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Clarke cut her off, heading towards the fridge. “I know, you’re not cute and if I ever tell anyone that you sleep out of uniform, you’ll have me assassinated. I know the drill.”

When Clarke returned to the table with two beers, she blessedly ignored the color creeping over Lexa’s face. It was impossible she hadn’t seen it. Her face was like a fucking stoplight. ‘Stop’ as in – please stop being so juvenile. ‘Stop’ as in – please stop looking at me like that, because I am extremely groggy and you are extremely pretty. Just stop.

“Expensive beer, because we deserve it,” Clarke clarified, clinking their bottles together. “Overtime isn’t worth it if we can’t get away from frat swill.”

Lexa had to agree. On the occasion she had time to sober up before being on duty, she preferred a darker beer or liquor. But those occasions were few and far between. “You deserve it,” Lexa corrected. “I just broke in and stole your clothes.”
“They look better on you anyways.”

“You’re supposed to say they’d look better on the floor,” Lexa sighed, nursing her beer and waiting for Clarke’s next attack. When it didn’t come, she glanced up to find a version of Clarke she wasn’t used to: Clarke seemed, well, flustered? That couldn’t be right.

“What? Did I compromise you?” Lexa laughed.

To her surprise, Clarke flushed further and spun one of her rings nervously. “Psh, what? Me? No.”

“Oh my god, I did.” Lexa took the rare opportunity to preen with her accomplishments. “Ha! I thought I would actually have to get naked to win. Your loss, by the way.”

Clarke covered her face with one hand, but her shoulders shook with silent laughter. “Okay, I get your point. Simmer down, Woods.”

Sure, she would simmer down. She’d simmer down when she was able to scrub the mental image of Clarke’s twinkling eyes and nervous laugh from her stupid brain. In the low light of the small apartment it was easy to forget to keep her back straight and her eyes to herself. It was even more difficult when Clarke leaned close, cheeks still slightly pink. Lexa’s stomach plummeted before shooting back up into her throat. This was definitely the part where Clarke sought revenge.

“You know what I’m really in the mood for?” Clarke whispered.

Too close. Too close.

“Uh, what?”

“I’ve wanted to do this with you for a long time.”

Fuck. Lexa tried to swallow but it didn’t really work.

“A long time?” She echoed dumbly.

Clarke’s fingertips danced briefly over Lexa’s forearm before she glanced around covertly, leaning even closer. “Trivial Pursuit.”

Lexa blinked at her. “What now?”

“Trivial Pursuit! I’m gonna kick your ass. One game and you can go back to sleep. Please?” Clarke clasped her hands together to further her plea.

Some combination of her competitive nature, Clarke’s earnest excitement, and the pleasant weight of food and sleep led Lexa to nod her acquiescence. Clarke whooped and slapped Lexa on the back before sweeping off to the fridge and retrieving the rest of the six-pack. Lexa trailed after her to the living room, Jake following close behind them, full of silent (feline) fatherly-disapproval.

+++ Much to her chagrin, Clarke ended up beating Lexa soundly at Trivial Pursuit. The game depended on a kind of useless, intimate knowledge with the most pointless corners of human knowledge
available. These were the kinds of factoids that Clarke reveled in, leaving Lexa in the dust. Three beers in, she almost didn’t care that she had lost. Jake was purring softly on her lap and every time Clarke got a question right, she would scoot closer. Or maybe it was every pull from her bottle that drove Clarke closer. No matter the cause, it was a decent consolation prize. By the end of the game, Clarke was wedged firmly in her side.

“That was exactly as satisfying as I thought it would be,” Clarke declared, tipping back the last of her third beer. “Nobody beats me at Trivial Pursuit. Not exactly how I wanted you on your knees, but I’ll take it.”

Well, hey, it wasn’t exactly how she wanted it either, but we’ve all got to deal with some disappointment sometime.

(Fuck.)

It was time for _bed_.

“Takes a lot more than three beers to get me on my knees, Clarke. That’s not really my style,” Lexa found herself replying.

No, you fool. _Bed_.

“Ohohoh, no kidding?” Clarke was way too goddamn close to be smiling like that. “Man, I’m gonna miss buzzed, homeless Woods tomorrow. You should call me again sometime. Don’t wait for your apartment to catch fire, though. I mean it. Jake’s going to miss you.”

“I’ll call Jake, then,” Lexa teased, stroking over the cat’s ears gently.

Clarke rolled her eyes, but didn’t press the issue. “Fine, call Jake. But don’t think I’m above arson.” She glanced briefly at her watch with a grimace. “You should go to bed. I’m going to try to finish this paper on the drunk side of buzzed. If you want to take a shower, there’s towels and stuff already in the bathroom – probably a spare toothbrush in the medicine cabinet too.”

Lexa decided to take her up on that offer before falling back into her restful coma. By the time she left the bathroom, smelling way too much like Clarke, the other girl was already set up with her books and laptop on the couch. Shuffling awkwardly, Lexa stood in the entryway unsure of how to proceed.

When Clarke noticed her, she seemed to read her mind. “Nope. You’re taking the bed. I’ve got an essay to write and you need a bed.”

“But-“

“No arguments. _Bed_. _Now_.”

Those were not words Lexa could really deal with coming out of Clarke’s mouth, so she offered a weak ‘thanks’ before retreating back to the bedroom. She was too exhausted to make things weird, so she just burrowed into the nest of blankets and waited for Jake to get comfortable at her hip again. One thing was for sure: she was going to smell irreparably like Clarke for probably the rest of her life. It would absolutely haunt her.

(There were worse things.)
insert vague, noncommittal hand gesture

glad you guys are still here. thanks for supporting or just reading. i'll never know if you like it or not, but what's life without a little mystery.

here's some music for ya, courtesy of these scottish dudes. highly recommend seeing them live if you ever find yourself with the opportunity. they were great last night.

cheer, pals.
pay it forward and buy it back

Chapter Notes

lot of bad things going on in the world right now. stay safe out there. and remember that bad times are just times that are bad.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+++ 

The two of them were expected at the office the next morning at roughly the same time, but Lexa didn’t bother waking Clarke before she excused herself from the apartment. Clarke had been flopped back on the couch, laptop resting awkwardly against her forehead and notes scattered across her stomach. An ironing board and iron had been set out and Lexa didn’t have the wherewithal to determine if the action was more teasing than thoughtful. Considering she ended up using it, Lexa figured she didn’t have any right to question motives.

After throwing a blanket over Clarke, putting her laptop somewhere safer, and scratching Jake’s ears, Lexa headed back to the office. She could cover for the dispatcher for an hour or two. On the off-chance Lexa was needed out of the office, she could bring the portable comm. computer and tally case numbers on the go. But chances were good that Clarke’s presence was unnecessary. For work purposes. For lunch and distraction purposes, her presence would be very much required in the afternoon.

Unfortunately, there was a new incident report in her priority inbox and an apologetic note in Bellamy’s familiar chicken-scratch. Reading his handwriting was like being fluent in another ancient language consisting only of clicks, breathing patterns, and sidelong glances.

woods,

new mural behind the rec center. sometime between 2200-2330. nobody saw anything. IR in priority box.

sorry boss,

bell

Son of a bitch.

But it was more of a half-hearted son of a bitch than a full-blown, raging bastard son of satan’s left nut. Lexa was too tired for more than that.

There were pictures attached to the report. Sweeping oranges and pinks smeared across a mural of a sunset over the central quad – a grassy area students gathered on by the hundreds during nice weather for Frisbee or reading or acoustic concerts put on by guys with patchy beards and a rudimentary grasp of basic chords, holding their unwilling audience at gunpoint while they badly
reproduced the best of Radiohead to people who would just rather not. That was a strangely universal college experience.

Never trust a white guy with an acoustic guitar.

Even the grainy photograph was beautiful. Sunset over the quad was one of Lexa’s favorite views, right in the moments before the sun sank below the tops of the towering library. It was stunning.

(Still vandalism though).

+++  

“Woods, Campus Police.”

“Hello, it’s Maya with the school newspaper.”

“Good morning.”

“Oh, um, yes. Good morning to you too. I admit myself surprised you even picked up.”

“I get paid to do very little during the days, if I’m being candid with you. I figure I should at least answer the phones. Besides, I’m sure you have something entertaining as always for me.”

“You’re in a good mood.”

“I have only one mood.”

“And what would that be?”

“Vigilant.”

“Oh my god that’s so cool.”

“Focus, Morey.”

“Maya. I was just wondering if you had any new leads or a revised statement for me. Rumor has it you were off-duty last night.”

“Rumors are correct in this instance.”

“Rumor also has it that your apartment burned down.”

“I’m a little concerned about the unnecessary accuracy of your rumors. Should I be looking over my shoulder more frequently?”

“No, I’ve actually lived in the same apartment building as you for two years. That one wasn’t a rumor. But you have my condolences.”

Lexa paused briefly to frown at nothing. How exactly she had gone two years without seeing Marney in her small apartment complex was beyond her. God, she really needed to spend less time at work.

“Er, right. I knew that.”
“Don’t worry about it. So would you care to give me any information about the case or make a new statement?”

“No new information at this time. As for a statement, the vandal can have this one. We can’t be everywhere, but we’ll stay vigilant and time will reward us for our patience. For now, students can enjoy the art. Er, vandalism. Enjoy the vandalism.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard you speak so many words. Very poetic.”

“Yeah, well don’t get used to it. Besides, if that doesn’t work, we always have the bear traps. Have a good day.”

“Uh right. Same to you.”

+++ 

When Clarke stumbled into the office two hours late, Lexa considered feeling guilty for not waking her. But Clarke didn’t seem upset, so she spared herself the trouble. On the contrary, Clarke had brought coffee and bagels and seemed in good spirits. Something about Clarke being in a good mood was enough to put anyone else in her vicinity in a good mood, so Lexa found herself basking in the new company. Even the fresh bout of vandalism was distant in her mind and as un-compelling as the first mural had left her feeling.

“Coffee,” Lexa pointed out helpfully when Clarke set their breakfasts on her desk.

“Well spotted.”

“I’m highly trained in the art of detection.”

A wide grin crept slowly across Clarke’s face, genuine and bright. “Jokes at this time of the day? Normally I’d guess you’re in a foul mood. But surely that can’t be the case now that you have food, coffee, and yours truly.”

Lexa just let out a single huff of laughter and rested her chin gently on the lip of her coffee lid after Clarke had passed it to her. “I suppose.”

“Damn, you’re in a really good mood. Do share.”

Actually, when it came down to it, Lexa had no idea why she was in a good mood. She had every reason not to be. Between her apartment going up in flames, more vandalism, and a call from the newspaper, things should have been as miserable as they had been over the last few weeks. They just weren’t, though.

Lexa shrugged, allowing her eyes to droop as the steam escaping her cup curled comfortably under her nose. “Hmm. I don’t know. Who cares.”

“Wow. My company has better healing powers than I thought.”

Lexa’s eyes fluttered open again briefly as she considered the suggestion before shrugging and allowing them to close again. “Yes.”

“Yes?” Clarke echoed.
When Lexa spared her a single glance from beneath her drooping eyelids, she was pleased to see the light blush creeping back into Clarke’s cheeks. Lexa’s game had finally returned from the war. It had been sorely missed.

“Yes.”

Clarke laughed nervously and twisted a lock of her hair between her fingers. “Set myself up for that one, I guess. But if I’m going to be given credit anyways, you’re welcome. And thank you. For covering the channel and letting me sleep. You really didn’t have to do that.”

“I wanted to,” Lexa returned, shrugging slightly while her eyes scanned over the reports on her desk without processing a word of it. Clarke was staring at the side of her head, a smile tugging at the corner of her mouth and a curious kind of look in her eyes.

“Oh.” Clarke hummed softly before returning to her breakfast. “Well…thanks.”

Lexa just nodded against her coffee cup. “You’re welcome, Clarke.”

+++ 

Raven came stomping in while they were finishing breakfast in a warm, comfortable silence. But Raven was anything except warm or comfortable or silent, so Lexa sighed and decided not to fight it. Easy come, easy go.

“Good morning, Reyes,” she murmured. In the warmth of the morning, she’d let her head drop onto her folded arms. Clarke’s elbow was pushed up against her own so she could comfortably peruse the applicant spreadsheets on the side of the filing cabinet. Occasionally, she’d poach Auxiliary applicants and offer them a job in communications instead. They’d have to do some major hiring before graduation to fill all of the vacancies. Clarke preying on her applicant pool wasn’t anything new.

“Morning,” Clarke added, fingers drumming softly against the desk. Lexa was fairly content just to watch their motion and listen to the tapping that filtered in from where her ear touched her arm resting on the desk. Occasionally, Clarke’s fingers would still with an increase in brain traffic, but they’d always resume their soft rhythm after a breath.

Raven stopped her shuffling and general racket abruptly. “Oh shit. No fucking way.”

“Hm?” Lexa hummed. Clarke muttered something under her breath about swearing in the office, but tracing the lines of the graph in front of her was absorbing her full attention.

“Clarke, you fucked Commander Hardass. Oh my god. Just…oh my god.”

Lexa pursed her lips and frowned against her arm. To her credit, her ears only turned slightly red. Clarke just rolled her eyes and continued looking over the spreadsheet. If Lexa even believed for a second that she could fire Raven and actually prevent her from continuing to show up for work, she would have considered it for the inappropriate commentary. The girl was beyond supervision, though.

Raven circled around the desk to confront them. “Tell me I’m wrong.”
“You’re wrong,” Clarke confirmed with a bored expression.

As though she might be able to see it in their eyes or something, Raven leaned closer and looked intently into each of their faces for an uncomfortable few moments. “No fucking way. I am not wrong about this.”

“You Fuck Radar is way off,” Clarke said dryly. “Get that looked at.”

“My apartment caught on fire last night,” Lexa offered. “Maybe that’s what’s throwing your radar.”

Raven scoffed at the idea. “Please. My Fuck Radar is military grade and I’m pretty sure there’s no such thing as an Arson Radar. And whatever leads you to believe that an Arson Radar would in any way overlap or influence a Fuck Radar has me deeply concerned, boss.”

Lexa’s frown deepened, but she hid it moments later in the crook of her arm, choosing to face the surface of her desk rather than Raven’s grating interrogation. Unfortunately, Clarke’s fingers had stilled permanently against the desk, leaving Lexa without their therapeutic rhythm.

“She smells like you, Clarke. Explain that one.”

“Why are you smelling me?” Lexa grunted into her arms.

Clarke let out a long-suffering sigh. “She crashed at my place last night. In case you missed it, her apartment was literally in flames last night. As in: on fire. This is something you should be expressing concern about, by the way.”

“Oh god, really? Woods, you get invited into Clarke’s super secret apartment, who she invites nobody into, and you don’t take the opportunity to get her naked?” Raven waits a moment, extending a silent invitation for Lexa to deny her claims. When nothing is forthcoming, she makes a strangled sound of disbelief and slaps a hand against the desk. “I have honestly never been so disappointed in someone in my entire life – keeping in mind that my mom got locked up for trying to trade me for a handle of Everclear when I was six.”

“Was that what I was supposed to be doing?” Lexa mumbled against her arm. “Must’ve read that whole Trivial Pursuit situation wrong. Sincerest apologies, Clarke. You looked comfortable in your clothes.”

It was a testament to Lexa’s good mood that Clarke snapped before she did. “Alright, Raven. You’ve made your point and now I’m going to do you a favor and stop you from getting fired.” She stood from the chair pulled up at Lexa’s side and ushered Raven towards the door. “I’ll excuse our Swear Jar trespasses for the time being, but this conversation is over.”

Raven made a last-ditch effort to protest, but Clarke practically shoved her out the door with an aggressive kiss on the cheek. Yet again, Lexa was left wondering exactly what their relationship was. She had formulated a theory of late that Clarke had accidentally ended up adopting a child her own age.

“I should probably have written her up, right?” Lexa mused, lifting her head from the desk. “Not that it would have mattered much.”

Clarke grimaced. “Yeah, sorry. She doesn’t have a filter. And her brain’s too filled with chemical equations and mechanical nonsense to fit any social grace. She’s just keeping an eye on me in her own weird way.”
“Are you two…” Lexa trailed off awkwardly, waving her hand a bit to gather her words. “Um, that is – you seem close?”

“We are,” Clarke said, a mischievous smile lighting up her face. “Close, that is.”

“Right, of course. I just – sometimes I wonder…well. Not that it’s my business. Because it’s not. But if it was my business, I guess I’d, er – nevermind. I’ll just get back to these reports,” Lexa choked out, grabbing a random report and pretending to be extremely interested in its contents.

Clarke laughed and returned to her chair at Lexa’s side, plopping back into it with a knowing look. Knowing looks were bad. There was nothing to know. Whatever Clarke Griffin thought she knew was unfounded and unwarranted. “She’s basically family. Like the sister I absolutely never wanted.”

Something tight unwound in Lexa’s chest, though she hadn’t even realized she was tense until it released. She kept her eyes fixed firmly on the report she was definitely not reading, but offered a small nod of acknowledgement. “That’s good.”

“Why is it good?”

“Huh?”

“You just said ‘that’s good’.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Sure you didn’t.”

+++ 

“Woods.”

“Lexa? It’s your landlord, Ted Rico.”

“Hello, Mr. Rico. Please tell me you have good news for me.”

“Er, perhaps I should call back another time, then?”

“Fuck.”

+++ 

“Do you believe this shi – er, this nonsense?” Jasper’s face was pushed close to one of the portable comm. computers, wide eyes flicking back and forth across the screen.

“Good save,” Clarke said from her position on the floor. She and Monty were spread out on the floor of the office, tangled in long lengths of wires and extension cables and surrounded by piles of radio parts and batteries. Lexa wasn’t exactly thrilled to have the three of them commandeering her
office space for their yearly radio overhaul, but saying no to Clarke was certifiably impossible. Besides that, there wasn’t enough space in the tiny dispatch room to sort through the mess.

Monty leaned in to Clarke’s side conspiratorially. “He’s been glued to the Marauder’s donation site nonstop since it popped up. I think he’s in love.”

“In love?” Jasper tore his eyes away from the screen and blinked at the two of them as though he’d forgotten they were there. He had always been more of an observer than a participator, especially when hard work was involved. “I don’t swing that way.”

“What way?” Clarke asked. “Towards the criminally inclined?”

Jasper shook his head. “No, no. I’m not into dudes.”

Clarke scoffed. “What makes you think the vandal’s a guy?”

Monty was grinning between the two like the idea of them having it out over criminal gender identity was the best possible outcome for their day. But if Lexa knew anything about the dispatcher, she knew that Monty’s three favorite things in the whole world were Jasper, Clarke, and being included. Dull arguments amongst the three of them probably featured prominently in his wildest dreams.

“I don’t mean to brag, but I’ve just got a sense about these things.” Jasper leaned back in his chair in a poor attempt at suave confidence, but had to jerk forward when the chair almost toppled backwards. “I just know it’s a dude.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Whatever, Jasper.”

“Me thinks he doth protest to much.” Monty whispered loudly in Clarke’s ear. “Sometimes I come home and he’s asleep, hugging his laptop with the donation counter still ticking upwards. Call it what you will.”

Jasper had the decency to turn red. “Oh, shove it, Monty. If anything, I’m in love with his money. That dude’s probably rolling in green right now. Just find the coolest, richest guy on campus, and that’s probably him.”

“He’s probably a complete tool,” Clarke laughed. “I bet he drives a Mustang and wears his sunglasses on the back of his head.”

“No way.” Monty grunted, attempting to pry the rusted, grimy back off of one of the oldest radios with a chipped screwdriver. “Somebody that artistic has to be classier. I’m picturing a ’76 Camaro, sweater vests, and a deep, intimate familiarity with musical history. He’s probably gay, Jas.”

Jasper seemed to weigh the options. “Eh, well. I could be gay for him. Just for him, though. Who wouldn’t be gay for the chance to drive a ’76 Camaro?”

“Hell, that’d be enough for me to be straight,” Clarke said, adding a second screwdriver to Monty’s failing efforts at opening the radio backing.

Monty offered an ‘amen’ and a crisp high-five for the sentiment. Lexa felt pretty religious about Clarke not being straight too, but she kept that to herself. Things were getting weird enough without those kinds of feelings.

“So what can’t you believe about it?” Clarke continued. “That you’d be gay for him?”
Jasper narrowed his eyes at her before turning back to the computer. “No. See for yourself: the suave son of a bitch hit his next donation goal less than 24 hours after setting it. They posted the new donation link just yesterday. $50,000! They did a story on it on some popular blog and now he’s got fans outside the university. Crazy, right?”

“People are weird. I’m gonna start a donation campaign for my bills,” Clarke muttered.

Jasper didn’t seem to think it was a bad idea. He nodded thoughtfully. “But like, what’s your asset? Why would people donate?”

“All donation goals reached, I post another nude.”


Lexa shook her head absently while she thumbed through abysmal paystubs and budget figures. “Clarke is worth paying for. You on the other hand…”

Monty was the first to break into wild laughter, but was joined shortly thereafter by a barely protesting Jasper and a delightfully flushed Clarke. Lexa hadn’t strictly intended to voice her thoughts, but when she spared a look over at the trio on the floor and caught Clarke’s eye, it was hard to regret the slip. She offered Lexa a rare, soft smile that was completely uncalled for and just the worst. How dare she. Lexa had a depressing amount of paperwork to plough through and the last thing she needed was an affectionate smile from Clarke fucking Griffin.

Snapping back towards her desk, Lexa shuffled some papers around and chanted the finer points of the department’s budget crisis in her head to slow her heart rate and depress her mood back to a manageable level. She had zero time to be smitten by anyone, let alone someone unavailable to her. (But was Clarke really unavailable? They spent so much time together.)

No.

Focus.

She had enough to worry about with her living situation. Unbeknownst to her coworkers, Lexa was currently living in the office. Her apartment had suffered nearly irreparable structural damage and the spare units were all in similar ruin. Mr. Rico had been practically in tears when he explained that Lexa would have to live elsewhere for the rest of the semester. He refunded the full month’s rent prior to the fire as well as her full security deposit. In the end, though, it left Lexa homeless and in possession of only her ash-dusted clothes, a sooty pillow, and the contents of her singed bathroom. For the last week, she’d been reduced to showering at the gym and sleeping on the grimy floor under her desk. She was more wild animal than human at that point. It wasn’t doing great things for her morale.

She had to find someplace to live before someone came in and found her living like a mole-person under her desk. Clarke was already getting suspicious and had been providing their daily meals more frequently than their typical 50/50 split. Her only lead so far was her cousin, but Anya was a lot to deal with on a purely irregular basis and the hour commute wasn’t enticing.

“Okay, my nudes will remain unpublished treasure,” Jasper griped. “But if I have to see you naked every time I open the internet, I might crawl out of my own skin. You’re pretty, Clarke, but I want to see you naked as much as I want to see my own mother naked.” Jasper furrowed his brows. “Er, that is to say: not at all.”

“That was a close one, Oedipus,” Clarke murmured at the back of her radio.
“Agreed on all counts,” Monty said quickly. “Now stop micro-managing and get down here.”

+++ 

“Dispatch to ID 77.”

“77, go ahead.”

“What’s your 20? Did you clear your last?”

“10-4, cleared the lockout. Hold me on a walkthrough of the student union.”

“Do you want a case number for your lockout?”

“Yeah, go ahead with it.”

“Case number is 069007”

“10-4, thank you.”

Lexa released her mic and folded her hands behind her back. The study abroad office had locked their keys in the office, leading to one of the most thrilling service calls available to the campus police. Having keys to every building and room on campus sounded cool until you had to run around saving people from their forgetful selves all day. During the day, she couldn’t even dump the boring calls on her patrol teams. But the call also gave her an opportunity to follow up on Marty’s anonymous lead about the painting in the student union that was a supposed match to the vandal’s style.

The evidence in question was a series of four small landscapes. Each featured distant views of larger scenes, dotted with small buildings or tiny silhouettes of indistinguishable people. They were wistful in a way – hazy, brilliant colors and impressive backdrops filled with insignificant participants dotted like ants across the lovingly rendered scenes.

Lexa was no artist. It was possible the vandal had made the landscapes a few years back, but she didn’t have the expertise to say for sure. And of course the plaque beneath the series of landscapes declared them to be painted by an anonymous student some three years prior.

Typical.

At least she hadn’t made a special trip for the lead – it hadn’t been much of one, in the end.

The paintings were nice, though – beautiful even.

And not vandalism. How refreshing.

She was preparing to leave when a body bumped lightly into her from behind before stumbling back a pace. One of the regular janitors was waiting for her with an apologetic dip of his head when Lexa turned to inspect the intrusion.

“Excuse me,” he said, tapping a finger against his headphones. “I wasn’t paying as much attention
as I should have.”

Rodney was a kind man, greeting Lexa frequently since he had helped her dig through the trash for an accidentally discarded homework assignment during her freshman year.

“No worries,” Lexa returned, offering her hand for a friendly handshake. Rodney accepted quickly, but not before wiping his dusty hands off on the front of his work shirt. “How are your kids?”

“Excited about free tuition,” he laughed, releasing Lexa’s hand to steady the cart he had been pushing. “It’s not a glamorous job, but free tuition for faculty’s children gets me out of bed every day.”

Lexa nodded with a wistful sigh. “Yeah, I’d kill for that. Trying to pay for it out of pocket has been like squeezing water from a stone. I work to afford school, but the work keeps me from school. What a world.”

Rodney nodded sympathetically and leaned more heavily against his cart. “I don’t know how you kids do it without scholarship or trust funds. Do your parents help out?” He asked with a gentle, encouraging smile.

He couldn’t have known the question was sensitive, but it stung a little all the same. “No,” Lexa said slowly, trying to find the least awkward way of explaining it away. “They didn’t approve of my choices. Or my grades for that matter.”

That and they were six feet under ground thirty miles outside of DC in caskets that Lexa only ever saw closed. They died as they lived: in fine-ass suits with their fists clenched tightly around their wallets and hearts shut firmly against their unsatisfactory daughter.

“Their loss,” Rodney assured her with a fatherly squeeze to her shoulder. Well, at least she knew for certain that there were three kids out there with a really excellent father. He released her shoulder quickly and gestured to the wall behind her. “Admiring the art?”

“You could say that. I was hoping to figure out who painted it,” she said honestly. “Someone told me it shares its creator with the vandalism going around campus.”

Rodney appraised the landscapes for a few moments, stroking absently at his patchy beard. “Well, it’s been up for three years. I think it won some kind of Freshman contest that the art school put on, but obviously the winner didn’t want their name on it. Shame, really. I like this one.”

“I do too.”

Rodney shrugged and planted his hands back on the handle of his cart, pushing it forward a few inches. “They’re probably some hotshot artist by now, all ready to graduate. Time flies, doesn’t it?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Lexa hummed with a quiet laugh. “I could’ve gone with a faster pace I think.”

“Well, time flies when you’re just mopping floors anyways,” he chortled, tipping his baseball hat in farewell. “Stay safe out there.”

Lexa nodded and lifted a hand in brief farewell before he turned off down a different hallway. Even after he had rounded the corner, Rodney’s deep, bass humming reverberated through the student union and accompanied her vague train of thought. The lead hadn’t gotten her very far. Assuming even that the anonymous landscapes in the student union belonged to the vandal, all it really told her was that they were an art student at some point and likely a senior. But you know
what they say about assuming.

Something about asses. Whatever.

Lexa took a last glance over the lonely landscapes before grabbing her mic and heading for the exit.

“77 to dispatch, I’m finished with that walkthrough. Hold the case number.”

“10-4, 77.”

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

im feelin the next chap. u gonna like it.

as for music: im tired of hearing these guys on the radio as much as you are, but this 
song is never on the radio and it’s actually really good, so cheers to that

until next time.
Clarke was already waiting at Lexa’s desk by the time she returned to the office. She was sitting in Lexa’s chair, swiveling back and forth idly and swinging her feet. Commandeering her chair hadn’t been enough, apparently, because Clarke also had Lexa’s uniform baseball hat pulled over her head and her headset slipped over the hat. The white lettering, ‘Woods 77’ was visible even from across the office.

“That’s my hat,” Lexa protested weakly. She didn’t actually care, but there was something annoyingly triumphant about Clarke wearing something printed with her name. When in doubt about how to feel, Lexa usually went with mildly irritated. And obviously that had worked so well for her up to that point.

“Yes, I noticed. It has your name on it. Didn’t you know?” Clarke teased, swiveling around to face her. The movement allowed Lexa to spot the food Clarke had spread across her desk. It was no wonder Clarke had been antsy about her location, pestering her about her 20 after every transmission. Food was Clarke’s priority at all times (rightfully so).

Lexa hummed and shrugged out of her drenched jacket. Rain jacket or no, there was little one could do to protect themselves from such biblical flooding. The hood had been soaked through and Lexa had to shake her wildly curling hair out in a feeble attempt at drying it. At least her boots were sufficiently waterproof. If she was going to die, she was going to die with dry feet.

“It’s gross out,” Lexa murmured, drawing up a chair from the center table to play guest at her own desk. “What are we eating?”

“You look like a wet dog.”

“What are we eating?” Lexa repeated, trying to grab one of the containers.

Clarke pulled them out of reach. “You look like someone dropped a big, bernese mountain dog in a lake and tried to dry it off with a paper towel. Or like, one of those terrible public restroom hand dryers.”

“Food,” Lexa groaned.

“Nope.” Clarke moved the food into the protective circle of her own arms and fixed Lexa with a stern look. “First we need to talk.”
If anyone ever tries to start a conversation with ‘we need to talk’, your best options are anything that involves packing up, getting plastic surgery, and moving to a country that’s population is more goat than human. Lexa’s few remaining belongings were already packed, though, so she remained seated in a wary attempt at not completely overreacting. But should all go awry, New Zealand was nice that time of year.

“About food?”

“About how you’ve been living in the office for the last week.”

New Zealand it was, then.

Lexa winced and dropped her chin onto the end of the desk, looking up at Clarke through tired eyes. Clarke returned the look sternly, refusing to show weakness in the face of what probably looked like a great, stupid dog that had tracked mud into the house. “Er, no I haven’t?” She tried.

“Is that a question or an answer?”

Eyes sliding somewhere off to the side, Lexa pretended to be interested in the side of one of the filing cabinets. “Um.”

“Alexandria.”

Lexa closed her eyes to avoid Clarke’s accusatory glare. “What was I supposed to do?” She muttered, slightly embarrassed at having been called out. “It’s hard finding new housing once the semester’s already started.” She kept her eyes firmly on the desk in front of her and fiddled with one of her pens. “How’d you find out? You’re not going to tell anyone are you?”

“Oh come on. You’re not as sneaky as you seem to think you are. Raven saw you sleeping under your desk like a vagrant when she dropped by last night for the textbook she left here. Why didn’t you tell me?” She asked, voice fading to a pleading whisper.

With a vague noise of distress, Lexa lifted her chin from the desk and slumped back into her chair. “Why would I tell you?”

Wrong answer.

Clarke’s eyes flashed angrily and one of her hands tightened into a fist. “You called me when you needed help – before you could even figure out what you needed or what made sense. That’s what we are. Pretending we’re not is – ugh! It’s bullshit.” She made a frustrated noise and tapped her fingers against the lid under her hand. “I told you, I’m your…person. That doesn’t expire just because you think you’ve used up your – your quota or something.” Her eyes flickered across Lexa’s face in search of something she wasn’t finding. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

For once, Clarke seemed almost lost.

Despite the overwhelming urge to look away or herd foreign goats thousands of miles across the ocean or maybe stack a wall of reports between them, Lexa forced herself to meet Clarke’s (completely called for) anger. “You’re right,” Lexa said after a few moments of tense silence. She released her discomfort in a long sigh. “I’m sorry. I don’t really – I don’t tell people things and I don’t really know how to when it’s important. It’s just not…normal to me. You deserve that,” she assured her, scratching her nail slowly across the desk. “I’m an idiot.”

“I mean, sometimes,” Clarke agreed, her shoulders dropping as she released her tension slowly like the air leaving a tire. “But I get it. For the purposes of not being a giant hypocrite: I get it. Let’s
just…try something new, alright?”

Lexa wasn’t entirely sure what that meant, but some part of her must have gotten it, because she nodded. “I can try,” she promised. Beyond trying, she couldn’t promise much more than that. “But I want you to remember that you conceded to me being an idiot sometimes, so I think you owe me a bit of a handicap,” she added with a slightly crooked smile.

Clarke rolled her eyes, but a smile of her own wormed its way into her unflinching disapproval. “Did I say that? I meant that you’re a jerk.”

“Is all this name-calling getting me any closer to forgiveness?”

Clarke shook her head, exasperation giving way fully to fondness. “We’ll see about that.” Finally, Clarke pushed one of the containers towards Lexa. “You don’t deserve it, but here you go: the best lasagna you’re ever going to eat. Don’t even bother looking anywhere else, because mine is the best.”

Lexa quickly accepted the food before Clarke changed her mind, digging spare utensils from one of her cluttered desk drawers. And while Lexa had little experience with lasagna, she doubted there was someone who made it better than Clarke did. Fast food and takeout were all well and good, but her favorite afternoons were ones where Clarke brought them food she had made. No college student should be as proficient at producing real meals as she was – not that it was something to complain about.

Clarke kicked her feet up on Lexa’s desk, which would have earned a sharp reprimand from anyone else. But Lexa was still in the proverbial shithouse and Clarke was, well, Clarke, so she made no comment.

“You shouldn’t work into patrol tonight.” Clarke still seemed kind of mad and Lexa began mentally scrambling for a way to smooth it over without having to open her mouth or produce intelligent words or deal with her crippling fear of emotional vulnerability. None of those things seemed avoidable.

“Probably not. Better than hiding in the gym for seven hours, though,” she mused.

“No, you’re staying with me. And you should skip patrol because I’m making falafel for dinner. Actually, that’s exactly what you’re doing! Good plan, glad we agree. Solid teamwork,” Clarke said brusquely. She stuffed some food in her mouth and turned back to her biology textbook that had been abandoned on the side of the desk up until that point.

Lexa had paused with her fork halfway to her mouth. “You’re still mad at me,” she pointed out needlessly. It wasn’t the best way to respond to such a kind offer, or demand rather. It was all she had.

Clarke sighed. “I’m always mad at you.”

“I could just get a motel room until I figure it out,” Lexa offered.

“No.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Negotiations were officially over after that. Clarke ended up on a call, having to talk someone through changing a tire because they didn’t want the humiliation of Lexa showing up to do it for them. College guys could be weird that way. But Clarke was patient and personable with him.
while he wrestled with his masculinity. It took the better part of half an hour to get him through it, and by the time they were done Clarke was cheering enthusiastically with him before they hung up.

“Protect and serve,” Clarke declared proudly, hanging up the call with a quick tap to her headset. “That’s how it’s done, Woods.”

“Very impressive.”

Clarke tugged on the bill of her stolen hat and kicked her feet back up on the desk. “Flatter me all you want, Alexandria, but I’m still mad at you.”

Lexa nodded glumly and pushed the empty container towards her. “I thought you were always mad at me.”

Clarke’s laughter was a refreshing reprieve from her previous disapproval. “And I always will be if you’re late for dinner tonight. And so will Jake. Don’t make my father wait, Woods.”

“10-4,” Lexa murmured, burying her grateful smile in a stack of contract requests.

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It was with only the slightest bit of shame that Lexa appeared at Clarke’s doorstep that night, hauling a giant duffel bag of clothes and another box of whatever else she had been able to salvage from her ruined apartment. Mr. Rico had actually started crying when she left and Lexa had to firmly remind herself that she wasn’t absconding with their divorce papers in the night without waking the children, despite Mr. Rico’s general aura of ‘well-meaning, abandoned father’. But Clarke acted like the whole situation was normal, easing the box from Lexa’s arms and picking up their conversation from the office like it had never ended. Jake was at Lexa’s heels in seconds.

Clarke had rearranged a portion of the army of potted plants camping out in her cramped living room so it was a bit roomier. It likely meant that Clarke would sleep that night with a bed full of ferns and tiny cactuses, perhaps hugging a Ficus tree like a dear friend.

“It’s not exactly the Four Seasons, but it’s definitely better than the office,” Clarke called over her shoulder. She had banished Lexa to the barstools at the first offer of assistance with dinner. A weird looking cactus was on the barstool next to her, quiet and seemingly pissed off that Lexa’s arrival had forced it out of whatever corner it had been living in. Fuck cactuses.

(However, as a public safety representative, Lexa could not in good conscious make jests that suggested one engage in sexual acts with cactuses without fearing the very real ramifications of such an act. Please don't fuck cactuses.)

“It’s wonderful,” Lexa said earnestly – pissed off cactus notwithstanding. It was more comfortable than her own apartment had ever been. She had never used her own stove or decorated her walls or hung fun reminders on her fridge. It was nice having a comfortable place to be after work. Being there was easy. Clarke was easy.

Clarke shot her a grateful look before turning back to the spitting pan she was tending. “That’s sweet. Oh jesus, fuck!” She hissed, snatching her hand back after a large hiss of spitting oil struck
her arm. “Though you’ve been homeless for a week, so I’ll take it with a grain of salt.”

Truthfully, by the end of dinner Lexa was in love. With the apartment. And the food. And maybe even that smug asshole cat. But just that.

(Not just that).

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“How many countries are there in the world?”

Lexa stared blankly at Clarke whose expression was one of gleeful impatience, like the answer was obvious or something. “I have no fucking clue.”

“You’re so terrible at this game.”

“I’m not terrible! I’m performing in a spectacularly average manner. You’re just too good.” Lexa made a frustrated noise in the back of her throat while Clarke pulled even further ahead in the game. “Well how many are there, genius?”

“196, counting Taiwan. A lot of people don’t, though, so I would’ve taken 195.”

“I was going to guess, like, twelve. Would you have taken that?”

Clarke laughed, draining the last finger of whiskey from her tumbler in one smooth motion. “Eh, why not. You need all the help you can get. But you’re doing a lot better tonight than you did last time. You have an insane long-term memory, you know that? Once you’ve seen all the questions, it’ll be pointless playing with you. In a few months, you’ll have the whole game memorized.”

Tapping her finger self-consciously on the lip of her glass, Lexa shrugged and looked to Jake for a distraction. He only spared her a withering look. “I guess. But only for things I’ve heard verbally. When I try to read stuff it all blurs together and the crowding gives me a massive headache.”

A moment passed where Lexa could feel Clarke studying her, but she kept her eyes on a small pot of snapdragons on the windowsill. Finally, Clarke cleared her throat and spoke carefully, trying to judge Lexa’s reaction as she spoke. “I don’t mean to pry or…or be rude or something…it’s just that I’ve been doing homework with you for a long time. And I just – that is, the way you learn is – well, it’s peculiar.”

“You mean not at all?” Lexa laughed humorlessly.

Clarke shook her head quickly. “That’s not true. It’s just different. I just –“ she cut herself off abruptly and chewed at her bottom lip for a few moments. “I’m going to sound like such a creep. Okay, I’m just going to say it: are you – have you ever been tested for dyslexia?”

Whatever Lexa thought she saw coming from Clarke’s fumbling, it certainly wasn’t that. “Why?” She set her glass down and regarded Clarke with genuine curiosity.

“My dad was dyslexic,” Clarke said slowly. “You get A’s in your lecture-based and visual learning-heavy classes, but barely pass text-based classes. You can do complicated math in your head, but can’t read it or organize it on paper or set up written problems. The headaches you get
from reading - the way you learn. I’m not trying to be a creep or an asshole, it’s just…very familiar,” Clarke finished in a rush, fiddling nervously with her rings and staring into her lap. "It’s not my place, though. I'm sorry."

While kind of terrifying to hear it spoken aloud for the first time since her fourth grade teacher had tried suggesting the very same to her infuriated parents, the attention to detail was – well, touching. Absolutely terrifying. But touching.

The word was always tickling at the back of her aching brain after an hour of failed studying, echoing quietly in the same tone Mrs. Turner had afforded it during parent-teacher conferences. But after the fury and indignant dismissal Lexa’s parents had treated the suggestion with, the word had never been uttered in their household since. No child of the Woods would be accused of some impairment. Pretending to be stupid was a hell of a lot easier.

“That so?” Lexa settled on with a tired smile.

Clarke kept her eyes on her lap. “Yeah,” she said quietly.

The uncharacteristic nervousness spurred Lexa to reach a hand out and tap Clarke’s knuckles conspiratorially. “I already knew that, Clarke. I never did anything about it, but I knew. Impressive diagnosis, though.”

“Oh.”

Clarke watched their fingers, shoulders relaxing slightly while Lexa smoothed over the silver bands on her fingers absently. She'd never really had a reason to touch Clarke's hands, but she'd always liked them. “It’s not a big deal, Clarke. I’m surprised you noticed, though.”

“Sorry,” Clarke said, shaking her head. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry about what?” Lexa asked lightly. “You’ve suspected for a long time, now, I assume. So is this an apology for being exceedingly kind or for your hours of tutoring spent reading me things normal people should be able to read themselves?” She tipped her head down to catch Clarke’s eye and give her a rueful smile. “Which one?”

“I don’t know. Forget it,” Clarke laughed, pulling her hand slowly back to reach for another card to get them back on the safe track of board games and inconsequential small talk. “I’m not good at feelings. Your turn.”

“Is this what gets you off?” Lexa muttered, swirling her own glass. “Destroying me at this nerd game? I guess it’s the only way you have to kick my ass.”

Clarke shrugged. “Or I could just kiss you. You’d probably short circuit.”

Yeah, that was probably (definitely) true.

“Oh, get over yourself. Just because you’re pretty doesn’t mean I wouldn’t destroy you in self-defense. You’re lucky dispatchers don’t have to re-qualify every six months.”

Clarke refilled her glass from the dwindling bottle on the coffee table. As an afterthought, she snagged Lexa’s glass with one finger and tilted it downward to top it off without asking. “You’re not that tough.”

Lexa frowned. “I am so that tough.”
“Please,” Clarke teased, “everyone knows you’re a bottom.”

Unfortunately, Lexa had chosen that moment to try swallowing another sip of whiskey and proceeded to inhale the fiery substance directly into her lungs. She hacked and spluttered while Clarke patted her back, grinning widely and nearly unbearable in her victory. “Wh - How would you know?” Lexa wheezed.

“Easy,” Clarke scoffed, setting her glass down on the table. Lexa began to panic slightly when Clarke turned to face her, leaning forward just a tad too close. Clarke reached out with one hand, her other arm propped against the back of the couch to keep her turned firmly toward Lexa. All Lexa could do was stare in wide-eyed apprehension as Clarke’s fingers pushed firmly against her collar bone, slowly pushing her back until she was almost reclined against the arm of the couch. At some point, Lexa realized she was holding her breath. Clarke just leaned over her slightly, a triumphant smirk on her face. “Told you,” she snickered, withdrawing her hand and retreating.

“That didn’t mean anything,” Lexa muttered, nursing her drink and wounded pride. “What was that even supposed to prove? What would I have done if I weren’t a bottom?”

“If you were a top, you’d know,” Clarke said with a wink.

Lexa shook her head. “That’s – that’s not how it works. You’re so full of shit. What was I supposed to do: punch you in the nose?”

“I’ve made my case. Your secret’s safe with me, Woods.”

Nothing was safe with Clarke.

Lexa decided to go on the offensive. “You wouldn’t last an hour working a Saturday night patrol shift when the bars are running half-priced domestics. What you see in the office isn’t the job, Clarke. You haven’t seen anything.”

“So you’re not just a paid traffic cone?”

“Oh I am,” Lexa assured her. “Nine times out of ten we’re useless bureaucrats. I should show you that one where we’re not.”

“Show me?” Clarke repeated, doubt flashing briefly across her face.

Lexa drained the rest of her glass and leaned back, offering Clarke a rare grin. “Clear next Saturday, Griffin. I think you’re way past due for a ride-along.”

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The following day brought no news of fresh vandalism or pushy journalists. In all honesty, the vandal had skipped Lexa’s mind and she hadn’t even bothered to call Bellamy and check in overnight. The whole thing was growing tiresome and whiskey had a habit of diminishing the importance one assigned to unpleasant responsibilities. And besides: what exactly was Lexa expected to do if she caught the vandal? Dramatically present them with a bill for the damages? It was more publicity and a personal vendetta that made her want to catch the bastard. These weren’t exactly capital crimes, though.
Bellamy was still in the office when Lexa arrived with her temporary roommate. Clarke had insisted on cooking them breakfast, so they were hoping to sneak in a few minutes late. Normally, nobody would be the wiser – not that Lexa enjoyed making a habit of breaking punctuality and protocol.

“Morning boss. And Clarke?” He looked between the two suspiciously like he was on the verge of discovering some great scandal. “Fun night?”

“Well, I do enjoy beating people at Trivial Pursuit,” Clarke said cheerfully, moving in to give Bellamy a quick hug. “I’ve never known you to work more than you have to. Anything interesting keeping you here?”

Bellamy accepted the hug, but raised an eyebrow at Lexa over Clarke’s shoulder. “No such luck. Atom flaked on overnight parking security and I covered it. I’m heading out as soon as I sign off on the equipment log.”

“Thank you, Blake. I’ll write Atom up and put a positive IR on file for you. Any new vandalism I should be concerned about?” Lexa asked, flicking through the reports from the previous nights. Nothing stood out to her, but she had long since learned to take Bellamy’s paperwork with some skepticism for accuracy.

“No new vandalism. And don’t sweat the stuff with Atom. He’s got a lot on his plate right now.”

“True,” Clarke said over her shoulder, picking through the files on Lexa’s desk for the ones she needed to take back with her. “He has to watch his younger sisters and he’s got like, three majors or something crazy. I’m going to go make a call to county real quick.”

“Don’t forget to ask them about the April initiative,” Bellamy called after her. He shook his head and watched Clarke as she left for the dispatch room with a wave of acknowledgment. “Did you and Clarke come to work together?”

Not that it was any of Bellamy’s business, but Lexa nodded in the affirmative while she gathered the night’s timecards.

“That’s…interesting,” Bellamy settled on.

“No new vandalism. And don’t sweat the stuff with Atom. He’s got a lot on his plate right now.”

Bellamy stayed quiet, though the heaviness of his unasked questions was loud enough. She could just feel his calculating look boring into the back of her head.

“If you’re going to say something, then say it already. I have timecards to approve,” Lexa shot over her shoulder, trying to keep the edge out of her voice (and failing).

Seeming to snap out of his thoughts, Bellamy let out an uneasy laugh and moved to gather his things and leave. “Nah, nothing. Not my business. Just…be worth Clarke’s trust, yeah? For her it comes at a much higher cost than most people know.” With a small nod to himself, Bellamy hoisted his bag over his shoulder and departed.

Lexa stared after him and slowly, but purposely, removed Bellamy Blake from the safe, simple little mental box she had filed him in. Maybe he wasn’t all floppy hair, bad handwriting, and shallow ego. Maybe she didn’t know him well enough to file him in any box.

“Dispatch to 77.”
“Go ‘head.”

“Jumpstart in lot 2.”

Lexa sighed and turned to check the charges on the jump-packs. It would have to do.

“10-4, what am I looking for?”

“Black Lexus, we’ll need tag information when you get there. You’re looking for a Mr. Monty Green. ETA?”

Of course Monty’s shit car was dead again. Clarke only called it out and assigned a case number at this point to embarrass him.

“ETA 10 minutes.”

“10-4.”

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Chapter End Notes

mood music, not sure for what, but mood music. for kicking my ass maybe, idk.

thanks for all the kind words. it fuels my low simmering rage...in a good way.

also: if you're hitting me up on tumblr, i've been having real issues with having my anon messages eaten, so you're way better off messaging me off anon, but i get it if you'd rather not. i receive anon messages, but i have a lot of trouble responding. so thanks for all the kind words i haven't been able to respond to.

cheers, friends, enjoy the weekend.
some gay heart condition

Chapter Notes

i had to add an additional scene and i was like uGH. can't believe these people expect to me to write. unbelievable.

also i have a massive migraine so enjoy my fucking typos

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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“77 to Dispatch, I’ve met with the RP.”

“10-4, tag information?”

“Pretty sure you already have it memorized.”

“Hehe, 10-4, 77. Good luck.”

Monty looked less than pleased. “Did you have to call it out?” He groaned, pulling a tired hand down his face while he kicked at his rusty bumper.

Lexa shrugged, clipping the cables to Monty’s old battery and flipping the switch. It was cold outside – too cold to be charging batteries and making small talk. Yet here they were. “Clarke seems to enjoy it.”

“You’re on a first name basis now I see,” Monty teased. Nobody except Lexa had ever really called Clarke by her last name.

Lexa shrugged. “Four years later is as good a time as any, I suppose.”

“I suppose it is,” Monty agreed. “But I’m going to give you some advice: avoid Jasper as long as you can. Ever since he found out that you’re staying at her apartment, he’s convinced you two have been secretly married for at least a year. He’s big on conspiracy theories. You’re in for a poorly concealed interrogation the next time he gets you alone.”

“Thanks for the heads up,” Lexa said earnestly. Jasper could be a handful at the best of times. She absolutely did not get paid enough to deal with him at the worst.

Monty nodded a bit and blew some air into his cold hands to help warm them when friction proved unhelpful. “It’s not his fault entirely. Clarke doesn’t let anyone into her apartment, so he was a little outraged when you suddenly moved in.” He was too tactful and sensitive to come out and say it, but she could feel the gentle probing for information. (And if there was one thing Lexa hated, it
was being probed. By men.)

Lexa quirked an eyebrow. “I’ve heard something similar a lot lately. Are you going to accuse me of nefarious intentions as well?” She asked, tone light and teasing, though the constant assumption that she intended to betray Clarke in some way was starting to sting a little.

Monty winced, hunching his shoulders apologetically. “Sorry. Best friend duty and all that. For what it’s worth, I trust you. It’s not about me, though. So I am obligated to say: if you hurt her in any way – I mean *any* way – I’ll fucking kill you, Woods.”

His tone was as cheerful as it was foreboding and surprisingly terrifying. Briefly, Lexa wondered how many men and women Monty had lured to their deaths over unsatisfactory interactions with Clarke. It was always the quiet ones, wasn’t it?

“Honestly, I’m just sleeping on her couch for a little while,” she reassured him.

Sleeping on Clarke’s couch was beginning to feel like meeting a prom date’s father who had decided to clean his entire gun collection in his living room when she tried to take Clarke out for a few hours of chaperoned dancing. Except this prom date had a dozen fathers and Lexa had a felony rap sheet stapled to her forehead, apparently.

“Yeah, I know that’s all it is for you. It’s just a lot for Clarke. You’ll both be fine,” he said kindly. “Total faith. Undertones of threat, of course. But total faith.”

Well, at least if Lexa ever decided to abandon all reason and make a move on Clarke, she wouldn’t have to go through the whole ‘meet the parents’ shtick again. Might as well get that out of the way for no apparent reason.

“Alright, why don’t you try turning it on,” Lexa deflected, checking the charge on the jump-pack.

Monty accepted the deflection without comment, hoisting himself into the driver’s seat of the four wheels and half an engine he called a car. As much as people made fun of Monty for having a car light-years away from his technical know-how, they kept the teasing friendly in light of the knowledge that Monty’s financial troubles were abysmal. Then again, most college students had abysmal financial troubles. They were all just comrades in suffering at the end of the day.

The engine turned over a few times, hiccupped once or twice, and then spluttered to life while Monty cheered. Lexa detached the clips and powered down the jump-pack before slamming the hood back into position. Monty’s beaming face was waiting on the other side of the windshield coupled with an excited thumbs-up. He rolled his window down and Lexa skirted the front bumper to meet him at the driver’s side.

“Back from the dead,” she laughed, hoisting ‘the big one’ higher up in her arms. (Octavia was right: Bellamy would never be able to take it.) “I’m always surprised when we can revive it.”

“Me too,” Monty said nervously. “One of these days, I’m gonna be in real trouble. You’ll catch me riding to school on my little sister’s pink tricycle and you’ll know my luck’s run out.”

Lexus roller her eyes, but was unable to force off the smile that the mental image put on her face. Sometimes she forgot how much she liked Monty – probably because he was able to keep his mouth shut at work unlike her other charming coworkers.

On further inspection of the car, Lexa’s sympathetic gaze fell on the clutter in the backseat – a large canvas bag, piles of old rags, takeout bags, and an inordinate amount of used paint cans.
Paint cans?

That was some Scooby Doo shit right there.

“What’s with the spray paint?” Lexa was trying for casual, but it came out a little ‘jinkies’ for her tastes. Mall cop on the case and all that.

Monty furrowed his brows, twirling to look in his backseat. He seemed just as surprised as she was to see the state of his car, but recognition quickly took over. “Oh, right. Big engineering project I’ve been working on. Or was working on. God, I really need to clean out my car.”

“So it would seem,” Lexa murmured, unable to tear her eyes away from the contents of his backseat. (She had a bad feeling about this, Scoob.)

“Well,” Monty said, slapping his hands against the steering wheel, “I’ve gotta get to the agro lab. Tell Clarke I said hello.”

Lexa nodded slowly, stepping back so Monty could drive away, but her eyes followed him until the old car was out of sight.

Suspicious.

“77 to Dispatch, jumpstart successful. Can I get a case number please?”

“10-4, case number 069101”

“10-4.”

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“Just a heads up, but I’m not going to be home until real late tonight. I made you dinner already, though, so just microwave the container under the meat drawer,” Clarke said distractedly, fingers tangled in the wires of a particularly finicky radio. She had been at it for an hour, occasionally squeaking when she accidentally zapped herself or scuffed the screwdriver across her skin. Clarke was no electronics expert, but she was stubborn and familiar enough with the radios to patch together a working ability to wrestle them back into semi-function.

Lexa paused in her typing, careful not to jostle the giant stacks of waivers bracketing both elbows. Her position was precarious to say the least. “I am capable of feeding myself,” she muttered, tapping one finger loosely against the spacebar.

“Sure you are,” Clarke patronized.

Lexa frowned and lifted her chin above one of the waiver stacks to glare at her. “What’s that supposed to mean?”
“All I’m saying is when you get us lunch, it’s a takeout day. When I get us lunch, it’s a lovingly prepared meal. Doesn’t take a genius to figure out you can’t cook,” Clarke teased. “And I don’t care how much you workout, takeout meals cannot be your only source of nutrients.”

Indignantly, Lexa pushed away the teetering paperwork to level a more effective scowl in her direction. “Just because I don’t cook, doesn’t mean I can’t. I’m just busy!”

“So am I,” Clarke returned easily. “Don’t get mad. You’re helplessness is as endearing as it is hilarious.”

Suddenly Lexa remembered exactly why she and Clarke ended up bickering like an old married couple for the last few years. It was just their nature. “I know you think that’s a compliment, but it’s really not.”

“Complimenting you was definitely not my primary purpose.”

“Fine!” Lexa sighed, throwing her hands up in defeat. “Tomorrow night I’m going to cook a gloriously mediocre meal. All you have to do is show up, fake a smile, and tolerate it. I guarantee you’ll never complain about takeout again.”

“Oh, you’re cooking for me, now?” Clarke laughed, placing a hand delicately over her heart. “This is so sudden. Are you sure you’ll be okay?”

“You make me want to be a worse person,” Lexa muttered sourly.

“Now I feel bad that I wasn’t trying to compliment you.” Any further teasing was put on hold when Clarke yelped again, snatching her hand back from the radio she was dissecting and sucking her fingers into her mouth. The beginnings of a triumphant, childish grin tugged at the corners of Lexa’s mouth until Clarke fixed her with a look that dared her to laugh. Unfortunately, she hadn’t had the good grace to remove her fingers from her mouth and the grin slipped quickly from Lexa’s rapidly reddening face. For Christmas next year she was going to ask the good lord for a more mature brain and to be less fucking gay.

Amen.

For once in her life, Clarke let Lexa scramble back behind her paperwork and beat an embarrassing retreat without ridicule. She needed a moment to get her juvenile brain out of the gutter, channel jesus, and refocus her irritation. By the time she chanced a glance over her barricade again, Clarke was back at work prodding at wires, tongue poking out from between her teeth. She had Lexa’s work hat back on – it looked much better on her anyways.

“Is Monty an artist?” Lexa blurted out. A change of subject wasn’t the worst idea, but it wasn’t exactly a smooth transition.

“What?” Clarke gave her a strange look. “Why?”

“Just curious.”

After a moment, Clarke shrugged and returned her attention on the radio. “He’s decent with landscapes. We took the same intro to art class freshmen year – that’s how I met him actually. But he’s as much of an artist as I am nowadays. The only part we’ve got down is the ‘starving’ and ‘tortured’ parts.”

“You’re a good artist, though,” Lexa said softly. She’d had more opportunities to study the scraps of paper and canvas around Clarke’s apartment the last few days. Her words weren’t just useless
“Doodles on biology notes and napkins?” Clarke asked skeptically. “Please. Being an artist was just some dumb dream before I became old and bitter. At least I still have my looks.”

“Monty can paint, though,” Lexa clarified.

“Sure, I guess. He was decent at landscapes last I checked.”

+++ 

“Generic University Newspaper, Maya speaking.”

“Hello, this is Lexa Woods with the Campus Police.”

“No kidding. I’ve received some strange calls in my time here, but this one takes the cake. What can I do for you?”

“This is going to sound kind of odd, but a few weeks ago when this vandalism nonsense started, you mentioned something. You said that there was speculation that the vandal was an Auxiliary Officer with the Campus Police.”

“Yes, I recall. And then you hung up on me.”

“Hey, don’t take it personally. You just irritate me to no end.”

“Glad we mended that bridge.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“Well, it wasn’t a particularly substantiated rumor. It got some attention on one of the university’s anonymous confession forums. Someone claimed it was an inside job, but the responsible party couldn’t come forward or they’d lose their job with you guys. That led to some Twitter speculation and a few anonymous tips in my direction. It’s nothing concrete, though.”

“What the hell is a Twitter?”

“That is without a doubt the most innocent thing I’ve ever heard. I’m going to do you a favor and not tell you. Also, you might want to get out more.”

“The university doesn’t pay me to ‘get out more’.”

“Right, they pay you to catch vandals. Really getting the bang for their buck.”

“I don’t think I like your tone, Marissa.”

“Little unfair that I’m enjoying yours so much, then, isn’t it?”

“I try not to keep score. What kind of anonymous tips did you get from the, uh, Tweeter argument?”
“I can’t tell if you’re for real or not sometimes.”

“I have never been anything less than ‘for real’ my entire life. What about those tips?”

“We got one claiming the vandal was a demon sent to smite us for that serial masturbator way back when. Two claimed it was Tupac and he was finally coming back to us after faking his death – surprising solidarity there on the conspiracy theories. There were really only two that seemed legit to me. One was some girl who had heard to be on the lookout for future murals and that it wasn’t a one-time thing. She’s the one who convinced me to take a look myself and write some stories on it. The other was some guy who told me about the website and asked me to spread the word and get donations going.”

“That doesn’t seem all that strange.”

“No, see the website tip came to me minutes after the domain was created, before anything had been donated or any comments were posted. I kind of get the feeling he had some intimate knowledge of the whole thing. And the girl called me late the night the first mural happened – she also seemed a little too knowledgeable. They were just too quick with their tips.”

“Hmm. You think it was the same person on both calls?”

“Couldn’t say. Probably not, right? But part of me feels like some of the rumors and tips were spread deliberately. The whole thing smacks of a publicity stunt.”

“You’ve seen to that personally.”

“Guilty as charged, I suppose. Am I a suspect now?”

“Do you want to be?”

“Yes. Holy hell, that would be so cool.”

“Yeah, you’re off the suspect list now. Your eagerness betrays you.”

“Damnit. Easy come, easy go.”

“Alright, I’ve got to go stop one of my employees from forcing me to write them up for workplace harassment. No – No! Stop asking Bellamy the length of his rectum, nobody is shoving traffic wands up anyone’s – stop!”

“Er, right. I’ll leave you to it then.”

“Thanks, Marty. You’ve been strangely helpful.”

“It’s – oh, whatever. Until next time, Woods.”

“Bye.”

+++
Finn Collins.

How to explain the phenomenon known as Finn Collins.

Finn was the kind of guy who wore clothes that were so nice they couldn’t be traced back to an actual store, but if you tried hard enough you might find the 300 year old tailor from Venice who hand pulled every thread on his stupid pocket square while being serenaded by Beethoven’s great-great-great-great grandson. Finn was the kind of guy who showed up to every function in a different luxury car and if it weren’t for the fact that he had his name lovingly engraved in gold cursive into the corner of every bumper, you’d be convinced they were all stolen or rented. Finn was the kind of guy who knew way too much about wine labels to be trusted with bringing some fucking chips to a casual get together – you’d end up with a bottle Massandra 1775, an inferiority complex, and still no goddamn Doritos. Finn was the kind of guy who would take you on a date to the most expensive restaurant within 100 miles just to see his own autograph on the bill at the end of the night (and if he happened to find sexual release in the memory of the double loop in his L’s when he went home that night, nobody could prove it). Finn was the kind of guy you didn’t actually need a reason to hate.

Finn Collins was an absolute tit.

“God, Finn Collins is a fucking douche,” Octavia muttered, scrolling irritably through her phone.

Lexa looked up from her paperwork and nodded enthusiastically. “Right? I was just internally monologuing about that.”

“Swear Jar, Octavia,” Clarke called from inside the equipment closet.

“He is, though!” Octavia protested.

Something clattered to the floor in the closet and Clarke sighed. “I dunno, he’s kind of cute. He looks like a puppy.”

Clarke was pretty, but she had no taste whatsoever. “Yeah, a puppy who probably doesn’t even know how to do his own laundry,” Lexa spat.

“I went out with him a few times,” Clarke said casually. “He’s not all bad. The laundry thing is totally true, though. Take that as you will.”

Octavia spun around, mouth hanging open in disgust. “Woah, you went out with Finn Collins? Ugh. How could you stand him?”
“Every time he tried to talk, I’d just stick my tongue in his mouth.”

Octavia pretended to gag and projectile vomit in the rusted garbage bin beside her. If Lexa hadn’t been wearing a supervisor’s shirt, she would’ve joined the vomit party. She must’ve had some kind of horrified look on her face, though, because when Clarke emerged from the closet and caught sight of her, she started laughing.

“Oh my god, I’m kidding. Geez, give me some credit, guys. All I had to do was start talking about mundane things like making tacos or changing light bulbs and he was enraptured. Guy’s rich, but he’s kind of helpless. I think he gets a worse rap then he deserves.”

Octavia didn’t seem convinced, but she skipped Clarke’s involvement to bring them back to the issue at hand. “Your bad taste in guys aside, do you think it’s him? Now everybody’s saying it’s him and he isn’t exactly denying it.”

It was peculiar.

Finn had posted a picture online of himself painting an old warehouse wall just off campus, claiming he was ‘practicing’. The internet kind of ran with it after that. He was exactly the kind of suave, semi-attractive white dude that people wanted the vandal to be. Donations had certainly spiked with the new direction the rumor mill had taken. Whether he was the vandal or not, he was making somebody very rich.

“Monty did say it was some rich guy who liked wine. I’ll call Jasper and see if it’s his Gay Exception or not. He’ll know,” Clarke said, plopping into a chair next to Octavia.

Octavia shuddered. “If he’s going to have a Gay Exception, it better not be Finn. That’s just embarrassing. What do you think, boss? Think Finn could be our guy?”

“It’s not impossible, I guess,” Lexa said slowly. “He does seem to enjoy attention. Let me know if he posts anything more incriminating.”

“I could just call him and ask,” Clarke offered. “I’m pretty persuasive,” she added with a wink.

Images of Clarke hanging all over Finn in some expensive car and persuading him burned themselves into the front of Lexa’s brain. She could feel her face embarking on a journey of frustration and self-discovery but was powerless to stop it. There was nothing worse than your face journeying without your permission. Octavia was watching her carefully like she was the world’s greatest fucking detective instead of just a lucky bystander to an unauthorized face journey.


“You sure? I can invite him to dinner tomorrow,” Clarke persisted.

Lexa glared at her computer monitor and pounded out a message to her Lieutenant about their defense requalification the following day. “You’ll do no such thing,” she growled.

The gleeful look Octavia directed between the two of them effectively ended the conversation.

+++
Before she was allowed to go home for the night to flail about in Clarke’s kitchen for a while and embarrass herself, Lexa had to put in an appearance at County Headquarters for a self-defense requalification session with whichever auxiliary officers required it. It wasn’t the most thrilling activity in the world, but she got to beat up her coworkers, so it wasn’t all bad.

A small group of them were loitering around in the visitor parking lot when she arrived in her truck, nursing water bottles and sizing each other up in a friendly way. The veterans looked mostly bored and inconvenienced by the twice-yearly required session while the newer ones laughed a little too loudly and fidgeted a little too much. She could smell the fear from halfway across the parking lot.

It smelled like…fresh meat.

Lexa grabbed a few bags from her car filled with training pads and various teaching equipment before she headed for the door without greeting the others. They fell in step behind her in a large blob, joined by the stragglers that jogged or sprinted to catch up.

If the veterans were bored by the occasion, it was nothing compared to Lexa’s disinterest. She’d been to so many sessions that they’d licensed her as an instructor so they wouldn’t have to hire one. The department would rather pay her for a few extra hours a dozen times a year than go through another company or pay a salaried officer.

“Are we doing that pad-less drill today?” Miller asked, pulling Lexa out of her bored musings. She hadn’t even noticed that he was in step with her until he spoke.

Lexa smiled slightly and shook her head. “We probably shouldn’t. It didn’t go so well last time. Call it what you will, but we all know it’s basically hazing.”

Miller laughed under his breath. “Speak for yourself. I just want to see if I can punch Bellamy in the face again.”

“Me too,” Lexa whispered. “But we probably shouldn’t.”

Despite being a generally serious guy, Miller smiled at her and shrugged at his loss. While not officially licensed, he was practically an instructor as well. Lexa had already inquired about getting him licensed before she graduated so someone could take over for her.

Intimidation wasn’t a requirement of their training sessions, but Lexa preferred the tough love approach to inducting new recruits and hardening older ones, so she banished the smile from her face as they neared the training gym. Miller followed her lead and fell back into his usual stern look.

Lexa was nearly made of stone by the time they rounded the last bit of hallway, but the resolve turned to pudding when she caught sight of two people conversing outside one of the long-term records storage rooms. Clarke was standing some thirty feet away, juggling a massive tower of dispatch transcripts and laughing at something someone else was saying.

“So I’m like, we can’t both be drunk when we knock on that judge’s door.”

Clarke laughed a full, charming laugh and shifted her papers awkwardly, revealing her conversation partner. Anya was leaning against the door frame with one of her endless coffee cups in her free hand. She laughed at her own story as well and launched into another one. Lexa narrowed her eyes at the two of them.

Before she could open her mouth or chuck her cellphone at Anya’s head, someone smacked into
her from behind. She stumbled forward a few paces and whipped around to glare a hole through Octavia’s retinas.

“Jesus,” Octavia moaned, rubbing at her nose. “Why’d you stop so suddenly?”

“I – I did not,” Lexa denied, propping her hands on her hips.

Octavia looked around for support, earning a few sheepish nods or quickly averted eye contacts. “You did! You were looking over there and then you…” she trailed off when her eyes followed her own gesture, transforming her indignation into a sly smile. “Ah.”

“No.”

Octavia grinned. “What do you mean no?”

Lexa shook her head. “Just no. Everyone go into the gym. Get them started, Miller, I’ll be with you in just a minute.”

The auxiliary officers all filed into the gym around Lexa while she pushed her way through the crowd towards whatever potential disaster Anya was wreaking upon her life outside of the records room.

“Lexa,” Clarke called, a pleased smile lighting up her whole face. Lexa’s name seemed to drop involuntarily from Clarke’s mouth. Surely that was the only explanation for the use of her name in a way that wasn’t designed to piss her off or mock her. Clarke seemed just as surprised, but she did well hiding it a second later.

“What are you doing here?” Lexa asked, glancing between the two. When she drew level to the others, Lexa eased the massive stack of paperwork from Clarke’s arms and propped it against her hip.

Clarke shook her arms out a bit and shot her a grateful smile. “Thanks. I’m digitizing some of the older transcripts with County before I head to the hospital. It kind of sucks, but I’ve got nothing else to do.”

“I know what you could do,” Anya chimed in. Lexa gave her a discreet glare, but she plowed on anyways. “Have you ever watched them requalify? It’s hilarious. You should go watch Lex beat up her coworkers.”

Clarke grinned. “That sounds fun.”

“Uh, it’s not that interesting,” Lexa muttered, moving the paperwork to her other hip and giving Anya a strained look. “You’re not missing much.”

“Well if Lex doesn’t want you there,” Anya said casually, “you could always come to the range and I can teach you how to shoot.”

“N-no,” Lexa stuttered. “Uh, that is, you should probably see auxiliary requalifications. I mean, it’s educational. And stuff.”

Anya grinned triumphantly and turned to leave. “You’re probably right. Lex is super good at being an instructor. She can’t wait to educate you, Clarke. Later, kids.”

The only person Lexa wanted to educate was Anya and the lesson plan consisted solely of a hard kick in the ass.
But it wasn’t a total waste. After Lexa offered to walk the paperwork back to Clarke’s car for her, Clarke had smiled that damn smile and wrapped a hand lightly around Lexa’s elbow the entire way there. And back. So, you know. Not all bad.

Upon their return to the training gym, Miller had finished with defense maneuvers and nearly finished holds. In a rare mood of showmanship, she’d called a new hire forwards and demonstrated a particularly advanced maneuver. It was flashy and unnecessary and totally worth Clarke’s eyes on her back.

When they moved to basic fighting drills, Lexa grabbed a shield pad and let Miller beat on her for a while. After a few rounds, she returned the favor in full. Near the end, Miller leaned close and murmured in her ear.

“Do that thing where you throw and pin me.” At Lexa’s confused look, he flashed a brief smile. “It will be very impressive.” His eyes flicked over to where Clarke was sitting in the corner and she followed his gaze. When she caught Clarke’s eye, the dispatcher waggled her fingers in a lazy wave.

Miller raised an eyebrow.

“Fine,” Lexa muttered. “You asked for it.”

Even winded and sprawled on his stomach with an elbow in his spine, Miller managed to give her a proud look from the corner of his eye. “’Atta girl,” he whispered.

High on endorphins and stolen smiles, Lexa allowed herself to get talked into pad-less drills at the end of the session. It was usually all fun and games until a new hire ended up with a broken nose. Broken noses just build character, though.

Lexa squared off with Octavia after Miller ditched her for the opportunity to punch Bellamy in the face. Some friends you just need to punch in the face once in a while. No hard feelings.

Things were fine for the most part, with Octavia ducking and blunting her strikes with practiced ease. She was a fast learner and a good sparring partner. Her strikes were a little too wild and harsh for a pad-less fighting session, but Lexa did her best to absorb the blows and refrain from returning them in kind.

It was all just fine.

It was fine right up until Lexa let her eyes wander over to find Clarke shamelessly admiring her fluid movements, eyes trailing careless paths over parts of her that were definitely not her face. Her attention had only been diverted for a second, but it was enough for Octavia to clock her with a brain jarring strike across her jaw. The unexpected strike sent her instincts spiraling into detaining mode and she had Octavia pinned to the mat before she could stop herself.

Octavia gasped as she thudded to the mat, snapping Lexa out of her fight or flight mode. “Oh shit. I’m sorry. Shit, are you okay?”

Without answering her question, Octavia rolled over and raised a hand to Lexa’s jaw with an apologetic look. “Aw fuck, my bad. I didn’t mean to sucker-punch you, boss. I totally didn’t notice your gay crisis!”

“My what? I’m not – it’s not a crisis.”

The point is I’m sorry.”

Lexa rubbed at her jaw a bit after pulling Octavia to her feet. At worst, she’d be a little bruised. “Don’t worry about it. It was my fault.”

Everyone was a little bruised when they called it quits shortly after Lexa’s embarrassing moment. She didn’t exactly want to look Clarke in the eye, but it was kind of hard not to when they were the only ones left cleaning up the training gym.

“I didn’t know you guys could actually fight,” Clarke said, handing Lexa one of the bags to sling over her shoulder. “I stand corrected.”

Accepting the bag and adding it to her pack-mule arrangement, Lexa spared a tired smile for the sentiment. “Yeah, well. College kids like to drink. Drunk people like to fight.”

“Is your jaw okay?” Clarke didn’t wait for a reply before stepping closer and grabbing Lexa’s jaw delicately. Her fingers stroked over the rapidly bruising mark while her eyes flitted around Lexa’s face for any sign of discomfort.

Lexa blinked in surprise several times before she remembered how to speak the English language. “Um. It’s okay,” she near whispered.

“Are you sure?”

Actually, upon further reflection, Lexa was disappointed to find that she was going into fatal cardiac arrest. So no. It was terminal.

“Should I bring you with me to the hospital to make sure?” Her fingers continued stroking softly against Lexa’s face way beyond what was required of a glancing check-up. As corny as it sounded, Lexa was pretty sure she could’ve spent her whole life right there in that moment. Well, mostly because she probably wasn’t going to live much longer. So wish fucking granted.

It’s always the weird moments that bring a strange sort of clarity.

For instance, it was only with Clarke absently stroking her bruised face while Lexa perished from some gay heart condition, that Lexa realized she was in love with the damn girl.

Great.


+++ Chapter End Notes

i mean, i personally don't hate finn. but my pov choice doesn't leave me a lot of options here.
im in too much pain to be witty. here's some music. stay in school. or not. whatever.

cheers.
what we're built for

Chapter Notes

as we hit these last four or five chapters, i've got some filling in to do so the updates might take a few extra days, but we're getting there. as always, many thanks for your comments, kudos, patronage, and vague threats.

you can look for an update on my other fic around tuesday when it's done kicking my ass.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+++ Clarke returned a little late from her internship, but not late enough to ruin dinner. In the wide world of available dinners, Lexa had approximately one dish under her belt that wasn’t completely underwhelming to serve a pretty girl who saved you from homelessness and starvation. Her uncle had at least taught her the fine art of making good burgers. The fact that she could hardly make anything else didn’t need to be public knowledge. After that night, she could go back to eating takeout for every meal.

“Honey, I’m home!” Clarke called dramatically the moment she entered her apartment. “Where’s my father?”

Jake dashed from between Lexa’s legs to greet Clarke at the door. Clarke’s laugh filtered in through the entryway with the sounds of her shucking her jacket off and dropping her bag. “Kitchen,” Lexa grunted, prodding the burgers one last time to check their doneness.

“I stand corrected,” Clarke announced. She swept into the kitchen, hauling Jake in her arms while he mewed pathetically and struggled to escape. “You can cook at least one meal. If I don’t get food poisoning, I’ll grovel properly.”

Lexa rolled her eyes fondly, handing Clarke a plate and heading for the bar stools. Jake earned his freedom in exchange for the plate and stalked off to nurse his wounded pride. “How was the hospital?”

“Good. Great, actually. Some of the money from our new donor is starting to filter in and we’re getting the things we need in pediatrics finally. Memorial’s not in a great area, so a lot of the kids we get have families that can’t keep up with their bills. Unfortunately, that means the hospital doesn’t come into a lot of money. It’s a shit show all around,” Clarke explained between bites. “The new donor’s helping a whole lot.”

“Thank god for selfless rich people.”

Clarke nodded. “Yeah, I guess. Enough about that, though, it’s time to grovel properly. You have my humblest apologies; you can cook, and I’m an asshole. Thanks for dinner, Woods.”

“I feel compelled to be honest with you: this is the only thing I know how to cook,” Lexa sighed,
“Figured I’d confess before you asked me to cook again.”

Instead of making fun of her, Clarke just shook her head fondly, eyes twinkling with amusement. “You’re cute. I’ll do the dishes.”

It was only by the grace of god and Clarke’s exhaustion that Lexa escaped Trivial Pursuit that night. The alternative ended up being nature documentaries and Clarke falling asleep on her shoulder an hour in. When Clarke unconsciously tangled her fingers in Lexa’s shirt and sighed contently, Lexa knew she was completely and royally fucked. But then again: what else was new.

+++  

Lexa’s self-made overtime schedule started to fit suspiciously with Clarke’s internship schedule, like two puzzle pieces keeping them home at the same time. It was only suspicious because they determined their own schedules for the most part. But more alarming than that was how she kept referring to Clarke’s apartment as ‘home’. Needless to say, her continuing efforts to find her own apartment were as unsuccessful as they were half-hearted. Every time Lexa tried to apologize or share her progress in that regard, Clarke got all wistful and sad, so she kept it to herself. What was the harm in it?

So Lexa worked into night patrol whenever Clarke had to go to the hospital, caring less and less about her brief obsession with catching the vandal red-handed. The desire was still there; she still wanted to give him a stern reprimand, a bill for the damages, and drag him before the academic honors committee. But that desire took the back burner to Clarke’s cooking and company.

Whatever. She was getting too old for that shit anyways.

“So, where’s the missus? Not home to hold your hand and feed you homemade apple pie tonight?” Raven kicked at one of the plastic cups littering the ground around the frat houses and offered Lexa a sly smile.

She’d long since given up protesting Raven’s insistence that they were married. “She’s got her internship.”

“Aw, poor baby,” Raven crooned, clapping a hand over Lexa’s shoulder. “I know I’m no Clarke – I ain’t gonna tuck you in at night or pack your lunches – but you’ve got the next best thing.”

Lexa gave her a skeptical look. “Yeah?”

“Oh, yeah. You’ve got me, Blake Junior, and hundreds of trashed frat kids just waiting to throw up on you.” A grand gesture towards the stumbling throngs of partygoers was all the evidence Raven seemed to think she needed. “You haven’t wrangled drunk kids with us in weeks. C’mon, maybe someone will try to fight us. You used to love that.”

That was true.

“I guess,” Lexa conceded, folding her arms across her chest to keep her body heat in. Octavia was several paces away, pulling an incoherent guy without a shirt from a nearby bush. A few slaps to the side of his face and slow instructions to his friend was enough to send them on their way. On nights like those, getting everyone back to a room was the best they could hope for. It didn’t even have to be a room that belonged to them. They just needed to make sure there wasn’t anyone in the
gutters when the street sweeper came by.

“Hey look, that guy’s peeing on someone’s leg! Oh my god.” Raven tugged excitedly on Lexa’s sleeve and directed her attention towards a gangly, scarecrow of a boy fumbling with his own dick while he attempted to urinate on another muscle-bound, gym worshiper. By the time the meathead noticed his predicament, the scarecrow had already pissed a championship-worthy puddle around and in his shoes. He only had one drunken second to recognize his mistake before the other guy roared and seized his skinny neck between his fists.

“They’re gonna fight. Please for the love of god let them fight,” Raven pleaded, crossing her fingers.

“Already fighting,” Lexa corrected quickly, pushing her sleeves up and making a beeline for the escalating tension. Octavia beat her there, demanding they separate and cool off. Raven was hot on Lexa’s heels, brace creaking with the effort.

“Put him down, Mike. He’s drunk and you’re built like a tree. He probably thought you were one,” Octavia reasoned. She patted the man’s forearm, reminding him of the death grip he still maintained on the kid’s neck. “I don’t want to make you put him down,” she warned.

Veins pulsed angrily along Mike’s shaved head and his grip only tightened, throwing the kid into a fresh bout of panic. Lexa pushed her way in front of Octavia and seized Mike’s wrist. “Drop him,” she commanded.

Mike tore his eyes away from his victim and gave Lexa a bewildered look, as though he truly hadn’t noticed three auxiliary officers begging for the other kid’s life. “Why?” He hissed, towering over Lexa in his anger.

“Drop him or I’ll make you.” Lexa met his rage with a cool detachment born from years of wrestling obstinate drunks and hecklers. “This isn’t how you want your night to end.”

Slowly, like releasing the air from a tire, Mike loosened his grip on the kid’s neck and allowed his shoulders to fall down and back in a less imposing stance. Eventually, his grip loosened enough for the boy to scramble away and cling to Octavia’s side. “Don’t let ‘im kill me,” he slurred.

Octavia kept him at bay with a hand on his chest. “Easy there, champ. No touching. Now apologize to the nice man who didn’t justifiably murder you.”

Mike’s eye twitched again, but he kept his hands at his side and stepped back. Lexa still kept her body between the two, but the immediate danger was gone. “I oughtta kill you,” he growled. “Fuckin’ freshman.”

“Hey, man. His mistake,” Raven said, reaching up to pat Mike on the shoulder. “Or rather, his piss-take. Get it?” She elbowed the murderous man until his booze addled brain caught up. When it did, he managed a genuine, if not slightly sinister smile.


Octavia took that as the dismissal it was and seized the shaking boy by his arm. “Alright, good talk. Let’s get you home, dumbass. Where are we headed?” With a gentle tug, she got the boy’s feet moving and they headed off in the direction of freshmen housing.

Raven gave Mike another pat on the back before turning to follow Octavia, walking backwards to address Lexa as she went. “Looks like we’ve got an escort, boss. Last time I let Octavia go off alone she took a swim in the creek. We’ll catch up with you later.”
The three departed, jostling their drunken third to stay upright and on target between them. That left Lexa alone with Mike and his piss-shoes, so she bid him a quick farewell and climbed back into her truck to keep an eye on the partygoers. She probably should have been patrolling more widely in anticipation of the next vandalism hit, but safety took precedence to a bit of illegal painting. Bellamy and Murphy could handle the larger patrol routes.

Hopefully.

+++ 

“678 to 77.”

“Go ahead, 678.”

“Can you drop by the fine arts center?”

“Negative. I’m watching the frats.”

“I really think you should drop by the fine arts center.”

“Is this an emergency?”

“Um, negative? Please just get here quickly.”

“10-4, I suppose. ETA 10 minutes.”

“You’d better make it 5.”

“I don’t like the sound of this.”

“Er, make it 3.”

“10-4. Stay safe.”

+++ 

Several minutes of hazardous driving later, the fine arts center came into view. It was a grand building, full of luxurious theatres and studios that some old rich bastard had paid for in exchange for his name on the outside of the building. Truly, it was a work of architectural beauty, but Lexa had eyes only for the rusted out SUV hidden around the loading docks with its lights off. Taking the hint, Lexa shut off her truck’s headlights and crawled to a stop next to the other auxiliary vehicle.

Murphy already had the passenger side window rolled down and offered her a half-hearted wave.

“Sup.”

“Don’t ‘sup’ me,” Lexa warned, leaning out her window. “I’d be less anxious if Bellamy had radioed me saying you were dead.”
“I get that a lot,” Murphy said dryly. He leaned back to allow Bellamy access to their conversation and went back to mindlessly scrolling through his phone.

Bellamy, however, was leaning over his steering wheel and peering intently towards the darkness of the loading docks. “Quiet,” he whispered, pointing out into the darkness. When Lexa followed his finger, though, she couldn’t see anything.

“What am I supposed to be looking at here?” Lexa whispered back. Even when she squinted and strained her eyes against the pitch of the lightless area, she couldn’t see much more than some thick, leafless oak trees and an empty service road. “I don’t see anything.”

“You can’t see him right now,” Bellamy agreed, eyes still glued to one of the brick partitions between access doors. “We followed this shifty guy around the back. He was dressed all in black and had the same big duffel bag the vandal had when I first saw him at the observatory. Listen.” He tapped a finger against his ear and pointed back out into the darkness.

At first, all that she could make out was the distant sound of traffic from the nearby highway and her own breathing. When she slowed her breathing and filtered out the highway, though, she could make out a faint hissing, tapering off and picking up in uneven intervals. “What’s that?”

“Paint can,” Murphy supplied, eyes still glued to his phone. “They’ve been at it a while.”

Lexa instantly perked up. “Why haven’t you stopped them?” She demanded. “You’re just letting them deface university property!”

“This guy’s a runner – we already know he’s gonna bolt the second he figures out we’re here. We needed you here,” Bellamy said, tapping his fingers silently against the steering wheel. “All hands on deck.”

“Not these hands,” Murphy muttered. “I don’t chase for $9 an hour.”

Bellamy rolled his eyes. “Fine. Stay with the car and pull around once we confront him just in case he takes off somewhere a vehicle can follow.”

Murphy saluted and finally tucked his phone back into his front pocket. “Alright, Reno 911, let’s get a move on.”

When Murphy was situated (stealthily) behind the wheel and Bellamy had (stealthily) met Lexa in front of her truck, they prepared to strike (…stealthily). While Bellamy insisted the best plan of attack was to ‘just go for it’, Lexa felt a more careful approach would yield better results. The vandal was likely right behind the small partition between loading docks, so Lexa decided she would confront him while Bellamy kept behind the partition. It’s best not to show one’s entire hand before you make your play. If or when the vandal bolted, Lexa hoped she would be able to funnel them towards Bellamy and the road they had left Murphy behind on. It wasn’t the most airtight plan in the world, but it was better than ‘just going for it’.

As they edged their way along the brick wall, the only sounds that accompanied them were some chirping frogs from the nearby pond and the occasional scuff of Bellamy’s giant shoes that he seemed incapable of controlling fully. His breathing was just a bit loud too, but hopefully the hissing of aerosol cans masked their approach.

On their final approach, backs pressed hard against the cold brick, Bellamy seemed to realize his own noise and held his breath for good measure. Lexa turned her head to look into his wide eyes and motioned for him to stay while she circled the partition. When it came to do just that, though,
Lexa felt her feet stick stubbornly to the pavement. What the hell was she supposed to say?

_Freeze asshole!_

Yeah, that would be kind of cool. If she was a fucking rodeo clown on a budget cop show starring David Caruso and the entire dramatic close-up gang. She didn’t know if the vandal was dangerous in any way, but if he didn’t, Lexa would shoot herself for saying something like that.

Intimidating silence it was, then.

Right before Lexa could weaponize her intimidating silence, a blood-curdling wail pierced their carefully constructed silence. Bellamy slammed the back of his head into the wall and cursed loudly, while Lexa jammed her hands over her ears. It took her a few seconds to recognize the noise as one of their sirens and she shot a pointless glare in Murphy’s direction. Even from their distance, Lexa could see him flailing about, trying to turn it off.

He had one fucking job.

Honestly.

Bellamy grabbed her shoulder and pushed her toward the other side of the partition, effectively reminding her that they were losing any advantage they had over the vandal.

Bellamy’s push kicked her into gear and Lexa dashed around the partition to confront their target, but was greeted by nothing.

No, not nothing.

Off near the tree line, Lexa spotted a dark-clad figure sprinting into the forest like their life depended on it. Maybe it did. Lexa was feeling pretty murderous at that point.

“Bellamy!”

“I’m on it,” he shouted, taking off past Lexa after their quarry. Lexa was hot on his heels for a while, but she tapered off to a stop before hitting the tree line. Bellamy was born to run miles through forests with his Pocahontas hair flowing in the breeze and his giraffe legs painting with all the colors of the wind, so she left him to it. The last time they had left the scene unattended, bad things had happened. Fool me once, asshole.

Hopefully Bellamy would catch him. Either way it was out of her hands. Besides, she had to secure the scene and end Murphy’s miserable life. Full schedule.

Jogging back to the mural, Lexa found she was mildly disappointed that it hadn’t quite been finished. Because, when all was said and done, the murals were really quite pretty. Sure, it was vandalism, but it was just a bit more than that. Maybe all of the paint fumes were finally getting to her.

While only partially finished, the new mural was a hazy depiction of one of the beloved college bars just off campus with throngs of smudged profiles of students milling about under large picnic umbrellas and awnings. It was rougher than some of the other paintings – more outline and impression than anything.

“I just have to say, from the bottom of my heart, my bad dude,” Murphy said carefully, shuffling up behind her. “Sincerely, my bad.”
“Don’t you ‘dude’ me, John Murphy,” Lexa snapped. “What the hell happened?”

Murphy sighed and shoved his hands deeper into his pockets. “Tried to kick my feet up on the dashboard and I kicked on the siren. I’m an idiot.”

“Yeah, well, at least I’m mostly used to it,” she muttered. And honestly, it was true. By that point, she had come to expect the worst. “Go near the tree line and radio Bellamy. If he hasn’t caught the guy by now, I want him to just come back. I don’t like him out there alone.”

Murphy must have been feeling truly sorry for his actions to follow her orders without another word and slouch off towards the forest. That left Lexa alone with the mural and a suspiciously large duffel bag abandoned underneath it. At least she had the bag.

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Clarke came home more than an hour later than Lexa at some ungodly hour near sunrise. As tempting as it was to fall onto her couch and pass out the second she returned, Lexa waited up. It was important.

“Geez, you’re up late,” Clarke yawned, tossing her keys on the table. “Has Jake been talking politics again?”

By way of an answer, Lexa hauled the giant duffel bag off the floor and dropped it down onto the coffee table.

Clarke stared at it for a few moments before raising an eyebrow. “You’re gonna have to give me more of a hint on this one. Do we have a body to dump? I won’t ask questions, just give me a signal and I’ll go get a shovel.”

Lexa shook her head. “I’ve seen this bag before.”

“Yeah me too: on my coffee table. Right now.”

“Be serious, Clarke,” Lexa sighed. She rubbed at her eyes for a moment before propping her head in her hands. “The vandal left this bag at a new mural tonight. I saw it in the back of Monty’s car a few days ago.”

Finally, Clarke seemed to sober up and she stepped closer to get a better look. “I’m sure it’s just a coincidence. You’re not honestly suggesting that Monty’s your vandal are you? He’s the definition of innocent.”

“He had this bag, Clarke. He had spray paint in his car too. He can paint. And he has the skill to create the website. At this point, he’s my best guess.” She shook her head slowly and willed her eyelids to stop drooping.

“What are you gonna do?”

That was the question, wasn’t it? What was she going to do?

Unable to hold her eyes open for much longer, Lexa gave into the desire to lie back on the couch. “What would you do?” She murmured as her eyes slipped shut.
Clarke didn’t respond immediately, instead taking the time to unfurl a blanket from the back of the couch and drape it over Lexa’s weary body. “Think,” Clarke said eventually.

“Hmm?” Lexa peeled one eyelid open to watch Clarke throw another blanket over her and fold her discarded work shirt.

“I would think. You’ll do the right thing, Lexa – you always do. Just…consider the whole picture first,” she suggested softly. “Don’t act before you’re ready to.”

If Clarke said anything further it was lost to the deep pull of sleep that dragged her under.

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So Lexa thought.

+++ 

And she thought.

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She was still thinking when she went home on Friday night to a surprisingly empty apartment. Technically, she wasn’t thinking about vandalism or justice, but she was thinking about important things. These important things included Clarke, seeing Clarke again, surprising Clarke with takeout, spending time with Clarke, and the way Clarke laughed when she came up with a new, convoluted way to incorrectly answer a trivial pursuit question she was unfamiliar with. These were all very important things. In their own right.

Unfortunately, there was an abysmal lack of Clarke in the apartment and Jake seemed just as put out as she felt. He stalked back and forth in front of the door for twenty minutes. Clearly he hadn’t authorized the breaking of his daughter’s curfew. Lexa silently agreed. And then, when she got particularly lonely, she audibly agreed. When you find yourself conversing with cats, it’s time to get a hobby.

The two of them restarted one of Clarke’s nature documentaries and sat in irritable silence waiting for Clarke to text or call or come back. It wasn’t that Lexa required knowledge of Clarke’s whereabouts at all times, but they had definitely fallen into a habit of keeping each other updated. The radio silence was unusual.

She began to worry as it got later, her texts going unanswered. Right as she considered calling Memorial to see if Clarke had worked a double shift or something, a raucous group stumbled down the hallway outside the front door, talking in loud whispers and bumping into things. To her dismay, they stopped right outside the apartment and argued a bit more. After a few moments of
failed stealth, one of the group’s members knocked loudly against the door in jerky intervals.

Lexa sighed, put on her best ‘you should know better’ face, and then shooed Jake off of her lap to answer the door. Her mouth was open to fire an admonishment at the partygoers until she threw open the door and swallowed her words. Clarke was propped between two unfamiliar people, all of whom were doing a terrible job of appearing even passably sober. Clarke especially.

The first thought Lexa was able to conjure was that Clarke didn’t get drunk. She’d get buzzed or a little tipsy, but not unsteady on her feet and flushed. That in itself was worrisome.

“Clarke,” Lexa said slowly, offering a hand for her to lean on. “Had a few drinks?”

Clarke shrugged a little too hard, her shoulders nearly touching her ears. “A few,” she confirmed. Instead of leaning on the offered hand, Clarke used it as a brief handhold before draping most of her weight across Lexa’s chest and shoulders.

“Um, right,” Lexa said stiffly, shifting a bit to support the additional weight of nearly an entire extra human being. She blew some of Clarke’s hair out of her face to level a serious look at the people who had brought her home. The effect was probably lost in her current position, but she figured she deserved some points for trying. “Did she drink too much?”

One of the strangers shook his head. “Eh, nothing serious. We stopped her a while ago, so she won’t get any worse.”

“Thank you for bringing her home.” Clarke hugged her a little tighter and Lexa shifted her weight to see their guests better. “I appreciate it.”

Clarke turned her head to speak directly into Lexa’s eardrum in a low whisper. “I work with them at the hospital. They’re great.”

“Do you hear that?” Lexa inquired wryly. “She thinks you’re great.”

One of the interns tripped on nothing and steadied himself against another intern’s shoulder. “Hey, ditto, Griffin. Sleep tight.”

“Thanks guys,” Clarke slurred into Lexa’s neck. “Thanks for bringing me to my, uh…Lexa. Thanks for that.”

“No problemo,” one of them called as they stumbled back down the hallway towards the stairwell.

The second they were out of sight, Lexa tapped Clarke on her back and tried to herd her inside. “C’mon, Clarke. The faster you go to bed, the sooner you get to deal with your inevitable hangover. And I know how much you’re looking forward to that.”

Lexa had just managed to shut the front door behind them when Clarke shot off her shoulder and held Lexa at arms length, studying her through unfocused eyes. “I forgot to text you!” She hissed, giving Lexa a little shake. “I forgot!”

Lexa rolled her eyes and glanced down to see Jake giving her a merciless look. His face said ‘give her the axe’, but Lexa was just glad they were all home. “It’s fine, you were just—“

And wouldn’t it just be the case that Clarke was an affectionate drunk. Like, a really affectionate drunk. Like a ‘stick your tongue in your roommate’s mouth when she’s trying to be supportive and reasonable’ kind of drunk. It’s the weirdly specific drunks you have to watch out for.
It was like a fucking drive-by. One second she was trying to get Clarke to go to bed, then the next Clarke was dragging her forwards while she walked them backwards until Clarke’s back hit the door with a soft thump. Her hands found purchase, one on Lexa’s shoulder and the other threaded through her hair to hold her steady. After a few seconds of bemused, shell-shocked kissing, Clarke pushed her back and returned to their conversation like nothing had happened.

“I should have called,” she lamented, brushing her hand across Lexa’s shoulder from her neck, to her arm, and back. “I wasn’t sure I was going to stay, so I figured I’d text you from the bar, but then I forgot and they had all these cocktails half-priced, and Charlotte died today even though we tried so, so hard. Lexa, I did everything right and she was so real and alive, but then all of a sudden she just slipped through my fingers like it was nothing. That’s never happened before,” Clarke babbled, running her fingers absently through Lexa’s hair. She was still propped against the door and had yet to release her.

Lexa sorted through the torrent of words and exploding synapses in her own brain, eyes wide and bewildered. “You…lost a patient?” She tried. It was kind of hard to focus on the crushing weight of morality and cruelty of fate when she could still taste Clarke’s chapstick and was physically unable to put some distance between the two of them. She was getting whiplash from her own brain between what was appropriate and was was definitely not.

Clarke nodded sadly and pressed her forehead against Lexa’s. “She was a kid - a kid who liked checkers and pistachio ice cream and swimming and her older brothers and-” Clarke hiccuped and breathed heavily through the tears that pooled in her eyes but refused to fall. ”Kids shouldn’t die, Lexa. I’m sorry I’m – I’m kind of drunk. I should have come home. I didn’t want – I just wanted you. Just you,” she mumbled.

Lexa stomped forcefully against whatever stupid feelings were bubbling from her stomach up her throat in an effort to choke her. Clarke was drunk. Very drunk. And emotional and sad and confused. “You’ve got me,” she returned, hoping she didn’t sound as pathetic as she thought she did.

“I don’t – I can’t…”Clarke trialed off vaguely and the hand on Lexa’s shoulder gripped her shirt tightly. “We’re not built for this,” she finally settled on. “We’re just not built for this.”

Lexa managed to regain awareness of her limbs and was surprised to find one arm holding herself up against the door over Clarke’s shoulder and the other resting comfortably against Clarke’s waist. “We’re built to survive,” she offered. “Even the things we don’t believe we’re built for.” She tapped a finger against Clarke’s waist and smiled sadly. “Perhaps, especially the things we don’t believe we’re built for.” Clarke's eyes were a tragic kind of beautiful in the darkness of the apartment. "You never really-"

Lexa really needed to keep her guard up better. The second she stopped paying attention, Clarke was kissing her again like they’d never have another opportunity. Hell, maybe they wouldn’t. Come morning, Clarke would likely come to her senses. In the meantime, she sighed against Lexa’s lips and held her closer.

What’s a girl to do? Clarke kissed her like there wasn’t a wall of grief and liquor between the two of them – kissed like she needed it to heal, but that wasn’t…well, she was still drunk.

Fuck.

Groaning more from the weight of responsibility than arousal, Lexa pulled back and planted an apologetic kiss on Clarke’s cheek. “You’re drunk,” she sighed.
Clarke thought about it for a moment. “I’m – yeah. I am.”

Lexa huffed a laugh and pulled her away from the door. “Come on, I’ll put you to bed. You’ll feel better in the morning.”

Luckily, Clarke made no objections or further attempts to compromise Lexa’s morals. She allowed Lexa to boss her into drinking a bottle of water and changing her clothes before climbing into bed.

“You’re not leaving are you?” Clarke mumbled into her pillow.

Lexa placed another bottle of water and some painkillers next to the alarm clock. “I’ll be on the couch, as always.”

Clarke shook her head against her pillow. “No, I meant leaving to move somewhere else. I don’t want you to find another apartment. Stay forever.”

Laughing quietly, Lexa shrugged even though Clarke couldn’t see her. “Fine. Go to bed and I’ll stay forever.”

One eye peeked out over the pillow, full of skepticism. “Okay, I’m drunk, not an idiot, Lexa. Don’t think I’ll forget you promised when I wake up tomorrow.”

“Allright, Clarke. Goodnight.” After turning out the lights and flopping back onto the couch, Lexa felt a twinge of guilt. Truthfully, she was kind of depending on Clarke forgetting. How the hell was she supposed to live with her after knowing what it was like to kiss her? The universe had a sick sense of humor.

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By the time Saturday rolled around again, Lexa had done more thinking than most college students did their whole educational career (though that wasn’t saying very much). The newspaper was still going wild even with only a rough, half-finished mural and a slightly more concrete description from one Bellamy Blake. The poor bastard had been cornered on his way to class and hadn’t been quick enough on his enormous feet to get away. His indiscretion wasn’t the end of the world, though. All he had to offer beyond his first description was that the vandal seemed to have slightly longer hair and wore rings on their fingers.

Rings and hair like Finn fucking Collins.

(But Monty had the bag.)

And that was why Lexa had done little more than think herself in circles over the last twenty-four hours.

Well, that and the fact that Clarke had shattered any ability Lexa had to compartmentalize her feelings and pretend everything was normal. Yeah, that…little gem. It hadn’t even been an innocent, overly friendly peck on the lips either. Like, shit. The girl might have been drunk, but in the wide world of faculties she could have chosen to hold onto in her stupor, she had apparently chosen kissing. Lexa couldn’t in good faith hold her to any of it or really even enjoy the memory in her compromised condition but…

Goddamn.

And that’s all she allowed herself to say on the matter.

Lexa wasn’t necessarily sure if it was a good thing or a bad thing that she had to leave the apartment before Clarke woke up for her morning shift at the hospital. Was it better or worse to talk about something neither friend could reconcile? Her instincts told her to leave it be until Clarke brought it up. A good friend would ignore their trespasses unless the trespassing party chose to bring it up. Right?

Either way, Clarke would be spending the evening with her on their promised ride-along so Lexa would know soon enough how Clarke had chosen to handle the situation. There might not even be a situation if Clarke didn’t remember.

And so the circular thinking made its latest pass around the circuit.
Until such a time when the maybe-maybe-not situation could be resolved, Lexa had to deal with an entirely different awkward situation.

Spending the entire day alone with Monty while Clarke pulled extra hours at the hospital just put her even more on edge. He acted normal, more or less. They didn’t spend nearly as much time together as Clarke chose to when she was in the office, but their occasional interactions were unintentionally filled with a day’s worth of ruminations and one-sided suspicion. To Monty’s credit, he didn’t seem to find her standoffishness that strange. Maybe she had always just come off as kind of an asshole. Being charming had always been Clarke’s job anyways.

If the silence was a little stinted while Monty checked radio charges for the overnight patrol teams, it wasn’t Lexa’s fault. Not entirely.

“Are you normally this quiet during day shifts?” Monty asked with a smile. “Or do you only talk to Clarke?”

Lexa sighed and shook her head, feeling just slightly guilty. She had no idea what she was supposed to say to him without it turning into an interrogation. “It’s not you. I’ve got a lot on my mind right now.”

“You think I’m your vandal don’t you?”

Well, alright. Point blank, then.

Lexa turned in her chair to face him fully. “Why do you say that?”

“Please, Woods. I’m not an idiot. You found the same bag you saw in the back of my car at the new mural – my car full of spray paint. Besides that, I’ve got the skill to make the website. Let’s not act the fools,” Monty laughed.

The muffled sound of car engines filtered in through the door, marking their time alone together as running short. Lexa met Monty’s friendly smile with an even look. “Is this a confession?”

“It’s an acknowledgment,” Monty corrected. “You know what you know, but it’s not all there is to know.”

Cryptic fucking STEM majors.

“Or I could just close the case now.” It wasn’t an entirely empty threat; she may not have had a smoking gun, but charging someone with vandalism wasn’t exactly a major felony. If she told the honors board it was Monty Green, they’d take her word for it.

Monty looked thoughtful for a moment, before shaking his head. “You won’t.”

“Yeah, why not?” Lexa crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes while Monty went back to checking radios.

“You haven’t figured it out – not really. Just think, Woods. If there’s one thing you’re not, it’s hasty,” he said reasonably. Truth be told, Lexa was pretty damn tired of being reasonable.

Before she could dispute his reasonableness or everyone’s insistence that she ‘just needed to think’, Clarke came in swinging her keys on her index finger. “Well, well, well, if it isn’t the two loves of my life.” She pulled Monty in for a quick hug before slinging an arm around Lexa’s shoulder and gesturing grandly around the office. “And by the two loves of my life, I mean law and order.”
“I thought you meant whiskey and General Hospital,” Monty muttered, gathering his things to leave for the night.

Clarke winced. “Okay, I thought we agreed that nobody ever had to know about my love for General Hospital. At least I don’t watch those contrived post-apocalyptic teen dramas you always get hooked on.”

“Ugh, who would watch something like that?” Lexa agreed, pulling a face of disgust.

Monty shrugged. “I think you’d be surprised. People will watch just about any garbage show nowadays with hot white adults pretending to be teenagers.” With that pearl of wisdom, Monty slung his backpack over his shoulder and hurried out into the cold.

“This is why I don’t watch television,” Lexa muttered, slipping out from under Clarke’s arm to return to her paperwork. Being alone with Clarke wasn’t uncomfortable. It was just a nervous sort of tension in which Lexa wasn’t sure how she was supposed to act. Clarke didn’t seem all that concerned. Maybe she had forgotten the previous night?

“Ready for tonight?” Lexa asked in a casual attempt at breaking whatever ice may or may not have formed between them. If Clarke didn’t remember the previous night, then she had definitely drawn the longer straw. Remembering was much worse.

Clarke groaned a bit, stole Lexa’s hat off her desk lamp again, and dropped onto a nearby chair. “Remind me again why I need to go on a ride-along. I’m pretty sure riding along with the campus police isn’t even a real thing. You’re just taking me out to get someone to throw up on me.”

“No, but that’d be kind of funny. You spend too much time behind computers and keyboards, Clarke. Trust me, this’ll be good for you,” Lexa insisted. “There’s always something interesting on a Saturday night.”

“You’re lucky I’m used to people throwing up on me at the hospital. Jasper’s coming in to cover dispatch overnight, so I’m all yours.”

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The first thing Jasper did when he entered the office with Murphy slouching in behind him was glance around furtively like he was casing the joint. When he confirmed that the only one in there was Lexa, he barked at Murphy to get lost and stalked over to Lexa’s desk on his gangly legs. Murphy didn’t actually ‘get lost’, but rather threw himself down in an old office chair and began scrolling through his phone. So he might as well have gotten lost for all he was paying attention.

“What’s going on with you and Clarke?” Jasper demanded, crossing his arms and trying to look intimidating. Or rather, Lexa assumed he was trying to look intimidating. He kind of looked like an Ostrich who was just a little put out and a lot constipated. Points for effort, though.

Lexa raised an eyebrow at him and delicately set aside the night log she was filling out. “In regards to what?” She asked coolly.

Jasper tried to look even sterner, but he just kind of upped the constipation factor. “You’re living with her. And she doesn’t live with people.”
“What a riddle.”

“I’m serious, Woods. How long have you been dating?”

That, at least, gave Lexa pause. She had started the conversation utterly uninterested in anything Jasper had to say, but had managed to evolve to only mild disinterest. “We aren’t dating. Why do you think that?”

“Well, she must be at least half in love with you to let you into her home like she has,” Jasper reasoned. “Ever since – well, she likes her privacy. And solitude. I just want to know what’s going on.”

Lexa didn’t really know what the going rate for ‘things I owe the girl I love’s best friends’ was. Did she owe him the truth? Would that be an invasion of Clarke’s privacy or would she want Lexa to level with the constipated Ostrich squaring up to defend her honor? The mysteries abound.

“What do you want from me?” Lexa asked warily.

Jasper’s face took on an uncharacteristically sincere look. “I just want the truth, Woods. I just want to know my friend is safe.”

At last, it seemed, Lexa Woods had found common ground with Jasper Jordan. “She invited me into her home after my apartment burned down. Living together – being with her is…easy. And I know about her last boyfriend because I’m the one who handled him, Jasper, so I know what her trust costs, alright? Clarke is safe,” she finished, firm but understanding. “She is safe with me.”

Jasper blinked at her for a few moments, searching her eyes for some lie or omission, but seemed to find nothing. “Okay.” He nodded a bit and cocked his head to the side. “Yeah, okay. Thanks for leveling with me.”

“You are welcome. You’re –“ Lexa cut herself off, debating giving Jasper a legitimate compliment. Sentiment won out in the end. “You’re a good friend.”

Jasper scoffed and banished the sincere look from his face. “Yeah, yeah, yeah. I gotta tell you: if you fuck this up in any way, I will fight you. I fought her last boyfriend, Woods. I fought him and I got fucked up so bad – I mean, this was an embarrassing loss. I’m not even sure he got a cramp fighting me. And I’m pretty sure I lost all of my memories between the fourth grade and high school by the time he finished with me. But it’s not about winning, Woods. I will get my ass kicked so hard by you if you hurt her.” He pointed a threatening finger at her. “I’ll lose, but I’ll like, mess your hair up or make you late to class before you put me in the hospital. Don’t mess with me.”

Lexa couldn’t help but smile a half-smile and nod along with his threats. For all his shortcomings and grating personality, Lexa was glad for his loyalty. “Duly noted.”

“You bet your ass it is.” He pointed one last time at her as though daring her to contest his threats, before leaving for the communications office.

When she was finally alone, Lexa heaved a heavy sigh and shook her head. At least Monty had warned her Jasper would go all Spanish Inquisition on her. If it had come from left field, she probably would have handled it with far less grace.

“Well it was almost the truth,” Murphy drawled from across the room.

Lexa startled at the interruption, having completely forgotten Murphy was even there. “What do
you mean?” She asked, building her guard back up in an instant.

He shrugged without looking up from his phone. “I mean, you told Jasper most of the truth. But I can see why you wouldn’t tell him Clarke kissed you last night. I wouldn’t either.”

Lexa froze, one hand hovering above her night log and the other gripping her armrest in a vice grip. “E-excuse me?”

Murphy didn’t answer right away, still tapping on his screen while his eyes scanned endlessly over its contents. When he did reply, it was distracted. “You’re excused.”

“How the hell did you know that?” She demanded.

Finally, he had the good grace to make eye contact and put down his phone. “Paranoid much? She told me, obviously.”

Curse John Murphy and his strange closeness with Clarke. Why the hell would she tell him and not her best friends?

“Great,” she muttered. “Does she tell you everything?”

Murphy shook his head. “Nope. Only the things she needs to talk about but doesn’t want anyone to know.” He rubbed at a dirty spot on his phone screen.

“You’re somebody.”

“Nope. I’m nobody,” Murphy deflected flatly. “Who the hell am I gonna tell?”

Lexa scoffed and crossed her arms across her chest. “Literally anyone. You have no loyalties.”

Murphy’s mask of indifference fell away briefly and he offered her a near-smile. She suspected it was as close to one as he ever got. “That’s where you’re wrong.” After a few moments of tense silence, he picked his phone back up and returned to scrolling through his apps. “Stop thinking so loud. She didn’t call me to spill her regrets.”

Faltering slightly, Lexa tapped a finger against her night log. “What did she say about it?” She asked quietly.

Murphy rolled his eyes. “I am not doing this. Clarke’s business is her own and I’m not about to describe to you in vivid fucking detail how magical it was or what goddamn color the butterflies in her stomach were. Give me a fucking break.”

Lexa, as payment for his discretion, gave him a fucking break.

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The ride-along started as all Saturday nights did, mostly: carrying a six foot seven, first string football player back to the varsity team house because he thought monster and tequila were acceptable chasers for Rump Minze. Mathematically, anything under 100 proof would soften the blow of a liquor designed solely to either kill you or get you to call an ex and sing Amazing Grace at the top of your sobbing lungs to (‘not that Clarke Griffin would know, thank you very much’). But college football stud Joey Rizzo could do as he pleased, so he was allowed to play suicidal
chemist to his alcoholic tendencies until he decided that ceiling fans were for riding and coffee tables were for softening the blow of a 290 pound man being flung from said ceiling fan. Had the whole event taken place anywhere besides a fraternity house, the government probably would have classified it as an act of terror.

But yeah, just another Saturday night.

“Shit, I’m gonna drop him.”

Joey giggled(?) into his chest where his chin was currently resting. “Oh nooooo,” he said quietly, tapering off into more…giggling. Yeah, that was the only word for it. Six foot seven, 290 pounds of giggling. “Don’ do that.”

“Please don’t drop him.” Lexa’s biggest concern at that point was that if they dropped him, they would probably never get him back on his feet again. At least he found the whole situation funny.

Clarke hefted Joey’s arm more securely over her shoulders and ploughed on. “Joey, move your damn feet. God knows they’re big enough.”

Cue giggling. “Feel like jellyfish. My feet. Jellyfish,” he slurred. “Took a marine biography class once an’ it was like-“ Joey demonstrated his experience of the class by making an explosion sound. “Blew m’mind. Fuckin’ jellyfish.”

“Fuckin’ jellyfish,” Clarke agreed.

“You know, Clarke’s a ‘biography’ major.”

“What’s that?” He shook his head slowly to dispel some of his alcoholic fog. “Biolophy? Biometry?” Giving up entirely on the word, he switched direction. “Uh, who’s Clarke?”

Lexa tapped the back of his enormous shoulder blade with one of the hands desperately trying to keep him on his feet. “Just look under your other arm.”

Slowly, Joey turned his head to observe the other struggling girl under his arm, as though he had forgotten she was there at all. “Oh shit, she’s hot!” His voice dropped to a comically loud whisper when he turned back to Lexa. “She’s real pretty. She been there the whole time? She know I’m a lil’ drunk?”

Lexa barely managed to smother her smile and offered him a solemn nod. “She’s helping me get you back home. But don’t worry, I don’t think she knows you’re drunk.”

Satisfied with her answer, Joey pasted a sloppy grin on his face and pulled Clarke a little closer to his body. “Hey, I’m Joey. You come here often? An’ by here, I mean me. D’you come…to me often? Fuck.” He laughed at his own expense, joined shortly thereafter by Clarke.

“Can’t say that I do,” Clarke returned.

Joey shook his head sheepishly. “Sorry, I know I don’ look it, but I’m kinda drunk. And you’re super hot. If you were a planet, you’d be outta this world.”

“Good one,” Lexa offered. “You’ve got her on the ropes.”

“If you were a dinosaur, I’d be an archieologer.” Joey paused dramatically. “Because I dig you.” When Clarke laughed at his charming ineptitude, he giggled with her and pressed his nose against her hair. Clarke took it like a champ. But then, Joey Rizzo was known for his naïve charm.
“You’re sweet.”

Lexa snorted. “Yeah, and he’s an ‘archeologer’. Joey’s a real catch.”

Joey gave Lexa a grateful look. “You’re my new wingman, Woods. Colton’s fired. I love Colton, but if you look real close he’s kind of a tool.”

Actually, you didn’t need to look all that close. You could see that Quarterback Colton Steele was a tool from the International Space Station. But Lexa decided not to mention that. “Please. You don’t need a wingman with pickup lines like that.”

Finally, the varsity house came into view across the parking lot and Lexa’s groaning muscles seized with relief. Clarke was barely holding any of Joey’s weight anymore and he was leaning heavily to Lexa’s side in order to offer Clarke more drunken compliments.

When they got to the door, Joey gave Clarke his keys and she let them into the lobby and his nearby room. His lavish room proved yet again that being a popular college athlete at a major university paid handsomely. Lexa voted for dumping Joey on his bed and leaving, but Clarke had apparently been charmed enough to help him remove his monstrous shoes and tuck him in like an enormous toddler.

“You’re somethin’, Clarke,” he murmured happily, snuggling further into his blankets. “You gonna stay?”

“Sorry, Joey – duty calls.”

He frowned slightly and managed to prop himself up on one elbow to look more closely at her. “Why? I’ll take you to breakfast after I sleep it off.”

“You’re sweet, Joey. Let me know if you ever need to be carried home again.” It was a nicer shutdown than Lexa would have offered some random guy she had been roped into carrying home after going all Tarzan on a ceiling fan. But Lexa had to carry him home frequently, so Clarke’s offer was a dangerous one; he might take her up on it.

After a moment of disappointment, Joey nodded sadly. “There someone else ain’t there? My coach always did say I’m just a bit late on near everything.” His disappointment turned to a sly smile that he directed pointedly between Clarke and Lexa where she waited by his door. “You zoomed me, Wingman. Joey misses out on the pretty girl again. Should’ve picked a wingman who wasn’t prettier than me. You win this round, Woods.”

“Don’t let it get you down,” Clarke said, smoothing a blanket over Joey as he collapsed back against the mattress. “You’re very pretty too.”

“Thank you,” he said seriously.

Lexa rolled her eyes and scuffed her boot against the doorframe. “Can we go? We’ve gotta go change a tire on Hanover and I told Jasper we’d be there ten minutes ago.”

“Alright, let’s go,” Clarke said, setting a water bottle on Joey’s nightstand.

Joey’s eyes slipped closed and he waved a hand weakly in Lexa’s direction. “I’ll see you next week, Doctor Officer Cop Woods.”

Lexa didn’t doubt that in the slightest.
For a moment, Lexa was almost sure Clarke was going to kiss Joey goodnight and read him a bedtime story, but she just pulled the blanket a bit higher on his chest. By the time she stood to leave, Joey was already snoring lightly.

“Sure you don’t want to stay and have hundreds of giant, beautiful children with him?” Lexa teased, holding the door open for her.

Clarke shrugged. “Nah.”

“You sure? He’s a football player and an ‘archeologer’.”

“I’m sure. Besides, he’s not really my type,” she said flippantly.

“Oh, you have a type now. What is Clarke Griffin’s type?” Lexa Woods was not a desperate person by any means, but she really hoped the next words out of Clarke’s mouth in any way described her. It was pointless trying to pretend otherwise.

“It changes every so often,” Clarke returned vaguely, waving a hand in some nonspecific gesture. “Lately, though, I’m really into people in uniforms.”

Lexa was a person.

Lexa wore a uniform.

(An ugly uniform, but whatever).

If Clarke didn’t want to have her comment interpreted in that way than she shouldn’t have bumped Lexa’s shoulder like she was letting her in on a secret. And she definitely shouldn’t have winked. Did nobody play fair anymore?

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“You’re serious right now?”

“Fuck off.”

Lexa settled the tire iron against her shoulder. “You’ve really never changed a tire before? You’ve talked hundreds of people through it but you’ve never actually done it yourself? I’m not even sure that’s possible.”

“More tire changing, less gloating.”

“Oh no. This is your ride along, Clarke. I’m worried that you’re just not getting the full experience if I don’t let you change this tire.”

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To celebrate nobody dying during what should have been a routine tire change, Lexa gave Clarke
her credit card and sent her into a gas station to get shitty coffee. Shitty coffee was one of the cornerstone experiences for the auxiliary police and an indispensible part of any ride along. Clarke grumbled a bit about indentured servitude, but ultimately snatched the card and obeyed orders. There was only a small chance that Clarke was going to do something vindictive like buy four hundred boxes of condoms and a suspicious amount of beef jerky with Lexa’s credit card – a chance we must all take eventually.

It was definitely a relief when Clarke emerged from the store with only two coffee cups in hand and a bag of donuts between her teeth. “Her majesty’s coffee,” Clarke managed to snipe around the donut bag.

“I much prefer ‘royal highness’. But thank you.” She took a sip and sighed at the familiar disappointment of gas station coffee – it was like coming home after a long day to the familiarity of a spouse you wish you hadn’t married. Just blissful. “Wow. You’ve got my coffee order down to a science.”

Clarke nodded. “I’ve had time. In the morning you drink it black, but after the sun sets you like it with 2% milk and just a bit of sugar. You’re like a werewolf who can only drink coffee that doesn’t taste like it was brewed around a campfire in the Vietnam War during the haunting light of a full moon.”

“Hey, never begrudge someone their coffee order. You drink it with honey and skim milk, but if you’ve already had three cups of coffee that day, you switch to half-decaf. We’ve all got our weird things.”

“You know my coffee order too,” Clarke hummed into her cup. “How flattering.”

At that point, there wasn’t much in the way of day-to-day habits that Lexa didn’t know about Clarke and she suspected Clarke knew as much about her. She inspected one of the donuts that Clarke handed her. “Wow. We really are married aren’t we?”

Clarke laughed through her nose while she chewed on one of the donuts before making a noise of agreement. “Told you so,” she said once she had swallowed. "Once you’ve got each other's coffee orders to the letter, it's all downhill from there.

There were worse people to be married to, Lexa supposed.

“And donuts, huh? Now you’re getting the mall cop experience.”

“That was the goal.” After a few moments of contented silence and stereotypical police behavior, Clarke cleared her throat and turned her head to look out the passenger window. Her arm was draped across the windowsill, rings tapping lightly against the metal siding of the car door. "Sorry. About last night."

She remembered.

"I'm not," Lexa found herself saying with a confidence she didn't feel.

Clarke shot her an amused look out of the corner of her eye. "Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Alright."

Lexa nodded and took another sip of her coffee. "Alright," she echoed.
anyways. three more chapters?? four?? if i don't know, who the hell does.

next chap is probably what you guys have waited 10 chaps for, i assume, so here's to whenever i get that up.

here's some music, which is off this band's first album BEFORE they had their brief fame. what's weird is that i don't like their famous album/songs, but this album is honestly really great. i sincerely recommend you listen to aim and ignite in it's entirety. but do as you will.

until next time.
there is no signal, stop waiting for one

Chapter Notes

hope y'all blew up some shit on the 4th. even if you aren't american - nobody should ever feel excluded from pyrotechnic celebrations of destructive merriment.

well, anyways. this is at least...in part what you guys were here for, I assume?? i proudly hold the title of 'least romantic person on the planet', so apologies in advance. i love how some of you are still concerned with plot like you have real faith in me to surprise you at this point. i promise im exactly as predictable as i seem. i'll prove it to you next chapter.

but you know what they say: you get what you pay for.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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The end of the ride-along found them responding to reports of a fight outside of one of the trashier college bars on the edge of campus boundaries – and that was truly saying something. Technically, the jurisdiction was a bit of a cluster fuck in the area, but the county police usually left the bars to the campus police until they requested a real police presence. If the real police came running every time some drunken kid took a swing to impress his friends, they might as well start paying rent.

When she rolled up to the scene, though, there was a worryingly large crowd gathered. The only thing worse than college students was college students in a crowd. They bonded together like nuclear particles and started setting things on fire or pissing in weird places. And like nuclear particles, the only way to get them to separate was with violent upheaval and cataclysmic explosions. Or something. Lexa got a C in chemistry.

“Shit,” Lexa murmured. “You can stay in the car if you want.”

Clarke shook her head and reached for the passenger door handle. “No, no. You said you wanted to show me the one out of ten times when the job’s interesting. Consider me interested.”

“Alright, just stay on the periphery and clear out if things go South. Or East. Or west or North or any other direction you don’t like. Just...be careful.” As an afterthought, Lexa twisted in her seat to snag her extra jacket from the back and tossed it to Clarke. “Wear this so nobody fucks with you if the crowd gets crazy.”

“Aye aye, captain.” Clarke held up the jacket and pointed to the printing on the back before shrugging it on. “Oh, I’ve been promoted.”

The knowledge that Clarke was in her jacket and had promised to stay back released Lexa to focus fully on the situation at hand. She barked at the gawkers to stand back and clear the area while she pushed through to the center. By the time she managed to sift through the booze-soaked crowd, the only one still in the center was a college kid curled up on his side and groaning. A large laceration
sent blood spilling down his brow and across the left side of his face while he clutched miserably at his stomach.

Lexa dropped to her knees beside him and tried to coax him into conversation, but all he could manage were more groans and a few incoherent complaints about his condition. A few bouncers from the bar were hovering uncertainly nearby and she snapped for them to bring towels. After applying pressure to his head and successfully annoying him into more conversation, she grabbed her radio.

“77 to Dispatch.”

“Speak and be heard, 77.”

(Fucking Jasper.)

“I need fireboard at Pike’s for a head injury. Send County too, I think it’s an assault.”

“10-4. Do you want another patrol team with you for crowd control?”

“Yeah, you’d better send another team.”

“10-4, vehicle 36 are you direct?”

“36 direct, ETA 7 minutes.”

“77 direct.”

“10-4, fireboard and County en route 77.”

“10-4 thank you dispatch.”

The groaning kid began to writhe more insistently and tried to sit up. “I-I can’t see,” he stammered, whipping his head around dangerously. “I can’t see anything!”

Lexa pushed firmly against his shoulder to hold him down. “You have a head injury. You’re going to be fine, though. What’s your name? Can you tell me what happened to you?”

He shook his head frantically, still trying to crawl out of Lexa’s grip. “I can’t see. What’s happening?”

When someone placed a hand on her shoulder, Lexa stiffened. Clarke’s voice, however, released the tension as quickly as it had set in. “Some student over there said a few older guys were strung out on something and started wailing on the poor kid,” she said, squeezing Lexa’s shoulder and leaning closer to murmur in her ear. “They’re still here.”

Shit.

Where was County when you needed them?

A sudden bout of shouting and cursing put her back on defensive mode and she rose to her knees to find the source. By the time she located the two men shoving onlookers and pushing towards the center, it was too late to prevent them from crowding up behind Clarke and grabbing her arm. Their eyes were wild and unfocused, ringed red from whatever the hell they were on while their
breathing heaved in uneven, ragged patterns. Most of the assaults on campus were drug or alcohol related. Nothing new, but no less dangerous.

Clarke made an attempt to wrench her arm free and pushed at her attacker’s chest, but whatever he was on rendered him either incapable of feeling her resistance or incapable of caring. Probably both.

It didn’t matter, though. Lexa was already on her feet and cracking a neck-snapping punch across the bridge of his nose before he could get much farther. Clarke would have toppled after him if Lexa hadn’t grabbed the back of her borrowed jacket and tugged her back against her body before he could take her with him. If Clarke was shaken up at all, Lexa didn’t have time to console her (though knowing Clarke she’d already let it roll off her).

“Watch the kid,” Lexa said quickly, brushing Clarke behind her towards their terrified patient. The words had barely left her mouth before the other attacker had seized a handful of Lexa’s jacket for a slow, clumsy right hook.

Nothing was better than when an asshole laid hands on her. That gave Lexa full authority to kick their ass until County got there. She took back her previous wishes.

County could take their damn time.

Dodging easily under his swing, Lexa brought her knee up into his groin and swung an elbow up into jaw. Contrary to popular belief, fighting below the belt is totally worth it. Once he had stumbled back enough for a full swing, she was able to land two swift blows to his weakened jaw and solar plexus. From there all she had to do was give him a hard knock on his doubled-over back before he was sprawled on the ground without the energy or desire to get back up. His skinnier counterpart was too busy howling around his broken nose to go another round with her.

Threat neutralized.

Hell. Fucking. Yes.

Also, ouch. Kicking ass is as exhausting as it is inefficient.

Lexa shook her aching knuckles at her side and hissed out a loud sigh. She allowed her adrenaline to bleed out of her muscles and turned to address the victim with what little energy she had left. Unfortunately, she must have pushed Clarke back a little too hard because when she turned back around, Clarke was sitting dazed on her ass. Lexa grimaced and held a slightly bloody hand out to help her back up.

Clarke took the offered hand with something close to awe on her face – something that Lexa had actually never seen. “Holy shit that was hot!”

Fuck.

Smooth as always, Lexa released Clarke’s hand in her embarrassment and dropped her right back on her ass. “Fuck, sorry. Give me your hand again,” she stuttered, wiping her hand off on the side of her pants before holding it out. “Kinda sweaty.”

“Well, you were cool for like six seconds,” Clarke teased, accepting the gesture again. When she’d been pulled up, she grimaced and rubbed at her hip. “That’s six seconds longer than you usually manage.”

Lexa rubbed ruefully at the back of her head, still holding fast to Clarke’s hand with her free one.
“Easy come, easy go. Are you okay?”

Clarke squeezed her hand. “A little weirdly turned on, but I’ll live.”

“Turned on by what?” Lexa laughed, scrubbing even harder at the back of her head like some teenager who’s never seen a human girl before. “My sweaty hands?”

Instead of releasing Lexa’s hand, Clarke grabbed her other one and laughed. “Mine are too! My heart’s going a mile a minute.”

“Mine are sweatier,” Lexa challenged, flipping Clarke’s hands so her palms were facing upwards. “Did you see me kick those guys’ asses?”

“Oh, yes,” Clarke hummed, just the slightest bit patronizing. “It was very impressive. You’re very strong.”

Lexa laughed. “Yeah it was. And I am. I don’t like to make a big deal out of it.”

Swinging their arms a bit, Clarke rolled her eyes. “Of course you don’t. Modesty is just another one of your charms.”

“Modesty and sweaty hands. It’s a wonder I’m single.”

Fireboard chose that moment to arrive in a blaze of red and blue lights – timely as always – and a familiar face hopped out of the passenger seat. “Woods! This is a scene I’ve missed lately. Glad to see you out of the office,” the paramedic teased.

“Lincoln.” Lexa dropped Clarke’s hands and met him halfway to clasp his arm in greeting. “County told me to stop fighting people. I’m convinced it’s the only reason I got promoted two years ago.”

“Looks like it didn’t work,” Lincoln laughed, taking in the three groaning, battered men on the ground. “What’s the story?” His colleagues started unloading stretchers and first aid kits while he surveyed the scene.

“To be fair, only two of them are my fault. White shirt got jumped by the other two and I jumped them. There was a whole lot of jumping going on, Line,” Lexa advised.

“Isn’t there always around here? How’s Octavia?” He asked casually.

Lexa rolled her eyes. “Oh, just ask her out already. She’ll say yes.”

He nodded his understanding with a bashful smile before kneeling to evaluate the only victim who hadn’t really brought their injuries upon themselves. Lexa let Lincoln and his team take over while she radioed in to Jasper to update him on the situation.

County wasn’t far behind. Two cars rolled up to the scene with all the fashionable lateness of a department that would rather get there after the dumb college kids were done beating the shit out of each other. It was a habit born from experience.

It was just Lexa’s luck that County sent the right officers for a happy family reunion.

“Look, Lieutenant: it’s little Columbo!”

Lexa gave her a wry smile. “Fuck, you’re old. Time to update your references, Anya. What the hell took you so long?”
“Am I late?” Anya asked, looking around with a practiced disinterest.

“You know damn well you’re late.”

“Yeah, I know. I just got held up by not wanting to be on time,” she said unapologetically. Anya had probably heard Lexa’s ID attached to the call and decided she should stop for dinner and a leisurely stroll around the park before helping her out. The only reason she didn’t take another few years before gracing them with her company was the presence of her lieutenant looming behind her with a stern face, barely masking the twinkle in his eyes.

“Looks like you have things handled,” the lieutenant laughed with a kind smile.

Lexa reached for his hand and clasped arms with the enormous man. “Uncle Gus,” she said warmly. “I haven’t seen you in a while.”

“That’s Lieutenant to you, kid.”

“Excuse me, Uncle Lieutenant Gus.”

He rewarded her quip with a deep, rumbling laugh and pulled her in for a tight hug. Uncle Gus always bragged that he only bulked up to get better at hugging. It seemed to have worked for him. “Couldn’t resist a little family reunion. Your application’s in background investigation by the way. If all goes well, you should have an offer by graduation.”

Lexa scoffed and pulled a face. “And work with you two? Gee, what a treat.”

Gustus gestured over Lexa’s shoulder to where Clarke was speaking with Lincoln while the other paramedics patched up and interviewed the injured men. “Who’s the pretty girl?”

“You know Clarke; she’s our head dispatcher – the same Clarke from that, uh, incident with the angry ex-boyfriend that you helped me…solve. Off-record,” Lexa trailed off when she received a dawning of understanding across Gus’s face. It had been a while ago, but Gus had always had a keen memory despite never having met the girl he stuck his neck out for. “She’s been riding with me tonight to get a taste for the elegant art of campus police.”

“How romantic,” he crooned. Gustus never did know when to mind his own damn business. Lexa’s parents hadn’t cared much for parenting, but Gustus was always sure to interrogate her about every algebra test, television show, and fleeting fancy she was involved in. It was kind of nice in the wake of such uninterested parents, but Gus was still an enormous pain in her ass.

“I wasn’t trying to be romantic,” she muttered, digging an elbow into his side. But now that he’d mentioned it, maybe she should have reconsidered a bar brawl as a bonding activity.

Gus snorted. “Oh yeah, no kidding?”

“Shut up.”

Gus, as usual, did the complete opposite of shutting up. “She’s the one you’re living with temporarily, right?”

Typical nosy uncle stuff. She’d been presented with little choice but to spill her situation during one of his weekly phone calls. “Yeah, that’s her. I’m twenty-two and living on a couch.”

“Well if you weren’t so smitten, maybe you’d swallow your pride and move into Anya’s extra room,” he returned. “You don’t fool me for one second, Alexandria Woods.”
Lexa crossed her arms and tried not to pout too obviously. “Anya lives too far from campus. This is an easier arrangement. Besides, Clarke’s a way better cook than Anya can ever hope to be.”

“Whatever you say, kid.” He responded to Lexa’s glare with a playful shove, which from Gus was more like being pile-driven by a rhinoceros. “Hey, I’m not trying to get on your case. I’d stay with the pretty girl too.”

“Pretty girl?” Clarke sidled up to the two of them with a grin, hands tucked into the pockets of her jacket. “You wouldn’t happen to be talking about me.”

“No.” – “Yes.”

Lexa shot Gus a dirty look, but it only amused him further. “Lieutenant Gustus Woods,” he introduced himself, offering Clarke one of his bear-sized hands. “If my niece hasn’t made a move yet, please accept my humblest apologies on her behalf. She’s a bit on the constipated side of emotional vulnerability.”

Fuck.

“I’m gonna kill you,” Lexa murmured just loud enough for Gus to hear.

Clarke seemed absolutely delighted. “Clarke Griffin. I see where she gets her good looks from, Lieutenant. You might have hogged a bit of the charm, though.”

Gus looked, if at all possible, even more delighted. That was the worst possible turn of events. God forbid the two of them became friends.

“Lex,” Gus said, holding fast to Clarke’s hand and turning to give Lexa a disbelieving smile. “She’s a darling. What’s wrong with you, kid?”

“Yeah, what’s wrong with you?” Clarke teased.

Just the worst.

“Don’t you have actual work to do?” Lexa grumbled.

Mercifully, Gustus eased back on his teasing to finish talking with the paramedics and arrange transport from the hospital to lockup for the attackers. Miller and Raven were busy dispersing the crowd and Clarke was on the phone with Jasper, walking him through some paperwork that he should’ve been familiar with. That left Lexa just enough time to get her knuckles bandaged and regret the retrospectively awful decision to bring Clarke on a ride-along. What the fuck was wrong with her? She basically invited Clarke to sit in a car for eight hours with a grand finale of getting assaulted by tweekers. Real fucking suave.

“You alright?” Clarke took a seat next to her on the back bumper of the ambulance and took one of Lexa’s hands to inspect it. At the very least, it was slightly less sweaty than it had been several minutes prior.

“Yeah. I feel like an idiot, but physically I’m just fine,” she joked humorlessly. The adrenalin had long since faded to exhaustion and her whole body ached with the exertion.

“Why’s that?”

Lexa sighed. “I shouldn’t have brought you along tonight. This has got to be, hands down, the lamest thing I’ve ever done to spend time with someone.”
Clarke smoothed a thumb over the bandages on her knuckles and rolled her eyes fondly. “Oh, please. We’ve made better out of worse. Time to face the facts, Woods: you’ll never reach a level of lameness that I won’t be endeared to.”

“We’ll see about that.”

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The end of the night found them alone, filing some last minute paperwork and logging the equipment back in from the patrol teams. Lexa would have stayed longer to get ahead on some of the event requests, but Clarke basically dragged her out the door. The moon was full and bright, long shadows cast like stalking beasts from trees and lampposts that crawled across pavement and grass. Most of the students had stumbled home and the parties were all over, so the campus was back to that Sunday morning peace that settled in after a long weekend of partying and debauchery. It was one of Lexa’s favorite times – that sweet spot between the weekend partygoers and the morning joggers when everything was still and solitary.

Instead of walking back to Clarke’s apartment, Lexa found her feet wandering towards the quad and the library, subconsciously bent on prolonging the peace of a sleeping campus. Clarke followed without question, holding the collar of Lexa’s extra jacket tight against her neck to ward off the bitter cold of late winter with one hand, while the other held Lexa’s elbow lightly. When her feet stopped behind the library in front of the vivid mural of the chapel, she was as surprised as Clarke seemed.

“They haven’t cleaned it off yet?”

Lexa shrugged. “They haven’t cleaned any of them off yet. Most people feel weird treating something so artistic as vandalism.”

“Not you, though.”

“Eh, I don’t know,” Lexa said honestly. “Maybe it can be both. It’s vandalism, but it’s also art. It makes for good publicity anyways.”

“Hm.”

Lexa smiled and gave Clarke an easy look. “What, you don’t think so?”

“It’s a little gimmicky.”

That was true enough. However, there was no denying the skill involved. The vandal may have been a petty criminal and a bit of a cocky asshole, but they were no slouch with paint. The mural was particularly pretty in the bright light of the moon, so Lexa plopped wordlessly into the grass and waited for Clarke to join her. She did, but not before producing a silver flask, sloshing with a few swallows of strong liquor.

“I can’t drink on duty,” Lexa admonished, pushing the flask away when Clarke tried to offer her some.

“You’re not on duty.”
“I’m in uniform.”

“So take it off.”

How do you say no to that?

Lexa considered Clarke for a moment, checking for signs of an impending prank or witty set-up, but she found nothing. While she wasn’t about to strip naked behind the library just for a few mouthfuls of liquor with a pretty girl, Lexa unbuttoned and cast off her shirt and jacket – the only articles of her uniform that identified her as campus police. She was left only in her uniform pants, belt, and an undershirt. The whole thing was a kind of awful idea. It was way too fucking cold for any of that nonsense.

“Cold?”

“Fucking frozen,” Lexa cursed, wrapping her arms around herself for warmth.

Clarke waved the flask in front of her face again and Lexa snatched it. The two mouthfuls of whiskey she tossed back would have to suffice for warmth. When Clarke tried to take the flask back, Lexa held it out of reach. “Hey, you’re in uniform too – and half of it’s my uniform.”

Clarke scowled, but pulled off Lexa’s jacket without complaint and tossed it at her face. “Fuck,” she muttered, undoing the top button of her dispatcher’s shirt before pulling it over her head. Thankfully, she was wearing an undershirt as well. Lexa hadn’t really considered that she might not be when she made the suggestion – not that it would have been an entirely tragic turn of events if she hadn’t been.

Lexa grinned, eyes trailing down Clarke’s bare arms and the delicate slope of her neck and collarbones. “Cold?”

“Alright you got me naked, now get me drunk,” Clarke said, snatching the flask back and swallowing a hearty amount of liquor. “Not that there’s even enough in here to get my left leg buzzed.” She sloshed the dregs around in her flask gloomily and shivered. “We’re gonna get sick.”

“Probably,” Lexa agreed absently. She knew Clarke was saying words, but the moonlight in her hair and across her shoulders seemed just a little more pressing. Clarke passed the flask back, though there wasn’t much left.

“This is without a doubt one of the most unconventional dates I’ve ever been on,” Clarke announced. “So congrats on that.”

Lexa accidentally inhaled some of the whiskey she was attempting to swallow and spluttered into the back of her hand. “W-what now? This wasn’t a date.”

“I don’t know, Woods. You bought me dinner, we went to a wild college party and carried some guy home, you held the door for me, I met the family, and then you fought a guy who touched me. I think you accidentally took me on a date, buddy.” She offered Lexa a sympathetic pat on the arm before retrieving her flask and tossing it onto her discarded shirt.

“It wasn’t – that is, I just...huh.” Lexa gave Clarke a thoughtful look before nodding reluctantly. “Shit, you’re right. I’m the worst.”

Clarke nodded. “Yeah. But at least you know I’m gonna go home with you at the end of the night, no matter how terrible you are – not that you’re terrible. It was actually weirdly fun.”
Lexa yawned and blinked away the exhaustion tugging at her eyelids. “Weirdly fun is about the only level of fun I reach.”

“That’s okay. I just…I just like being around you. In whatever capacity that may be,” Clarke assured her, almost bashful in her delivery. It was the absent twisting of her rings that gave her away. “Weird; mundane; hectic. It’s all fun to me. I’m glad I get to go home with you.”

Without really thinking about the consequences, Lexa smirked and asked, “Yeah? Am I going to get lucky?”

God, those words actually left her mouth. What the hell was wrong with her?

Clarke had the good grace to laugh instead of slap her or call her out on her inability to be cool for two fucking seconds. “Maybe. I don’t know, Jake likes you.”

“Oh good.”

No, not good. Not good at all. Clarke had shuffled over to get closer and share warmth in light of their poor wardrobe choices and every neuron in Lexa’s brain was screaming at her to make a move. Just kiss her. She’d done it before. Clarke was giving her…some kind of look – wide eyes and soft expression. Was there some secret fucking signal that everyone else was privy to? What was the signal? Was that look the signal? Or was she waiting for the goddamn Bat Signal above Gotham Fucking City before she just did something. Holy shit.

But her brain was full of small idiots who were almost always wrong about everything, so she tried her best to ignore it entirely.

What was she gonna do: lean over and kiss Clarke Griffin? Fat fucking chance. Life didn’t just work out like that. Clarke was brilliant, beautiful, and destined for some shiny doctor job and a shiny life and a shiny family and all the good things the world had to offer. Lexa was destined for a cramped apartment and a shitty salary from the dusty precinct over in County. Her family was broken, she had no money, a brain that couldn't keep up with itself, and the emotional range of a doorknob. Things like – people like Clarke didn’t happen to her.

And yet.

“What are you thinking about? It’s always hard to tell with you,” Clarke whispered, reaching out to place her hand just over Lexa’s, so only their fingertips were pressed together. She still had that look, but Lexa wasn’t any closer to deciphering it or doing something about it.

Lexa’s mouth apparently decided to just go with honesty without her express permission. “How out of my league you are, if I’m being truthful.”

It was Clarke’s turn to choke on nothing. “What league? I don’t have a league, Woods. Holy shit.”

“Everyone has a league, Clarke. Your league is doctors and Finn Collins and $100 whiskey and blonde hair,” she said, waving her hand vaguely in front of her face. “That’s your league.”

At least Clarke found it all amusing. She could barely restrain her mirth, smothering a grin with the hand that wasn’t pressed over Lexa’s. “How is ‘blonde hair’ a defining part of someone’s league? Are the lower tiers restricted to liars, frauds, and the dark-haired?”

“Okay, first of all, I think you’re mixing up the Circles of Hell and the tiers of leagues. Second of all, I’m retracting ‘blonde hair’ as a contributing factor to your league since you want to make a goddamn production of it. And third of all, you can’t argue your way out of your league.”
“Are you gonna argue your way into my league,” Clarke said with a wink.

Lexa’s head whipped back towards the mural when she realized how close they had gotten during their dumb argument. “N-no. I’m – no.”

Clarke’s index finger tapped lightly against Lexa’s knuckle until Lexa turned back to face her. “Don’t overthink things so much. Life’s not about what we mathematically deserve, you know. Just surround yourself with the things you like and let the rest play out as it will. And besides: as far as I’m concerned, you deserve the world.”

“What I like huh?” Lexa mused, stilling Clarke’s fingers by trapping them against the ground.

Clarke shrugged. “Yeah, sure. Why shouldn’t we?”

Well, bravery was just another form of foolishness. Perhaps Clarke had a point.

“Right now,” Lexa said slowly, “I kind of want to kiss you. Like, a lot.”

“Ha! Called it,” Clarke chortled. With that romantic declaration, she turned around, grabbed Lexa’s face, and pulled her into an abrupt kiss – which was fine except for the sudden arrhythmia and impending cardiac arrest. Other than that minor roadblock to Lexa’s well being, everything was great. The kiss came with all that gross romantic stuff like stars exploding behind your eyelids and awkward first-time fumbling seeming charming rather than embarrassing. All that lame stuff.

Technically, it wasn’t their first time, but Lexa decided through the haze of her cardiac arrest that she was counting it as such. She had felt too guilty during the first one and was so sure that Clarke hadn’t wanted her, that it was a memory filled with more anxiety than joy. This one was much better. Clarke’s nose was colder than her hands – a jarring contrast to the warmth of her mouth – and wisps of her hair tickled at Lexa’s cheeks. But it was nice. Not in spite of those things, but because of them.

Lexa was busy having a pleasant heart attack or whatever, so Clarke had to be the one with the mental capacity to end it. She broke it off softly, brushed one last kiss against her nose and one more against her cheek for good measure, then turned back to face the mural like the whole thing had never happened. Truth be told, Lexa wasn’t entirely convinced it had happened. Her only proof was the lingering tickle on her cheeks and the barely familiar taste on her lips.

“Um, thanks?” Lexa tried.

“You’re welcome.”

“I would’ve gotten around to it.”

Clarke seemed doubtful. “Sure you would have.”

“What, you don’t think I would’ve?”

“Woods, you’ve had three years.”

The implication that Lexa had been subconsciously pining after Clarke for the entirety of their acquaintance was as insulting as it was true. “What was I supposed to do: just kiss you out of the blue while we were arguing over paperwork? These things take time,” she defended. “I was waiting for – for a signal or something, I don’t know.”

“These things” don’t take three years in my experience. Excuse the hell out of me for stealing your
thunder, hotshot. Next time, I’ll wait for the burning bush or the plague of locusts or whatever holy sign you’ve been on the lookout for.”

Lexa scowled at her folded legs, still bitterly ecstatic that she’d kissed Clarke, even if she hadn’t gotten the last laugh. It was hard to be angry when a big, stupid grin was trying its damndest to split her scowl in half. “Next time?” She hedged, glancing at Clarke out of the corner of her eye.

“One can only hope. And wait apparently.”

That was...fair.

If there was one thing Lexa had gotten good at during the last three years it was eating her pride in Clarke’s company. She let out a long sigh and placed her discarded jacket around Clarke’s shoulders. “Sorry. I’m not good at...” she trailed off and gestured helplessly, “this.”

“Me neither,” Clarke said softly, pulling the jacket tighter under her chin. “I’ve kind of had a rough go of the whole ‘trusting people’ thing.” She fiddled with the zipper of the jacket and released a long breath that puffed out white against the backdrop of the cold sky. “It’s just easy to be around you – as easy as being alone. And if you need another three years, I’ll give it to you. You’re my-“ Clarke’s mouth closed as she searched for the right word, brow furrowed in concentration. “Person.”

“I’m your person?”

“Yep.”

Lexa laughed quietly and pulled the other jacket up over her shoulders. Nothing had ever sounded quite as appealing as being Clarke’s person. “Alright, I can be your person since you’ve so humbly agreed to be mine. But let’s not wait another three years next time.”

“Agreed.” A violent shiver ran down Clarke’s spine and she stifled a sneeze against her arm. “Okay, this is beautiful and critical to our character arcs, but my ass is literally frozen to the ground right now. I vote we move this back to the apartment.”

They were both shivering at that point, so Lexa nodded and forced her stiff limbs into a standing position. She offered Clarke a hand, pulled her to her feet, and zipped her jacket up under Clarke’s chin. “I’m hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” Clarke admonished, hooking her arm around Lexa’s elbow and tugging her towards the apartment. “I’ll make waffles.”

+++
enjoy this song while i go tenderly rest my head in a fully operational car compactor.

as usual: thanks for all the comments and support, on this site and tumblr. i don't publish a lot, but i'll get around to privately responding to messages there, i've just been hung up on stuff. i get them all and love them all, though. and i love you. yes you. with the eyes.

next chap likely won't be until monday since im going out of town straight to hell. probably gonna see some of ya'll there judging by the kind of tags i spot round ao3. i'll be the one in the charming personality.
i just kind of feel like i've had all the stuffing taken out of me lately, you feel? im all out of stuffing. im...yeah, idk. worked hard on this chap anyways. lot of these last few chaps were really rough and unfinished, so updates are harder.

if u find my stuffing, let me know please. i miss it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+++ 

“Campus police, Woods speaking.”

“Hello again, it’s Maya.”

“Good morning. What can I do for you?”

“You seem cheerful.”

“I’m always cheerful.”

“Sure you are. I was wondering how much you know about Finn Collins?”

“Not much. He’s that rich kid hinting at being the vandal isn’t he?”

“Yes, that’s the newest kick. It could easily be nothing more than a publicity stunt or something, but the guy’s been hinting pretty heavily lately. Are you considering him a suspect?”

“I suppose I am. Do you think it could be him?”

“You’re asking me now? Should I be flattered or concerned?”

“Concerned, maybe. I don’t know, I’m definitely at the point where I’m willing to take suggestions. You might be better qualified to hazard a guess than I am.”

“What’s wrong? You don’t sound as invested as you usually do.”

“Maggie, the last thing I want to sound is invested. In anything. Particularly this ridiculous case.”

“You didn’t think it was so ridiculous a few weeks ago.”

“I also didn’t think I’d spend fifty thousand words falling in love with my impossible coworker this year, but we’ve all got shit we’ve got to deal with.”

“Uh, sure. Does that mean you don’t care anymore?”

“I – I don’t know. I just don’t know, Merlin.”
“If you’re going to butcher my name, can you at least do it in a more consistent and believable manner?”

“Sorry, Madison. It’s a running gag I’ve kind of lost control of – do try to understand.”

“Sure, Larry. Whatever you say.”

“Don’t be childish. What I’m trying to say is that…well, the whole thing is a little pointless isn’t it? From the beginning I had little interest in elevating this case to something it’s not. It’s vandalism. Do you have any idea how many instances of vandalism we’ve had since this case alone?”

“Some, I would imagine.”

“I’ve personally signed off on thirty-eight incidents. Why is this one special?”

“You know why it’s special. It’s incredible!”

“Exactly. How about I invest my time into watching stairwells so maintenance doesn’t have to have a poor facilities worker spend their day scrubbing at crudely drawn testicles rather than invest it trying to stop some illegal artwork?”

“Is this some kind of existential crisis? Because I’ve got class in like ten minutes.”

“Who do you take me for? My crises know full well they’ve been budgeted only as much time as a coffee break or a commercial intermission.”

“How efficient.”

“That’s not the point. I think we need to regroup. Long story short: I remain bureaucratically interested in catching the vandal, but have flagged somewhat in regards to personal motivation. If you have leads, though, I will consider them.”

“Wow, your crises are efficient. Well, if you’re asking my personal opinions on Finn as a lead, I’m not convinced that it’s him. But I’m also not convinced that it isn’t? Sorry, that’s not very helpful. What I’m saying is that he’s worth talking to at the very least. Last night he posted a picture of himself winking next to about thirty spray paint cans. He definitely wants people to think it could be him.”

“Maybe it’s just for attention.”

“Could be. Doesn’t he get enough attention, though?”

“That’s true.”

“If you have a way to get in contact with him, it might be worth it.”

“Unfortunately, you’re probably right. I’ll let you know how that turns out, but right now I’ve got to go unlock the Dean’s office again for the thousandth time. I’ll talk to you later, Myra.”

“Until then.”

+++
Lexa leaned back in her office chair and tried to block out her steadily growing headache. Between Jasper’s internet videos and Raven’s rousing performance of the entire fucking anthology of that one band she was into, Lexa was sorely missing Clarke’s company. Raven wasn’t even supposed to be there in the afternoon and Jasper was definitely not supposed to be using their internet to watch grown-ass men do strange things for YouTube funding. Yet here they all were.

“I’ve got to go unlock an office in the student union,” Lexa said, pulling her jacket on and grabbing her keys. “Lock the office behind you if you leave.”

“Wait hold up,” Raven called, ducking out of the radio closet. “I’ve got to return a textbook to some kid who works at the tech store in the student union. Can I tag along?”

“No.”

“Great! I’ll get my jacket,” Raven said, cheerfully ignoring her.

Lexa rolled her eyes, but didn’t have the energy to argue. Instead, she held the door open and locked it behind the both of them before hauling herself up into the driver’s seat of her truck. Raven chattered the whole way there about some grant she got to blow up the moon or whatever. Things just kind of happened to Raven at alarming rates and frequencies, so her wild stories all blended together after a while.

The union was bustling and annoying, as it always was around lunchtime on weekdays. Raven left her borrowed textbook with some guy who had even worse game than Lexa. He kept trying to hint that they should get dinner, but the hints bounced off of Raven like water off wax. His last ditch invitation to work on their senior projects together ended with Raven telling him, “Wick, I’d have better luck building a nuclear reactor out of a live pig and a mailbox than trying to compromise with your dumb ideas.”

Whatever the hell that meant.

Poor Wick.

As they left Lexa shook her head in disappointment at him. “That was weak,” she said quietly.

“I know,” he grumbled, tucking a laptop under his arm and stalking to the back of the store.

Afterwards, they let one of the student clubs into their cramped office while the two co-presidents fought over whose fault it was. It wasn’t until they were headed back to the car that Raven grabbed Lexa around her waist and pulled her back against one of the door’s thresholds, just out of sight of anyone lingering in the hallway. When she tried to protest, Raven shushed her sharply and pointed around the corner of the wall.

Speak of the devil, Finn Collins was only a few feet away, running his hand through his obnoxious hair and laughing at something someone was saying to him. And speaking of the other (prettier) devil, he was conversing with none other than Clarke Griffin.

“Why are we hiding?” Lexa whispered, trying to push Raven away with her elbow.

Raven held fast to her waist. “I thought it was obvious.”

“Well it’s not.”
“You need dirt on Finn Collins – I heard you on the phone earlier. He could be the Bitch Bandit! Besides that, you’ve gotta wonder what your wife’s relationship with the dude is.”

Lexa growled in the back of her throat. “I know what my wife – er, Clarke’s relationship with him is. They went on a few dates. That’s all, Reyes.”

“I don’t buy it,” Raven said, shaking her head against Lexa’s shoulder. “A guy lets you drive his ’69 Camaro, your souls are bonded for life. I’d blow him in front of the entire union lunch crowd just to sit behind the wheel.”

“What? Ew, no.” Lexa made one last attempt to free herself from Raven’s iron grip, but was kept firmly in place. “I don’t want to know that.”

Raven shushed her again and gestured for her to listen to the conversation a few feet away.

“Yeah, but then all my socks and underwear keep turning pink. Isn’t red a light color?”

Clarke laughed and shook her head. “Finn, since when is red a light color? Unless the color is close to white, don’t wash it with your whites. Have you been using cold water? Always use cold water.”

Finn sighed, pushing his hair back again in a nervous tick. “Why are there so many rules? Is this something that everyone knows how to do?”

“It should be. It’s just laundry, dude. Everyday you’re one step closer to being a normal Earth human,” she teased.

Finn shrugged helplessly and shoved his hands in his pockets. “We’ll see about that. I never realized what an idiot I am until I met you.”

Clarke gave him a sympathetic look and hiked her backpack up higher on her shoulder. “Hey, don’t sweat it. I get that a lot.”

Raven snickered into Lexa’s shoulder. “Holy shit. She’s like his mother.”

“More like your mother, Reyes,” Lexa fired back. She had given up fighting their weird position and relaxed against Raven’s hold for lack of any better way to hold her weight.

Instead of snapping back, Raven just shrugged and tapped her chin on Lexa’s shoulder. “I can’t even really dispute that.”

“Your Twitter’s been blowing up lately,” Clarke continued, shutting down Raven’s whispered conversation. “Very mysterious.”

Finn gave a dismissive snort. “Yeah, well, you were right. People are always happy to find their mystery man is actually someone they already know. What’s the fun in a mystery where the bad guy turns out to be someone nobody’s ever heard of?” He mused.

Clarke huffed out a laugh and shook her head. “That’s fair. Imagine how lame it would be if I suddenly claimed to be that vandal. I’d get like, two likes. Most people would too, I imagine. You’re making all their dreams come true, Collins.”

He smiled sheepishly and rubbed at the back of his head like the giant child he was. Raven jabbed a finger into Lexa’s side. “Ouch, what?”
“I can hear your biased narration from here, Woods. Stay on target.”

“Sorry.”

Finn rubbed the back of his head like a perfectly capable adult male who just so happened to be terrible at basic adult tasks, which was completely understandable and not at all child-like. “I’m just stirring the pot. Admit to nothing and people are free to fill in the blanks in ways more creative than you could ever provide with the truth.”

“Exactly,” Clarke said with a grin. “Don’t tell me you’re not enjoying it, though.”

Raven jabbed another finger into Lexa’s spine to get her attention. “Stop that,” Lexa hissed, jostling their bodies together.

Holding fast and ignoring Lexa’s demands, Raven adopted a thoughtful expression. “Is it just me or does it kind of sound like Finn isn’t the vandal?”

Lexa hummed quietly. “I don’t know. It kind of sounds like that, but he’s being pretty vague. Clarke seems to know he’s full of shit, though.”

“She’s got a good sense for people,” Raven agreed. “Comfortable, boss?” She gave Lexa a little squeeze and placed her chin on her shoulder more firmly.

“Not the word I would use.”

“Promise me one thing, boss.”

Lexa grunted and tried to nudge Raven’s chin off her shoulder. “What?”

“You must promise not to fall in love with me.”

“Wish fucking granted,” Lexa muttered, finally succeeding in dislodging Raven’s chin from her shoulder with a jerk of her arm. “Shit, where did Collins go? Oh fuck, Clarke’s coming this way. Act natural.”

Whatever ‘natural’ was supposed to look like, neither of them managed it by the time Clarke came level with the door and spotted them. Raven had her ear pressed against the door and was knocking on it like she was looking for termites or some shit. Lexa couldn’t really fault her too badly, though, because her own ‘natural’ idea was holding her cell phone up like the only place she could locate reception was in some random fucking corner of the student union. Raven had started nervously humming the school’s fight song while she knocked for termites.

Clarke opened her mouth like she wanted to say something, but seemed to think better of it and shook her head. “You know what? I don’t want to know. Have fun.”

Raven had even less shame than Lexa initially suspected and called a cheerful, “bye Clarke!” at Clarke’s retreating form.

+++ 

“Did you have fun spying on me and Finn today?”
Lexa winced, but it wasn’t out of surprise of the question. They were sitting in Clarke’s kitchen eating the fish Clarke had cooked while Lexa prayed the topic wouldn’t come up. “Not really.”

“How about Raven?”

“Yeah, I think she might’ve had fun,” Lexa said, stirring her green beans around. “It was her idea,” she added childishly.

Clarke laughed, genuinely amused and it eased some of the tension. “Trust me, I figured as much. Did you learn anything of value?”

Lexa stuffed a forkful of food in her mouth while she considered the question, digging through the information she had gathered that day for anything useful. Nothing particularly stood out to her. “I don’t think so – just more questions, as usual.”

Clarke shot her sympathetic look and Lexa returned it with a helpless shrug and a small smile. She didn’t really want to discuss work anymore, but things had been kind of shy and new around the apartment. The last thing she wanted to do was take away Clarke’s outlet for safe conversation. Despite her usual swagger and good-nature ribbing, the girl was surprisingly timid about the evolving nature of their relationship. Lexa couldn’t tell if Clarke was afraid of hurting her or being hurt.

Lexa would have been content to ride out the tides of Clarke’s energy and confidence, being tugged along increasing intimacy at whatever breakneck pace she suspected Clarke would have wanted. That just wasn’t the case, though. She hadn’t anticipated being left feeling so wanting. Sleeping on the couch felt like sleeping a thousand miles away and sometimes she just wanted to reach out and touch her without feeling like she was trying to cross the border without a passport.

No, if Clarke thought she would damage Lexa with a touch, Lexa would simply have to convince her otherwise. And if Clarke was afraid of being damaged herself, Lexa would just have to hold her together by the nape of her own stubbornness.

Lexa Woods did not cower. And Lexa Woods wanted very little for herself.

But she did want Clarke.

“Can I help?”

The question stalled Lexa’s ruminations and she looked down to find she had finished her entire meal without realizing it. Clarke glanced between Lexa’s empty plate and her bewildered expression before laughing quietly and scraping half of her own meal onto Lexa’s plate.

She would have argued, but they both knew Lexa ate far more than Clarke did. And sometimes the kindest thing you can do for someone you love is accept their own kindness without objection. That, and Lexa was still pretty damn hungry.

“Thank you.”

Clarke nodded happily and gestured between them. “So, can I help? With all the questions you have, I mean.”

Well, she certainly couldn’t hurt. “Is Collins the vandal?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. He’s holding fast to the mystery of it all, for better or for worse. If you ask me, though: I don’t think so. It’s just a publicity game,” Clarke concluded before tipping
back the rest of her water.

Lexa chewed slowly, sifting through everything she thought she knew about the case. It all checked out more or less. “Yeah, you’re probably right. It’s like I’ve got all the pieces of the puzzle, but I have no idea how they fit together or what picture I’m supposed to be creating.” She snorted and dropped her chin onto her hand. “All this work over a bit of unregulated art.”

“Wow.” Clarke paused with her last bite halfway to her mouth. “I’ve never heard you call it art before. Not really.”

“That’s what it’s supposed to be isn’t it?” Lexa asked defensively. “I’m tired of fighting people on it.” She shook her head and stared into the contents of her water glass before letting out a quiet huff of laughter. “You were right from the start, you know? It wasn’t a game until I played it. I played my role admirably, did I not?”

Her tired grin was met by Clarke’s own. “You did.” She reached out and trailed the back of her fingers lightly down the side of Lexa’s cheek before seeming to remember her previous hesitations and retracted her hand. She gathered their empty plates and headed for the sink, slightly flustered. “You really did,” she repeated absently.

Lexa let out a heavy sigh as her eyes followed Clarke’s escape to the sink. Normally, Clarke would let her do the dishes, but the sink was as good a place as any to hide. And that was what she was doing, was it not? Hiding. Timid. On the precipice of something vast and unknown, but scared to jump in alone.

Shyness be damned, though.

They were not made of glass and they would not shatter each other if they were. Nobody had cracked or chipped in the three years they spent in close company and becoming softer towards one another certainly wouldn’t change that. And even glass can endure the beating of waves and sand for years, rounding out and shaping into something smooth, beautiful, and rare. Were they made of glass, Lexa would still want to endure each other.

But they were not.

They were built of sterner stuff.

And Lexa Woods deserved a bit of happiness for herself.

Pushing away from the counter with a confidence born from years of being swung at, pissed at, laughed at, and ignored, Lexa closed the distance to Clarke’s side in a few long strides and pulled the wet plate from Clarke’s hands. The plate was set aside somewhere on the counter – Lexa didn’t care to check where – while her other hand tapped the faucet off. Clarke’s hands were still soapy and her eyes were still wide and cautious when Lexa framed her face with sure hands and pulled her into a firm kiss.

The kiss was...decidedly less innocent than Lexa had intended. Or maybe she had gone into it
without any real, tangible intent. Whatever the case, she’d definitely lost control of the situation. But if she didn’t have control of the situation, and Clarke didn’t have control of the situation, then who the hell was flying the plane?

Some gay-ass pilot is who.

Lexa vaguely registered that Clarke required air to survive when she pulled back to heave in a few shaky breaths. It didn’t dissuade Lexa much, who moved to occupy her mouth with other things, like the line of Clarke’s jaw, the soft skin under her ear, and finally the column of her throat, while her hands slipped down to Clarke’s waist slowly – more concerned with the journey than the destination. She considered giving Clarke a break, but the hand fisted in her shirt tangled in the hair at the nape of her neck, holding her in place, so she abandoned the notion.

Eventually, Clarke grew impatient and tugged Lexa’s head back up to deprive each other of oxygen for a little while longer. Or forever, maybe. Being in control for a change was nice – Clarke a strangely docile, breathy mess under her hands. Lexa herself was more interested in teeth and force and pressure, while Clarke was more mesmerized by tongues and glancing touches, but somehow they managed a happy medium.

Things were kind of spiraling into something heavy and intoxicating when the shrill blare of Lexa’s work phone snapped her back to reality. She jerked back with a start and Clarke’s hand propped on the counter slipped.

“Shit!” She yelped, nearly tipping back into the dishwater. Lexa’s grip on her waist saved her from an unplanned bath.

Lexa heaved a growl of a sigh while her phone blared cheerfully from its place on her belt. Clarke seemed dazed, hands clutching at the material of Lexa’s shirt and eyes darting around for the source of the interruption. Without unhanding her, Lexa shifted her grip. One of her hands pressed Clarke close by the small of her back so her other could unclip her phone from her belt and receive the call.

“What?” She snapped. At the sound of her voice, Clarke’s hands tightened, pressing irreparable wrinkles into the lapels of her shirt. Some irrational part of Lexa’s brain, still feral and hazy from their kiss, commanded her arm to tighten possessively around Clarke’s waist.

“Woods!” A familiar voice filtered in from the tinny speaker on her phone. “Is it illegal to take all your clothes off and walk across campus. Like, I’m not – I’m not doin’ nothin’ illegal. I’m good. But like, good and naked. C’n I get in trouble for that?”

“Joey,” Lexa seethed, “I’m busy.”

On the other end of the phone, there was a bit of static and some clattering while the football player moved about. “You’re – oh shit, you’re busy. ‘M sorry. Lil’ drunk right now. You’re…oh snap, you’re with your lady friend.”

“Joey.”


“Yes, Joey, in case you forgot: I get paid to be there,” she explained impatiently. Clarke’s hands were wandering across the front of her body and she seriously needed to find a way to wrap up the phone call. “Now drink two glasses of water and go to bed – and don’t forget to set your alarm.”
“Good call, Woods. Imma go now so you can…whatever the classy word for ‘fuck’ is. Wit’ your lady friend. Hehe.”

“Goodnight, Joey,” she sighed. As an afterthought, “and keep your clothes on. You’re not allowed to be naked in public.”

“You sure?”

“As I’ll ever be.”

“Alright, peace out, Girlscout. Hey Colton, Woods says swim naked in the fountain or you’re a pussy-“

The call cut out and Lexa rolled her eyes. Leave it to Joey. “Sorry,” she muttered, clipping her phone back to her belt before curling a lock of Clarke’s hair around her finger. “I just…yeah. Sorry.”

Clarke relaxed her grip on Lexa’s shirt and tilted her head to the side with a sweet smile. “You know I was joking about waiting another three years to kiss you, right? You don’t owe me anything. And I don’t want – I don’t want to hurt you or push you into something you don’t want,” she said earnestly. “I want you, but I want you to be happy more.”

Lexa quirked an eyebrow and offered her a crooked smile. “Clarke. We are not glass. And this will not break us,” she said simply. “And I am happy.”

“Oh,” Clarke breathed, a little taken back. “Okay.” She nodded to herself, eyes traveling slowly across Lexa’s features in absent patterns. “Me too.”

“Good.”

“Um, yes. Good,” Clarke confirmed. Since she had ceased putting her tongue down Lexa’s throat and had to resort to actual words, a healthy blush had crept its way across her cheeks. It was ironic that she had chosen that moment to feel self-conscious. “Good.”

“Yes. It’s good,” Lexa echoed, grinning openly. “What? You’re choosing now to be embarrassed?”

Clarke laughed nervously and shook her head. “Ugh, I was fine until you did all that. Jesus, Woods. You just shoved me out of the gay tree and I hit every gay branch on the way down. That was lethal.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” she preened, leaning down to brush her nose along Clarke’s jaw. Clarke shivered slightly and trailed a finger in circles against Lexa’s back. Despite the nipping at her jaw, Clarke powered through her hitching breath with something resembling her former authority.

“If I let you sleep in my bed tonight, can you promise to behave? I have to be up at the hour of my death tomorrow morning and I can’t have any of that keeping me up, you hear?” Clarke demanded. It was a little watered-down with the way she clung and sighed at the attention.

Lexa shrugged and placed one last kiss below her jaw. “10-4. You have to let go of me first, though.”

+++
“I’ve got some good news, and I’ve got some bad news. What do you want first, boss?”

Lexa spared a glance in Octavia’s direction. “Bad news, I guess.”

“Trick question. It’s the same news, but it’s half good, half bad.”

“Out with it, Blake.”

Octavia pulled her laptop from the table and brought it over to Lexa’s desk. “Take a look at the vandal’s website.” She turned the screen and pointed at the banner across the donation site. It proudly declared that the vandal was retiring after one last heist, with the highest donation count yet. Despite it’s ambitious goal and the recency of its announcement, the marker was already far above its requirement. “Looks like the vandal’s retiring.”

“How is that bad news?” Lexa muttered, turning back towards her computer.

“It’s not really,” Octavia said carefully. “But if you don’t catch him this time, you’ll never be able to figure it out. There’s a lot of people out there who want to know the mastermind – or at least what they’re doing with all of the money.”

“Well maybe they should try catching him,” Lexa snapped, pounding a little harder than necessary on her keys. “He can paint the next mural on my forehead if he promises it’s the last one.”

Would she be disappointed if she never found out who the vandal was? Probably. Would she be irreparably obsessed with her nemesis’ identity until the end of her bitter days? Well, maybe. Jury was still out on that one.

“I think everyone’s going to try to catch him tonight,” Octavia mused. “You might not have to catch him.”

“Why is that?”

Bellamy pulled Octavia’s baseball cap down over her face and laughed while she cursed and struggled to pry it off her head. “Didn’t you read the website she keeps shoving in people’s faces? They promised the mural tonight. If he doesn’t get caught tonight, I’ll feed Octavia her hat.”

“You already have,” she spluttered, beating Bellamy’s shoulder with the offending garment.

“For once, I think the campus might be on our side on a Friday night,” Bellamy continued. He ignored Octavia’s assault and kept her at bay with one long arm. “It’s Friday the 13th, boss. Anything can happen!”

And it did.

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im...trying on the relationship dynamics. im just a security guard with a keyboard and a death wish.

part of me wants to recommend *this song*, but it's honestly kind of an acquired taste i think. hit or miss. in case it's a miss, i'll leave you with *this other song* for the hell of it. i like them both.

so yeah. idk my dudes. im a sad clown this week. i can still honk my nose a bit and take a pie to the face or whatever. hopefully, you have much more stuffing than i do. best wishes on your weekly endeavors - hit a home run for me.
As the night wore on, the campus came out in droves, trekking behind buildings and peering into loading docks and dark corners for a glimpse of the vandal. Most of them were drunk – as college students are wont to do on Friday nights – but the massive presence was enough to give Lexa pause. What was the vandal playing at? They had to have known their announcement would make their job a thousand times more difficult. If they meant what they said, then there was some larger plan at play.

As midnight rolled around, Lexa was still sitting stubbornly in the office caught between the burning desire to unmask the vandal and stubborn pride demanding she pretend she didn’t care one way or the other. Calls began pouring in as the night wound up, but there was no news that the vandal had been spotted.

Lexa gathered a stack of theft reports and headed towards the communications office to get them digitized. The door to the cramped monitor room was slightly ajar and she paused before pushing fully into the room. Monty was on duty, furiously typing on, not one, but two laptops propped on his knees. One was a jumble of code and indecipherable jargon, but the other was open to the vandal’s donation site. As he worked the code on his left, the computer on the right refreshed occasionally with new blurry pictures from around campus.

Lexa was a technological barbarian on the best of days, but she could spot a smoking gun when it presented itself.

Monty typed. The website updated.

Even with evidence of Monty’s involvement right in front of her, Lexa found herself no better off than before confirming her suspicions about the website. If Monty was working and another mural went up, then he wasn’t actually the vandal. What was she supposed to do? Charge him with making a website?

“Nice side-project,” Lexa said, announcing her presence.

Monty jumped and the right laptop clattered to the floor. “J-just updating my senior project,” he said nervously, pushing the fallen computer under the desk with his foot and hiding the other with his body. “It’s, uh, not what it looks like?”

“Are you sure?”
Monty grinned sheepishly. “Not really.”

“So it’s your website.” Lexa leaned against the doorframe and crossed her arms. “What did you mean back when you told me to consider the whole picture?”

Monty gave her a careful look, studying her face for signs of something Lexa couldn’t quite read. “It’s just a website.” With that cryptic, frustrating statement, Monty turned back to the main monitor to fiddle with something on LEADS. His dismissal wasn’t surprising, but it was annoying.

“Just a website,” Lexa echoed skeptically. “So you’re not involved?”

“Well I would hardly dare make that claim,” he muttered, eyes flitting distractedly between monitors and projects.

Lexa frowned at the back of Monty’s head and made a frustrated noise in the back of her throat. “I wish people would just stop assuming I have the capacity for riddles.”

Monty spared a glance over his shoulder, wearing a look that was about as close to irritation as Monty Green ever dared get. “Woods,” he sighed, typing away at a blinding speed, “I’m not trying to talk you in circles. It’s just a website.”

“That’s transparent,” Lexa huffed. “This isn’t about a website.”

Charitably, Monty gave her another glance over his shoulder, the second one more pointed. “I am being transparent. I. Made. The. Website,” he annunciated. “But you’re not here for a website.”

Lexa rolled her eyes. “Then what am I here for?”

“Whoever is vandalizing school property, I assumed.” Monty switched his computers and started in on a fresh page of bizarre code. “I told you: this is just a website.”

Lexa glared at Monty’s back and slammed the door as she turned back towards her own territory. Monty would be no more help to her.

Monty would be no more help to her.

Just a website.

Lexa hated mysteries.

But then, it was just a website – hardly a crime. Maybe she hadn’t been considering the whole picture, hung up as she was on rumors, websites, publicity stunts, and bad timing. She was trying to fit everything together in one neat package – a single mastermind capable of pulling strings across mediums and constraints. But there had been many historians who suspected that Shakespeare hadn’t been just one person. Many believed that Shakespeare was a single name that a large group of creative geniuses worked under. Was it farfetched to believe that the best things can only be created by a melding of minds and talents?

What had led Lexa to conduct her half-hearted investigation on the assumption that she was looking for a single person?

Tunnel vision was a son of a bitch.

Because first and foremost, people had friends. Just because she tended to do things alone didn’t mean it was typical. Just because she tended to do things alone didn’t mean the vandal did.

Fuck.
“Dispatch to vehicles 36 and 33.”

“36, go ahead.”

“33.”

“We need traffic and crowd control on Frat Row. The Finn Collins party just let out and they’re up to something big and loud.”

“10-4, ETA 4 minutes.”

“33 direct, ETA 3 minutes.”

Lexa sighed and tapped a finger against her radio.

Well that was just great. Both vehicles would be out of commission for the foreseeable future, and the other two foot patrol teams were busy chasing drunk kids out of the stadium on the far edge of campus. If any service calls came in, Lexa was on her own. It was like the universe was conspiring to distract the department from their last chance to catch the vandal. The universe was an asshole.

“712 to 77.”

Great.

Murphy’s general existence was the only way to make the night even worse. He only called in when something was truly fucked. Tonight it looked like it was going to be her. She wondered vaguely why she spent so much time stuck in the awkward valley between fucked and truly fucked. Fuck Valley was a disasterous, if not comfortably familiar place to live out one’s life.

“Go ahead 712.”

“Can you 25 with me at the business school? Someone tampered with our key ring and I can’t get into any of the offices.”

“10-4, 10 minutes.”

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campus police for individual colleges. They were easy shifts, but undeniably dull. Murphy looked like he wanted to lobotomize himself with his flashlight even more than he usually did.

“What’s the deal with the keys?”

Murphy gave up on cleaning his pants and underhanded a key ring in Lexa’s direction. “Half of them are missing. I can’t get into any of the conference rooms to stop people from fucking in them. I’m stuck as an unwilling voyeur through the tiny door window until we get them back.”

“Ah yes, unwilling voyeurism: the old ball and chain. Do people actually do that?” Lexa looked between the keys and Murphy’s dull expression with something close to horror.

Murphy blinked once. “What, fuck in the conference rooms? I dunno, business majors are weird.”

Lexa shook her head and swung the keys around on her finger. “Yeah, I take it back. Basically the only thing this job has taught me is that college students delight in finding new, uncomfortable places to get caught copulating in.”

Murphy snorted. “I love hearing you try to be human.”

Rolling her eyes, Lexa took a cursory glance over Murphy’s horribly organized security log. It wasn’t even worth reprimanding him – he had legendary levels of apathy.

“Catch your vandal yet?”

Lexa glanced up with one eyebrow raised to find Murphy studying her with an unusual level of interest. “My vandal?”

“I know what I said,” Murphy drawled. “Did you catch ‘em or what?”

“Or what,” Lexa supplied glumly. “I’m not sure I even care anymore. Everyone keeps expecting me to care. It’s honestly pretty awful.”

Murphy nodded with something close to sympathy shining in his dull eyes. “God, welcome to my fucking world, Woods.” He chewed a bit on the end of his pen before pointing it in her direction. “You know what you need? You need a good montage. You haven’t caught ‘em ‘cuz you ain’t had a good montage yet.”

In the wide world of awful advice she had received, it wasn’t the worst thing she had ever heard. She shrugged. “Probably. Montages are kind of a difficult device in narrative fiction. They only work in movies.”

“This is some low-budget bullshit.”

Lexa hummed her agreement. ‘Low budget bullshit’ was an accurate description of her time having her character eviscerated in fiction. And her life in general. But she had better things to do than swap fourth-wall breaks with John Murphy.

“Let’s go check all of the maintenance closets. Facilities probably borrowed them and put them back in the wrong place,” she sighed, holding the door open for Murphy to follow her out. “Since we’ve only got my master keys, we can’t exactly split up. We’ll start on the third floor and work our way down.”

Murphy stopped in his tracks, eyes widening slightly. “Uh, what? No, let’s start on the first floor. Why would we start on the third floor?”
“Because I said so?” He was giving her a weird look, so Lexa stopped and raised an eyebrow at him. “What’s the problem?”

“We should start on the first floor,” he said firmly. Murphy wasn’t firm about anything, though. Something weird was going on.

Lexa stared openly at him until he fidgeted and averted his eyes back to the floor. “The keys are on the third floor aren’t they?” When Murphy made no effort to answer, she took his silence as confirmation. “Is there a particular reason you needed to waste my time tonight?”

“No,” he muttered, still unable to meet her glare.

She’d be damned if she let John Murphy accidentally foil her attempts to catch the vandal again. Not again. Not the same bullshit.

Or was it purely accidental?

Finn Collins was busy distracting half of campus and most of the auxiliary officers at his mansion of a frat house, Monty was busy trailing breadcrumbs and riling people up on his website, and Murphy was busy – what? – distracting her.

Big picture.

“Who are you covering for?” Lexa hissed, grabbing the front of Murphy’s wrinkled work shirt. “Why do you need me out of the office?”

Murphy glared back at her, but kept his mouth firmly shut. Who the hell would John Murphy keep quiet for? He had no loyalty, no spine, and no qualms about throwing his acquaintances under the bus. Hell, Bellamy was the closest thing he had to a best friend and Murphy spent most of his time being an ass to him. The only person John Murphy seemed to genuinely care for in the world was –

Fuck.

Fuck.

“Where is she?” Lexa gave Murphy a shake for good measure.

He sighed and the sour expression that she thought was permanently etched into his features dropped, making him look at least a few years younger. At that point he just seemed tired. Defeated. “We needed you out of the office,” he confirmed humorlessly.

“Fucking shit,” Lexa cursed. She dropped Murphy, snatched his phone right out of his hand and took off towards her truck. There was approximately one place on campus that wasn’t swamped or staked out on a busy Friday night at that moment and the vandal knew it. Without his phone, Murphy had no way to warn her.
Lexa parked her truck down the street from the office so the noise from the engine wouldn’t spook the vandal. She crept quietly towards the familiar building, feet moving on their own while her brain clouded over with an indecipherable swirl of thoughts and emotions. Instead of walking through the door, though, she swept past it and made her way stealthily around the back of the department’s headquarters.

She didn’t announce herself, but paused just out of sight to watch the vandal work. The only sound was the hissing of paint cans and the occasional scrape of a rag or finger against the brick wall. For whatever reason, Lexa stood in the shadows far longer than she had intended, until her feet ached and the vandal was nodding at their finished work. The process was mesmerizing – impossible to disrupt.

“Looks good,” Lexa called.

The vandal froze, the paint can clattering to the ground from her left hand. Her face wasn’t visible in the shadow of her hood, but the moonlight caught on the rings around her fingers in a dull glow. After a tense moment, the vandal seemed to relax and Lexa got her hopes up that she wouldn’t run. The vandal shrugged in an almost apologetic manner, looked briefly around the area, and then bolted.

Well, at least some things never change.

But Lexa was ready. Lexa was a runner.

She closed the distance between them in less than a minute just where the overflow parking lot tapered off into a bit of woods near the highway. Lexa lunged forward and grabbed a fistful of the vandal’s dark jacket before pulling the girl back against her. They teetered awkwardly for a moment, legs tangling and tripping over each other before Lexa brought the girl down hard on top of her own body. Luckily, she managed to brace against the fall and the extra weight with her other arm and a pile of long-dead leaves. The vandal didn’t have such luck; she fell hard against Lexa’s body and knocked a knee against the frozen ground where her legs straddled Lexa’s hips. The girl groaned and left her forehead where it had landed on Lexa’s aching collarbone.

“Ugh, fuck me, you’re fast.”

“You!” Lexa hissed, pushing them both up slightly on her only steady elbow.

The vandal pulled back and smiled. “Me.”

Lexa tried to come up with something more intelligent to say, but ended up repeating, “you!”

“I told you you’re a bottom,” Clarke laughed nervously, sitting back in Lexa’s lap. They fell silent for a few tense moments, Clarke looking like she’d just won a lottery with an unknown prize and Lexa trying to decide if vandalism was an acceptable legal defense for murder.

“…You.”

“Do you need a moment?”

“I need a loaded gun is what I need. I’m going to kill you, Clarke! In a loving, legal way, you’re so dead.” Lexa grabbed the front of Clarke’s jacket with her unoccupied hand and pulled until they
were nose to nose. “You’d better start talking, pal.”

Her vandal blinked at the proximity, swallowing loudly and cycling rapidly between expressions of guilt, forced confidence, and some other conflicting mixture of features. “Well now that I’m officially retired, I’ll tell you anything you want to know. Ask away, Woods,” Clarke said casually like her life wasn’t in immediate danger. Her charisma wasn’t as convincing as she probably believed it was.

Lexa searched her face for a moment, jaw clenched tight in her fury. “Monty, Finn, and Murphy. Was anyone else in on it?”

Clarke shook her head and tilted her chin down to look up through her eyelashes. “Wow, you really did think it through. You’ve got ‘em,” she confirmed quietly. “It was just the four of us. Monty handled the tech, Finn handled the publicity, and Murphy kept the investigation tripped up.”

“And you vandalized the buildings.”

Clarke weighed the accusation for a second, and then shrugged. “Yeah, I guess I did that.”

The word she had been longing to say for weeks spilled from her mouth with a sort of desperate curiosity. “Why?”

It was funny, but Lexa hadn’t truly cared about the answer until she had Clarke squirming above her, unable to settle on a single emotion. When it came to it, Lexa wasn’t entirely sure what the ‘why’ referred to anymore. Why were you vandalizing school property? Why did you need donations? Why didn’t you tell me?

Just: why.

Clarke’s gaze drifted off to the side. “Money, obviously.”

“You have a job!” Lexa lamented. “What do you need that much money for?”

Finally, Clarke had the decency to fully commit to an expression of apologetic nervousness. She averted her eyes to the opposite corner and tried to ease back out of Lexa’s personal space, but Lexa held fast to her jacket. “I can’t tell you,” she murmured. “I can’t risk the money getting taken back. Monty’s already destroying the financial trail as we speak.”

“What the hell are you involved in?” Lexa shook Clarke’s jacket slightly until she looked back at her, eyes wide and worried. “Tell me, please,” she appealed. “I would have helped you, Clarke. I would have – I would have gotten a loan or, or shit, I don’t know, another job,” she rambled, reaching up to absently touch her fingertips to Clarke’s face. “Remember? That’s what we are to each other. I’m your…person.”

At the fear that must have been apparent in Lexa’s expression, Clarke reached up to grab her hand. “It’s nothing bad, I promise,” she said quickly. “They need that money, though,” she insisted. “Nobody got hurt. Please, Lex, just drop it.” Clarke’s eyes were full of so much sincere vulnerability, that Lexa wanted nothing more than to drop it. She wished she’d just stayed with Murphy and looked through maintenance closets for keys all night. She wanted to go back to not caring. She wanted to go back to not knowing.

Damnit.

“Then tell me,” Lexa pleaded. “I’m just campus security, Clarke. This isn’t exactly a federal crime. I care about my job, but I care about you more. I thought you knew that.”
They fell into silence again while Clarke studied some point over Lexa’s shoulder, playing with her
fingers while she thought. Just when Lexa had given up on Clarke saying anything further, Clarke
let out a long, sad sigh. Her hand tightened around Lexa’s and she nodded.

“You’re right. It’s not that I didn’t trust you – hell, I’d trust you with anything. I just…didn’t want
to put any of this on you. It wasn’t right, but – but it was easy. And then it wasn't. I don’t know,”
she explained haltingly. Try as she might, Clarke couldn’t seem to find the words she wanted to
use.

“All the money was funneled as an anonymous donation from a rich benefactor to the hospital I
work at – Memorial General. Monty and I came up with the whole thing to fund new equipment
for the pediatrics unit and the fund for uninsured patients with long-term illnesses. We didn’t keep
a dime,” Clarke finished with a rueful smile. “Whatever was left went into the holiday fund for
Facilities Management workers. We felt a little bad that I was drawing all over the walls they were
charged with keeping clean. That’s – yeah, that’s it.”

mean so much to me, you know? None of this was intended to upset or betray you. Ugh, I feel
sick.”

“Ah, fuck me.” Lexa shook her head and stared at Clarke’s jacket. “Just – damnit.” She smoothed
the wrinkled corner down absently where she had crushed it in her grip earlier and released a long,
tired sigh while all of the buzzing thoughts in her head flushed out uselessly. What an anticlimactic
end to a dumb situation.

There was a certain… relief to it. No more mystery. Clarke was safe. The world kept on spinning,
same as it always had.

“Sorry,” Clarke whispered again.

“I know, Clarke. I know.”

Clarke reached her hand out tentatively and tucked a loose strand of hair behind Lexa’s ear. “I
fucked everything up didn’t I?”

“Nah.” At that point, Lexa was mostly just tired. When all was said and done, who really gave a
damn? It was just vandalism and a bit of underhanded charity work. Who fucking cared? As a
cosmically important question: who fucking cared? She’d lost a few hours of sleep, some sick kids
got another chance at a bad hand, and the school had some unsanctioned artwork in weird places.
Case closed.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Really?” Clarke seemed dubious at Lexa’s sudden dismissal, but the truth of the matter was that
Lexa hadn’t particularly cared from the beginning. Vandalism was annoying and the media circus
was irritating, but it was all just another incident report on her desk at the end of the day.

“Yeah, really. It was never that big of a deal, I guess,” Lexa mused. “You’re still getting a bill for
the damages, though. And I can’t believe you didn’t put me out of my misery sooner,” she laughed.
“You’re a lot better at keeping secrets than you let on.”

“Hey, for what it’s worth, I wanted to tell you. Your disapproval and the department’s involvement
is what got the donors on our side. I needed you just as much as Monty or Finn or Murphy,” Clarke
said sincerely. “You said it before: there wasn’t a game until you played it.”
Lexa shook her head with a tired smile. “Sorry I wasn’t the best nemesis. There’s not a whole lot of incentive for catching vandals on a college campus. Maybe if you’d drawn cartoon dicks instead of beautiful murals I would’ve hated you more.”

Clarke seemed almost shy. “You think my paintings are beautiful?”

“Oh, they’re alright,” Lexa teased. “You’re prettier, though.” Clarke’s face split into a wide grin and she leaned forward to kiss her, but Lexa held her back with a palm to her sternum. “Woah there. You’re a criminal in temporary custody, Clarke. I’m definitely not allowed to kiss you. Wait until I’ve filed the paperwork, then we’ll talk.”

“I’m not interested in talking,” Clarke said slyly.

That was about as much proximity as Lexa could handle, so she gently eased Clarke off of her lap and clambered to her feet. “Er, right. Sure. I mean – uh, great. We’ll just… reschedule that,” she stammered, pulling Clarke upright.

“You know where to find me.”

"Yeah," Lexa agreed. "In fucking jail."

+++  

The following days were… strange.

Monty posted a picture of the mural on the donation website, effectively blowing up all social networking circles within the university. People were understandably upset that they hadn’t gotten the big reveal they were hoping for. Finn put his own rumors to rest by creating an alibi a thousand people strong during his all-night rager at his frat house. Murphy just crawled back into whatever sewer he lived in like nothing had ever happened.

The story was just starting to die down when one of the campus geniuses traced the donations from the website to the donor account funneling into the hospital. Their disappointment at being denied a perpetrator quickly turned to glee that their ‘Mural Marauder’ was moonlighting as some kind of artistic Robin Hood to save sick children. They couldn’t have asked for a more satisfying end to the saga.

Of course, people still wondered.

+++  

“Campus police, Woods.”

“Good morning, Woods. It’s Maya with the newspaper.”

“I’m surprised it took you this long to call. I’ve had a lot of people calling lately since somebody realized the bill for the damages had been footed and our crime blotter cleared the vandalisms as ‘solved’. I can honestly say that was the first time anyone has ever said they read the crime blotter
– well, not since we were dealing with that serial masturbator my sophomore year.”

“I apologize, I didn’t realize you enjoyed our conversations so much. I just decided to leave the truth for the end of the hype. I had heard you closed the incidents, but I wanted to put out a few more speculative articles first.”

“Well I certainly wouldn’t want the truth getting in the way of your sales.”

“Greatly appreciated.”

“So are you calling for the truth, then?”

“If you have it. I think it’s time we all moved on.”

“I agree. But there’s not much you don’t know. The vandal funneled all donations into an anonymous fund for one of the local hospitals – Memorial General. Facilities Management estimated damages, sent me the bill, and I served it to the vandal, whom I apprehended at the last mural. The vandal paid the bill and the Honors Committee declined holding a hearing for punitive measures. All the murals are being left up at the discretion of the Board of Educators and the website has ceased activity. It now redirects to a donation page for the hospital instead. Case closed.”

“Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

“You’re really not going to release the identity of the Mural Marauder? Throw me a bone here, Woods. The speculation will never end without a name.”

“I think it’s more fun that way.”

“You don’t think anything’s fun.”

“We know each other so well.”

“It was someone in your department wasn’t it?”

“Now that would be something, wouldn’t it? Imagine if you were able to print that story.”

“Fine, Woods. Keep your secrets. It’ll get out eventually. So can I put your name on these statements when I write my last article?”

“Sure, why not. Tell your readers they’ve officially driven me into retirement. I got an offer to start academy with the County Police a few weeks after I graduate and I’m taking it.”

“Oh, congratulations! I’ve also been driven to retirement. We’re getting a bit old for all this aren’t we?”

“Retirement? Oh, you mean this is going to be your actual last article – not just your last article about the vandal. Maybe I’ll actually read this one.”

“You sure know how to flatter a girl. I’ll have the couriers drop a stack off at your office, my treat. You take care of yourself, Woods. I don’t want to read about you being heroic and getting yourself killed a year into being a police officer.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll wait at least two years before getting killed. Beyond that, I’m pretty sure my
“girlfriend will be the death of me anyways.”

“That’s the spirit. I mean it, though: take care of yourself.”

“You too, Maya. Take care.”

“W-what?”

“Huh? I said…take care?”

“No, what did you just call me?”

“Your name, obviously. Stay sharp, Maya. Not everyone’s as nice as me.”

“Not exactly a ringing endorsement for humanity.”

“I’ve got good sources.”

“As do I. Thank you, Woods – for everything. Enjoy the rest of your semester.”

“Goodbye.”

+++ 

“Who was that on the phone?” Clarke adjusted her headset before dropping a sandwich in front of her and a kiss on her cheek.

“Newspaper.”

“And you answered? That’s a first.” She unwrapped her own sandwich and snatched Lexa’s hat as she usually did. If it weren’t for her name and ID number on the back, nobody would suspect it was Lexa’s.

“Those were different writers. This was one that deserved the truth,” Lexa returned, clearing her desk for their lunch. It was nice that the office wasn’t as swamped by phone calls and visitors eager to see the last mural. A return to routine can be a blissful thing. Lunch with Clarke over a bunch of paperwork would be a sorely missed chore when they both graduated.

Clarke grinned. “Yeah? You sell me out?”

“Nope. I told her everything except a name. I didn’t want to ruin all the publicity-fueled donations pouring into the hospital. Besides, I think the legend has outgrown you by now.”

Clarke scoffed, fitting her headset back over the hat she had pulled on. “I’m legendary. Nothing’s ‘outgrown’ me, Woods.”

Lexa offered her a smug smile. “Let it go, Clarke. You wanted anonymity, you’ve got it.”

“Jerk.”

+++
im so self-conscious about this chapter. hold me.

while you're doing that, listen to this song. it has come to my attention that i don't rec nearly enough female artists. gotta check myself before i wreck myself.

anyways. can't decide if it's gonna be two chaps left or just one big-ass chap. im thinking i'll probably go with the latter, but we'll see. last chance to tell me shit you want to see before the end. i wouldn't count on that update for a solid week tho. there's a bunch of shit i have to answer for and tie up in this horrible fic, so im sure i need plenty of time to wallow and perform blood sacrifices. the usual shit.

as always: thanks for all the support and charming comments. you bring light to my dimly lit home. enjoy your week.
man so many of y'all were holding me last chap like..was it awkward? or did u make some new friends.

anyways, i was all steam ahead to give u guys one giant final chapter until it ended up being 12k words then i was like...how 'bout i....not do that. so there's one more after this, sorry folks. like two of you voted for one big chap, but this is why democracy gets so fucked.

mild sexual content btw. just head on past that if u wish. but i've seen what y'all are apparently okay with, so let's be real here. its....less mild in the last chap because i got really drunk last night idk. we live with our choices.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+++
As of this moment, the only thing we are still in the dark about is the actual identity of the vandal. Senior President of Beta Theta Pi, Finn Collins, was rumored to be the mysterious artist responsible for the six detailed paintings spread around campus over the last few months. The final instance of vandalism on the campus police headquarters, however, occurred during Finn Collin’s annual birthday celebration. His alibi is, needless to say, airtight – by about three thousand people.

So who is the Mural Marauder?

Over the course of the last few weeks, I’ve been in close contact with Campus Police Supervisor Lexa Woods in a rather…interesting series of conversations. There were several conversations that led me to wonder whether or not she had literally set bear traps all over campus in a frustrated attempt to catch her vandal. Between heckling phone calls, a rather ungrateful student body, and irritated administrators, it was no wonder she wished for a less couth way of capturing her quarry. In this instance, bear traps I suppose. Who am I to judge.

But while I was meant to be researching the identity of the Mural Marauder, I found myself more taken with their nemesis. Supervisor Woods has worked for the campus police nearly her entire four years of undergraduate studies, two of those years spent as a supervisor. Under her watch, the campus has seen a twenty percent reduction in DUI arrests, a thirty percent reduction in violent assaults, and a twenty percent reduction in traffic accidents. Coincidence? Perhaps.

Star University Lineman Joey Rizzo had this to say:

Oh, Woods? She’s the [positive exclamation redacted]! Everybody on the team has her cell number in case we get ourselves in some deep [redacted]. My dad drove drunk one night and got himself killed, so I take that [redacted] real serious. When I met Woods at a pre-homecoming safety talk, she told us that her parents got killed by a drunk driver too and then she gave us all her personal cell phone number in case we ever needed her – no questions asked. I can’t even tell you how many times she’s gotten me or one of my guys home safe. If she can’t be there herself, my girl calls us a cab and pays for it out of pocket. It ain’t always feel right calling 411 when you’re somewhere you ain’t supposed to be. But I know one thing, sure as [redacted] and it’s that I always got a person got my back when I [redacted] up. Woods got everyone’s back. I asked her once why she does this [redacted] for us and she told me ’she was in the business of caring’. Ain’t that just the coolest [redacted] you ever heard?

[Redacted] is she there with you? Hi Woods! I got drafted by the Saints for next season! I’m sendin’ your [redacted] the best [redacted] tickets available.

Congratulations on the draft, Joey.

In light of Supervisor Woods’ upcoming graduation and employment with the County Police, she has appointed Auxiliary Officer Nathan Miller as her successor. He is set to take over as the departmental supervisor during the summer and has provided a brief, admittedly curt statement:
Yes. I will take over as supervisor. No, I will not answer any questions regarding the vandal. But if you could please inform students on campus to stop pulling urinals off the wall in celebration of the semester’s end, it would be greatly appreciated.

Well, you heard the man: leave the urinals alone, folks.

Truly, I feel safe and protected during this exchange of leadership. At the very least, I won’t be caught worrying about the sanctity of public bathroom access. Shame on those who would jeopardize that.

And finally, thank you, Supervisor Woods. On behalf of every student you’ve ever gotten home safe, every roadblock you’ve ever been cursed out over, and every patron of Pike’s Bar you’ve saved from a fight they couldn’t win: thank you and godspeed on your future career.

I tried valiantly to get the identity of our vandal from Supervisor Woods, but she wouldn’t budge on the matter. Not to stir the pot, but her refusal to reveal the vandal’s identity does little to dissipate rumors that the vandal was an employee of the auxiliary police department.

Perhaps this is one last gift from the campus police to all of us. After all, isn’t the mystery of it what endeared us to the anonymous artist in the first place? Maybe we all need a little more mystery in our lives.

But I digress.

To the Mural Marauder wherever you may be: thanks for the excitement. It’s been one hell of a senior year and I’ve never liked the back of the library as much as I do now. Happy trails.

“Aw, you made a friend.”

“Oh, shut up.”

Clarke waved the topmost newspaper from the enormous stack the school courier had dropped off on the office doorstep. Lexa had already read it (blushing furious the entire time if you must know), but she was hoping to keep anyone else from it.

“I thought the newspaper rats were being assholes to you?” Clarke gave her a suspicious look as she perused the article again. “It sounds more like she was slowly falling in love with you. What the hell did you say to her? Did you use that line about having only one mood, then you pause dramatically and say ‘vigilant’?”

(Yes.)

“No.” Lexa scowled half-heartedly at the copy of the article still on her desk. There was about a
0% chance that Clarke believed her, so she kept her face turned stubbornly away from Clarke’s knowing look. “It’s not a big deal.”

“Yeah, I’ll say. They barely talked about me at all!” Clarke protested. “At least the picture is of my last mural. It’s one of my better works, wouldn’t you say?”

It really was. The mural around the back of the office was a snapshot memory from the homecoming fireworks they hosted every year above the intramural fields. Everyone would drive trucks and cars up to the edge of the field and sit out on their hoods and truck beds to watch them like an after-dark tailgate. You could even see Lexa’s campus police truck off in the distance preparing to sweep the intramural fields to make sure nobody got their feet blown off the next morning by dud fireworks. It was more romantic if you didn’t know that was what she was there for, though. Lexa remembered it more as the one night per year she made her peace with whatever god was listening.

“It’s nice,” Lexa confirmed. The grainy picture of it in the newspaper didn’t really do it justice, but it was still beautiful. “But did you have to vandalize my office?”

Clarke nodded cheerfully. “Yep. It just felt right.”

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re incredibly territorial?”

The silence was enough of an answer, so Lexa let it drop. Secretly, she had taken to starting her mornings by drinking coffee in front of the mural before digging in on paperwork. It felt like the mural was just for her. After all, it was on her office.

“I hope Joey’s serious about sending you those Saints tickets.”

Lexa smiled and grabbed the stack of envelopes building in her personal inbox from the past week. When she held them out for Clarke to take, she did so with only the slightest bit of pride. After Joey’s public declaration, there had been an influx of season passes and invitations to join the various athletes from the senior class who had been drafted before graduation for their opening seasons. It was almost impossible to attend all of the games she had been invited to by people she’d driven home or rescued from questionable locations. Amongst the tickets to sporting events were ones for art shows, graduate presentations, and various places of employment.

Clarke flipped through the envelopes quietly before offering Lexa a smile. “You know I’m proud of you, right? Because I am. I’m so proud of you.”

“Nah,” Lexa said, laughing nervously. “It’s nothing. Makes me hate my job a little less, though.” She twirled her pen absently with a small, quiet laugh. “I did some good things here, didn’t I? No matter how much I hated it sometimes?” She felt awkward asking, but she’d never allowed herself the luxury before.

“You did,” Clarke agreed, moving to sit against the edge of Lexa’s desk. She looked down at her with a soft look. “I… I couldn’t think of it.”

Lexa waited patiently for the rest of her thoughts. Clarke had been on the cusp of something vulnerable, guilty, and sore for the past few weeks – the symptoms being long, conflicted looks and apologetic gestures. Lexa wasn’t an idiot. She knew Clarke was chewing over some form of guilt over the whole vandalism debacle, unsure of how to prove her worth or something.

“I’ve been thinking about something you said,” Clarke finally forced out. It was the closest she had
gotten to putting her vulnerabilities on the table all week. When Lexa gave her an encouraging nod, Clarke pushed on. “You said something on the night of the last mural.”

“I said several somethings,” Lexa confirmed.

Clarke nodded and allowed her eyes to wander around the office. “Yeah, well, I’ve been feeling kind of guilty about it. Er, very guilty. Unrelentingly so.”

“Can’t imagine why,” Lexa teased, malice absent from her joke. It didn’t have the desired effect, drawing a flinch and an accepting nod from Clarke. “We don’t have to dwell on this,” she offered instead. “I’m not mad at you.”

Clarke blew out a heavy sigh and ran a hand through her hair to grip at the back of her neck. “I know. It’s kind of unsettling.”

“Why is that?” Lexa inquired, pulling the manual Clarke had begun to wrinkle gently from her fidgeting fingers.

Sighing again, even more dejectedly than the last, Clarke glanced down at the floor. “It’s just—this job is everything to you, Lexa. You’ve given everything to this place and I feel like I’ve asked you to give it all up or something. What I did looks good on paper, but that’s because nobody cares to think what it did to you. And then you say that you care about me more than this thing you’ve given your entire college career to and you treat me like I didn’t betray you, like I didn’t hurt you, and all I want is for you to yell at me—rage at me—tell me I’ve done something wrong and leave me to clean up the pieces,” she rambled, twisting her hands together and looking anywhere but Lexa’s own steady gaze. “Just because I had no ill intent doesn’t mean I did nothing wrong.”

Lexa raised an eyebrow and reached out to still Clarke’s frantic hand wringing. “You…want me to be mad at you?”

“No!” Clarke groaned. “I want you to do what you want to do—I don’t want you to ask me what you should do.”

“Oh.” The admission was kind of surprising in a muted way. Few people ever requested Lexa do what she wanted to do, much less demand it. “Uh, huh.” She considered the request for a few moments before shrugging. “I already did.”

Clarke’s eyes narrowed and she pulled back slightly. “What do you mean?”

“I mean I already did what I wanted to do,” Lexa said simply. “I satisfied my curiosity, I achieved fair compensation for crimes against the school, and I have assured no further vandalism will occur.” With a small smile, Lexa squeezed Clarke’s hands. “And I’m happy you’re okay and things are normal.”

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“But this job,” Clarke mourned. “I feel like I’ve betrayed something you love.”

Startling Clarke, Lexa barked out a loud, gut-clenching laugh and shook her head. “Clarke. Light of my life,” she laughed. “I hate this job.”

It was Clarke’s turn to look betrayed, snatching her hands back and glancing pointedly down at the newspaper on the desk. “You—what?”

Laughing harder, Lexa leaned back in her office chair and wiped at the corner of her eyes. It wasn’t that funny, but for some reason she was laughing harder than she’d laughed in years. “Clarke,” she gasped, wiping at the corner of her eye, “this job is fucking terrible.”
Crossing her arms, Clarke leaned forward with a challenge in her eyes. “I know it’s terrible, but you’re – you’re so dedicated! You’ve poured years into this – crossing every ‘t’ and dotting every ‘I’ and chauffeuring students home and being pummeled by drunk kids – just – it’s just – why?”

Somehow, Lexa had managed to control her laughter to a lingering dopey smile. “You’re not making a distinction here, Clarke. My job is paperwork and bureaucracy and bullshit. I’ve always hated this job. But the paychecks put me through college and the uniform helps me do what I like doing. I don’t love the job, Clarke, I just love keeping people safe. I could do that with or without the uniform. You think I really give a shit that students draw on walls sometimes or park in the wrong spaces? I care enough to do my job as duty requires it so I can go home. To you.”

Clarke looked like she’d been slapped in the face by a handful of character development she hadn’t seen coming. We never do, do we?


“This job blows,” Lexa said, grinning. “Who the fuck enjoys working for the campus police? You know what I do enjoy? I enjoy happy, healthy students and I enjoy you. So can you quit goading me into a broken heart already?”

“You’re tellin’ me you’re not mad that I kept this from you?” Clarke asked dubiously, arms crossed over her chest. “Not even the slightest bit? Because I’m telling you now: if you deny yourself this anger and let it fester, we’ll never work out.”

It was a fair point. But honestly, Lexa decided long ago she was happiest without a grudge in every pocket and a chip on both shoulders. Who had the energy for that?

“For what? Not telling me?” She asked lightly, turning to gather the reports she had finished earlier.

Clarke nodded uncertainly. “Yeah. For keeping secrets.”

“I’m okay with secrets.” She pushed a staple through an irresponsibly thick stack of papers and grunted with the effort. “I’ve got things I haven’t told you. You don’t have to bare your entire soul to me, Clarke. I’m crazy about you, but we’ve got time, you know? Stop looking for drama where it doesn’t exist, alright?”

Clarke had a vexed, shell-shocked look on her face like she’d let her guard down long enough to be slapped again – this time with a handful of understanding and responsible dating practices. “Uh, yeah. I guess you’re right. The last guy I dated didn’t really agree with that,” she admitted quietly. “Secrets were a contraband luxury I didn’t entertain often.”

“We don’t need to – or rather, we shouldn’t – operate that way. I trust you,” Lexa assured her, hoisting herself out of her seat to file paperwork. “If you need to keep things to yourself, then do it. I’ll be here when you want to share.” She planted a quick kiss on Clarke’s cheek before heading off to the filing cabinet.

It was only a few moments before Clarke joined her, sliding her arms around her stomach and hugging her tightly from behind. She mumbled something into Lexa’s back, her face pressed tightly against the fabric of her work shirt.

“How?” Lexa continued filing, thumbing through case number groupings and smiling.

“You’re my favorite,” Clarke mumbled.
“Well, if it weren’t for Jake, you’d be mine too.”

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Eventually Lexa relented and allowed the office to throw a party with half of the money they’d collected in the swear jar over the last few years. The other half had to go towards equipment. When Clarke tallied their profits, they celebrated the overwhelming total by daring Octavia to swear over the radio ‘on accident’ when Lexa was out of the room. They all seemed to think the angry phone call from County was worth it, despite Lexa’s admonishments.

(“Don’t pretend like you never wanted to tell Jasper to 25 with you at the office for a departmental 10-10 (fight) and to bring his fucking A-game,” Octavia laughed, completely unapologetic in every way.

“But did you have to use Bellamy’s ID number in the transmission?”

“Absolutely.”)

Octavia received the honors of the first donation to the newly emptied swear jar while Clarke smoothed things over with County.

The party itself was less rowdy than a typical day in the office. They held it on one of the university’s institutional holidays so everyone could attend. Additionally, they patched the phones through to Lexa’s cell so she could stay on call, but the line stayed quiet for the most part. The weather had started to turn milder, so they ventured out to one of the pavilions at Nelson Lake to barbeque and frolic – or whatever college students do at parties.

“Aw, what?” Raven dropped down next to Lexa and offered her a red solo cup. “I thought I was finally going to see you in real clothes. What gives?”

“I’m on call,” Lexa said, pushing the drink back towards her. “Somebody has to watch the phone lines even on holiday.”

The noise Raven made was somewhere between disgust and sadness. “God, you really are in the ‘business of caring’. I wish you’d go bankrupt already. Relax Officer Friendly, its just soda. I don’t drink.”

Lexa rolled her eyes at the reference. “I take it you read the article.”

“Yeah, it was disgusting. I think Clarke’s ready to propose any day now, so whatever you do, keep your lame mouth shut before you ruin the hero illusion.” Raven laughed at her own joke and tipped the rest of her drink back before starting in on the other one she’d brought for Lexa. “If you want my advice, which you should, just never speak again.”

That wasn’t the worst advice she’d ever gotten. “I’ll consider it. I thought I wasn’t good enough for Clarke, though.”

“Hey, nobody’s good enough for Clarke,” Raven corrected. She took a moment to shove an irresponsible amount of potato salad in her mouth and choke it down. “But you’re close, so allow me to extend a uh, a bamboo branch?”
“Olive branch.”

“Right, right. Allow me to extend some fucking olives.” Lexa mentally prepared herself for some fucking olives while Raven wolfed down the rest of her food. When her plate was empty, Raven drained the rest of her second soda. “Alright, listen: here’s some real olives for you. Without the whole backdrop that this story’s author ain’t got time for, Clarke saved my goddamn life. My mom was a useless drunk and I decided the best way to move forward was by becoming the same damn thing. Clarke dragged me kicking and screaming through years of rehab and sobriety until I decided she was right: I am worth fighting for. I’m worth a whole fucking lot with or without Clarke, but I didn’t know that until I was brave enough to admit it. Those are some fuckin’ olives, boss.”

Lexa nodded slowly, not entirely sure how to deal with those olives. “Why are you telling me this?” She wondered aloud.

“I’m telling you because that’s what normal people do when they want to make friends,” Raven mumbled into her cup. “I’m telling you because Clarke’s important to me and you might be worth my time too. I’ll just have to wait and see.”

“I suppose you will.”

Raven stared into the bottom of her empty cup for a few moments, cheeks slightly flushed and valiantly attempting to not look awkward. “Well, that’s enough of that. Let’s do this again sometime, but maybe with less over-sharing. I’ve got to go get more of Murphy’s potato salad before Clarke eats it all. Seriously, do yourself a favor and try that asshole’s potato salad before it’s gone – it changed my life.”

Lexa watched her go before allowing her eyes to drift over to where Clarke was badly performing a card trick for Murphy. Even from her distance, Lexa could tell that Clarke had guessed his card completely wrong. Instead of pointing it out, he just said it was his card and accused her of witchcraft. Harper and Miller went from dubious to impressed and baffled, considering they had probably watched Clarke mess up the trick before ‘getting the correct answer’ anyways.

“The real magic was the friends we made along the way,” Murphy drawled, flicking one of the cards at Clarke’s forehead. Not to play a numbers game, but the sum of Murphy’s friends probably didn’t equate to a whole lot of magic.

“I can’t believe I have to deal with him for another whole year,” Miller grunted, dropping down to sit at Lexa’s side with a plateful of food and a mournful expression. “Tell me: does Murphy have some protective hex on his employment status here, or have you just taken pity on him all these years?”

Lexa shot Miller a small smile. “Dark magic, definitely. I wouldn’t mess with it.”

Miller snorted before tucking enthusiastically into his mountain of food. They sat in silence watching their coworkers place bets on Octavia’s card-throwing abilities – the target of which was the back of Bellamy’s head where he stood, blissfully ignorant at the grill.

“Ready to take the helm?” Lexa asked without turning her head to look at him.

Miller grunted and stabbed his form to rest upright in his potato salad before wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. “Were you?”

“Nope.”
Miller laughed a rare laugh. “We’ll be fine, same as always. You’re the one that everything’s going to change for.” He rubbed thoughtfully at the fabric of his jeans and gave Lexa a calculating look. “Are you gonna be okay?”

“Yes,” Lexa replied confidently. “Change is good.” Periodically, Clarke had been looking back to meet her eyes and offer a quick grin. Just to check in. When she did it again, Lexa offered a small waggle of her fingers in greeting. “Besides,” she continued, “not everything is going to change.”

Instead of turning back to her conversation, Clarke took the small wave as an invitation and began making her way towards her. Miller had returned to his food and didn’t notice their visitor until Clarke was sitting on Lexa’s other side, one arm stretched out on the table behind Lexa’s back. “Guess what?” Clarke asked with a grin.

Before Lexa could answer, Miller beat her to it. “What?” He grumbled around a mouthful of bratwurst. When neither girl replied, he turned to take in their raised eyebrows and casually intimate position. He rolled his eyes and got up to leave. “And I’m out.” Something suspiciously close to ‘I can’t believe I helped set that up’ left his grumbling mouth as he left.

“Guess what?” Clarke repeated.

Lexa leaned back against the table and Clarke’s arm. “Hm?”

“No, you have to guess.”

“Not in this lifetime, Griffin.”

Clarke laughed, eyes shining in the hard afternoon sunlight. “Alright, alright. The landlord for that complex on Jefferson called me back finally with an offer. We’re in.”

Smiling slyly, Lexa turned to face Clarke more fully. “We’re in? What do you mean ‘we’?”

Suddenly nervous, Clarke looked away. “Uh, right. I mean… I’m in. Unless you wanted to – it’s just so close to County headquarters and then rent is cheaper if it’s two of us and it’s close to my new school, but you don’t have to, I just thought I’d offer and-“


Clarke narrowed her eyes and ceased her fidgeting. “Are you going to live with me or not, Alexandria Woods?”

By way of an answer, Lexa surged forward, wrapping her arms around Clarke’s neck and kissing her soundly. They typically kept all of that nonsense out of work and away from prying coworkers, but graduation was so close Lexa could taste it, so to hell with it. They all basically knew anyways. Clarke was almost too surprised to reciprocate, hands floundering and breathing uneven until Lexa pulled back with a laugh.

“Sure.”

Clarke blinked. “W-what now?” She stuttered, licking her lips.

“I’ll live with you.” Lexa threw an arm over Clarke’s shoulder and leaned in as though sharing some grand secret. “Didn’t you hear? My last home kind of burned down.”
The thing about trying to be romantic is that it never works out. Ever. You’re better off hiring a mariachi band and an extremely well trained toucan than any personal gesture that requires your physical presence. Or flowers. Just buy some goddamn flowers.

Or just gore your significant other with a live bull. Any of these things are easier and more passionate than whatever your brain convinces itself it can get away with.

Instead of a romantic evening, all Lexa really achieved was massacring her attempt at cooking, dumping a glass of red wine down the front of Clarke’s shirt, and tripping over each other’s pants as they tried to simultaneously undress and make it through Clarke’s door at the same time. All of these things could have been avoided if Lexa wasn’t trying to be romantic. One: she knew she couldn’t cook. Two: who the fuck actually enjoyed red wine without the context of trying to be sophisticated. Three: taking off your pants is dangerous enough without distraction.

Clarke had managed to catch the both of them at the last second in some weird, bastardized french dip like two of the worst dancers in the world. They stared at each other in the dark of the room before bursting into nervous laughter, easing into genuine humor as they fully realized their positions. Jake interrupted them with a haughty mewl from the open doorway, pulling a glare from Lexa.

“Oh no,” Lexa said firmly, attempting to right herself and nearly falling again. Her damn pants were still tangled halfway off her legs. “I’m not doing anything to you with the goddamn cat judging me a few feet away.

Clarke laughed and stretched one of her legs out to toe the door closed in Jake’s face. It swished closed with a loud snap and an indignant meow. After a beat of light silence, Lexa shifted in Clarke’s awkward hold. “I’m…stuck. In my pants,” she admitted.

“How stuck?”

“Does this not arouse you?” Lexa murmured in her best mockery of seduction, failing again to twist out of her irreparably twisted work uniform.

Clarke hummed and helped hoist her up onto the edge of the mattress so they could begin figuring out how to unknot each other’s clothing. “Oh it does. But not nearly as much as you spilling wine all over my shirt did. I’ve been turned on ever since.”

“That recently?” Lexa mused, freeing one of her legs at last. “I thought the departmental picnic I put together would have counted for something.”

“Yeah, nothing gets me rock fucking solid like a communal barbeque,” Clarke giggled, tossing her shirt somewhere at the foot of her bed and pushing Lexa down to straddle her. Well, most of their clothes had been discarded. It wasn’t a professional job, but it was comfortable and easy. “You’re really beautiful,” she whispered, setting her hands lightly on Lexa’s stomach.

“But don’t go soft on me,” Lexa returned, reaching up to tug on a curled lock of blonde hair. “I will do as I please,” she said into trembling skin.

“You usually do,” Lexa gasped when teeth grazed her throat. Whatever else she wanted to say was
lost in Clarke’s mouth, stolen off somewhere in her lungs or maybe her heart or something equally gay. “Clarke,” she hissed when the other girl pushed her hips down more insistently.

“Lexa,” Clarke returned with a cheeky smile and a kiss to her nose. “I really never pictured you as a talker.”

“Ah, but you did picture me.” The smile on Clarke’s face widened, her eyes reflecting the faint green light from her alarm clock. With a surge of motivation, Lexa pushed up from her prone position to sit up and have Clarke closer, kissing a line up her throat while she clung to her shoulders. “We don’t have to talk, though,” she offered.


Lexa smiled into her neck before detaching and meeting Clarke’s gaze. “Well that’s a relief,” she grinned.

Before she could return to where she had left off, Clarke grabbed her face and held her steady. “I’m serious.”

“Me too.” The second Clarke’s grip slackened, Lexa pulled her closer to pick up where she had left off. Despite their positions, Clarke was surprisingly docile, crumbling into a mess of involuntary praise and sighs as she bore down on Lexa’s lap. She would have had the height advantage for once if she hadn’t melted into a puddle that’s power of speech was limited to Lexa’s name and the occasional whispered encouragement.

Lexa was in no particular hurry to toss Clarke over the edge – neither in the sexual sense nor the literal sense. But under her tongue, teeth, and roaming fingertips, the other girl’s breathing had become haggard and a little desperate. The contact Clarke needed was not a thing easily obtained in their current position.

“I feel,” Lexa whispered into Clarke’s skin, “in the spirit of learning to share our secrets, I must tell you something.”

Clarke’s response was a sharp tug on the handful of hair she had seized at the back of Lexa’s skull and an uncharacteristically needy whine.

Good enough.

A yelp pierced the breathless quiet of the room when Lexa flipped their positions, lying Clarke flat on her mattress and settling firmly over the flustered girl. “What-“ Clarke began before Lexa quieted her with a finger against her lips.

“Full disclosure: I am accustomed to being on top,” Lexa whispered devilishly. “Contrary to your foolproof test.”

Clarke nodded dumbly, reaching out to grip at Lexa’s sides. “I – okay. Yeah, okay. Whatever you want, shit. Just – jesus.” Lexa’s return to nipping along Clarke’s neck brought back some of the girl’s faculties and she laughed a stuttering, breathy laugh against the shell of her ear. “Does this mean I owe you a secret now?”

“No,” Lexa mumbled, jerking back to put her tongue to better use as she kissed Clarke senseless. “Only if you want to.” One of her hands trailed low on Clarke’s abdomen pressing with purpose just below her navel.

“Well, give it a few years and I doubt there’ll be anything you don’t know about me,” Clarke
gasped, clawing down Lexa’s exposed shoulders.

Lexa grinned. “Oh, I doubt it. I give it about seven minutes.”

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Chapter End Notes

then they fucked, the end.

i kid. well...about the second part. anyways, i'll post the second half probably in a day or two since it's basically sitting there all finished.

we need some upbeat music in the meantime i daresay.

if you want to hear me be serious for a second, STAY TUNED. if you want to keep your mental image of me as an entertaining keyboard wielded by a smarter-than-average marmoset, then SEE YOU NEXT TIME BYE.

it's not that serious: i just wanted to say that i'm sorry if you don't get the whole 'lexa isn't mad about the vandalism' thing. seems to be the thorn in some sides around here. let me just say, that i spent most of my college career working for campus police and truly, it is just a job. you do your best, focus on getting people home, and then get yourself home to those you love. It's not that big of a deal. i TRIED to convey Lexa's disinterest beyond mild irritation and bureaucratic expectation, but maybe i didn't make it clear enough. c'est la vie.

sometimes people you care for don't tell you things because they don't know how or don't feel comfortable doing so and the easiest answer in some situations is just to let it go. just some personal advice from someone who worked a hard job and doesn't share a lot. agree to disagree im sure - not interested in a debate, just throwing out my thoughts from someone who has been there. and i drive this boat, so those are the thoughts you get. you may always find a new boat with a more dramatic, angsty captain. cheers, pals.
here we are. finally.

ended up longer than i envisioned it, but so it goes. i've enjoyed it for the most part -
got to work on some specific things i was looking to work on during this weird story.
im gonna estimate it somewhere around 200-250 hours of work. that's right folks:
writing is hard and death is right around the corner at all times.

enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Lexa startled awake, looking around wildly for a moment while her eyes tried to adjust to the dark.
All she managed to bring into focus were a bunch of freeloading plants and the ghastly image of
her own work uniform hanging on the back of a chair. There was a solid moment when Lexa
thought she was seeing the ghost of her own sad life trying to throw in the goddamn towel across
some stranger’s chair.

False alarm. This time.

“What’s wrong?” Clarke slurred, pushing up on her elbows to squint around her room. “What time
is it?”

Lexa tore her eyes away from her empty depression vessel across the room and flopped back
against the pillows. “Dunno. Don’t care.” It was kind of disturbing to her that she’d had the natural
inclination to retrieve her work uniform from the floor and hang it up even after all…that.

“Then why did you wake up?” Clarke grumbled, slinging an arm across Lexa’s stomach and
burrowing back under the blankets.

“I don’t know, why do you feel the need to sing that stupid jingle from the gum commercials in the
shower?”

“Wow.”

Lexa sighed and pulled a hand across her drooping eyelids. “Ugh, sorry. That song is criminally
catchy; it’s not your fault. I’m pretty sure I just had a dream that they wouldn’t let me start
academy until I adopted a child so I ordered one on eBay, but when it came in the mail it was
Reyes.”

“Holy shit.”

Despite the lingering horror, the corner of Lexa’s mouth pulled up and she pressed a tired kiss to
the top of Clarke’s head. “Think it means something?”
Clarke laughed quietly. “God I hope not. But we need to address your understanding of where babies come from – not that I don’t fully condone the idea that Raven was created in a factory.” Lexa had just started getting her heart rate under control from her sudden, startling return to consciousness when Clarke thought it would be acceptable to kiss her neck and drag a finger lightly down her ribs. “I mean, we could address it now if you’d like.”

“I think we addressed it plenty before bed… but like, in a gay way that doesn’t actually address it at all.” Lexa frowned up at the ceiling fan while Clarke continued drawing patterns on her ribs with her fingers. “I think I’m losing a handle on our euphemisms for sex here, but if Reyes shows up tomorrow in a FedEx truck, I blame you.”

“I’m like, 86% sure she won’t,” Clarke said like that was any kind of reassurance. When safeguarding against Raven Reyes, Lexa required 100% assurance. Nothing less would allow her to sleep soundly. She pressed another kiss against Lexa’s neck that turned into an unmistakable grin. “Want to ‘address it’ again anyways? Jake’s asleep on the couch, so he won’t make it weird.”

While sorely tempting, Lexa felt sleep tugging heavily on her eyes and her brain. “First off, please don’t mention your father and proposition me for sex in the same breath. You made it weird. And second, I’m too worn out. I’m pretty sure you threw my back out earlier. Not complaining here – but I don’t bend that way.”

"I hardly bent you!"

Lexa shook her head. "No, no. I don't bend at all. I have roughly the flexibility of a diving board."

Clarke laughed sleepily into her neck. “God, you’re so old, Lex.”

“Yeah, it happens with the rhythmic revolution of our planet through the solar system, sweetheart.” Lexa was used to jabs at her lack of character and general lethargy about anything exciting, but Clarke was the only one who could say it in a way that didn’t sound insulting. Apparently that sort of thing just did it for her. Or maybe being insulted by Clarke was just one of those things. And by ‘one of those things’, Lexa meant something she had neither the narrative prowess nor the energy to explain.

“I fell in love with such an old person.”

The words twisted their way between Lexa's ribs and sunk in the cavity of her chest, warm and comfortable and just a tad bit scary. But in a good way. She took a deep breath in, held it for a beat, then released it, watching Clarke rise and fall against her chest. By the time she had released that one breath, the fear pattered out to nothing but easy comfort and a pleasant sense of inevitability.

Turning her head to press her nose into Clarke’s hair, Lexa rolled her eyes. “That’s your own damn fault.”

(And it was, really. Clarke was supposed to be the smart one.)

Clarke didn’t contest that, but rather tightened her hold on her and laughed quietly to herself. “Did you catch that? How I casually slipped that in during clever banter so it wasn’t a big deal?”

Clarke could have locked herself in a concrete bunker and thought it halfway across the ocean and Lexa probably would have caught it.

“It was a little contrived.”

Clarke shrugged, her shoulder nudging into Lexa’s side, but otherwise didn’t contest it. That would
have been a good time for Lexa to provide some form of validation for Clarke’s spontaneous confession, but words were, as always, extremely difficult and hard to put together in completely not-awful ways. Every combination of words in her head sounded stupid and clunky and awkward, so she kept her teeth clamped together and leveled a frustrated look at the ceiling fan.

Words were awful.

“Uh, you too,” Lexa forced out.

In the great, sweeping, romantic ballads and flowery poems of history, painting galaxies of soulmates and gut-wrenching love, a monument stood in the tumbling ivy and sprawling meadows of flowers of the most beautiful place in the universe carved in marbel and proudly declaring the world’s most romantic declaration: ‘Uh, you too’.

Fucking Christ.

Clarke must have been on the verge of sleep again, because her words were slow and confused. “Huh? I’m contrived?”

“No, that’s – that’s not what I meant. I mean the other stuff.”

“Right,” Clarke murmured absently. There was no recognition, though – she sounded too tired to care what Lexa was trying to piece together.

“I mean…fuck.”

“Sure.”

Lexa groaned and gave the ceiling fan another glare. “How is it still this difficult to talk to you?” Clarke made a vague noise to indicate she wasn’t completely unconscious, but she was fading fast. “What I mean – I guess I mean that I’m glad I’m here. With you. So, uh, thanks for that.”

An addendum to history’s monument to romance: ‘thanks for that’.

Honestly.

“You got it, champ,” Clarke slurred.

Eh, close enough.

There was plenty of time for them to figure out less horrible ways to be sincere later on. Clarke was already asleep anyways and Lexa was tired of glaring at the ceiling fan. Was she delaying the inevitable? A little bit. Could it be proven in a court of law in front of a jury of her peers? Well… probably. She’d take her chances either way.

Her consciousness was slipping, tugged under the thick waves of sleep close behind Clarke’s own when a loud rumble shook the glass panes of Clarke’s bedroom window. It was a rolling sort of thunder – grumbling and groaning in decreasing and increasing frequency without any clear beginning or end. In her sleepy haze, Lexa hadn’t even noticed the rain pinging off the window and slapping into puddles around the building’s badly irrigated landscape.

Like pulling her feet out of quicksand, Lexa propped her eyelids open and turned to watch lightning flash in blinking patterns across the thick, dark sky. She smiled sleepily at the sight before releasing her hold on Clarke to roll over on her stomach and watch the storm as it rumbled by the window next to her side of the mattress.
Lexa’s father used to tell her it was giants fighting in the clouds. Honestly she was pretty sure he had stolen that from one of their awkward parenting books, but it takes very little for children to find magic in their parents. To everyone’s amusement, Lexa had asked her uncle Gustus at the next family holiday if he was one of the fighting giants. It was cute at the time, probably, but now it was just fuel for annoying uncle jokes. Every time it stormed, Gus felt the burning need to tell her that he was ‘a lover not a fighter’. Goddamn uncles.

“Clarke,” she whispered, reaching blindly back to poke at her side. “Clarke, wake up.”

Clarke did no such thing. Instead, she groaned and flopped over even further away from Lexa, tugging the blankets with her. Lexa rolled her eyes and slapped blindly at Clarke’s body. “Wake up!” She hissed.

“Fuckin’.” Clarke rolled back over, wrapping herself in the blankets so Lexa was left out in the cold. “What?”

Lexa propped her chin on one of her hands. “It’s storming. And stop taking all the blankets.”

The mattress jostled and dipped as Clarke extricated herself from the tangled mess of sheets and limbs. Even though she was facing the window, Lexa could feel Clarke sit up as she huffed irritably. The girl took a few minutes to wake up enough to converse, but when she did, it absolutely did not disappoint.

“Hehe, you’re naked,” Clarke sang, drunk off sleep.

What Lexa wanted to do was roll her eyes, but what she ended up doing was laughing. “You are too, dumbass.”

“Uh, huh.” She watched Clarke rub at her eyes in the faint reflection from the window. “Yeah. Yeah, alright.”

“It’s storming,” Lexa repeated. “Don’t you like storms?”

Clarke yawned and threw one end of the blankets over Lexa’s exposed waist before crawling over to get a better view of the window. She hauled her upper body over Lexa’s back, digging her elbows into Lexa’s spine in her attempt to see better.

“You’re killing me,” Lexa wheezed.

“Sorry.” After a moment, Clarke relented and pried her elbows out of Lexa’s bruised flesh. Her compromise was to flop down over Lexa’s back so they could both have the best view of the lone window in the bedroom. They shifted a bit to get more comfortable, swiping each other’s hair out of their faces and laughing at the mess of it all. Eventually, they settled.

“Am I too heavy?” Clarke whispered, tapping a finger on Lexa’s shoulder.

“Nope.”

Clarke placed a light kiss where her finger had tapped and fell silent again. The storm rolled through slowly – a consistent rain and steady thunder pulling along the skyline like it was content never to pass over. Silence stretched between them, snug and comfortable in the small bedroom while tiny flashes of heat lightening illuminated the plants and pictures all along the walls and desk. Lexa felt full. Good. Happy, content, and ready.

“Hey,” she whispered, reaching up to snag a lock of blonde hair that had fallen over her shoulder.
“I wanted to tell you something.”

Clarke pressed her cheek against Lexa’s back and hummed. “What’s that?”

“It might be kind of weird.” She could feel Clarke’s smile form against her skin.

“How intriguing.”

Lexa smiled into her arm. “Oh, it is. Don’t be too weirded out, but I can’t seem to find a way around it. I’m pretty sure I love you and there’s nothing to be done about it.”

Clarke’s soundless laughter fanned over her back, tickling her skin pleasantly. “That’s not that weird. It’s probably weirder that I’m in love with you.”

“Ugh. That is weird,” Lexa scoffed.

That time, Clarke’s laughter was decidedly not quiet. Lexa shushed her quickly, insisting they were ruining the ambience of the storm. Despite their intentions to enjoy it until it’s end, they both ended up asleep in a pile long before the clouds moved away and the giants quit their grumbling. Clarke totally drooled all over her shoulder at some point. Completely gross.

It was great.

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Graduation came along, as scheduled, with the basketball stadium filled to the brim with weirdly dressed seniors and their strange square hats. You couldn’t walk down the hallway without ending up lurking in some stranger’s selfie or having your hand shaken by a professor surprised to see you succeed. It was overwhelming.

However, Lexa didn’t have to worry about that very much. True to form, she was on the clock, pressed in a uniform, and ensuring the general security of the event. All of the senior auxiliary officers wanted to walk during graduation and all of the underclassmen were buried in a semester worth of procrastination as finals loomed ominously. So, naturally, that left Lexa and the one other person in the department who didn’t care about performing academically. Or in anything.

“Where do you want me?” Murphy asked, shoving his hands deep into his pockets and glancing around at the excited graduates. “Six feet under?”

That was insulting. If Lexa truly wanted Murphy dead, she wouldn’t bury him, she’d burn him on a ceremonial pyre to rid the planet of his corporeal form. “Not today,” she said instead. “Just post outside the entrance and make sure people aren’t parking in the drop off lane. I’ll stay and make sure nobody tries to sneak onstage before the ceremony.”

Murphy scowled at his assignment – parking duty was never preferable – and headed out to the front entrance with mumbled objections. Lexa grinned at his retreating back. The both of them knew she had taken the better assignment. But if she didn’t have the opportunity to participate in graduation ceremonies, the least she could afford herself was an indoor assignment and a chair to rest on. She deserved that much.

Threading through the throngs of excited students, Lexa tapped her earpiece further into her ear
and snagged a volunteer chair to plant in front of the stage entrance. Ideally, she would have had a few more auxiliary officers with her, but they could manage with two. Right before she could enjoy the comforts of planting her ass in a chair for the foreseeable future, she was attacked.

Okay, not attacked. Hugged. Even worse.

Some massive moron had swept her up in a crushing bear hug while she yelped in a distinctly non-authoritative manner. Her attacker laughed uproariously before setting her back on her feet and releasing her from hell. “Woods!”

“Joey,” Lexa muttered, straightening out her uniform. “Always a pleasure.”

Joey grinned and adjusted the tiny graduation cap struggling to escape his thick skull. “Why ain’t you walkin’? Where’s your graduation gown?”

“Somebody has to run things,” she said with a shrug. “It’s not that big of a deal.”

“What? But I got like, most of the division teams to give you a holler when they call your name!” Joey pouted, slumping his enormous shoulders. “You’re breaking my heart.”

Lexa rolled her eyes fondly and crossed her arms. “That’s very…sweet. Feel free to scream anyways. It’ll be weird without me there, but don’t let me crush your dreams.”

Joey seemed to consider the offer for a few moments. “Yeah okay,” he sighed. “Guess I can settle.” The resigned look dropped from his face in an instant, replaced by a cracking grin and mischievous glint in his eyes. “Anyways.”

With that, Joey hoisted her up on his shoulder, aided by the sudden appearance of a crowd of massive men and accompanied by the sweet, melodic sounds of Lexa’s undignified screeching. She slapped at a sea of thick heads and muscled shoulders, cursing Joey’s entire ancestral line while they chanted her name and paraded her around the secluded hallway. It was simultaneously gratifying and on par with being disemboweled by a nightmare hellhound. Mixed feelings, overall. 8/10.

“I thought you liked being tall!” Joey laughed, whirling her around one last time before depositing her back on the safe, blessed ground.

Lexa braced herself against the wall with one hand and glared at him. “Like I enjoy root canals. Or speeding tickets,” she hissed, gripping at the fabric over her heart.

Joey nodded with a trace of guilt. “Sorry, Woods. Just…thanks. Thanks for caring. I know it wasn’t easy.”

“It wasn’t,” Lexa said truthfully. “But you’re welcome. Now go or you’ll miss the ceremony.”

The crowd filed out after that, jostling each other and engaging in a rousing chorus of the school’s fight song. Finally, blessedly, Lexa was left to enjoy her chair. She did so with a contented sigh, leaning her head back against the wall and turning her radio up in case someone needed her.

The peace was, as always, short-lived.

Something kind of heavy dropped into Lexa’s lap and her eyes snapped open, reaching out instinctively to stop whatever it was from falling to the floor. She was pleased to find the object she had secured was Clarke.
“I have arrived,” Clarke declared, slinging her arms around Lexa’s neck for support. “I am here.”

“You don’t say?” Lexa glanced over Clarke’s body, grinning at the ridiculous amount of honors cords and medals. She didn’t even know what most of them meant, but it sure looked impressive.

Clarke pulled the graduation cap from her head, removed Lexa’s work hat, then swapped them with a satisfied smile. Lexa could feel the graduation cap tilting dangerously off her head, but Clarke reached out to fix it after she had adjusted Lexa’s baseball cap over her own head.

“Oh! I stopped by Dr. Tsing’s office to pick up your glasses on my way home today,” Clarke said, snapping her fingers. She reached into the folds of her gown and pulled out a black leather case. “For you.”

Lexa reached out reluctantly for the case, eager to shove it somewhere deep in her pocket and forget about it until the second coming of Christ. Clarke had other ideas, though, and popped it open to retrieve the black frames. She slid them awkwardly over Lexa’s nose, jabbing her once in her eye and twice in the ear. Satisfied with her terrible work, Clarke sat back and nodded.

“Aw, they look good!”

Lexa adjusted them slightly on her face and gave her a doubtful look. “Hm.”

“I mean it,” she insisted.

Lexa blinked a few times and squinted. “Everything’s all blurry.”

“That’s because they’re just for reading. Dr. Tsing thinks it will help reduce your headaches and process writing better.” Reaching into her gown again, Clarke produced a crumpled program for the ceremony and held it out in front of Lexa’s face. “Can you read better?”

“I think so?” Lexa allowed her eyes to roam over the program for a minute. “I don’t know, we’ll see I guess.” She pulled the glasses off gently and handed them to Clarke to return to their case. When they were safely put away, Clarke tucked the case into Lexa’s pocket.

“Don’t stress about it. You’re going to do great in academy,” Clarke assured her. “You’ll see.”

Lexa’s arms tightened around Clarke’s waist and she shrugged hopelessly. “Well, we’ll definitely see, I suppose.” She wasn’t worried persay. Academy would be a bit of a culture shock – difficult and time-consuming, but not impossible.

Clarke dropped her head to the side, leaning their temples together gently. “When you said you’d be here, I didn’t think you meant you’d be working,” she said critically. “Couldn’t you find someone else to do security?”

Lexa shrugged and offered her an apologetic smile. “Everyone else has finals. Besides, I’m graduating without any kind of honors or anything. I’ll still get my degree whether I walk across a stage or not.”

“But you worked so hard,” Clarke pouted. “Isn’t your uncle or your cousin coming?”

“They couldn’t.” Lexa pulled Clarke a little closer to stop her from slipping to the ground in her silk gown. “Big training conference. Seems kind of pointless when nobody can make it.”

Clarke sighed. “Yeah, I guess I get it. Nobody’s here for me either. My mom couldn’t get out of work at the hospital. Man, I miss when she was only interested in cleaning up my vomit. Growing
up blows. If I had it my way—"

Their conversation was cut off abruptly by a gruff man and the pompous, blustery clearing of his throat. Lexa glared up at the perpetrator, fully prepared to tell him to get lost, when her scandalized gaze fell on the most intimidating mustache she had ever bared witness to. The man attached to it was immaculate and stern and altogether capable of colonizing the entirety of Europe on a casual weekend getaway with nothing but an unamused huff and sidelong glance.

But that mustache.

Lexa’s second thought was the horrific realization that she was glaring up at the County’s Chief of Police. You know: the man who was about to own her ass for her foreseeable career. Lexa jumped to her feet with a jolt, dumping Clarke to the side of their chair, flat on her ass.

“Sir,” she gasped, clasping her hands behind her back and straightening her spine. “May I assist you with anything, sir?”

Why the hell was the chief of police even there to begin with? Surely he hadn’t shown up to quiver his mustache at her and reprimand her for public frivolity.

The man raised one of his bushy eyebrows and stared down his mustache at her in judgmental silence.

“Or…not,” Lexa murmured, eyes fixed on the mess of medals and commendations pinned to his breast.

Finally, his mustache spoke. Er, he did. “No assistance required at this time,” he said imperiously. “I was merely touring the facilities before the ceremony. They have asked me to speak during the ceremony, you see.”

“Ah.” Lexa nodded and willed herself to stop addressing his mustache.

The man’s eyebrow climbed even higher and he leaned forward, eyes flickering briefly to where Clarke was…doing something. Lexa couldn’t tear her eyes away long enough to know what. “You’ll be joining us shortly I hear, Ms. Woods?”

“Yes sir.”

He nodded slowly before outstretching one massive hand in her direction. Internally, Lexa began to panic. What the fuck did he expect her to do with that? Should she…slap it?

No.

God, no, shake the damn hand. “Yes sir,” she choked out, grasping his hand firmly and giving it a shake. “Next academy class. Good luck on your speech.”

After releasing her hand, the Chief straightened his perfectly straight shirt some more and tucked his hat more securely under his arm. “We look forward to having you.” Lexa fully expected that to be the end of their awkward encounter, but the man surprised her by glancing down to Clarke.

“Might I suggest a chair next time, Ms. Griffin?”

Clarke huffed, thoroughly unimpressed, and Lexa shot her a warning glance. To her surprise, when she looked back at the Chief, he offered her a cheeky wink before turning on his heel in a perfect pivot and taking formal leave of them.
When he had gone, Lexa snapped out of her daze and bent to help Clarke from the floor. “Shit, sorry. That guy scares the hell out of me.”

“Why?” Clarke muttered, dusting herself off and pushing Lexa back into her chair so they could resume their previous positions. “Thelonius is a doofus.”

“Clarke,” Lexa hissed, jabbing a finger into her side. “You can’t say that about him! And since when do you call the Chief of Police, Thelonius?”

Clarke rolled her eyes and adjusted herself on Lexa’s lap. “Please. He let me believe he was a desk officer for years when I came by headquarters. The guy is a total softie – and kind of an ass. I never would have complained as much to him if I had known he was the goddamn Chief.”

“God,” Lexa laughed. “That’s an astounding level of obliviousness.”

“Oh, shut it.” Clarke grinned, fiddling with Lexa’s fingers with the hand that wasn’t wrapped around the back of her neck. She swung her legs a bit where they hung off Lexa’s lap and reached out to adjust the earpiece port on her radio. “So you’re not going to walk during the ceremony? For sure?”

“Yeah, I’m going to have to pass,” Lexa said apologetically.

Clarke considered the information with a calculating look, then shrugged helplessly. “Alright, we’ll skip it.”

Lexa frowned. “We?”

“Yeah. It’s boring anyways.”

A tug at her uniform shirt brought Lexa’s gaze down to watch Clarke undoing and securing a button on her shirt at her stomach absently. “Well, if you don’t want to sit through the ceremony, I could just let you walk across the stage when everyone’s gone. It’ll be a while, but it’ll be all yours in two hours.”

“That sounds cool.” Clarke pulled her cell phone out to check the time, formulating the plan in her mind. “Yeah, let’s do that. But what are we going to do until then?”

“Nothing. We’re mostly here just for appearance’s sake.”

Clarke frowned, twirling the soft hair at the back of Lexa’s neck with one of her fingers. “Nothing?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’m sure we can find something responsible and wholesome to pass the time.”

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“This is neither-“ Clarke choked on her words, cursing and gripping at Lexa’s hair while Lexa pressed hard on her hips to minimize her squirming. “This is n-never responsible nor wholesome.”
Lexa’s mouth was far too busy to dignify a response, so she offered a distracted shrug instead, jostling the leg Clarke had propped over her shoulder.

Besides, Clarke had totally started it.

The girl had tugged her around the shadowy, unoccupied corners of the stadium, whispering promises and wicked things before turning and walking ahead like nothing had happened. She got what she wanted in the end, some ten minutes into their wandering.

Admittedly, trying to fuck in the trophy room was a lot less sexy than either of them had probably envisioned. Clarke had likely gotten some kind of bizarre, gay carpal tunnel from her poorly planned handjob, right before whacking the back of her head against the Women’s Softball Team’s 2010 Championship trophy – which was also pretty gay. Everyone knows softball is gay.

Lexa, being the reasonable, more highly evolved member of their party, had allowed her competitive nature to take over and endanger their lives. Unless you’re a goddamn gymnast, you have no business trying to eat someone out without a bed or a chair or something to prop your poor significant other against. But stubborn souls have overcome greater odds, Lexa supposed.

So there they were.

About to die for some poorly planned sex.

Which, in the wide world of ways Lexa saw herself leaving the mortal plane, was not the most surprising. As far as things go.

“Oh shit,” Clarke gasped, slapping one of her hands back against the wall. “You’re gonna make me fall, I swear to –jesus, control yourself.”

On the contrary, Lexa felt perfectly controlled. Clarke was the one heaving in stuttering gasps of air, legs trembling around Lexa’s face and shoulder while she ran the gambit of every curse word known and unknown to the general population. For as much as she swore she wasn’t vocal, she sure sang under Lexa's hands and mouth.

If Clarke could finish up before she sent them crashing into the extensive collection of Men’s Soccer Team trophies and inevitably to their deaths, that would have been greatly appreciated. By all parties involved. The most prominent of those parties being the men’s soccer team, who were going to have to endure the strange story of why all of their trophies had been confiscated as evidence in a double homicide.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Clarke stuttered, tugging on the back of Lexa’s hair. “Oh my god, wait.”

Pulling back with a rather raunchy, slick sound, Lexa huffed a sigh and leaned her cheek against Clarke’s thigh. “What?”

“S-stop. Jesus,” Clarke laughed, clawing at the wall.

Lexa smirked, raising one eyebrow and huffed another sigh. “Stop what? There was a lot going on.”

“S-stop -stop breathing.”

Lexa barked out a disbelieving laugh. “Stop breathing?”

Clarke covered her own mouth to stifle her returning laughter and moans. “Well I’ve basically
stopped breathing. What’s your excuse?”

“Is this really why you wanted me to stop?”

Clarke’s eyes flickered up to some point above Lexa’s head and she shook her head, still laughing through her fingers. “God no. I just feel really weird that the entire fucking lineage of university football coaches are staring at us while your tongue’s in me.”

Sure enough, when Lexa glanced back over the shoulder that wasn’t supporting Clarke’s leg, she was met with a large wall of stern looking men in athletic polos watching them completely dishonor Lexa’s uniform. “Oh fuck,” Lexa breathed.

Small tears were gathered in the corner of Clarke’s eyes with the effort not to bust out laughing. “I can’t fucking look at them like this.”

Lexa laughed and placed a kiss on the inside of Clarke’s thigh. “Then don’t. Look at my beautiful face instead.”

“I can’t see your beautiful face, Lex!”

“Then look at the top of my beautiful head. I don’t fucking know. Give me three minutes,” she reasoned.

Clarke raised one eyebrow. “That’s a lot of confidence.”

“Yes.”

Game on.

Clarke only laughed harder, but she nodded and patted the back of Lexa’s head. “Okay, okay. I’m close anyways, I’ll just…” Clarke gestured helplessly before covering her eyes with the hand that was meant to be holding her up. “Out of sight out of mind? This is definitely going to haunt me, though.”

Yeah, they were going to die.

Three minutes ended up being more like six minutes with their awkward, middle-aged voyeurs glaring at them from their glass frames across the room. Lexa counted it as a personal victory that she drove Clarke to her release despite the obvious handicap on the mood. Sure, Clarke was breathless from more than just arousal, but the laughter felt just as good where it pulled at her sore muscles as the efforts of their illegal tryst felt.

Lexa just managed to catch Clarke before they actually broke anything – school property or their own bones. Clarke laughed through her dimming release, her chest pushing against Lexa’s as she wiped the tears from her eyes and pressed giggling kisses to her temple, cheek, and lips. When their ridiculous laughing fit tapered off to happy sighs, Clarke leaned forward in Lexa’s lap to rest her chin on her shoulder, hands trapped between them where they pressed into her stomach.

“You know, I guess the guy in the bottom left corner is okay as far as old dudes go. I’m kind of into grey temples,” Clarke murmured into her ear. “I guess I can get used to an audience if that’s what you’re really into. You could have just told me you were into that.”

Rolling her eyes, Lexa knocked the sides of their heads together lightly. “At this rate, I’ll probably have grey temples soon too. If I’m such an old person it’s only because you’ve made me this way.”
“This was a little stupid,” Clarke admitted without even bothering to dredge up some fake regret. “Let’s be honest.”

It was kind of stupid.
It was kind of perfect.

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The janitors had long gone, following on the ghosts of the tails of parents and students who had all left to celebrate somewhere along the scale of frivolity between ‘well mannered’ and ‘see you in jail, buddy’. One of the local colleges was renting out the stadium for their own graduation ceremony, so everything was left pretty much intact from the chairs to the podium to all the cameras and screens and mics.

Lexa was reclining against the back of one of the foldout chairs at the foot of the stage, one arm slung over the back of a neighboring chair and one ankle propped on her knee. She had a massive knot in one of her shoulders from failing to be sexy, but felt otherwise relaxed and content.

Clarke was busy onstage trying out every single chair that belonged to anyone of importance, offering an imperial wave to the empty audience with each new seat. One of the deans had left their robes there, which Clarke promptly pulled over her own – much to Lexa’s dismay. Dismay wasn’t enough to prompt Lexa to stop her, though. The girl was having way too much fun.

Eventually, after trying out every single chair, Clarke made her way to the podium and tapped at the mic. The taps reverberated around the enormous stadium, bringing an extra gleam of joy to Clarke’s already gleeful expression.

“Holy shit, this thing’s still on!” She nearly screamed into the mic, flinching back when she realized how loud it was turned up.

Lexa covered her ears and gave her a pained smile and a thumbs up. “Still on.”

Clarke adjusted her ridiculous, stolen robes and cleared her throat. “I wasn’t prepared to give a speech, but – well, if you’re all going to insist.”

“I think I speak for everyone,” Lexa called up to the podium while gesturing around at the thousands of empty seats, “when I demand a speech.”

“Alright,” Clarke laughed. “Democracy has it.”

She placed her hands in a wide stance on either lip of the podium and gave the entire stadium a sweeping, grand look. “As my time here at the university comes to a close, I would like to offer a formal thanks to the kid in my freshmen orientation class who told me never to get drunk on anything when energy drinks are involved. Your advice was as wise as it was pointedly ignored. But from the depths of the second worst hangover of my life: you totally called that one. You can’t save everyone.”

“Additionally, from a place of professional advisement as the dispatcher who logs every stupid
thing that has ever happened on this campus, please stop putting weird things up your butts. We do talk about it in the office. And we do judge you.”

“Wow, I’m bad at speeches. Um, shout out to family, friends, and coworkers – in that order – for not murdering me. Actually, biggest shout out to Alexandria Woods for being as into me as I’m into her…well, almost.”

Lexa pointed a finger gun at Clarke and winked.

“Oh, and a huge thanks to her for asking me to be her girlfriend while she essentially had me under arrest. That was wild and I can’t wait to share that with our beautiful cats someday.”

Lexa frowned and Clarke offered her a cheeky grin.

“Oh, and a huge thanks to her for asking me to be her girlfriend while she essentially had me under arrest. That was wild and I can’t wait to share that with our beautiful cats someday.”

Lexa pointed a finger gun at Clarke and winked.

“Or children, whatever. We can talk. Anyways, it’s been wild, co-eds. Take a tequila shot for me tonight and imagine I’m doing something less lame than picking out curtains for our new apartment. Happy graduation, losers.”

When Clarke realized she had no microphone to drop, she grabbed an abandoned notebook from under the podium and threw it somewhere irresponsible. Satisfied with her graduation experience, Clarke made her way to the edge of the stage and dropped down to dangle her legs over the edge. She reached her hands out and gestured for Lexa to help her down.

Lexa obliged, catching the majority of her weight on the way down.

“Your turn,” Clarke sang, gesturing at the stage.

“My turn for what?”

Clarke grinned. “A speech! I demand a speech! My kingdom for a speech.”

“Allright, alright,” Lexa grumbled, releasing Clarke’s hands to hoist her body up and clamber onto the stage. God, she hated giving speeches. Occasionally she had been forced into public service announcements, safety talks, or press conferences for the university and they had all been terrible. But graduation was about grand gestures and milestones, so what the hell.

Sighing heavily, Lexa set her hands on the edge of the podium and glanced out at the nonexistent crowd before zeroing in on Clarke where she sat on the edge of a foldout chair, hands gripping excitedly on her knees. “Look: you’re on t.v.!” She called, pointing upwards.

Lexa jerked her head upwards and found her own unamused face projected on the screen above the stadium. “So I am,” she laughed, looking back down at her solitary audience.

“Speech, huh?” She mused, tapping her fingers against the polished oak of the podium. “Well, my college experiences weren’t exactly…universal, shall we say. Were any of you present at all right now, I’d ask you to dig for both your worst and best college memory. Hold onto it. Replay it. I’m probably somewhere in one of those. I might be holding your hair back or putting you in a headlock or driving you home or, for a select few, maybe carrying you home – not that you’d actually remember that one. I’ve met a lot of you in situations that make me look forward to never meeting you again. And I’m sure the feeling is mutual.”

“I want to state clearly for the non-existent record that I did not enjoy ‘ruining your day’ or ‘fucking you over’ or ‘writing tickets for fun’, contrary to popular belief. The things I did enjoy were the same things you did: the football games, late night bonfires and fireworks, the 5k’s for charity, intramurals under the midnight flood lights, and wild homecoming dance parties in the
union – all of it. I was there. You may or may not have thrown dog shit at my windshield at some point during those events. Not pointing fingers here, but one of you assholes was fond of canine excrement. What I’m trying to say here is I might have been a background character to your time here at the university, but it was honor to be a part of the story anyways. It’s been a son of a bitch fighting you guys and a racket winning those fights. Seriously. Some of you should be really embarrassed by how thoroughly I kicked your asses.”

“Now that I’ve done regularly cleaning your vomit out of the back of my truck, I want to wish you all a sanitary, **safe** farewell. I feel confident I’ll hear from you when you’re plastered and forget I don’t work here anymore. But I’ll come anyways. You should consider tipping from now on.”

“Final shout outs to my uncle and cousin for keeping nepotism alive and well in the County Police Department. And also to Clarke who is incredibly cute, but a horrible liar, because I totally waited until *after* I had signed off on her disposition before asking her to be my girlfriend. Shout out to *that* jerk.”

Clarke booed heartily from the front row.

“Oh, yeah, and Clarke Griffin is the vandal you were all creaming yourselves over. I totally outsmarted her.”

Clarke booed harder.

“Anyways. It’s been real. Not adding an adjective there. It’s been real…something. Stay hydrated, don’t walk home alone, and call 411 for Supervisor Miller if you ever feel unsafe. Happy graduation, you fucks. Cheers.”

Clarke clapped heartily at the end, the jarring noise diminishing to something small and out of place in the enormous, echoing stadium. Lexa took an exaggerated bow for her audience of one before hopping off the stage and throwing herself in the chair next to Clarke. One arm cast around the back of Clarke’s chair, Lexa stretched her legs out and sighed.

“Well,” she said warmly, “we’re done.”

“Nah. We’re just getting started,” Clarke returned, reaching up to grab the hand hanging by her shoulder.

Lexa nodded critically. “I think we should have prepared our speeches better. Kind of an awkward reception here. It’s like *we* were the only ones clapping for each other.”

“You exaggerate!” Clarke scoffed, jumping to her feet and dragging Lexa up with her. “Come on, curtains are only on sale through the end of the day.”

Lexa didn’t fight it. She just let herself be drawn out through the metal doors into the crisp night air while Clarke went on about patterns and styles that would be best suited for her plants.

Of course, little did they know, but the very next day would find them fielding and attempting to negate an unfortunately popular video that had popped up from their impromptu speeches. Turned out that graduation had been streamed live for those who couldn’t attend and had never actually stopped streaming after the ceremony.

So that was fun.

It was largely received in good humor, but Lexa felt compelled to write herself up for the transgression as her final act as supervisor. Calling her entire graduating class 'you fucks' wasn't
something she felt appropriate letting slide without punishment. Both she and Clarke signed the incident report, stealing away with an extra photocopy of the disciplinary form on their last shift to hang in their new apartment.

You know:
For posterity's sake.

+++ 

End.

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

now i can die.
well we started this fic with this band and im a sentimental shit, so let's finish with them. started with their first album and we're ending with their last. enjoy this song and imagine there are credits rolling where literally every listing is just my name over and over again.
i'll crank out the rest of my other fic now if that's what you've been waiting for. THEN i can die.

but anyways. HUGE thanks to everyone for sticking around, commenting, sending me vibes (the good the bad and the weird). i'm gonna celebrate by responding to comments on this final chapter. remember to tip your fic writers with fond thoughts and by leading a healthy, happy life.

cheers pals.

End Notes

feel free to berate me for my character flaws as a human being on tumblr  @coldmackerel

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!