Summary

When the containment of a highly infectious, DNA-altering disease suddenly breaks loose in the densely populated city of New York, longtime best friends Lexa and Clarke come to the shocking conclusion that they’ve now become part of an endangered species. As the people around them are slowly reduced to the mind-numb, flesh-eating walking dead, the two women and their ever-dwindling group of friends and family must grasp that their imminent survival now only relies on one realization: it's kill, or be killed.

So… who will be the last one standing?
It's pretty late so I don't know how well this story will fare, but this was a really (really -- as in like four or five years ago) old story of mine that I wrote for another fandom. This is completely remastered (for lack of a better word) from the original, which was an experience to do considering the state of my writing then in comparison to what it is right now. I actually found it while looking for some stuff so I figured I may as well see if I could refurbish it a bit because I really liked the plot but just didn't ship the ship in the fandom anymore. I have a little over 200k words and I'm almost certain it's 70-80% finished, give or take some edits here and there. I don't know, it's late and my brain is fried from family drama and the flu, but here are the first few chapters for those who may be interested!

Let me know if you want more and I can pump out a few more chapters at a steady rate while I update my other stories! Like I said, it's mostly finished so you wouldn't have to wait long for anything, really.

Starts a little slow, but picks up. Some Costia/Lexa and Clarke/Niylah in the beginning, but it is a truly Clarke/Lexa fic, which isn't entirely slow-burn. Mentions of cheating involved, so if that squicks you, don't read the first couple of chapters or so, lol. It solves itself out in the end, however! :)

See the end of the work for more notes.
The Reckoning

Chapter Summary

Loving someone always requires you to not love others.

Chapter Notes

Yoooo so this is not a new fic or anything. It's actually a conversion of an old fic I wrote for the first fandom I'd been in and it's been refurbished. If you've been with me since the beginning, you'll know what it is and how this shin dig is gonna go down.

I already have 200k+ words done, and it's a little over 70% done, so it's not gonna be an incomplete fic. There's some elements of cheating and stuff in here, but that only lasts the first couple of chapters and then things pan out… I hope. Idk, I just found this and wanted to transfer it over to this fandom because I genuinely liked the plot and where it was going.

Lemme know what y'all think!

The quote in the summary is from Koushun Takami's, "Battle Royale".

See the end of the chapter for more notes

WINTER

* * *

Day 0

Lexa stares at Clarke through the top of her phone. Her eyes cast over her best friend's slouched frame, watching intently as Clarke sighs deeply as she flips her page. She’s reading a Stephen King novel, a classic, but the cover is so worn that Lexa can’t make out which one it is. She's known Clarke to be an avid reader, it was how they met back in grade school, but she's knows this book. Clarke never reads the same book twice if she can't help it, something about redundancy, she’d say, but this book, Clarke never reads this book.

Lexa licks over her chapped lips to wet them, her fingers clenching around her phone case in an unrelenting grip as she notices Clarke shift uncomfortably on the couch, trying to focus on the lines in her ragged book. A part of Lexa beams knowing that Clarke can sense her staring, but another part is furious at her own neediness for the other woman's attention. They've been playing this game for so long it should be routine, but something has been feeling off recently. Lexa wants to be blind, to be naive, but a child prodigy like herself isn't so lucky. Instead, she waits for Clarke to respond, but after a few seconds of silence, all she gets is a passive-aggressive mutter in return. Grunting with frustration, Lexa instead turns to look back at her phone, watching as she waits for her girlfriend,
Costia, to type a response to her question from a few hours ago. It takes a moment before there’s the all-familiar ding of the What's App message on her phone. She slides the lock screen and reads.

*I’ll be there at six. Don’t wait up if I’m late. I got caught up in a meeting with my boss about a recent investigation at the hospital. Photojournalism isn't as nine-to-five as you'd think. Talk soon, xx.*

Lexa frowns at the message and grumbles, absently typing up a half-hearted response before casting the iPhone to the side of the couch with a disgruntled noise of apathy. The plastic collides with the soft cushions in a gentle thud, finally drawing Clarke’s attention from her book. Those blue eyes stare suspiciously over in her direction, but at the sight of Lexa’s pouted face, Clarke’s gaze softens sympathetically and she sets the book face-down to not lose her spot. Lexa leans back into the couch, throwing an arm over her face.

“What’s going on with you guys? Niylah said that you two have been fighting recently. I’m worried, Lexa.” Clarke pushes, wanting to understand the strife that was going on between the two women. She’s concerned, because she’s seen Lexa walking around aimlessly at night since she’d flown over for the holiday break. Her best friend often suffers from insomnia when dealing with stress. Most of it had to do with her PTSD, Clarke knew from what Lexa had chosen to share with her during their nights after the older woman came back from her last tour half a decade ago. It had been so long, and still Lexa hasn’t talked about what happened back in Afghanistan.

“It’s nothing, we’re fine. It’s just that she texted me saying she would be back at six, not four. She didn't mention anything about Niylah,” Lexa mumbles absently, looking out the crusty window of Clarke’s apartment to glance at the clouds rolling in. The winter snow is falling slowly, sticking to the cool glass and forming its own crystalline structure. Clarke sees that Lexa doesn’t want to talk about it, so instead she reaches for the television remote, powering on the giant screen. She flips through the channels until she lands on the news. Lexa watches for a few minutes, but there’s a question on her mind that had been bugging her for quite some time now.
“I saw the brochures,” Lexa says before she can stop her mouth from moving and the words from leaving her lips. She clears her throat before continuing to say, "there were a few in the kitchen. It looks pretty serious from what it seems." Her croaked voice ends up interrupting the muffled voice of the news reporter on the television, causing Clarke’s gaze to shift back to her best friend as Lexa clears her throat and leans forward.

“You guys are planning on having a kid, then?” She asks, her voice guarded. Clarke’s shoulders stiffened as she looks to her striped socks. Lexa can see the lines building upon her brow, the unsteadiness in her posture.

_Fucking prodigy, she thinks, can't catch a break._

“Yeah, I guess we're thinking about it. I mean, we're not getting any younger, right? It's mainly Niylah that wants one, something about this being the optimum age to conceive. I don't know, we haven't talked about it that much as a couple. I love her, I do, but there's something… missing.” Clarke murmurs. She's missing, Clarke wants to say, and she can tell that Lexa knows it too if her flinch is anything to go by.

"Besides," Clarke mutters half-heartedly, "I can't help thinking it'd be fucked up to bring one in just yet."

"Why?" Lexa asks back, but she already knows the answer. She just wants to hear Clarke say it.

Instead, her best friend simply glowers her way and grumbles, "you know why, Lexa."

Unable to find words, Lexa just nods. She swallows thickly as the words lay in the silence between them, thickening the tension. They've always been like that, though. They've never needed words to convey their deepest secrets and insecurities. They have always gotten each other, since they'd first met. Clarke knew about Lexa's transition before even Lexa did. No one else had been there for the brunette as much as Clarke, and even though they still had their awkward relationship problems, they never separated from each other. The two of them were a team since they met at the library book club under two different names and as two different people.

Choosing not to ask anything else, Lexa resolves to watching as her best friend's eyes glaze over with guilt. Deep down, Lexa rationally knows why Clarke isn't as on board with the child as Niylah seems to be. She takes a moment, her hand reaching up to run her fingers through her hair as she swallows thickly.

“Right,” Lexa echoes after sometime, "well, I hope you guys sort it out. If Niylah's considering it, you best talk about what the baby would mean to both of you." Clarke is about to reply when the news reporter returns to the screen, huddled in front of a hospital. Both best friends turn to face the television with perplexed gazes.

“Maimonides is experiencing a new wave of infection. H1Z1, as doctors are labelling it, seems to be a rare fleshing eating disease caused by fermented bacteria that seem to be affecting cytotoxic cells in the immune system. Containment is at sixty-four percent in the hospital. All authorities are urging those experiencing flu-like symptoms, fever, blood in the urine or stool, nausea spells or dizziness, hallucinations, insomnia, or any bizarre changes in their daily functions to report to their nearest hospital for further examination immediately.”

Clarke turns up the volume as the camera pans to the hospital. In the distance, a loud and high pitched shrieking can be heard. The news reporter freezes and whips his head around, his neck veins bulging with apprehension.
“Until further notice, the lower Harlem states are under quarantined regulations. Until authorities can come to a decision regarding the infection, we are recommending people limit their exposure to the Harlem district. This has been John Smith reporting on behalf of CNN, thank you for watching and goodnight.” The news coverage cuts out and goes to a commercial as Clarke reaches for the remote. She powers off the television and frowns.

“What the hell was that all about?” She muses, glancing back at her best friend. Lexa shakes her head, just as confused as her best friend. She eyes her phone and swipes it up again. No new messages from Costia or her other friends. Lexa thinks about the news reporter again and shakes her head as she starts jumping from one radical conclusion to the next. She tries to calm her anxiety, but she feels herself starting to panic about unknown variables. There's no equation to solve paranoia; no parables, no formulas, no rationality, nothing.

“I'm sure it's fine, Lex. It's probably some sort of swine flu and people are over-exaggerating it again. Remember the whole Ebola thing? It'll go away in a few months probably,” Clarke says unconvincingly, "I strongly doubt that there's anything catastrophic we need to worry about. We tend to make big deals out of little things."

The thing is, Lexa would have believed her, but the scream that sounded from the television plays like a broken record in her head. She thinks of the screams from back when she'd been in service years ago and she feels herself quiver and tremble at the memories during her time in the armed forces. Lexa scratches her head tries to reason with her best friend, but finally decides that she was most likely over-thinking the entire situation.

A few hours pass, and the two best friends immerse themselves in their own habits. Lexa plucks at the strings on her Martin, playing with different chords and melodies to ease the churning fear in her stomach. She tunes to each pitch, matching the tone to the narrowest of frequencies. Clarke continues reading her book, occasionally stopping to sneak a glance at her best friend. After some awkward, ambient silence between them, their tense avoidance is cut short by the rumble of Clarke's stomach. The two fashion up a quick lunch consisting of sandwiches and soup, mumbling quiet conversations as the hand on the clock ticks closer to four.

After they've finished eating, Lexa puts the plates in the dishwasher as Clarke wipes down the table. Mundane, Lexa chuckles to herself, how ironic. When she looks at the clock, something in her heart cringes and she curls her fists angrily. Taking a deep breath, she lowers her head and tries to refocus her thoughts properly.

It's not that she doesn't like Niylah, well… maybe she doesn't. No, she really doesn't like her. Niylah isn't rude or mean to Lexa, but when her best friend is with her girlfriend, Lexa is often the third wheel. And Lexa, while fully aware that her six year open-relationship with Costia is crumbling at the seams, can't help but feel jealous of Clarke, or Niylah, or maybe even the both of them. Truth be told, all Lexa wants is love, trust, stability. A love that she's never had, a love that she's only felt when she's been with Clarke. It hurts to know that the most that Lexa can ever be is just a friend with benefits, a tool used for meaningless sex and nothing more.

A part of Lexa wants to believe it could be more, but the rational side of her knows that like everything else in her life, she's overestimating herself. The probabilities are stacked against her, and she's not an optimist.

The door unlocks, startling the ex-soldier out of her thoughts. She snaps her head up anxiously to see as in shuffles Niylah, shopping bags in tow and flush-faced from the cold. She grins as soon as she spots Clarke and quickly drops her bags at the front bench before shutting the apartment door behind her. Lexa plants her gaze on her guitar strings as Clarke lets out a quiet exclamation at the sight of
her girlfriend, but doesn’t sound too enthused. Lexa practically suppresses the urge to gag as she hears the sound of their mouthes meeting in a kiss.

“Hi, Lexa!” Niylah says somewhat cheerily, clearly trying to make an effort to be polite. Lexa cocks her head in a semi-turn before jerking her head up in a half nod. “Afternoon,” she replies curtly. Niylah’s smile drops into a small frown as Clarke places a hand on her back. She feels the lightest of kisses on her shoulder.

“She’s having a rough day, baby,” Clarke mumbles against her skin, though it doesn’t sound particularly affectionate. Not that her girlfriend can notice a difference, however. Niylah’s bright and innocent smile returns at the sound of Clarke’s low, raspy voice as she nods, reaching back behind them for her bags. She carries them up the stairs and towards her room, but not without passing Lexa another sickeningly sweet smile.

“You could have been a little nicer to her, you know. She’s not out to get you,” Clarke mutters, crossing her arms as she briskly walks back into the living room. Lexa’s head cocks up and for a brief second, a flash of hurt passes through those hazel-green eyes. Lexa places the flat of her palm upon the neck of the guitar.

“Really,” Lexa asks, brow raised. "You're criticizing me on how to behave with her?"

Clarke winces, and she knows she's hit a sore spot. Clarke dips her head meekly, but Lexa can see that she’s gone too far. She says nothing in return because Niylah has already returned with a happy grin on her face.

"Really," Lexa asks, brow raised. "You're criticizing me on how to behave with her?"

Costia has her hands shoved deep within her pockets as she juts her head up. Her soft hazel eyes meet those of her girlfriend’s, and it doesn’t take long for her to let out a tired sigh. Lexa’s eyes narrow at the non-verbal response to her greeting as she rubs the back of her head, feeling apprehensive that this isn't the warm welcome she made it out to be. Clarke and Niylah stand behind them, simply observing in silence as Costia mumbles a small hello to Lexa and nods at the other two women. Lexa steps forward and opens her arms. Costia, however reluctant, finally gives into the embrace after sometime, placing her face in the crook of Lexa's neck.

“I missed you,” Lexa whispers in a low croak, her voice cracking with the anxiety that had been building over the day. Love, affection, stability… the three things she longs for but Lexa knows, she's calculated, she's rationalized, she's weighted the odds and no matter which path comes forward, it does not bode well for her.

And just like that, the proverbial shoe Lexa had been clinging to, drops.
“Lexa,” Costia says in a quiet voice, “we need to talk.”

Anyone who’s been through heartbreak knows what the four words entail, and Lexa, a master of love and heartbreak, knows these words all too well. Clarke sucks in a deep breath and Niylah flinches guiltily as they watch the scene unfold. She knows what Costia is going to do, because she had discussed it with her earlier on the phone. Lexa nods, pressing her hands together tightly as she looks up at the stairs with a hesitant glance.

“Oh, okay,” she agrees, "yeah, we can talk."

But still, inside her chest, all Lexa can hear is the shattering of her heart against her ribs.

As they pass Clarke and Niylah, Lexa keeps her head down and her eyes fixated on the wooden tiles. Costia leads them upstairs quickly and soundlessly. It feels almost clinical, in a sense, as Lexa shuts her bedroom door behind her and watches Costia slip off her winter coat. Time seems to tick by faster, and suddenly the six years of what she’d believed to be love dwell to a matter of seconds. Inside of her head, Lexa's mentally building every single shield she can muster while Costia pieces together what she wants to say. Her fingers wrench, growing clammy with anxiety. Lexa expects Costia to draw the situation out, filling negatives with positives so it doesn’t hurt as much. But, like their entire relationship planned out to be, Costia never does what Lexa expects.

"I can’t do this anymore," Costia states simply, pointing at Lexa and then between them, “I can’t do this with you, Lexa. What we have… it’s not working. We aren’t working. It's… it's not something that I think we can fix, either. The open relationship… look, I just… we fell in love years ago but now…” The words are dry and tasteless, and for a moment Lexa wonders if Costia ever put effort into anything they had done. Considering Costia doesn't even have the decency to speak the words they both know, Lexa knows that her answer is redundant. Sheepishly, Costia waits for Lexa to digest the words she'd dished out. Accept them, holster them inside, burn with them.

“O-okay,” is all that Lexa can manage, her voice stuttering, "I… I know you're right, Cos, but I don't know why now? We could try something else, couples therapy, counselling…” Lexa doesn't even know why she's trying. This relationship had been a mess since before they'd taken it seriously. They just kept dragging it out and now it's left them in a spot of trouble. Lexa's eyes burn as she bites her lip, internally berating herself for being stupid.

Yet again, she finds herself caught in her own web of disaster.

"Oh Lex," Costia hums sadly, reaching out to brush a stray hair off Lexa's shoulder, "it wouldn't work. We don't work, Lex. You know that. You can't fix this like you fix everything else. You can't save this… us… we aren’t… this… it's over, Lexa. It's been over for years now but this time, we have to do it right. Neither of us deserve this."

Lexa swallows the dry lump in her throat and nods, unable to formulate a response. Costia sighs, blinking back tears as she stands from the bed, her hands firmly clasped together as she reaches out to grab her coat. She nods at her now ex-girlfriend, pity swirling in those hazel eyes.

"Take care, Lexa," Costia states, reaching out to brush Lexa’s cheek with the palm of her hands. “You were an amazing girlfriend. This… it just didn't work. Any girl would be lucky to love you and cherish you the way I should have. I wish you the best of luck, Lexa. I mean that honestly.”

Lexa nods and mumbles a quiet, “same to you", but is unable to meet her now ex-girlfriend's gaze with her own. Costia solemnly nods before she wordlessly shuffles out the door, leaving the heartbroken woman alone in the empty bedroom. Lexa sits on the bed and holds her head in her hands, trying understand how that had managed to happen so fast, from when she'd been in a
straining relationship to suddenly leave alone once more. From the floor below, she can hear Clarke angrily bad mouthing Costia in the living room, and Niylah trying to diffuse the situation by throwing in rational words to her best friend in an effort to calm her down. Lexa closes her eyes, blinking back tears, and she can't help but feel like this is her fault.

But isn't it always her own fault?

If it hadn't been for her, she'd still be living with her parents.

If it hadn't been for her, she'd have been able to live a normal life, to get married and have children.

If it hadn't been for her, she's be happy, safe, wholesome.

If it hadn't been for her, she wouldn't even exist.

“I knew she was a bitch, you know,” Clarke says, causing Lexa’s head to jerk up at the sound of her voice and jarring her from her self-deprecating thoughts. Lexa’s eyes meet Clarke’s as her best friend steps into the room. She shuts and locks the door behind them, leaving Lexa puzzled.

“Niylah?” She asks, bewildered, noticing that the apartment is eerily quiet aside from the two of them. Clarke shoves her hands into her pockets as she takes a seat on the bed, a flash of guilt taking over her light blue eyes. “She’s off to Costia’s apartment. She’ll be back tomorrow.” Lexa nods as she gazes down at her shoes. Clarke slowly inches closer to her best friend. Their fingers brush, and Lexa shivers, but for a different reason this time.

“I… I just thought… I…,” Lexa can't finish the sentence as she chokes up. Clarke removes one of her hands from her pocket and drapes it over the shoulder of her best friend, squeezing it lightly. At the contact, Lexa bursts into tears, internally cursing herself for being so damned weak all the time.

Love is weakness, her father used to say, love is what gets good men killed.

Well, she's not good and she's not a man… at least not anymore.

“You thought that she loved you,” Clarke finishes her sentence in a bitter tone. Lexa lets out a quiet huff before she nods in agreement faintly.

“Yeah,” Lexa mutters with a sad chuckle, “that.” She pauses a moment before looking up, gaze distant and shoulders slumped.

“What?” Clarke asks softly, reaching out to softly curl a strand of hair behind her ear. Lexa rolls her eyes, trying to give her a half-hearted smile.

"This is a time for a told you so," Lexa replies, her voice still cracking despite the solemn humour added to its tone. "You're always big on those."

Clarke's facial features soften and she takes a deep breath. "Not this time, Lex. I'm not that big of an asshole."

"Says the girl who stole my crayons the first day I met her."

"You pushed me off the slide!" Clarke quips back, her brows shooting up. Lexa chuckles again, feeling lighter already.

"Only because you were taking so long to go down."

"You were such a jerk back then," Clarke mutters, shaking her head with a soft laugh, "I still have
that scar on my butt, you know.”

Lexa is about to respond with a witty, sharp-tongued response, but before she can, the lights in the apartment suddenly shut, leaving the two best friends in complete darkness. Something inside of Clarke churns as she clings harder to Lexa. One would think after having lived in a city like New York for so long, Clarke would be accustomed to power shortages, but Lexa knows that Clarke’s always been scared of the dark. The older woman gazes at the terrified blonde before slowly rising from the bed with an exasperated sigh and a roll of her sore shoulders. Clarke whimpers at the loss of heat and comfort Lexa’s presence provided.

“Come, we’ll grab the candles,” Lexa says softly. Clarke gets up and pads after her best friend. Lexa can hear the apprehension in each footstep that trails after her. She knows Clarke doesn’t like the darkness, so it isn’t long before more than a dozen candles dimly provide light to the living room. Lexa effortlessly lifts the coffee table as Clarke timidly sits on one corner of the couch. Clarke cocks her head and asks, “what are you doing?”

Lexa looks back at her best friend’s puzzled gaze and instead offers her a warm half-lipped smile. She points to the centre of the room and nods, “Making a place so we can sleep, just like how we used to when we were kids. I’ll grab the comforter and pillows from upstairs while you set up the bed.” Clarke’s eyes widen in fear at the thought of Lexa leaving her alone for even a second. Her best friend kneels before her and gently squeezes her knee.

“I’ll be right back, I swear. If our power’s out, so will be our heating. Focus on setting up the bed and before you know it, I’ll be back down here, okay?” Lexa asks her in a soothing tone, squeezing her knee. Clarke takes deep breath and reluctantly relaxes her body as her best friend searches in pursuit of her needed materials. Clarke tries to put herself to work in setting up the bed, but after she's done, the swirling apprehension comes back full force.

Clarke waits a few minutes before anxiety begins crawling through her bloodstream. She shivers as the room’s space multiplies and she feels smaller in her own body. It was the main reason why she came to hate her joint apartment with Niylah; the rooms were far too vast and spread apart for her liking and there was too much emptiness between each article of furniture. While she enjoys the model's minimalist style of living, she wanted just enough space, not too much. The apartment felt like an apartment, but never like a home.

Clarke shakes herself out of her thoughts as she glances at her watch, frowning as she realizes that Lexa still isn’t back yet. With wobbly knees, she gets up and slowly makes her way to base of the steps. She looks up at the bleak darkness, a lump now obscuring her throat. The irrational fear of a clouded black looms over her like a raincloud, threatening to release its storm. The news segment from earlier hasn't helped with alleviating her anxiety in any form, either. She feels like she’s about to be swallowed up into the bleak abyss. Her hands tremble at her sides, but she cannot find the will to move as her breathing starts to quicken hastily.

“Lexa?” She calls out in a ragged, nerve-wracking voice. “Lexa, if this is your idea of a prank, it’s not funny. Come down, please. You know I don’t like the dark, Lex.” No reply. Clarke shifts her weight from one foot to the next as she waits on Lexa’s response. "Lexa, please, I'm freaked the fuck out just come down. You win, okay?"

Still nothing.

Clarke looks back at the candles and then back up at the top of the stairs. Taking a deep breath, she slowly ascends each creaking wooden panel. As she reaches the top, she bumps into something warm and lean, causing her to shriek loudly and ungracefully tumble backwards into the wall.
“Jesus, Clarke!” Lexa exclaims, her eyes bugging out in fear as her face comes into view. Clarke regains her breathing as she trembles fearfully, her eyes twitching around the apartment as the fear accumulates and rises with each shaky breath. Lexa sighs, seeing her distressed best friend, and quickly pulls her in for a hug. Clarke cowers in Lexa’s strong embrace, closing her eyes as the familiar scent of her best friend calms her down significantly. She leans into the taller woman, burying her nose into Lexa's muscled shoulder.

“What the hell was taking you so long, Lexa? It isn't a big apartment. Did you get lost?” Clarke asks with a hint of frustration, but mostly relief at the sight of her friend. Lexa’s eyes are guarded as she quickly ducks inside the bedroom to grab the pillows and blankets. In her other hand she holds Clarke’s pajamas and her own nightwear.

When she returns, she ushers Clarke down the stairs. They set up their bedding before the each of them change into their respective clothing. Lexa turns on the fireplace as Clarke huddles under the covers, waiting on her best friend. Before Lexa can join her best friend, she cautiously double checks the locks on every door. Clarke watches in confusion as Lexa glances out the large window and into the street, her fingers clenching and unclenching as if she were ready to punch through the glass to get to whatever lingered below.

“Lexa,” Clarke calls out in a shrill voice, “what's wrong?”

“Nothing,” Lexa replies absently, before shutting the blinds on the window, "I just wanted to make sure everything was secure. With the holidays coming up, you never know. I get that this is a pretty safe building considering Niylah's basically a millionaire, but it's still good to air on the side of caution, am I right? Better safe than sorry, as I always say." She offers Clarke a small, unconvincing smile before crawling into the makeshift bed. The minute her body joins her best friend’s own, Clarke is curled around her like a heliotrope vine. Lexa pulls Clarke closer to her, pushing her nose into her soft brown hair. Her hand rubs slow circles on Clarke’s back.

“You didn’t answer my question from earlier,” Clarke mumbles sleepily, her hand now lazily creeping its way up Lexa’s front. "What did you see that made you tense up?” Lexa’s jaw goes rigid as she inches down to face Clarke. Her hand wanders dangerously close to the undersides of her breasts, her fingers gently teasing them.

“I thought I saw something outside the window,” Lexa says distantly, and within a half-second that hand stops its wandering and trembles. Lexa sighs, shooting Clarke a half-hearted smile. ‘But it was probably nothing. Just crazy ole' me, probably.” Clarke’s eyes widen at the statement as she pushes herself further into Lexa’s arms.

“What do you mean you saw something?” She asks, her voice taught. She ignores the last half of Lexa's statement, because both of them know that despite the paranoia of her PTSD, her best friend's gut feelings have never been wrong before. Clarke hears Lexa take a breath before she shakes her head and lets out a small grunt.

“It was just my eyes playing tricks on me, Clarke. PTSD acting up again. You know how I get closer to wintertime,” Lexa mumbles. “Listen, we should get some sleep. Hopefully the power will return in the morning.”

Clarke murmurs a quiet, but still wary agreement before leaning up so that they're face to face again. Lexa can tell that her best friend isn't buying her story. Clarke looks terrified, still, her blue eyes wide with fear and worry.

And so, Lexa decides to do what she knows best.
Lexa leans forward slowly and very gently captures her best friend’s lips between her own. The small, and relatively quick kiss is like an antidote to her friend's anxiety as Clarke dispels a sigh of relief.

*Your girlfriend of six years just broke up with you without even giving you time to react or grieve, Lexa* thinks with a sarcastic chuckle, *and yet this feels so goddamn normal. It's not even been a day and you can't resist her.*

But when Clarke's tongue gently swipes along her bottom lip, the rationalization flies out the window.

Lexa feels something in her heart twitch at the small amicable gesture. The peel apart after a few more chaste kisses, their heads resting on the pillows. Lexa stares up at the ceiling, trying to calm her mind, as well as other regions of her body. Before she can say anything a few seconds later, Lexa hears the soft snores of Clarke beside her. She gazes at her best friend, trying to shake the haunting image that she had seen earlier.

*Paranoia,* she tries to convince herself, *it's all in your head.*

(Except it's not. It never is and it never was.)

Clarke twitches slightly in her sleep, unintentionally drawing Lexa in for a tighter embrace before her breathing evens out and she grows limp with fatigue. Lexa keeps tracing over her best friend's features, trying to pinpoint each and every blemish so that she can root herself to the presence, to Clarke, and not her mind. She tries to get through the images that won't cease plaguing her, but she can't help it.

What she'd seen, she doesn't know if she *could* forget.

And that says a lot, considering all that she's seen and hasn't been able to forget.

It had been a man, but he didn’t really act like a normal man. He walked less like a man and more like an ape, Lexa thought -- slouched and hunched over like walking was an effort he wasn't capable of exerting. He had been dragging his feet behind him like he had been hurt or attacked. In the rare, but somehow silent streets of New York City, she had very clearly heard the soft groans coming from his lips, but she didn't know if he'd been in pain or if he was simply drunk. Lexa couldn’t make out much in the darkness, but she knew what she had seen, and it hadn’t looked normal. No man walked like that, not here to say the least, not even inebriated.

Lexa looks back at Clarke and draws a sharp breath. It’s now her turn to feel scared as snuggles closer to her best friend. Lexa looks beneath the sheets to see Clarke’s hand limply pressing against her stomach. Softly, she joins their bodies together so they mesh like a puzzle. Lexa inhales the familiar scent of her best friend before she closes her eyes. It takes a few minutes for her to weed out the frightening scenes, but soon enough, her body becomes restless. Her insomnia kicks in full force and she can't stop the irrational thoughts from flying through her mind and taking over as she trembles in the bed. She tries to close her eyes, but nothing works.

Lexa pries herself from her best friend’s arms and looks at the base of the steps, cursing her inability to sleep. She begins to sweat nervously as flashbacks of what she had seen an hour ago rush through her mind frantically. She tries to dispel them, but it doesn't work. She quickly makes her way over to the window and gazes down at the street. To her relief, she sees that it’s empty. Lexa scolds herself, scoffing lightly at her stupid insecurities. She wants to believe was right in telling Clarke she had just hallucinated or that her PTSD was acting up again. Maybe Costia’s break up was having more of a toll on her than she thought. She wants to believe it, she does.
But she doesn't.

Crawling back under the covers, Lexa calls in defeat against the intruding and disturbing thoughts lingering in her mind. She presses her body closer to her best friend’s own, seeking heat. In the sweet candlelight and soft crackling of the fireplace, she rests her eyes. It doesn’t take long for slumber to encompass her body and for her to relax once Clarke's face nuzzles back into the crook of her neck and her hand splays out over her stomach once more. Lexa allows herself to sink into the touch, allowing herself to believe she's safe in Clarke’s arms.

She falls asleep without even knowing that the man she'd seen was right outside their door.

Chapter End Notes

I'll upload like three or so more chapters to give y'all a feel for how this is gonna go down, and then if there's an interest, I can upload the rest if you guys want! I don't know if it's as good as my other works considering I've written a lot between this and my current stuff, but I always think it's a good idea to go back and reread where you started from and edit it :)

Cheers!
A Strange Turn of Events

Chapter Summary

The only thing that matters in the end is your own survival. It's what humans and cockroaches are best at.

Chapter Notes

New part! Some intro to the infected!

Also for those wondering, I'm working on the Sisters update and the WTTIMG updates currently. They're both quite long so it's taking me awhile! This is just some work to hopefully hold y'all over until I manage an update. Sorry again for the long wait! :(

This game has huge ties to The Last of Us and Telltale Games: The Walking Dead. Lots of references to some of the plot points in both of those games that I couldn't pass up.

The quote in the summary is from Susan Ee's, "World After".

See the end of the chapter for more notes

* * *

Day 2

Clarke shivers awake, stirred by a cool draft. Her eyes blink open to see Lexa sprawled out beside her, head pushed deep within a pillow. Clarke takes a minute to run her eyes over the smooth plane of her best friend’s clothed back, smiling as she leans over and presses a soft kiss to the bare skin of Lexa’s shoulder where her sleeves had crumpled up. Lexa sleepily mumbles something incoherent in her slow wake, causing Clarke to giggle. Another sharp breeze blows through the younger woman, causing her to jerk her head up and her spine to tingle with the sharp sting of the cold. A breeze in the middle of winter didn't sound all too pleasant, nor did it feel that way, either. Perhaps the power was still out. Her cautious blue eyes gaze around at the room, instantly falling upon the front door. A gasp leaves Clarke breathless as her heart stops beating in a lurching thud.

It's unlocked.

Lexa never goes to sleep with the door unlocked.

Another faint gust of cool air blows through her, causing her to whip her head around. Daylight pours in through the open window down the hall, causing the sun's deceivingly cool rays to cascade over their bodies. Clarke can hear the faint noise of traffic and commotion from the streets below, meddled with the gentle whirring of the ongoing snowfall. She stares at the open window with a blank, but equally terrified expression as she feels dread and fear crawl into her bones. She turns back to her best friend and shakes her slowly. Lexa grumbles, but shifts slowly, blinking the sleep from her eyes as she peers up at Clarke.
"What is it, Clarke?" Lexa asks in a sleepy voice, her words slurring together groggily. "It's too early."

Clarke can't even gush over the adorable anti-morning person Lexa is because another breeze sweeps through her frame. Lexa yawns she fights off the fatigue clouding around the corners of her vision. Clarke glances back at the window before quickly staring at the door, gulping harshly. Her eyes cast themselves frantically upon her dazed best friend. "Did you go out earlier or something?" Lexa frowns, sitting up to gaze at the door. Her jaw hangs open slightly as she slowly shakes her head, no.

Lexa vividly remembers the sight of the man limping down the emptied streets. She sees the frightening image play in her head as she swivels to face a scared Clarke. She is about to explain the events of last night, but the draft coming in from the window freezes the words in the back of her throat. Lexa's body stiffens at the chill as she swallows painfully.

She was hallucinating last night. It was all a dream. A part of her fucked up mind.

It wasn't real.

Was it?

Her mind repeats over and over again, without limits, it was, it was, it was…

Before Lexa can process all the thoughts and questions, the both of them startle as they hear a loud, shrill creak. The two best friends jump at the noise, their faces paling at the possibility of an intruder. Lexa's military instincts immediately kick in as she reaches out for Clarke, pulling the blonde woman swiftly into her side while standing as straight as possible. She peers into the glaring rays of the sun spilling out over the hardwood floors, alert and searching for an intruder that could have broken in.

And then, there's another low, straining creak.

Clarke swallows harshly in trepidation as they both glance at the origin of the noise, the top of the stairs. The cool winter air drifts again, causing a faint fluttering noise with the blinds against the sill. Lexa sees Clarke’s old field hockey stick from college sitting in the corner of the closet and licks her lips. Soundlessly, she rises and makes her way over to the open doors. Clarke is frozen to her seat, watching as her best friend pads across the wooden floor and grabs the heavy carbon rod.

"Lexa," she whispers in a high pitched voice, "what the fuck are you doing, Lexa?!"

The brunette ignores her and instead tests her grip on the stick. Lexa is about to respond when suddenly, there is a small mewling sound now coming from the top of the stairs. Clarke’s head snaps up as she quickly makes her way to her best friend. Clarke gulps down her fear and searches for her phone, only to find it discarded and out of battery on the coffee table.

"Shit," Clarke mutters as she sets the device down before looking back at Lexa, "I think that--"

Another loud groan sounds from the steps, louder than before. Lexa swallows harshly as Clarke looks over to her, blue eyes blown wide with fear.

"What was that?" She asks as the whimpering grows louder. "Lexa, what was--"

"Ssh," Lexa whispers as they both hear the noise growing successively louder. "Don't talk."

Inside her chest, Lexa’s heart is beating faster than the highest tempo on a metronome. She feels like she's back in Iraq, on the front-lines with bullets raining down on her from above. She feels like she's there again, watching her uncle bleed out into the sand while clutching at his innards. She's there, the
smoke raining off the barrel of the gun as she stares at the metal bullet lodging into the spine of a ten year old boy with a bomb strapped to his chest. She swallows her desire to run and quickly turns to face Clarke. “I’m gonna check it out, stay here. Don't move.” Clarke’s eyes bug out at the order as she shakes her head.

“Like hell I'm staying here. I’m coming with you, Lexa,” she says quietly, but her voice quivers with fear. Lexa doesn’t want to waste time while the culprit of the break-in is still in their living spaces, so she doesn’t try to fight Clarke on this. Together, with Lexa leading and Clarke following, the two women make their way up the stairs to the source of the sound.

All the windows Lexa had left closed last night were now wide open, pouring a chilling sunlight into the small hallway. The only door that is open, by just a crack, is the main bedroom. The wind whistles in the living room, further creating unrest in both two best friends. The silence, safe for the wind, is eerie and heavy. Sucking in a calming breath, Lexa pads on, leading them to the source of the noises. As they approach the door, the best friends pause, each simultaneously sucking in a deep breath. Lexa’s hands tremble around the stick as she raises it quickly to her side. With one last deep breath, she kicks the door open.

Lexa lets out a fierce grunt as she swings blindly. She shuts her eyes tightly and throws every ounce of force into the swing. The stick whizzes through the air, but there is no resistance, or sound of metal crunching against bone. Lexa blinks open her eyes, breathing hard as she sees an empty room. Clarke’s sheets have a soft crinkle, even though Lexa clearly recalls them being straight last she had checked. The bed had been made when she'd walked down the night before, and she only just woke up.

It hits her like a shot to the gut, a cold tingle down her spine.

They are not alone.

Sweat beads down her forehead as she turns to face Clarke. Before they can do anything else, Lexa sees the bathroom door crack open from the hallway. She hurriedly grabs Clarke and pulls her to the wall. Clarke is trembling harder now. They both lean against the cool plaster, out of sight from the hallway. Lexa stands in front of Clarke, her hands clutching the stick again. She sees the shadow moving closer at a slow pace. Both best friends are breathing faster now, fearful of what lies ahead. Lexa sees the darkened figure creeping closer as she quickly turns to face Clarke. She shoves the stick in her hands, feeling her instincts kicking in. She's already formulating a plan as Clarke continues to look at her with a baffled expression.

“Hold this; I’m gonna pin whoever it is to the ground, and then you come in,” she orders in low, stern voice. Clarke’s eyes bug out at the request. Sure, she’d taken karate lessons when she'd been younger as mandatory by her parents, but she wasn’t a trained military officer like Lexa. She couldn’t even remember how to hold the damned stick, let alone wield it as a weapon. Lexa quickly returns to see the figure just a few steps from the door. Bending down slightly, she prepares her legs to spring.

The minute the first half of the body gets through the door, Lexa pounces from her position at the frame. She hears a loud, high pitched shriek underneath her as she pushes the nameless person deeper into the hardwood floor. The person flips her, quickly gaining the upper hand. Clarke watches as they tumble with shock, and it takes her a minute to register who Lexa is fighting. She watches in horror as Lexa rolls them back so she's on top before driving and elbow across the body's throat.

“Stop!” She cries out, casting the stick aside with a harsh thud. “It’s Niylah, Lexa! It’s Niylah!”
Clarke reaches and heaves her best friend off of her girlfriend. She quickly assesses the damage between the both of them and luckily, neither of them are hurt aside from a few light bruises. Lexa’s eyes are still laced with adrenaline, but once her gaze lands on the familiar blonde in Clarke’s arms, she relaxes slightly. Clarke can still see Lexa is on edge, however, but seems to be out of the violent sphere she’d casted herself back into. Lexa's eyes cloud with guilt, but Clarke shakes her head slightly.

Niylah, on the other hand, is not as calm. She violently tears herself from Clarke’s grasp in a raging fit and glares at both women. Her hands are still trembling as she struggles to compose herself, though her glare is more scathing in Lexa's direction. Clarke gives her girlfriend the much needed space as they break apart from each other. The three woman are silent and staring, trying to understand what had just happened in the last few seconds.

“What the fuck,” Niylah whispers after some time as she runs a hand through her hair, “is wrong with you?”

Lexa swallows nervously as she nods her head in the direction of the hallway. “The doors and windows were unlocked. We thought someone got in,” she says, her voice shaking. Niylah lets out a breath and shakes her head in disbelief.

“No,” she mutters with a sigh, “it’s just me. I got in ten minutes ago from Costia's. I guess I forgot to lock the door. I'm sorry if that freaked you out. I know you can get about locking things and what not. It's just a misunderstanding and I'm not hurt, so it's okay. Just… please don't tackle me like that again. It's terrifying. If I doubted your strength before, I sure as hell don't now.” Niylah tries to add a chuckle, but it falls flat. Lexa nods and hangs her head in shame as Clarke looks at the field hockey stick.

“Jesus Christ,” Clarke breathes out, leaning against the wall. Her head thuds against the plaster as she closes her eyes, trying to calm down her body even if it's safe. Her hands tremble in her lap as she licks her lips. A few tears straggle down her cheeks as she struggles to centre herself to reality. "This is fucking bullshit, man. We're all just on edge. That's it, right?"

“I'm assuming you've seen the news?” Niylah asks softly, ignoring Clarke's small whimper of fear. Lexa clears her throat, deciding to answer on behalf of her and her best friend.

“I guess the whole quarantine thing is freaking us out. That kinda shit doesn’t happen here,” Lexa murmurs, rubbing the back of her head. Niylah nods and reaches in her pocket, grunting. "You see that fictionally in books and on TV, but the way they reported it yesterday and the alarming rate at which people are being infected, it seems like something in a horror movie."

Niylah nods, taking another deep breath before glancing down at the phone she’d fished from her pocket. “I have fourteen percent battery left. Any idea if the power has come back on yet?” She asks Lexa, who simply shakes her head.

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“We haven’t tried,” Lexa responds, glancing back to Clarke, who seems to avoiding her gaze.

Niylah rises from the floor and turns on her night clock. The panel is black and lifeless, showing no signs of coming on anytime soon. Niylah growls and sits down on the bed in a huff. “F**k, it’s been out for nearly twenty-one hours. Even with our worst storms, it's never gone out for that long before, right? And the weirdest part is that the weather is fine. Aside from some constant snow, we've got no massive winds or blizzards. It's so… weird.” When no one replies her, Niylah only huffs.

Lexa, meanwhile, makes her way over to her best friend, who seems to be plastered to the wall. Lexa quickly reaches out and pulls her into her arms. Clarke’s head rolls onto Lexa’s shoulder as she
shakes her head in disbelief. A small chuckle leaves Clarke’s lips, causing Lexa to pull their bodies apart and frown down at the younger woman.

“What’s so funny?” Lexa asks, bewildered that Clarke could find the situation amusing. Clarke sighs and rubs her forehead, feeling a headache coming on. She glances up to see Niylah staring at her intently. “It’s just, I feel like we’re completely making this seem like such a big deal. It’s probably gonna sort itself out in a few days. We’re probably getting paranoid over nothing, just like you both said. It’s just too much Stephen King.” Lexa listens intently to her best friend’s words, letting them sink in.

“Yeah,” she breathes out, “I guess you’re right.” Niylah nods in agreement as Clarke pulls herself off the floor. She quickly reaches for the hockey stick. Before she leaves the room, Clarke turns back to gaze at Niylah with a puzzled look.

“Oh hey Nye, why did you open all the windows?” She asks. "It's fucking freezing in here." Niylah frowns as she stands up.

“I didn’t,” she states, “they were open when I got here.”

The words shatter the once comforting feeling in the room. Before they can even register it, the tension creeps back into their bodies. Niylah and Clarke both look over at Lexa with widened eyes. They look at the woman, feeling anxiety pump through their veins harder than both of their hearts combined. Lexa rises to stand next to her best friend with a scared look on her face.

“I swear, I shut them,” she says, “I… I think I shut them, you know my routine. Five times, double-checked.” Lexa scrambles through the back of her foggy mind as she struggles to remember what she had done last night. She almost certainly remembers shutting the blinds, but did she shut or lock the windows themselves? She had to, it’s routine.

The probability of her skipping a check is minimal.

“Maybe you forgot, Lexa,” Clarke says, nudging her best friend’s shoulder. "It probably slipped your mind when you were getting the blankets or something.” Clarke tries to mask the fear in her voice, and Lexa knows that she’s lying through her teeth because both of them know about the ex-soldier’s routines. She wants to find reason in Clarke’s proposition but she can’t help the shaking words as Clarke says, “you know, sometimes habits get forgotten.” Lexa nods hesitantly, but now she finds herself second-guessing all the events of last night. Niylah suddenly remembers the question she had for Clarke, or Lexa.

“Hey,” she says, drawing their attention back to her, “why was all the bedding on the floor? I saw it when I walked in this morning.” Clarke’s face relaxes as she meekly gazes at her best friend, before quietly telling her girlfriend the truth.

“The power had gone out, and so we decided to sleep downstairs,” Clarke meekly asks, "it was warmer because of the fireplace."

Niylah’s head juts up slightly as she lets out a quiet, “ah. That makes sense. Well, I think we should tidy up. I think that a few friends from the agency are popping by soon.” Niylah doesn’t question why they had to sleep together, and instead peers at her cuticles. Tension filters through the room, threatening to suffocate them with the pressure. Lexa rubs the back of her head, trying to get out from the conversation. She gives both women a faint smile before she makes her way towards the door.

“On that note, I guess I’ll take the stuff back up to my room.” Lexa tells them with a curt nod, “I
should be getting ready to pack my flight anyways. I hope it doesn't get cancelled like the last two years. As much as I've always loved your place, I highly doubt that Anya would like it if I left her with my shitty apartment any longer than necessary." She senses the two women need some time alone to discuss the findings, as well as the events of the morning, so she gives them each a nod before turning away. Lexa trudges down the hallway, passing the opened windows. She shuts them and locks them, trying to preserve the heat. With no power, they would have to rely on gasoline and candles to keep them warm for the time being.

As she scoops up the bedding, Lexa hears a soft grunt from outside the door. She places the sheets on the couch and clambers over the pillows to get to the door. She peeks through the glass hole, but sees nothing. Gingerly, she opens the door just a slight crack. She shifts her gaze up and down the carpeted hallway, but no one is there to greet her. Lexa frowns as she shuts and locks the door in confusion. She had looked everywhere in the hall, but not down at the floor.

If she did, she would have seen the fresh drops of blood spattered on the doormat under her feet.

* * *

Day 4

Life progresses as normally as it can.

There are no more signs of any strange incidences. Each night since seeing the man in the street, Lexa finds herself triple checking each lockup procedure before sleeping. Her anxiety doubles and she can't seem to settle it, no matter what she does. The power comes back that morning, alleviating some of the tension that had been brewing around the apartment's occupants. After the electricity had been restored, the two best friends even managed to call Clarke's mum and a few of their friends. Clarke, Niylah, and everyone else seemed to have come to accept that maybe things are back to normal.

Yet somehow, Lexa can't.

She is flying back to Vancouver tomorrow night, but for some reason, she feels oddly insecure about it. The thirty-six year old woman has been packing and unpacking her clothes for the past two hours; it's become somewhat of a usual routine, but this time, she can never get it to her preference. There is more of a noise sounding from the busy streets of New York, more so than before, but Lexa thinks nothing of it. She gazes at the kitten socks Clarke had gifted her for Christmas before placing them in the suitcase. This is the fifteenth time she had done this, and still, she wasn't satisfied. Lexa grumbles as she begins to unpack again, organizing everything by clothing type and colour as the rigid, tenuous process begins yet again.

“Lexa?” Clarke’s voice sounds from the doorway, causing Lexa’s head to snap up. Clarke leans on the frame of her doorway with crossed arms as she gazes at her older best friend in concern. Lexa gives her a half-hearted wave and a tight-lipped smile.

“I… I was just wondering if you had a minute?” Lexa nods and shoves her suitcase off the bed and to the side so Clarke has some room to sit next to her on the mattress. She remains quiet as the bed sighs under Clarke’s weight. She remembers the last time Clarke had sat with her like this and shivers. She fights off the foul memories of Costia’s short farewell.

“How are you holding up, Lex?” Clarke mumbles, wringing her hands together. It takes a few moments for Clarke’s head to turn and face her best friend. Lexa shrugs, because to be honest, even she, a fully primed OCD machine, can’t seem to organize her feelings right now.
“Confused, scared, apprehensive,” Lexa lists in short. Clarke feels something in her heart beat faster at the sight of her conflicted best friend. Lexa's eyes are glazed and dark, hazy and distant; something about them screams insecurity, but Clarke can't pinpoint what. She softly reaches out and angles Lexa’s jaw so they are facing each other. Lexa’s gaze flickers to Clarke’s lips, then to Clarke’s eyes. The two of them stay in silence, but even without uttering a single word, they know what they want.

Lexa leans in and connects their lips in a soft and gentle kiss. Clarke’s eyes close immediately upon contact. Her fingers reach up and brush Lexa’s sharp jaw in gentle strokes. A moan is caught between them, the source unknown. Lexa wants to continue this, to let them take control, but then she pulls away to look into Clarke's eyes, silently asking her what she's thinking.

“Listen,” Clarke mumbles against her lips after another long and slow kiss, “I want to make something special for dinner tonight, you know, before you leave and all.” Lexa chuckles as she pulls her face away from her best friend.

“Mhmm?” Lexa mumbles as Clarke kisses her again, this time deeper. "Did you consult with Niylah?"

"Fuck," Clarke growls as Lexa's teeth graze her bottom lip, "must you bring her up now?"

"She's your girlfriend."

"Not for long," Clarke hums as she pulls away, her eyes set on Lexa's lap. "I'm going to break up with her. I think we both know that it's no longer working out for us. I can't keep stringing her along and if she's serious about this baby… well… I don't know."

Lexa frowns. She knew that things must have changed if Clarke was finally considering ending her three-year long relationship with the model. Sensing her concern, Clarke reaches upwards and pulls her face back down, sealing their lips together again.

“But first, I want to do something special right now,” Clarke grins wickedly. Lexa’s eyes are sparkling as once again, their mouths meet in another set of hot kisses. Their tongues swirl as Lexa’s hand comes to rest on her best friend’s thighs. It is more than fortunate for them that Niylah is doing a photo shoot and would be back just after noon. Lexa’s eyes close as Clarke gently pushes her back on the bed. Hands run everywhere, creating friction in places that have been yearned to be touched.

“What time is it?” Lexa asks between kisses. Clarke’s stop hands fumbling at Lexa’s belt as she pauses to pull her iPhone out of the waist band of her tights. She pushes the button at the top and the screen flashes to reveal the answer to her question.

“Nine o’clock. We have time for a quickie,” Clarke states, grinning at her best friend. Lexa smirks and hums contently as Clarke kisses her hard, tugging on her bottom lip with her teeth. She removes herself from her best friend’s body to put the phone on the dresser. Clarke returns to Lexa, straddling her best friend’s waist as she narrows her eyes. Lexa watches as Clarke unbuckles her belt and whips it off, causing the metal of the buckle to clang against the edge of the dresser.

"Eager much?" Lexa breathes as she watches Clarke's near-black gaze settle for her shirt. The blonde chuckles slickly.

"Speak for yourself," Clarke hums, fingerling the slight bulge in the front of her pants, "Commander."

"Fuck," Lexa moans as her eyes roll to the back of her head in ecstasy. "Clarke, please…"

"As you wish," Clarke grins salaciously, licking her lips with a devilish smirk. "No touching, hands
above your head."

Like a good soldier, Lexa obeys the order.

To Clarke, she doesn’t quite view it as cheating, for she knows that Niylah has slept around during their relationship -- if she isn’t doing it currently, that is. She'd judged Costia and Lexa, but what she and Niylah had been doing in the last year was just as messy. It was dishonest, built on a love that had died out so long ago it is barely recognizable. It was a relationship for the sake of a relationship, nothing more. Clarke knows that she should be upset when Niylah cheats, just as she should feel disgusted when she does the same, but instead, she can't help but feel somewhat relieved. It only marks her coming close to leaving her, which she plans on doing soon. She shoves the idea aside, instead preferring to settle on the present.

"Relax," Clarke purrs softly when Lexa's hips buck up, "now close your eyes, Lexa. No peeking."

Lexa’s eyes slowly shut and she grits her teeth in sexual frustration. Clarke's deft hands run down the front of her chest, the tips of her fingers fiddling with the buttons of her top. She growls as she tugs upon the material, desperately writhing for what she craves the most: Clarke's touch, for skin on skin. Clarke rips the shirt off her body, disregarding the patient quality her touch had previously been exerting. She follows with her own strip of clothing, revealing smooth, pale skin and ample breasts that threaten to spill out from her lacy bra. Lexa can't help but open her eyes the slightest bit, hissing in pleasure at the sight of Clarke’s body, as it has been quite awhile since she has seen Clarke naked. She runs the flats of her palms up Clarke’s torso and sides, causing the younger best friend to curl over and tangle her hands in Lexa’s choppy brown hair.

"Rule breaker," Clarke mutters, but makes no effort to scold her as those rough hands knead her breasts. "Such a dick."

"You love it," Lexa chuckles into her lips, chasing Clarke up for another kiss, "both parts."

As Lexa reaches for the clip on her bra, Clarke's reserve snaps and the all powerful control falls back into place. She slaps her best friend's hand away and grinds her hips down against her waist. Lexa pulls back, brow raised as Clarke takes her hands and holds them above her head again. Clarke knows Lexa's libido well, and she knows how to work her into a frenzy. She follows that within Lexa there is a dominant beast. The fucks they share are often fast and hard, and most of the time, Clarke leaves unable to walk the morning after. Their fight for dominance always leaves Lexa pinning Clarke against walls or tying her to bed posts. They fuck with seeded anger from their childhood, and that’s what makes the sex so great; it’s completely raw.

Clarke sees the familiar crazed look in Lexa’s eyes as she writhes under her grasp. Lexa always refuses to be taken by Clarke, but Clarke doesn’t mind. To her, this game is still controlled ultimately by her. She could be dominate should she choose, but instead she allows Lexa to play the role. Clarke enjoys being able to scratch her nails down Lexa’s back, or leave bites hard enough to break her skin. Clarke especially loves when Lexa is particularly riled up, and her hand clasps around her throat just tight enough to allow the necessary breaths through. The thought of it sends shudders running up and down her spine.

Lexa bucks her hips up as Clarke hunches over. She plants a rough and messy kiss upon her best friend’s lips, tightening her grip on her wrists. Clarke growls as Clarke begins to thrust her hips into hers. The friction between their remaining clothes causes both women to groan with the aching pleasure. Clarke deepens her kiss and parts Lexa’s mouth so she has more room. Their tongues twist and dance the flamenco as heat surges up through both their bodies, leaving the room thick with tension.
Finally, Lexa has had enough of the foreplay. She uses her strength against Clarke and flips them. She snatches her hands free of Clarke’s grip and slams her best friend into the mattress. A small breath escapes Clarke’s lips, but Lexa steals it before it can vanish into the air. Lexa violently throws off her sports bra, tossing it haphazardly behind her with a cheshire smirk.

Lexa’s body is more than a masterpiece for Clarke. Her eyes trace over the perfectly chiseled muscles that line her abdomen and arms. Clarke’s finger touches the hard skin contracting on Lexa’s stomach, causing her core to burn with wanton need. Lexa watches as Clarke gazes at her hungrily, those sapphire eyes raking up and down her exposed skin. It dawns on her that not once did Costia ever look at her like that, not with that same amount of passion and fire. Clarke doesn't avoid her scars, but she kisses them instead. She doesn't bat away from the marred blemishes, but instead soothes the fire burning within them. She doesn’t look at Lexa and see a broken woman like Costia once did. Sometimes it’s all a little too overwhelming.

Lexa only needs one hand to hold her wrists in place, so with the other, she claws at Clarke’s tights. The thin material comes off Clarke’s legs without much effort, leaving her in her panties. Lexa’s insides heat up with the sight of Clarke’s near nude body quivering beneath her, eager for more. She can make out the wet spot on Clarke’s panties and lets out a teasing hum.

Lexa reaches down and unbuttons her own jeans so she can feel Clarke’s skin on hers. She releases her grip on Clarke’s wrists, but gives her the look to let her know not to move. Clarke obeys and hungrily watches as Lexa slips out of her jeans, leaving her in her skin-tight boxers. She watches as Clarke’s lips wet at the sight of the bulge imprinted near the front of her boxers. Lexa’s eyes glance between Clarke’s legs before she stares back up at her best friend, grinning at the look in her eyes.

“What if I’m hungry now?” She asks with a knowing tone. Clarke smirks and cocks her head downwards. Lexa can smell her arousal, and it drives her crazy. Her throat burns as the scent slides down into the pit of her belly, igniting the dormant spark.

“If you’re hungry,” Clarke says with a slight rasp, “then eat.”

Lexa doesn’t need to be told twice as she quickly slides the barrier out of the way. She dips her head and licks between Clarke’s thighs, her nose perking at the intensifying smell of Clarke’s juices spilling out unto the sheets. Finally, after much teasing, Lexa’s mouth reaches the wet, swollen folds of Clarke’s mound. It takes everything within her to not tear the cloth.

Lexa licks up Clarke’s slit, collecting every ounce of sweet cum that she can. It spills out over her cheeks and down her chin in rivulets. Clarke’s head slams backwards as Lexa pushes her head further into her. The sound of her tongue lapping fills Clarke’s ears, rendering her immobile to Lexa’s touch. Throwing her left leg over her shoulder, Lexa moves up on her knees, driving Clarke further backwards on the bed. Her best friend’s head hits the wall in a soft thud as Lexa buries her face deeper.

It doesn’t take long for Clarke to start twitching and panting. It’s embarrassing, really, how fast Lexa can make Clarke come. She gasps and bucks her hips harder into Lexa’s face, with one of her hands wrenched in her long brown hair. Lexa keeps her eyes glued on Clarke’s scrunched face, watching as her mouth twitches into the familiar ‘o’ shape. Lexa sucks on her engorged clit, sliding her hand under her leg to cup her ass firmly. Clarke squirms as Lexa’s tongue probes deeper inside of her.

Clarke screams, unable to hold back any longer as the tides of pleasure wash over her. Her legs quiver and shake as the orgasm rips through her like a tidal wave. Lexa grins she doesn’t slow her movements. She intends to milk Clarke dry, and she does exactly that. Clarke’s toes curl over her best friend’s shoulder, and Lexa can see the muscles and veins in her beautifully sculpted calves tighten and flex with each straining twitch. Her body jerks several times before Lexa finally calms
her movements. Clarke’s body falls limp in Lexa’s arm as her legs kick out when Lexa kisses her sensitive clit one last time.

Lexa crawls her way up Clarke’s body, kissing every patch of slick skin available for her to taste. The sweat mixes with the sweet taste of her best friend’s juices in her mouth. After licking up the valley between her breasts, Lexa finally meets Clarke’s lips in a tangy kiss. Clarke tastes herself in her best friend’s mouth and hums in content. Lexa’s fingers run through Clarke’s sweaty hair as they share another lazy kiss. Clarke grins as she slowly recovers from her mind blowing orgasm.

"God," Clarke mumbles hazily, "I missed that."

Before Lexa can make an arrogant comment, Clarke flips them. Lexa gazes up into Clarke’s fiery and lustful eyes as she pulls Lexa’s boxers down and flings them ungracefully across the room. Her erection slaps noisily against her abs, causing Lexa to sigh in frustration. Clarke places her palms flat on Lexa’s heaving abdomen muscles before running one down and grasping at the pulsing rod. She gives it a few tender strokes before adjusting herself on Lexa's thighs. She positions herself directly above Lexa’s cock, her lips puffy and red from the copious amounts of affection they’d been doused with earlier. Lexa’s eyes narrow into slits as her head tilts backwards at the sensation of Clarke's wetness dripping upon her. Her best friend leans down and presses a quick bite to Lexa’s neck, sucking harshly on the sable skin before pulling back and lowering down her pelvis to grind against Lexa's abs. Lexa’s groans reverberate through Clarke, causing them both to moan as the blonde fumbles for a condom in the side drawer. In a matter of seconds, Clarke manages to roll the latex down upon her cock and give it another stroke.

"Ready?" Clarke breathes as she looks into Lexa's dazzling green eyes. The brunette groans and nods eagerly.

"Always," Lexa responds, hips jerking up. "Hop on, C."

Without further ado, Clarke’s hips soon drive into Lexa’s, and before long, their quickie no longer lives up to its name.

* * *

Clarke pulls up her turtle neck as she wanders into the living room to where Lexa and Niylah are sitting, immersed in their own things; Lexa is reading a book as Niylah intently watches the news. Clarke’s hands are consciously scratching at her throat, worried that the deep welts Lexa had previously left are visible. She quickly makes her way into the kitchen and opens the fridge. She has plans to make her mum’s famous spaghetti carbonara, but realizes that she’s out of tomatoes. She glances at the clock to see that it’s nearly three-thirty in the afternoon. I have some time before the store down the road closes.

“I have to run to the store,” Clarke calls out as she makes her way over to the coat closet. Lexa and Niylah both glance up at her. Niylah rises and walks up to Clarke, giving her a wide smile. Her lips find Clarke’s, but in her mouth, Niylah tastes bland. She craves for the electric spark she gets from her best friend, but finds none. Niylah pulls away and buttons up Clarke’s coat.

“How long do you think you’ll be, baby?” Niylah asks tenderly. There's an edge to her voice, but Clarke ignores it out of her own denial and guilt, shrugging as she glances at her phone. She can feel Lexa staring at her from the couch.

“Maybe an hour,” she states, "but it depends on the lines. I just need a few things, anyways." Niylah nods as Clarke mumbles a quiet goodbye to Lexa before wordlessly shuffling out the door, leaving the two women alone in an awkward, heavy silence.
They don’t talk, Niylah and Lexa, bare for the minimal questions and conversations, such as asking for the remote or something menial. Lexa tries to get lost in her book, but all she can think about is Clarke’s tongue between her thighs, her mouth hot and slick around her. A shot of electricity courses through her at the thought, and an involuntary grin spreads across her lips.

Her happy moment is short lived, however, as the sound of Niylah turning up the volume of the television fills her ears. Lexa’s head snaps up as the two of them watch the news reporter from a few nights ago, John Smith, comes to face the screen with a petrified look plastered to his face. The microphone trembles in his hand as he points to the blockade of tanks and barbed wire fences behind him. In the background, there are people frantically running and screaming in random, disorganized directions.

“John Smith here from CNN, we have just received breaking news that there are riots starting within the quarantined districts of Harlem State. I repeat, the quarantine has fallen and there has been complete and utter disarray. As you can see behind me, the military have created a strict security buffer to prevent exposure to the rest of the city,” he says in a shaky voice. Lexa watches intently as there is frantic shouting and gunfire. The reporter’s head whips around as his eyes widen in fear and awe.

“There are shots fired, I repeat the military is now firing upon civilians!” He shouts, covering his head as the clang of bullets fill the screen. The camera man zooms in behind him to see a man jump atop a tank, screaming hysterically. Right on public television, a bullet whizzes through the air and slams into an adjacent reporter’s forehead, splattering blood everywhere and brain matter everywhere. John screeches and ducks, before swearing at the cameraman to do the same. There’s a quiet, gurgling breath that leaves the man's bloody lips before he teeters forward, out of shot from both John and the cameraman. The shouting and screaming intensifies as the camera pans around the scene blearily, the cameraman sobbing with fear.

The sound of the microphone being dropped is heard as John covers his mouth with his hands. A sea of people are behind the line of tanks now, screaming and shouting as they charge the security buffer. The shrieking of sirens bellow in the distance, followed by the sharp punching of rapid gunfire. Lexa and Niylah watch on, wide-eyed and afraid as John and the cameraman run for cover. The camera is dropped, and all that can be seen is the running footsteps of the film crew and John running away.

The camera is picked up shakily, its focus pointed at the snow covered grass. Both Lexa and Niylah both rise from their seats to stare at the screen, anxiety ripping through their bodies as they hear a low growling moan coming from whoever seems to be holding the camera. Suddenly, the object is turned over and the sight of the bearer elicits a horrified gasp from both women.

It’s a hysterical man, foaming at the mouth, who picks it up. There is a large cut on his forehead, causing crimson blood to drip down his jaw like a leaking faucet. The gash is deep and from beneath the mangled crimson flesh, both women can make out the white bone of his skull, as well as the clenching veins working overtime. The haunting image causes Niylah to gag as she turns away from the screen. Lexa however, isn’t horrified because of the looks of the man, but instead of the man himself.

Lexa squints at the TV; she knows him. She tries to put a name to his face, but after a few minutes of a hard inquisition, it hits her like a bullet train. This was him, this was the man she had seen the few nights ago lingering in the streets. She knew something had been off about him. She knew that she hadn’t been hallucinating. She was right all along.

This time, however, being right is the last thing she’d ever want.
Lexa gasps and covers her mouth in trepidation as she watches the delusional man scream in at the camera, shaking it like a rag doll. Behind him, a horde of people charge clamber over the barrier and into the streets, shrieking partially from delirium and partially from trepidation. Lexa’s heart stops beating as she realizes that the Harlem district is but a few subway stops from where their apartment is. When she turns to face Niylah, she knows that they both have the same thing on their mind.

*Clarke.*

Chapter End Notes

I’m working on the next chapter right now! Should be up in an hour or two.

Happy new year everyone! :)

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Clarke.
Anarchy

Chapter Summary

If trouble comes when you least expect it then maybe the thing to do is to always expect it.

Chapter Notes

Another part is coming soon! Some violence and gore in this chapter near the end, so if that squicks you, beware! It's gonna start picking up now and more characters will be coming in, too. I hope you guys are liking these updates so far! I'll have more Sisters and WTTIMG soon. I'm 70% through both the updates and will post them ASAP!

The quote in the summary is from Cormac McCarthy's, "The Road".

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke browses the aisles of the supermarket, looking for the tomatoes. In her basket, she had picked up a few other items, including a few spices and herbs. She has the intentions of making fresh pasta tonight, as she knows that it is Lexa’s favourite. Her mind jumps back a few years as she reminisces over the memories of growing up together as kids, to when Lexa would always hover around her, warding off bullies and fighting anything that even breathed the wrong way in her direction. More so than anything, she remembers Lexa's appetite, especially so as she spies the tomatoes in the back by the other vegetables. The corners of her lips twitch into a small smile as she readjusts the basket and makes her way over to the back of the store.

It’s oddly quiet for a Saturday. There are only a few people aimlessly wandering the stores, probably browsing for a few different kinds of items. At the front, only two people are working the tills, both of whom seem relatively young looking. Clarke likes the hushed atmosphere, though. It gives her more time to concentrate and think about what she wants. She hums one of Lexa’s songs as she browses through the various types of tomatoes, testing their weight in her palms and lightly squeezing.

Once she selects the ones she wants, she rips off a plastic bag and reaches for a few of them. She remembers that she needs some garlic too, so she ties up the bag and searches for the last necessary ingredient. She sees it right next to the entrance towards the storage. She pads over, manoeuvring through the various tables that contain other random fruits.

As she picks her way through the garlic, Clarke can hear some commotion going on in the street. She cautiously jerks her head up to see some people standing in the road, shouting something incoherent. By the looks of it, Clarke perceives it to be a protest of some sort. She quickly grabs the garlic and heads to the front, starting to feel fearful of what’s to come.

Before she can reach the front, one of the clerks rushes up to her, grabbing her shoulders. Clarke sees the fear in his eyes as the other customers dash outside of the door. Clarke stares at the clerk, ripping herself away from his grasp. The young man shakes his head and points back to the glass windows
at the front of the store.

“Something big is going on outside. The news station just said the Harlem quarantine has broken. People are protesting; it’s complete anarchy out there!” He exclaims, waving his hands to emphasize his point. Clarke remains frozen for a moment before she remembers how far Harlem is from where she lives. She gazes over the man’s stiffened shoulders and swallows hard.

“What are we supposed to do?” She asks, scared. The man points to the back of the store. “The supply room, we can hide there. We have to wait out until the military can come and control it. People are going crazy out there, ma’am.”

Clarke hesitantly follows him towards the back of the store. She drops her basket and matches his footsteps as soon enough, they’re at the supply room. It’s dank and small. The cold air hits Clarke’s skin below her parka and she shivers. Fear is crawling through her bloodstream as she struggles to breathe. The clerk is about to say something when there is a huge crash.

Both Clarke and the clerk whip their heads outside the door to see that the glass has cracked. Nobody seems to be coming in, but rather just destroying the property. The clerk ushers Clarke further into the room and tells her to hide.

“I’ll go board up the window; you wait here,” he says in a rush. Clarke desperately wants him to stay, but before she can voice her opinion, he dashes out and shuts the door behind him. Clarke stands frantically, peering through the small glass window to see him running towards the front of the shop. The shouting is growing louder now as Clarke slumps against the cold metal barrier. She wraps her arms around herself to stop the violent shaking as the sounds of total mayhem fill her ears. Tears claw at her eyes as she struggles to try and stay calm.

Quickly, she reaches into her pocket and grabs her cellphone. She hits speed dial in the attempts at contacting her best friend. She sees that she only has two bars of reception, and only ten percent battery life. Taking a deep breath to calm her nerves, she presses the phone to her ears. In her head she prays that the call goes through.

Unluckily for her, God doesn’t seem to want to answer to an agnostic.

*Your call cannot be completed as dialled. Please check the number and try again.*

"Fuck, Clarke huffs out as the shouting grows even louder now, "come on, work you damn thing."

“Come on,” she hisses, “please, for fuck's sake just do something….”

The call doesn’t go through again, and neither does it the third, fourth, or fifth time. Clarke’s tries are fruitless and she soon realizes that she is stuck in the room alone. She holds the phone in her hands, staring at it with widened eyes as her breathing becomes erratic. Panic is thinly lining her stomach, causing the acid to swirl uncomfortably as the feeling of nausea builds up.

“Fuck, Lexa, please….” Clarke whimpers, tears now rolling down her cheeks. It’s getting colder as she pulls her knees up to her chest. The screaming can be heard clearly now, indicating that the mass protest has spread deep into the streets. Ten minutes pass, and there’s no sign of the clerk either. She grips the phone tighter in her hands and closes her eyes, willing away the panic. She tries to convince herself that she’s okay, that she’s just playing this all out to be more than what it really is.

Finally, the phone vibrates.

“Clarke!” Lexa exclaims into the phone as soon as Clarke quickly presses the green accept button. Clarke nearly cries at the sound of her best friend’s voice as she shakes her head. “Lexa, you have to
help me. It's a shit-fest out here and I'm stuck in a supply room at the back of the store. People are screaming and something's happening outside. I... I'm fucking scared, Lex.”

“I'm coming, okay?” Lexa doesn't hesitate to reply, "just stay put and hang in there.”

“Lexa, I'm scared... the man who helped me isn't back yet. I only have about an hour left of battery on my phone. Lexa...,” Clarke is crying hysterically now, her hands trembling. She can see her breath clouding in front of her as she realizes that this is not the supply room, but in fact a giant refrigerator and each second grows colder. Her breath clouds in front of her trembling lips. Clarke tries to shuffle closer to the door to get a look of the commotion coming from outside, but she's too cold to move.

"Clarke," Lexa's voice asks over the static, "where are you?"

Suddenly, there's a crash and the sound of glass breaking from outside the storage room. Clarke jumps and grips the phone tighter, her tears starting to obscure her vision as she squeezes herself further back into the massive open fridge.

"Whole Foods," she breathes out, "hurry."

* * *

Lexa darts up from where she'd been sitting, her phone gripped tightly in her hand as she moves past a shocked-looking Niylah and towards the steps. She hops them two at a time to get to the top floor faster. The entire time, she can't seem to stop the rattling anxieties that bury through her mind at a mile a minute. She grits her teeth as Clarke relays the directions shakily.

"I'm coming, Clarke, just stay on the phone with me. We're gonna come and get you out. It's gonna be okay, C, just don't move from where you're hiding. Take deep breaths, I'm on my way. I just need you to stay right there," Lexa orders quickly as she runs into Clarke's bedroom. She reaches under the drawer until she finally feels what she has been searching for.

She pulls out the handgun and stares at it in her hands. It's a thirty-eight calibre Glock, with a full cartridge. Lexa swallows harshly as the nerves twist in her belly. She hadn't fired a gun at someone in half a decade. She knows that with one pull of a trigger, the tiny bullet inside the gun could kill someone in an instant. She knows the weight the loss of a life could hold upon someone. She spent the last two and a half years recovering from the nightmares and the flashbacks. She's worked so damned hard to bury the hatchet, to diffuse the bombs wired inside of her head that have lingered since her last tour.

And now, as Lexa looks at the gun, she can't help but feel like those two years are about to become nothing but a waste.

“Lexa?” Clarke's scared voice jolts Lexa back to the present. The carbine quivers in her clammy hands as she swallows and nods. Lexa tests the weight of the gun in her hand for a few moments before she sets her jaw and musters up her courage.

“I'll get you, Clarke. Just sit tight. I'll call when I get closer, okay? Don't move, you're going to be fine. I'll be there as soon as I can,” Lexa says calmly, hoping that Clarke doesn't hear the insecurity in her voice. She knows that the streets are going to be filled with violent protesters and potential Harlem escapees. Whatever awaits her isn't going to be pretty, especially based on whatever she'd seen on the news. She shudders at the image of that bloodied man again, but pushes it down for Clarke's sake.
Come on, soldier. This is what you've trained for your entire life.

Now go get your girl.

* * *

Clarke whispers a faint goodbye as she hangs up the phone. She lets her head rest against the door as she gazes at the battery life. Five percent of it was left. By gripping it tighter, Clarke wonders if she can somehow manage to preserve the last few minutes. Lexa was coming, she’d be okay. She’d get help and everything would be just fine.

But, nothing ever goes according to plan.

Suddenly, gunshots ring out from within the store, followed by more shouting and screaming.

Clarke gulps, glancing at her phone fearfully as she prays to a God she doesn't believe in for Lexa's swift aid.

* * *

Lexa zips up her parka, the gun fitting all too snugly in waistband of her jeans. She runs down the stairs to see Niylah staring at her, wide eyed and confused. Lexa doesn’t say anything as she quickly grabs three empty backpacks from the closet and Niylah’s parka. She stuffs one of the backpacks in one of the others before throwing the pack as well as the parka at her best friend’s girlfriend. Niylah holds the pack and coat in her hands in confusion.

Rolling her eyes, Lexa simply states, “get ready, we’re going.”

“Are you shitting me?!” Niylah demands, aghast. Lexa’s face scrunches up into a frown as she gazes at her watch. They don’t have time for this, and she hates that every time she's spending here is a time away from guaranteeing Clarke's safety. She knows her best friend is capable of defending herself, but this is something else. Niylah steps forward and grabs Lexa’s arm, dragging her towards the window. They both gaze down the eighteen floors down to see people running and screaming on the streets. Police are trying to maintain the situation, but the sheer numbers of the crowd are too overwhelming. It doesn’t seem as though anyone is violent yet, but judging by the dwindling patience of the cops, the pseudo-peace won't last long.

“It’s about to turn into a fucking war zone down there, Lexa. You may be some fucking military operative, but look at that shit. There's no way we would make it. We can’t go,” she snaps quickly, letting fear prevent her from reasoning with the older woman. Lexa doesn’t hesitate to grab Niylah’s shirt collar and pull her close enough to feel her breath on her lips.

“That’s my best friend,” she snarls in a deep voice, “and your girlfriend. We’re going whether you like it or not.”

Niylah looks petrified as she fervently shakes her head again, trying to put her foot down to stop herself from going. She puts her hands up and shoves Lexa away from her. The shouting from the street intensifies as Lexa and Niylah look down to see cars being over turned and people starting to throw aimless punches with the police. Lexa’s shoulders stiffen at the sight of the complete dismantling of the system, and fear begins encompasses her, too. For a brief minute, even she is doubtful. The hoard is massive and boarding on dangerously violent, but the second the thought of leaving her best friend to fend for herself crosses her mind, she is adamant about going. She's fought for many things in her life, her country, her family, her friends, but no fight could ever be compared to the fight Lexa would endure to protect Clarke. She’d give up anything, even her own life.
Little does she know, one day her devotion to Clarke will come back to haunt her.

“We have to go, Niylah. If we wait, something could happen and you’ll regret it. If you care about Clarke you wouldn't be hesitating,” Lexa pleads, shaking Niylah lightly. The other woman glances back at the streets swelling with people and gulps.

“You go,” she whispers, “but I am not coming.” Lexa growls in exasperation. Fine, if she wouldn’t come, she wouldn’t come. Lexa can make it on her own. She turns on her heels and grabs the empty backpack as she makes her way over to the door.

“It’s either you stay here alone, or you come with me. Just remember that there’s only one gun, and I have it. I am your best chance of surviving whatever the hell this is, and you know it.” She says the spiteful words in a low voice, knowing that it’s her last chance of persuading the younger woman into joining her to save Clarke. Niylah listens intently, remaining silent for a few minutes as she digests the words. Lexa tries to calm the swirling in her stomach as she watches the blonde contemplating.

“Fine,” Niylah grumbles at last, reaching for the parka. "Let's go." She slips it on and heaves the empty pack over her shoulder. Lexa shuts the door behind them, grunting in appreciation. After locking the door, Lexa and Niylah descend in the elevator.

The lobby of the apartment is empty. The windows are still intact and oddly enough, everything seems to be okay. There are no workers at the front desk or anything, but the main street is flooded with people. Garbage is littered through the streets, as well as the beginnings of small fires from some of the overturned cars and the odd molotov cocktail. It baffles her to think that the world all went to shit in a matter of an hour. She doesn’t want to think about how bad it's about to be if this is what it looks like now. Lexa quickly recognizes that the most residents from the area; they don’t seem to be wielding weapons of any kind.

Yet.

Before they can make it to the revolving doors, Niylah’s hand lands on Lexa’s, drawing her attention. Lexa’s head cocks to the side as Niylah’s eyes widen with fear. “Are you sure that you want to go out that way? It’s swarming with people and cops.”

Lexa thinks about it for a moment. It is a complete disarray, and she knows that the last thing they need is for either of them to get hurt. Suddenly, she remembers the old route she would take with Clarke. She yanks on Niylah’s hand and draws them away from the main entrance. “I know a better way,” she whispers as they reach the back door, “through the alleys.”

Niylah has seen far too many horror movies to know what happens in alleyways. She clings to Lexa’s side as they both burst out the back entrance. Just as Lexa had predicted, the small alleys are near deserted. The emptiness is chilling as they quickly make their way towards the store. The only sound that can be heard is the distant screaming from the other side of the street. Lexa and Niylah pick up the pace as the older best friend reaches into her pocket for her cellphone.

* * *

Clarke stands up from where she had been sitting to see what the commotion was about. Her entire body is still trembling from the first few loud bangs that had occurred not even a few minutes ago. When her face glances out the window, however, she regrets her decision immediately. The store is desolate and empty, and from where Clarke is standing, she can make out the green sneakers of the man who'd helped her poking out from behind one of the aisles. Clarke lets out a gasp as her heart begins to race when she notices that neither of his two feet are moving or twitching at all. Her eyes
follow up from the shoes to see a dark puddle of crimson blood accumulating further up towards his waist. She doesn't look up at his head.

This cannot be happening.

“Holy shit,” she breathes out, tears rolling down her cheeks as she turns away and covers her mouth. She is about to open the door and run from the store when suddenly she sees a shadow cross her gaze. Clarke sinks down and focuses on making her breathing as quiet as possible. The sounds of footsteps echo behind the metal door, causing terror to flood her mind.

“Take what you can, we don’t know what will happen when they get here.”

The gruff voice belongs to a male, probably in his late thirty's based on the depth. Another man grunts in agreement before more footsteps scuff against the linoleum, their sound drawing closer to where she's hiding in the fridge. Clarke cups her hand over her mouth tighter as she hugs herself. As she does so, her shoes shriek against the tiles loudly, frightening herself.

The footsteps stop.

“Did you hear that?” The first man asks in a low growl.

“Yeah,” the second replies. "Sounded like it was coming from the back."

The footsteps start again, and they grow louder and more aggressive. They are coming in her direction, she realizes in a panic. Clarke’s eyes shift quickly at the room. She has to find a place to hide, but she's cornered with no way out. The front door is her only escape. She knows that she can't make it past the men, especially if they have guns. Finally, she sees some space behind a metal bar holding some produce near the back. She crawls over quickly, burrowing herself in the dark space before moving the box ahead of her so that it blocks her face. She pulls her knees up and presses herself against the wall, trying to calm her racing heart. The box of what seems to be carrots and potatoes cover her, but just barely. There is nothing but silence for a few moments, and as time passes, she thinks that maybe it was a false alarm and then men found another distraction elsewhere.

Clarke's never been more wrong.

Suddenly, the door swings open, crashing against the frame of the wall with a loud bang. Clarke has to cup a hand over her mouth as she stifles a shriek. Sweat beads down the side of her face in fear. They are here; these men are inside the same room as her and she can't escape.

Clarke doesn’t know if they are dangerous or willing to help her, but she can't risk being seen in the hopes of finding out. The heavy footsteps clatter as Clarke just clings to the hope that they do not come into the small space where she is hiding.

But, they do.

Clarke watches as the first man steps through. She holds her breath as she sees a pair of combat boots scuff against the cool floors. Clarke can’t see from his waist up, but he is wearing a pair of jeans. A shotgun dangles from his side as he walks further into the room, passing where she is hiding. She cannot afford to make even the slightest noise, or they’d find her.

The second man steps through, but he isn’t wielding a weapon from what Clarke can see. They both wander around the small space, gazing at each random nook and cranny in hopes to distinguish the source of the sound. The first man whispers something that Clarke can’t catch, and soon enough, they both leave. Clarke lets out the breath she had been holding as she closes her eyes. Her pocket
vibrates, frightening her. She sees her best friend’s face on the screen and immediately answers it.
“Lexa,” she breathes out shakily. "Please."

* * *

Lexa rounds the corner. They are now just across the street from the store. Lexa can see the broken windows as they turn around to press their backs against the bricks of the building. Niylah lingers on Lexa’s side as she swallows anxiously. There are a few people in the streets, still shouting and protesting, but nothing seems to be completely out of control just yet.

“Clarke, we’re across the street. We’re coming to get you. The streets are a mess right now but we’re on our way. Hang in there,” Lexa says, keeping low to the side of the wall as she presses forward, Niylah hot on her tail. Just as she is about to run into the long concrete stretch towards the front entrance of the store, Clarke’s voice interrupts her encouraging ramble.

“No, you can’t come in through the front. I’m not alone, Lexa,” Clarke cries, her voice trembling over the line. "There’s… oh God, there were these guys in here earlier and I don’t know if they’re still here." Lexa stops as she peers harder, struggling to make out any sort of movement from the chaos erupting in the streets. She can see the glass has been kicked in and the store looks relatively bare. Just as she's about to tell Clarke that she’s in the clear, Niylah jerks on her arms and points to two hazy figures near the back of the store. “There,” she breathes out. "I see them."

“They’re armed, Lexa; holy fucking shit, he has a shotgun,” Clarke whimpers, and Lexa can tell that it is taking everything in her power to keep calm and collective. Lexa sees them move about the store, before turning back into the alley.

“Fuck,” she swears, shaking her head. Her other hand finds the gun again, causing Niylah to widen her eyes. Lexa is unsure of what to do. She's trained for years and did a few missions in the special ops, but this is something completely else. It's never been personal before. She can feel her heart clouding her judgement and it drives her insane. She draws a sharp breath and looks back up, trying to assess the area surrounding the store for a good vantage point that won't draw any attention.

“Where are you exactly, Clarke?” She asks into the phone, nervous about her best friend’s safety. Clarke doesn’t say anything as Niylah watches the figures move further back into the store. There's some rustling over the line, but nothing from Clarke.

“She’s got to be in the back,” Niylah says, pointing at the store again. “They must have heard her talking to you on the phone. Look, they're heading for the frozen section near the produce.” Lexa tries to ask Clarke again, but her best friend has hung up.

“She's got to be in the back,” Niylah demands as Lexa leads her through a maze of different alleys and paths until they're only a few steps away from the store. Finally they reach a clear spot in the street. Niylah follows quickly as they sprint to the other side. Lexa and Niylah dive behind a small building and out of sight. The back of the store is only a few meters from them.

“What are we doing?!” Niylah demands as Lexa leads her through a maze of different alleys and paths until they're only a few steps away from the store. Finally they reach a clear spot in the street. Niylah follows quickly as they sprint to the other side. Lexa and Niylah dive behind a small building and out of sight. The back of the store is only a few meters from them.

“We have to get her, Niylah,” Lexa hisses as she pulls out the gun. It feels heavy in her hands, like lead. She tries to hold back the memories of the last time she'd held one just like this. Niylah glances down and stares at it with fear, shaking her head.
“Clarke said--”

“I don’t give a fuck what Clarke said; we have a gun too. I know how to use it. If they’re armed, I'm not about to believe that they have the best intentions.” Lexa is adamant about her decision, but she can’t escape from the fear filling her bones. Niylah looks hesitant, but she’d rather stick with Lexa at all costs. She nods reluctantly, knowing that there is little to no time to bicker.

Before they can move, however, a gunshot rings out from inside the store.

Lexa and Niylah’s heads snap up simultaneously. The older best friend can feel her head spin as she tries to think straight. She shares one last look at Niylah and they both have the same fear brewing in their eyes. Something in her heart twists.

"Clarke," Lexa breathes out in a faint whimper. It couldn't be Clarke, she wouldn't let it. Picking up their pace massively, Niylah and Lexa weave through the thick snow until finally, they approach the loading bay of the store. Lexa can see that the back entrance is wide open, revealing the darkness lurking inside. The metal door is loosely swinging back and forth in the chilly wind, creating an eerie creaking noise with each slow sway. Lexa shoves her face into her coat to fight back against the cold wind as she turns to face Niylah. She looks at the gun before she checks her ammo and cocks it back to load it.

She has to steady her fingers before she turns the safety off.

"We're really doing this?" Niylah asks, wide-eyed. "Lexa, you're not Rambo!"

“I'm close enough,” she mutters begrudgingly as she takes cover on the side of the building. "Now stay right behind me and don't talk unless I ask you to, understood?" Niylah hastily nods, despite the obvious fear and confusion in her brown eyes. Lexa takes another deep breath and looks ahead towards the seemingly-vacant room. Placing both hands on the gun now, she creeps forward. Lexa stakes out the perimeter as she keeps low. Her footsteps are barely audible as she enters in a few steps. She cocks her head the slightest bit to glance around the room. From what it seems and sounds like, the place is empty.

After taking a second glance, Lexa steps further into the small back room. She glances down at the floor to see a crimson trail. Her heart plummets to her stomach as the gun lowers and she follows the liquid towards the supply room. Recaching down, she takes a bit of the blood between her fingers and rubs her fingers. It's warm and sticky, fresh. Gulping anxiously, Lexa sets her hand back on her gun and moves forward. As she gets closer to the door, she sees the liquid has accumulated greatly. Lexa lets out a quiet gasp as she sees that the door is cracked open slightly. She takes a deep breath and reaches out, pushing it open.

The room is empty, but there is still red covering the ground. The trail leads further back, and in her fear and daze, Lexa can’t comprehend what the liquid actually is. She steps into the small space until the trail simply leads to a box of splattered pomegranates and a shattered water cooler, causing the colour. Cocking her head in confusion, she lowers the gun completely.

If it wasn't blood, what could it have been?

“Lexa!”

The ex-soldier, alert again, snaps around with the gun raised to see it pointing directly at Clarke. The younger woman lets out a stifled shriek as tears fill her eyes. Her hand covers her mouth as the salty droplets roll down her cheeks. It takes a second for Lexa to register that it’s Clarke before she lowers the gun. Clarke throws herself into her best friend’s arms, shaking violently.
“Oh god, Lexa you came; it was so fucking scary. I was hiding in the corner when they heard me talking to you. They didn’t see me, but they shot the container instead,” Clarke cries harder, clutching onto Lexa with dear life. Lexa’s eyes flutter shut as she simply focuses on her best friend trembling in her arms. They embrace for a few more moments before Lexa pulls away.

“We’re gonna get out of here, but first we need to take what we can from here.” Clarke cocks her head in confusion. She just wants to get out of this place, nothing else. The last thing she wants is to spend more time here. “Why would we need to do that? We can’t just rob a place, Lexa! This isn’t *Apocalypse Now* or some bullshit like that. We aren't about to lose our civility.”

Lexa gently grabs Clarke’s arm and looks from her to Niylah. She takes a deep breath and tries to calm herself down as she puts the words together in her head. “It may as well be *Apocalypse Now*. We don’t know what the hell is going on Clarke, and until we do, we need to survive. You know just as well as I do that this is our only chance to get whatever provisions we can.”

“This isn’t Iraq, Lex!” Clarke argues, brows raised. "It's not… it's not like that here."

Lexa growls, tugging Clarke's arm gently before pointing towards the shattered glass and the people running mad in the streets. She glances out at the police tazing people and stunning them with blunted nightsticks. Gunshots can be heard in the distance, but the noises are only getting louder as the chaos advances. Lexa watches as both Clarke and Niylah gulp in fear.

“You don't understand, Clarke. This,” she emphasizes with a wave of her hand, "this is how it all begins."

"So what?" Clarke chokes on the words, looking back at Lexa with confusion and anxiety. "How do we stop it?"

Lexa sighs, glancing back outside.

"We can't. We can only prepare for the worst."

* * *

Clarke lets her best friend’s words digest as she glances at her girlfriend. Niylah looks petrified but she's processing it. Finally, she swallows and nods in agreement. Lexa lets out a soft, relieved breath as she puts some distance between them. She points to Niylah as they all exit the room. “You get gasoline and matches, I’ll get water and medical supplies, and Clarke,” she says, looking to her best friend, "you go get non-perishable food items.” Both women nod, understanding the instructions clearly.

They all stick to Lexa’s orders, rounding up as much stuff as they can fit into both of the large packs Lexa had brought. In total, they have enough to last them about a month or two without rationing. Lexa stuffs the last bit of supplies into her backpack as suddenly she hears a loud crash. She jerks her head up from behind the till when she hears a soft grunt followed by a thud.

Niylah and Clarke pause from where they are kneeling on either side of Lexa. Clarke glances around to see a man, bleeding from a gash in his head, trudging slowly into the store. Blood drips from the corner of his mouth to softly tap against the linoleum floors. His hands are trembling as he slowly cocks his head in the direction of the dead clerk. From what she can see, his face is ghastly white, his cheeks gaunt and sunken in, and his eyes have a yellowish hue to the cornea. Clarke gulps, wanting to reach out and help him, but she's held back by a shake of the head by Niylah. Lexa kneels beside her silently. She turns to see her best friend and Niylah pushed up against the desk. Her best friend reaches out and pulls her away from sight.
Clarke is about to say something when Lexa covers her mouth with her own hand, drawing her body into her chest and out of sight from the lumbering man. The three women stay as silent as they can as the man’s groaning intensifies. Lexa swallows nervously as the sound of dragging footsteps draw closer. Soon, the movement stops and there is a brief moment of silence. The three women let out a soft breath as Lexa soundlessly curls her way around Clarke so she can get a view from the side.

"Ssh," Lexa whispers, "don't move."

* * *

The sound of gnawing and the squelching of something wet fills the room with tension. Confused at the type of sound, Lexa peeks her head out to see the man knelt beside a pair of green sneakers. The pool of blood that had been surrounding him is spreading quickly. She struggles to understand what is going on until a shrill siren sounds, startling all four of them.

The man whips his head up, and Lexa can see blood dribbling down his chin. Past his mouth, he makes out the mangled and tattered flesh of a clerk. She puts a hand over her mouth as she realizes that the hole in his leg is not from a bullet wound, but from teeth. A piece of his flesh dangles from the man’s mouth as he groans again when the sirens sound once more. His fingers clench and unclench as he rotates his head around until he starts gazing in the direction of their hiding place. The sudden movement causes Lexa to fall back and look over at Clarke and Niylah frantically. She hears the man groan again and she gulps.

“We need to go,” she whispers shakily, “now.”

Niylah and Clarke don’t question what Lexa has seen, but nod as they follow her away from the man leaning over the clerk. They creep their way out of the back entrance and back towards the alleys from which they’d came. Niylah is at the front, Clarke is in the middle, and Lexa brings up the rear as they run down the abandoned streets and towards the apartment complex. They clamber through the thick snow until they finally reach the back entrance, the shouting in the streets seems to have quelled.

They ride the elevator up, the soft piano melodies sounding anything but soothing. As the soft ding sounds, the three women exit the small room and make their way over to Clarke’s apartment door. The younger best friend unlocks it with a heavy sigh as they pile in quickly, grateful for the warmth that contrasts the aching cold from outside. Putting the bags aside, Lexa locks the door behind them. She runs over to the window and gazes down to see the reason why the commotion had stopped.

A dozen tanks are rolling down the street with soldiers walking beside them. Lexa is happy to see that they are getting aid, but the sight of the military has her stomach churning for all the wrong reasons. Niylah and Clarke are behind her, talking in hushed voices and exchanging hugs as they both try to relax after the high tension they had both experienced earlier today. Lexa takes a deep breath and turns away from the window, instead turning to pick up the television remote.

Niylah and Clarke come to stand behind her as they watch the news come on. They stand in front of the couch and watch in silence as it cuts from commercials to the another news anchor. Her desk is a state of disarray, and she looks haggard of weary. There is a look of concern and distraught upon the woman’s face as she shuffles the paper in front of her before glancing up.

“Today, the US military has officially moved into upper New York City. It seems as though the quarantine at the Harlem state has broken, causing mass rioting and uprisings in certain districts. In order to prevent the further spreading of the H1Z1 virus, local and federal authorities are placing another buffer zone around New York City. This will be heavily policed and resistance will be met with force,” the reporter says, sighing as she looks to the sheets of paper, and then back up at the
camera once more.

“Military officials have said that they are unsure if the infection has spread into the main city but will issue mandatory checks, which will detain any suspecting virus carriers until further notice. The entire state of New York will also be quarantined, and no one is permitted to enter or exit their districts until a federal decision can be reached in regards to containing this outbreak. To enforce these rules and to prevent another buffer zone being destroyed, the military will be enforcing strict curfews and regulations to keep the city under control during these trying times. These are not mean to scare, but to control the situation at hand and to prevent anymore riots from breaking out,” the woman finishes her statement, putting the papers down. Lexa lowers the volume as Clarke sits on the couch, her palm covering her mouth. She plops down on the couch, staring at nothing.

“So… we’re trapped in here?” Clarke breathes out, breaking her away from her swirling thoughts. Niylah takes a seat next to her girlfriend and hangs her head, unable to think. No one answers Clarke's question, however, besides the silence.

Lexa looks down, thinking not of the new quarantine, but of the man she had seen in the store. If she was not mistaken, he had been eating that other man. When Lexa remembers the minor details, the fear festers away at her insides like a parasite.

She thinks about the words of the news reporter and suddenly feels dizzy. Clarke is right, they are trapped, but that is not why Lexa is scared. No, Lexa is scared because she knows what she saw. Suddenly, it all makes sense. The man from four days ago and then man she saw today, not only on TV but in the store, were one in the same. The sight of the clerk’s flesh dangling from his mouth sends shivers down Lexa’s spine. The reporter was wrong; nothing can stop the disease from entering New York.

It's already here.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!!
Desperate Measures

Chapter Summary

“In World War One, they called it shell shock. Second time around, they called it battle fatigue. After ‘Nam, it was post-traumatic stress disorder.”

Chapter Notes

I'm about to hop on a plane but I should update soon after I get back to Montreal! Some violence and sexual language towards the middle of the fic if that squicks you!

The quote in the summary is from Jan Karon's, "Home to Holly Springs".

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

* * *

Day 11

It’s been a week since they’ve received the news of the quarantine, and already Lexa, Clarke, and Niyalah are beginning to feel their anxiety levels tripling with each hour that passes. The streets are more questionable by the second. While they had initially hoped that there would be some level of improvement in regards to the management of the people by authorities, it now seems that the way the world works depended on who was favoured the most. It's a corrupt system, but somehow, it manages to keep trouble away from their district. Being an ex-member of the forces, it bothers Lexa to no end how the system was operating.

Now, however, Lexa finds herself anxiously checking the locks on doors at any given moment. Clarke paces from room to room, muttering to herself like a mad woman each time she hears the slightest noise. Niyalah keeps trying to diffuse the situation by cleaning the house or watching movies, but even she has her jumpy movements. Lexa’s insomnia has worsened significantly, as now she is only able to find herself able to sleep during the day. She spent all night losing sleep over the faintest crackles and creaks. She is like a watchdog almost, and when she was left alone in the dark of night, the gun stayed under her pillow.

She wasn’t sure what kept her up last night: the thought of being killed, or taking a life again.

Lexa could have done it, and she knows this. She could have fired the bullet straight into that… thing’s (because there was no way in hell that it was man) head and ended it then and there. She saw what it was doing, and yet her body had frozen. It was like she was back in Afghanistan all over again, watching the gory torture of her squad through a barred prison cell. The situations were different, but the image of blood and death is one that is steady no matter the context, and no matter how hard Lexa tries to get away from it, she knows that it will never leave. Now, the gun stuck to her like an organ laced into her skin, and even when she left her service behind, it seems like she was wrong. It was a part of her, and she couldn’t let it go.
“U.S Military, this is a random inspection. Open up!” A sudden gruff voice causes Lexa’s drooping lids to snap up from where she’d been napping on the couch. At first, she thinks that she is imagining things, so she rests her eyes again, her heart still beating rapidly at the sudden noise. There is a violent knocking that ensues, fully alerting the once-dozing woman.

Lexa gets up from the couch as she hears the hammering intensify at the door. She walks over quickly, keeping a watchful eye at the gun she had left in the umbrella case beside the key holders. She cautiously peeks through the peephole to see two men in uniform standing outside the door, guns slung over their shoulders and a sly smirk on both of their faces. Clarke and Niylah clamber down the stairs behind her as Lexa reluctantly opens the door by a slight amount, only so they can see her.

“Good morning, ma’am,” one of the officers, the taller and more well-built one, says with a too-chipper-to-be-good smirk. He gives Lexa a slight nod, whereas the wider-framed man simply eyes her, obviously and suggestively checking her out. He elicits a soft grunt of greeting as his eyes finally reach hers. Lexa pays him no attention and instead turns to the first man.

“Hi,” she mumbles absently. "What can I do for you, officers?"

The first man digs into his back pocket for a folded manila envelope, handing it to her promptly.

“This is just a notice instructing you of how things are going to be running from now on. With the recent quarantine, it will be hard for everyone to go about their normal activities.” Lexa tears open the envelope as Clarke and Niylah peer over her shoulder. The soldier looks at them over Lexa’s shoulder skeptically, while his companion checks them out just as vulgarly as he had done with Lexa. Retrieving its documents, Lexa reads over the paperwork with shifty eyes before she squints at a line.

“You’re rationing the food?” She trails off as she reads the third paragraph. "We've been under quarantine for a week. Don't you think this is a little too early?” The fatter man puts his hands at his belt buckle and grins nonchalantly, licking his lips.

“Yeah, it’s protocol, lass. Since The Big Apple's being quarantined, nothing’s coming in, or going out. That goes for food, too. Sorry about that, sweet-cheeks, but there's no aid coming anytime soon until they find a cure for this thing,” he laughs, rubbing his protruding belly. Lexa’s head snaps up in the middle of a sentence to glare at him as she cocks her head to the side.

“What did you call me?” Lexa practically growls, her neck veins bulging in rage. "What did you fucking just call me?"

Eyes up, sweet-cheeks. It only hurts in the beginning.

“Sweet-cheeks,” he repeats in a chuckle, gazing at her backside, “because you have one fine ass, darling.”

Lexa’s lips curl into a snarl as she launches herself forward, her hands pressing into the man’s shoulders and pushing him back against the hallway wall. The man is taken by surprise as Lexa sizes him up, growling. Her hands clench into his uniform, her nails grating against the thick fabric. She hears the gasp of surprise from behind her where Clarke and Niylah are standing.

“Don’t you ever,” she hisses in a sharp tone, “call me that again. Do you understand?” The man simply keeps his stare level with Lexa’s, choosing to remain silent. Lexa shoves him harder as a pair of hands reach around her arm, pulling her away from him.
“That’s enough, ma’am.” It’s the taller one. "Force against an officer will result in detainment. I’m giving you a warning." Lexa is glares at the grubby officer, who is now reaching for his shotgun. He glares at the young woman furiously, shaking his head.

“That’s right you fucking twat,” he growls, raising his gun, "take another jab at me, I dare you.” Clarke surges forward from behind Lexa, but is held back by Niylah. The first officer glances between the women with his brow raised. Clarke's fists are swinging and she's snarling like a rabid animal. The bigger officer grits his teeth, his grip on his shotgun tightening. Before it can escalate any further, the first man steps in between them. He pushes the gun back down, lowering it away from Lexa’s face.

“That’s enough, Carl,” he whispers in a low tone, before turning back to Lexa. "Your comments are out of line and it's no way to treat a veteran. That right there is Commander Alexandria Woods of the first regiment. POW, served in Tagab, right?"

Lexa's glare doesn't soften, but she offers a forced nod. At her reaction, Carl eases up and bites his lip, looking a bit shameful.

“Listen,” the first man sighs after he sees that Carl isn't going to do anything rash. He looks between the two of them before retracting his grip upon Lexa’s arm, “I understand that things may be confusing and immensely stressful at the moment, but it is important for you recognize that we need to have some sort of order. You of all people understand our purpose here, Commander. I know that it's tough and things are tight, but we need cooperation.” Lexa digests his words and hesitantly nods.

“Fine,” she replies in a gruff voice, “what else is there that we should know of, officer?”

Carl steps forward, slinging the shotgun back around his back. He reaches up and gently brushes Lexa’s cheek with his smudged fingers. Lexa recoils from his touch as Clarke comes to take her place defensively by her best friend’s side. Niylah remains at the door, seemingly unsure of what to do r how to proceed with the situation. Clarke, however, doesn't ease up.

“Don’t touch her, you fucking pervert. You have no right to touch her like that. Now, answer her question,” the younger best friend barks protectively, glaring at him. Carl's smile drops as his lips form a tight scowl. Lexa’s eyes land upon Clarke’s for a moment. She can make out the mix of fear and caution swelling in those hazel depths. Carl snorts as he pulls his hand away.

“Labor jobs will be assigned this coming week. Because employment will be halted due to the quarantine, the military has provided jobs for you. Your payment will be ration cards for which you will be able to provide yourself with nourishment. It's easy, you get what you put in.” Niylah’s face falls as she shakes her head, aghast at the mere suggestion of hard labor.

“I'm a model…, fuck, my girlfriend is an artist. We can’t do that! I have a contract in Belize in a few months,” She protests, her voice cracking. Lexa and Clarke remain silent as the taller man gives them a weak, reassuring smile.

“It’s all momentarily going to be fixed, until then, we need the people to cooperate. We’re sorry, but if we want to get out of this mess, we’re gonna need all the help we can get. New York City will not be receiving any supplies or help until a few weeks from now, when the situation in the Harlem districts is accounted for and contained,” he explains slowly. Niylah shakes her head in contempt as she walks back inside the apartment, muttering frustrated words under her breath about her contract.

“I do apologize, but we are trying to contain the infection as best we can with the tools we have. As far as we know, New York has not been infected yet,” the man finishes with a confident tone. Lexa scoffs, drawing everyone’s attention towards her.
“You’re wrong about that,” Lexa states in a low voice. "The infection? It's already here."

The man cocks his head in confusion. He draws his arms up, crossing them around his chest. "Excuse me?"

“There was a man…,” Lexa trails off as images of yesterday's events flood through her mind. She closes her eyes tightly, vividly able to see the flesh dangling from the man’s mouth. “But he… he didn't really look like a normal man though. We saw him yesterday at the supermarket when the riots were happening. He… didn't look right.” The man cocks his head, brow furrowing.

"How do you mean?" He asks with a guarded tone. "He was sick?" Lexa takes a deep breath to see Clarke staring intently at her, just as perplexed as the other man. She remembers that Clarke had been hiding behind the counter with Niylah when she'd seen the man jerk his head up, flesh dangling from his mouth. She clears her throat and wrings her fingers together nervously.

"He was slumped, and had a gash in his head," Lexa says, her voice cracking as she fumbles for the right words. She can feel her stomach flipping and her hands growing clammy. "He was bleeding, but it didn't seem to affect him. He… he was eating that clerk in the shop that my best friend was trapped in. I'm not lying, I swear. I saw him eating him and he didn't stop, either.”

A gasp escapes Clarke’s lips as she looks at her best friend in disbelief. "What?!"

Lexa sighs as she rubs the back of her head. “When we were in the store, Clarke, and we were trying to escape, it was him. He ripped a chunk out of that clerk’s leg and ate it like he was eating any other kind of meal,” Lexa briskly explains, her tongue growing thick at the memory. Clarke’s eyes are dazed and confused as she struggles to understand what Lexa is saying.

Lexa knows that she must sound insane to anyone listening to this, but this is Clarke, and Clarke has heard all of Lexa's insanity. Clarke has held her head in hands as wars waged inside them on the latests of nights and earliest of mornings. Clarke changed her sheets when she accidentally wet herself from the force of her panic attack a few weeks after being discharged. Clarke loved her body, no matter the scars and the burn marks that adorn her skin. Clarke never questioned her about the insanity of her mind after she'd been deployed. She never questioned her for her transition, either. Clarke took everything in stride, protecting her from harm and scrutiny. Clarke never questions her for anything, so she wouldn't question this.

Right?

Lexa’s voice is honest and trembling with fear as she turns to her best friend. “You have to believe me, Clarke, what I saw was true. I've never lied to you. This isn't different.” Clarke licks her lips and looks to the ground, taking a sharp breath as she crosses her arms. Her foot nervously taps against the hardwood floor of her apartment from where she stands in the doorway. There is a moment of silence before Carl bursts out into a booming laugh. He clutches his stomach and shakes his head. “You're shitting me, sweetheart. We already swept up the last of the infected at the Harlem quarantine,” he says in a chuckle. "The entire situation is under control. There's no need to worry your pretty little face about it." The taller man is silent, however, the smile now dropped from his face. He stares intently at the woman in front of him. Lexa’s head whips up to glare at Carl.

“You're shitting me, sweetheart. We already swept up the last of the infected at the Harlem quarantine,” he says in a chuckle. "The entire situation is under control. There's no need to worry your pretty little face about it." The taller man is silent, however, the smile now dropped from his face. He stares intently at the woman in front of him. Lexa’s head whips up to glare at Carl.

“I know what I saw,” she quips back defensively. "I am not a liar, officer."

Carl reaches out and pokes her shoulder, jutting his head up in an arrogant manner at the sarcastic tone she uses at his title.
“Darling, you were probably scared shitless and delusional; I’d bet you saw him shuffling like in the movies, too; am I right? Was he groaning and walking around like he was a member of the dance crew in *Thriller*?” Carl’s face is almost red from laughter. "Boy, and to believe you were a well-respected veteran. What a fucking joke." Lexa frowns as she crosses her arms, growling.

“Are you actually military men?” She asks in a frustrated tone, bewildered by their immaturity. "Is this what the service is sending out to us? The lower level scraps that no one needs so they're given busy work?” Carl stops laughing and his lips form a tight line. He suddenly grabs Lexa by the collar and shoves her against the wall. Lexa lets out a quiet yelp, causing Clarke’s head to snap up in shock. Her mouth widens as she watches her best friend get pounded into the wall yet again.

“You fucking bitch; you listen to me,” Carl screams into her face, saliva spewing from his mouth. "I don't care who the fuck you are or what you've done. You're nothing right now." Some of the spit lands upon Lexa’s face in tiny splatters, and accumulates in his overgrown beard, making him look like a rabid dog. He shakes her violently, throwing her back against the hard plaster.

“Don’t fucking act like you know everything, you fucking piece of whore shit,” he shouts louder, gripping her shirt collar tighter. Clarke breaks free from her frozen state and leaps further towards her best friend being hammered into the wall.

“Stop!” Clarke cries out, but before she can reach forward and help, the taller man’s hands wrap around her waist and yank her away. They both watch as Carl slams Lexa into the wall one last time before releasing his grip on her. The winded woman falls, her face landing in the stained carpet. Her glowering doesn't stop however, even as she looks up. From the corners of her eyes she can see a faint bloodstain in the entrance mat; it was something that was old, but not old enough to have been from months ago. She doesn't remember ever having a wound that caused her to bleed, not even when they'd escaped the store.

*Maybe your mind is playing tricks on you,* she thinks frustratingly, *maybe you're not as sane as you thought you were.*

Her back and ribs are sore, but nothing feels broken. Lexa remains dazed on the floor as Carl steps back, wiping the sweat from his brow as he shakes his head in disgust. The taller man finally lets Clarke go so she can fall to her best friend’s side. She runs her hands over Lexa’s body, trying to physically check to see if she’s hurt. Getting onto her hands and knees stiffly, Lexa shakes her head and mumbles something incoherent. In her gesture, she reveals that she’s okay, which only causes Clarke to growl.

After realizing that Lexa is just stunned, Clarke cowers over her protectively, her eyes seething as her lips curl into a furious snarl. “What the fuck is wrong with you? Why would you hurt her like that?! You’re supposed to protect us!” The taller man ignores her shouts and instead squats beside Lexa. His face comes closer towards Lexa as she cocks her head to the side.

“Tell me again, ma’am,” he whispers in a soft voice, “what exactly did you see?”

Lexa’s gaze shifts behind him to see Carl playing with the straps on his gun holster as he eyes Clarke hungrily. Her best friend’s confused face is not pointed in the direction of the big man looming over them, so she cannot see the look of pure vengeance in his eyes. Lexa swallows her pride as she turns back to face the taller man, knowing what he wants her to answer. She knows that this has just turned into something bigger than herself. She dips her head in defeat as she purses her chapped lips.

“Nothing,” she says, “I saw nothing.”

“Good,” the man states, a cheerful tone returning to his voice. "Well, it looks like that was sorted
quickly." He stands and looks at Carl with a faint nod. Carl lets his hands drop as he eyes Clarke and Lexa one last time, clicking his tongue suggestively.

"Why don’t you leave the real work to the men and go about your business. We shouldn’t have to remind you again, ladies, but your place isn't out there with us, but in here. Next time we come around, we'll be doing an inspection.” Carl says, the misogyny evident in his voice as he snickers at the two of them. Lexa knows better than to throw a retort at them, so she remains silent.

“Fuckers,” Clarke mutters barely audibly from beside her as the men turn around. The taller one cocks his head over his shoulders to give them both a stoic smile. He carries a knowing gaze as he stares directly into Lexa's eyes.

“Have a nice day,” he says curtly. Before they can say anything else, both men disappear around the corner. Lexa slowly rises from her kneeling position, groaning. Clarke gazes at her best friend in concern as she helps her up from the ground.

“Are you okay?” She asks gently, placing one hand just below Lexa’s chest and the other around her waist. Lexa nods as Clarke leads them back inside the house, passing a shocked Niylah. Lexa can't even be bothered to give a disgruntled retort about how she had stood there and watched the abuse take fold. Clarke's girlfriend shuts the door behind them as she quickly goes into the kitchen for an icepack. Clarke helps her best friend to the couch slowly, guiding her each step of the way.

Lexa lets out a pained groan as she lowers her body onto the couch. Niylah returns and hands the icepack, wrapped in a kitchen towel, to Clarke. Lexa grunts out a muffled (but still heavily jaded) thanks as Niylah quickly remembers the muscle cream that was in her room from a few days ago. She quietly tells them that she’ll grab it, leaving the best friends alone in the room.

* * *

Clarke gently places the icepack under her best friend’s shirt, pressing the cold against her bare skin. She can feel Lexa's abs twitching at the uncomfortable sensation of the cold. Clarke hums lowly under her breath, easing her pain as she tenderly kisses the exposed skin near her collar. Lexa elicits a hiss at the contact, shifting uncomfortably as Clarke moves the ice pack further up her chest to right under her breasts. Clarke glances up at the stairwell, but notices that Niylah is still gone. She quickly leans over and places her lips upon her best friend’s in a sweet kiss, trying to convey every emotion that she is feeling at that moment. Lexa’s eyes close at the kiss, and she can taste the fear and worry upon Clarke’s lips.

"What you said, was it true?” Clarke asks as she pulls away. "It doesn't seem like it could happen. It feels so… unrealistic. Like it's all so cliché, Lex." Their faces are still close together, and Clarke can feel every darting breath coming from her best friend as it falls upon her own lips. Lexa takes a deep breath and winces as Clarke moves the icepack upwards slightly.

“Would you believe me if I said it was?” Lexa answers with her own question. Clarke is taken aback as she reels her face away from her best friend. Lexa watches with an intent gaze as Clarke takes her question into consideration.

“I don’t know,” Clarke says finally, “yesterday is still hazy to me, Lexa.” Clarke is honest, but in some sense, she can feel her heart pulling her towards believing in her best friend. Before either of them can say anything else, Niylah hops down the stairs with the tube of muscle cream in her hands. She gingerly hands it to Lexa, glancing at her in wide eyed concern.

“What the hell were those guys’ problems? Like holy fuck, they’re supposed to military; I’d wished they’d act like it. I swear, this city is just getting more corrupt as things get worse,” Niylah says
spitefully, shaking her head in disappointment. Lexa uncaps the lid, but before she can squirt some in her hand, Clarke takes the tube from her hands, casting the icepack aside.

“You won’t be able to reach back there, allow me.” Lexa is hesitant at first, but slowly allows Clarke to rub the cream upon all her sore spots. Niylah takes a seat on the armchair and turns on the news as the sounds of the squelching wet cream making contact with Lexa’s bruised skin fill the room. Clarke can see that she's blatantly avoiding their presence as she distracts herself with the television. Clarke knows that the churning in her gut at Niylah's cold shoulder means only one thing. She sighs, letting her head rest gently on Lexa's shoulder. They both glance upwards to see the reporter from yesterday is on again, but her face is scrunched up in a frown. Clarke lets her hand linger beneath Lexa’s shirt, her thumb discretely stroking her muscles. Clarke feels Lexa’s shoulder slouch slightly in relaxation at the touch. The two of them shift closer as they watch the news.

“Investigators have uncovered a new video pertaining to the Harlem riots,” the woman begins as they show a security tape. They watch as the tape plays. There is a locked off area in the hospital, labelled with strict neon caution signs and has tape rolled over the doors. Behind the doors, the three women can make out some sort of biohazard warning sign.

“Those infected with the H1Z1 virus were placed under strict quarantine in Mamonides Medical Clinic in the lower district. These victims showed signs of severe fungal pus protruding from their skin, spores in their lung areas, and their brain activity functioned below normal. Hysteria and manic behaviours were present, alongside vast personality shifts. Fever, nausea, and flu-like symptoms were seen as pre-cursors to the development of this deadly and unimaginable disease.”

The footage cuts to that of a hooded figure walking across the empty hallway and towards the door with a massive biohazard sign on the front. They watch as the blurry person walks over to the door and glances around the hall with cautious swivels of their head. Before long, the person reaches forward and unlocks the latch on the door, pulling the it open. Leaving the door ajar, the figure stops, almost as though frozen in shock before turning and bolting in the opposite direction out of fear.

“It seems as though someone had purposefully opened the door that contained the infected, thus either accidentally or intentionally setting them free. Authorities are trying to locate this person, but all the proof that remains is of this video footage. The rest of the tape was purely snow. There were no finger prints on the door, and no foot marks on the linoleum either. If you know anything, military personnel are urging you to step forward and present any and all information possible.”

Clarke watches as the security video cuts out, but just as it does, something catches her eye. “Wait,” she says briskly, “rewind it back a few frames.” Niylah picks up the remote and quickly complies, skipping back a few moments. Clarke leans in as her girlfriend hits the play button. Just a few seconds before it cuts out again, Clarke holds up her hand. “Pause it.”

Niylah hits the button on command, and they all stare at the screen. At first, Niylah and Lexa are skeptical as to what Clarke had seen. The door is open and the hallway is empty; there’s nothing more to see, really. But, it wasn’t the emptiness of the hallway that had caught Clarke’s attention, but the something in the reflection of the small glass on the door.

“Can you zoom in a bit?” She asks Niylah, her words getting drier and drier. Niylah gets nervous at the request, feeling that familiar fear creep into her veins. Hesitantly, she nods and clicks the zoom button, until the screen is maxed out.

“Move it towards the door,” Clarke says specifically. Lexa’s brows scrunch up as she leans forward, too. When Niylah finally moves the screen towards the door, they all let out frightened gasps.

“Holy fucking shit,” Clarke cries out, the words nearly faltering as they leave her lips. All three of
them stare at the frozen picture in front of them, the blood in their veins going cold from fear.

In the reflection, they can make out the mangled face of what could have been a young woman. Her eyes are glossy and yellowed, and her flesh greyed and saggy. Green pus lines her lips like lipstick gone wrong. Her bones can be seen through her thin skin and her eyes are sunken in considerably. On the door, the three women can faintly make out the curled grey finger tips around the metal frame. All the while, only one thought runs through Clarke’s mind.

Lexa was right.

Suddenly, there is a faint rapping sound against the door, startling all of them. Clarke latches onto her best friend, fear flooding through her as her heart erratically beats against her chest. Niylah lets out a shriek as she, too, cowards beside her girlfriend and her best friend. They all stare at the door as they see that Niylah had forgotten to lock it. Lexa somehow finds a newfound strength as she gets off the couch and pulls Clarke up with her. She gazes at Niylah with fear in her eyes as she nods furiously.

“Come on, we have to hide, now,” she hisses. "I don't know what the hell that is but we need to hide.” Clarke knows they have to think quickly. She shoves Lexa into the small closet across the room as Niylah hides behind the kitchen sink. Clarke takes her own place behind the couch as sweat accumulates upon her forehead. She gazes at the closet and through the slits to see Lexa staring at her with dread lacing her eyes. Clarke can feels Lexa’s anxiety radiating off of her from meters away.

* * *

In her head, Lexa prays to a God she doesn’t believe in to let it be just a draft, or that her mind is simply playing tricks on her again. The only sound that can be heard is that of Niylah’s harsh, panicked breaths from across the room. Lexa bites her lip hard enough to draw blood as she nervously shifts her gaze back to Clarke, who is now cowering in the corner of the couch.

It is silent for a few moments before the unmistakable noise of the doorknob twisting and clicking startles the tranquility. Lexa hears the sharp creak of the rusted metal wedges as the door slams open, violently smashing into the wall with a loud thud.

Only one recurring thought runs through her head as she grits her teeth, struggling for a plan to attack the intruder.

Someone, or something, is now inside with them.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the feedback on the fic! I'm loving it! :)

* * *
“You know how sometimes you tell yourself that you have a choice, but really you don’t have a choice? Just because there are alternatives doesn’t mean they apply to you.”

TRIGGER WARNING: SCENES OF VIOLENCE, BLOOD AND GORE, DEATH, ATTEMPTED SEXUAL ASSAULT, AND ROUGH SEX.

Sorry for the long wait on these updates, y'all. I forgot about uploading the new revised chapter that I thought I would be able to do a few days ago. I'm really bogged down with work at the moment, so updates are going a little slowly right now.

I hope this was worth the wait!

The quote is from Rick Yancy's book, "The 5th Wave".

“Lexa, Clarke, Niylah?!” Costia's unmistakable voice rings out from the door.

Lexa lets out a sigh of relief as she heaves herself out of the closet to gaze at her ex-girlfriend, staring wide-eyed at the door. At the sight of Lexa, Costia runs and wraps her arms around the woman’s shoulders. Clarke and Niyah emerge from their hiding spots to gaze at their interaction. Costia ducks her head into Lexa’s shoulder, inhaling her familiar scent. Lexa knows that the feelings she once had for Costia are gone, but she can't help but revel in the safety that accompanies her embrace.

"Oh God," Costia whimpers as Lexa’s arms loop around her back tighter. Lexa gulps down the emotions tearing apart her throat as she closes her eyes. Even though her heart is completely devoted to Clarke, she can’t help but feel a twinge of nostalgia play at the beating organ. She opens her eyes to see Clarke staring at her over her shoulder, her eyes blank and emotionless.

"Please tell me you all saw the news?" Costia whispers, her voice hoarse. Lexa nods as she pulls away to swallow harshly. She tries to convince herself that her mind is safe, calm, rational. She stares at Clarke and Niyah, taking a deep breath.

“Yeah, shit is getting bad out here,” Niyah says in a fearful voice, coming up to envelop Costia into a hug. Costia folds in her grasp as the two friends embrace tightly. Clarke comes to step next to Lexa as the two women pull away from each other.

“The military have rolled in, so I’m guessing they can control it, right?” Costia asks with a soft tone, looking back at her ex-soldier of a girlfriend. Lexa flinches and instantly her hand finds her sore back. Clarke’s eyes shift up at her best friend’s with concern as she gently brushes their knuckles together. Costia soon begins to realize that she hasn’t been answered.
“Right?” She echoes, glancing at Lexa. Costia gazes at her ex, desperately begging her for an answer or response of some sort. After having learned her lesson, however, Lexa bows her head and falls silent, fear scratching at her throat like a festering scab.

“Yeah,” Lexa breathes out scratchily, “they’ll control it.”

Clarke can see how much it is paining Lexa to whisper the heavy white lie, so she gently flicks her fingers to lock loosely with Lexa’s dangling digits. The older best friend’s head cocks up at the sensation as she gazes down at their hands with sadness brewing in her depths. Clarke doesn’t have to say anything, and Lexa appreciates the silent reassurance. She needs it so much.

“We’re gonna be okay, you guys,” Clarke says as confidently as she can. Her head turns up to stare at Niylah and Costia as she offers them a meek smile. Lexa can’t smile back, not when she still sees the expression on Carl’s face as he’d looked at Clarke.

Clarke avoids her gaze as she repeats, “we’re gonna be okay, we have to be.”

* * *

Day 17

Lexa and Clarke shuffle through the streets as they go about their business getting whatever supplies they need. Their job assignments come in tomorrow, and on Monday of the following week, they will start their assigned work. Lexa can only feel apprehensive of what’s to come, whereas Clarke is a bit more naive and still believes that everything will work out.

It’s denial, and they both know it.

They quickly finish up shopping for clothes as they make their way over to the grocery store for their final chance at buying anything before rationing starts. The snow is falling lightly, causing the white fluff to stick like puffs of marshmallows to their jackets and faces. Lexa walks with her head down and mouth tucked into her scarf, following her leading best friend.

The sky is beginning to darken as they shuffle quickly to the store. The store is the one just a few blocks from the apartment, and luckily this one hadn’t been damaged during the mass protest a few days ago. Lexa follows Clarke to the entrance, but she spots a hardware store down the road. She pauses for a moment before tugging on Clarke’s jacket sleeve to draw her attention.

“I have to grab some tools,” Lexa says quickly, nodding her head in the direction of the store, “I just want to grab some stuff in case we need anything.” Clarke gazes up and follows her stare before dipping her head in acknowledgement, smiling softly.

“Just meet me back here,” she says gently. Glancing around, Clarke sees that no one is really around. Because they are bundled up in their winter clothing, it’s hard to tell if they’re together anyways. The younger best friend leans up on her toes to press a gentle kiss to her best friend’s soft lips. The two stay lip-locked as Lexa’s eyelids flutter shut. She leans down a little further to deepen the kiss, but only slightly. Clarke lets out a quiet moan which is later swallowed by Lexa’s lips.

Lexa removes themselves from the contact as she lets out a low sigh, pressing her forehead to Clarke’s. Her best friend’s hands brush her sharp jawline as she pecks her again, and then again, and then one last time. The two almost have to remind themselves that they are in public and cannot be so open with their secret gestures. Clarke reluctantly pulls away as she pecks Lexa’s lips one last time. She takes a step back and squeezes their hands once more, needing the comfort to last a bit longer.

“Just hurry back, Lex,” Clarke murmurs gently. "I hate being alone out here."
Lexa's heart aches at the statement, so she nods firmly before turning away. Clarke watches as Lexa jogs off towards the store without any further word. Her gaze drifts past the slowly blurring figure of her best friend walking away in the opposite direction. There are a few people lingering outside the store across from her, smoking. She thinks little to nothing of them as she turns back to see Lexa finally fade out of view. A piece of her heart is slowly shattering with each step her best friend takes. She knows that Lexa isn’t lying, but she also knows that what her best friend had said seemed highly implausible. But, there was also the security footage. At this point, Clarke honestly doesn’t have clue what or who to believe. Everything is a mess.

There is the soft ding of the bell as she pushes open the door of the store to see nobody inside. Instantly, fear settles in her bones as her mind transports itself back to the day the other store had been vandalized. She remembers the men with guns and shivers, trying to force herself to concentrate. You're not there anymore, she tries to tell herself, you are safe, you are gonna grab your stuff and go. She spies the items she needs and grabs a basket. Finally a sigh of relief leaves her body as she spots one staff member working at the back. Clarke can see that he’s busy stocking items, so she doesn’t pester him.

The young blonde continues to grab her necessary items, from toiletries to food, until she finds herself finished quickly. She glances at her watch before looking through the windows at the hardware store. Lexa still hasn’t come back, causing her breath to hitch in worry. She's probably inspecting each one, that's all. Clarke carries her full basket and heads towards the till. The clerk spots her and she flashes him a small smile. He returns it with a hesitant nod as he finishes stacking the last few cans.

“It’s a little late for a young woman as beautiful as yourself to be out wandering, ma'am,” the clerk says cheerily, scanning her items. Clarke chuckles as she blushes. It had been some time since someone had flirted so openly with her aside from Lexa.

“Thanks, but I can take care of myself,” she says in a polite tone, not wanting to cause trouble or draw attention to herself. “I took a karate class… once.” The clerk smiles again as he rings the rest of the items through, pausing upon the rye bread.

“Rye, huh?” He asks as he stares at the item. Clarke gives him a gentle smile and nods.

“I like to stay healthy, you know, I'm into the whole 'live while we're young' thing,” she explains, laughing to herself nervously. Her eyes keep flickering back to the door. Where was Lexa? The clerk chuckles with her as he rings it through.

“You know,” he says gently, “I've got a new shipment of this great dark loaf. It's really healthy and is great for the digestion system.” He processes Clarke’s credit card as he motions over to the back. “Do you wanna have a sample?”

Clarke looks over to the door. She knows that she told Lexa to meet her in the store, and since she hasn't come yet, she guesses she can wait a little bit. She turns back to the clerk and nods slowly. “Sure, I guess. If you're offering I can't say no.”

The clerk lets out a genuine smile, as if she were the first person all day to acknowledge his presence and give him some sort of recognition. He grins as he steps behind the counter and holds his finger up. “With all the recent shit that’s been going on, we have a lot of security protocols that we’ve been issued to have. You know, government rules, right? The ‘rare’ stock is in the back. It's pointless, though. No one's really left their house since the quarantine.” He opens the door and enters silently.

But then, just as Clarke's left alone, there is another soft ding at the door.
Lexa browses hastily through the aisles until she reaches the section with the various knives and hunting rifles. She looks around her as she gazes at the different rifles. She gazes at the Marlin 336 XLR, recognizing the gun from her earlier hunting sessions with Costia and her father. Lexa had never shot game before, but merely went for the experience. Instead, she practiced on wooden archery targets. She knows her aim is good, but she could never shoot a living creature again even if she tried. It was at that time she learned that apparently Americans enjoyed killing innocent, helpless animals for sport.

And when she went to war, she realized they killed humans for sport, too.

The gun repulses and attracts her at the same time. It's like a drink to an alcoholic who's been sober for so long but absent of any other drink, She peers at it through narrowed eyes. Her fingers reach out and ghost over the wood finish on the handle and the metal muzzle. She swallows the rattling gunfire and screaming in the back of her head. She has to clench her fists to remind herself that there's no blood on her hands. She pulls her arm back and sucks in a deep breath. She can't help it, though, the first touch was too euphoric. She feels almost like a child touching an expensive vase as she quickly retracts her fingers again.

“It's a real revelation, that one,” a deep voice pipes up behind her. Lexa jumps, startled by the sudden noise. She turns around to see an older man with greying hair and stubbled beard put his hands up defensively, giving her a small smile.

“Didn't mean to scare you there, young lady,” he says friendlily. Lexa regains her breath as she dips her head in embarrassment. "I can guess at how things lately can make a person tense. It's no surprise my stock has sold so well recently."

“It's okay, I was just browsing,” she replies shakily, turning her attention back towards the gun. The man puts his hands on his hips as he nods at the gun again. Lexa gulps hastily, her mind still wandering back to days of death and explosions and gore.

“I'm a big Marlin fan myself, so I say you have a good eye. Best guns for hunting deer, that's for sure,” he says in approval. Lexa lets out a strangled chuckled. "I could never picture you as a woman out for hunting, though. You're a little slight, no offense."

Lexa looks up at him, and it takes everything inside of her to not tell him, that's because I never hunted deer, I hunted men.

“What about hunting other things?” The words slip past her lips softly, each syllable cracking at its birth. In some way, she's proposing her thoughts in a different fashion, but she's still so damned unsure. The man’s left brow raises. “Other things?” Lexa shuts her eyes, contemplating telling him or not. Realizing that since the military, her own brethren, refused to believe her, she would have no chance at getting the man to comprehend her situation. She simply resorts to sighing and shaking her head.

“Like… moose and caribou perhaps,” she says, remembering Costia’s brother mentioning something about those animals. The man lets out a soft laugh as he points to the gun she had been staring at for nearly fifteen minutes. She hastily looks behind her at the store, noticing a few men making their way down to the store, talking amicably amongst themselves.

“This gun can pierce through two caribou hides in a straight line, that's how powerful it is. Thirty-five calibre rounds with a trigger pull of five pounds, eleven ounces. Not bad for eight hundred bucks, if you ask me. Not to mention, hitting a target from two hundred meters away is dead easy,”
he explains, turning back to face Lexa. She takes a deep breath, overwhelmed by the information. She promptly turns to the man and gives him a bleak smile. It's a hunting rifle. She's pulled the triggers of worse.

So why does it still feel so damned scary?

"Thanks, I'll think about it," she whispers hoarsely. Before she can say another word to the man, she is bolting out the door and down the street. Her breath quickens and she doubles over in the alleyway, her hands scrabbling for grip upon the brick wall. She heaves, her eyes stinging as she blinks back tears. She grits her teeth, sucking air through them forcefully.

"You're okay," she tells herself hoarsely, "you're okay, you're okay, you're fucking okay…"

But she isn't.

She never was.

* * *

Clarke turns around to see that the three people she had spotted earlier have now entered the store. She makes out the face of a man with scar running jagged down the left side of his face. He walks with a slight limp as he and the two other men walk through the store. Clarke swallows hard as she turns back to the till. She can hear murmuring behind her, but she refuses to turn around. Thankfully, the clerk is back with the dark loaf of rye bread.

"Sorry it took so long, it’s just that we have so much stock to sort through--" He stops mid-sentence as his head jerks up to meet the gaze of the three men now just mere steps behind Clarke. His smile falters and his hand begins to tremble as the men approach him menacingly.

"Where’s our supply?" The man with the jagged scar demands. Clarke shrinks away from the till, trying to inch away from their confrontation and make herself as still as possible. She watches as the anxiously clerk gulps and points shakily to the back. The man grunts and waves over at his comrades to follow him. They disappear behind the counter and into the storage room. Before the man with the scar can enter the room, he pauses to glance at Clarke with a sly smile. He says nothing as he follows the other men into the storage room. The minute they are alone again, the clerk turns to Clarke, his hands outstretched shakily.

"Go," he hisses, shoving the bags of groceries in her direction, “go before they come back.”

Clarke looks confused, but complies as she grabs her stuff and hesitantly looks towards the door. She turns to leave, but before she can reach the second aisle form the door, the ear piercing sound of a gunshot rockets through her sensitive ears. Something from the shelf beside her falls and shatters to the ground. She drops the basket and covers her ears in shock as her head whips around to see what has happened. She sees the splatter of blood on the ground in front of her and screams.

The clerk’s forehead has a clean hole through it, leaking blood upon the countertop. His body is slouched over and his eyes open and staring lifelessly into nothing. Fear plasters his face in a permanent mould as his mouth is curled into the beginning of a scream that never made it out. There is some slight steam coming from his forehead as Clarke looks past him to see the man with the scar still pointing the gun in the clerk’s general direction. He catches Clarke’s eye and gives her a smirk.

“Business has its tight ends, sweetheart,” he states in an innocent tone, lowering the gun. "I'm sorry you had to see that, blondie." Clarke backs away, the words getting caught in her throat as she trips on broken bottle of beer that had fallen from the shelf. She slips and crashes onto her back, her left
hand slicing open upon the glass. The sound of her skin tearing is muted by the ringing in her ears. For a moment, she can’t even register the painful sensation of the cut upon her cracked palms. The other two men are coming towards her now, but she is frozen, unable to recognize what is happening.

One of the men grabs her arm and hoists her from the ground while the other pats her down. He turns back to the man with the jagged scar before clearly stating, “she’s clear, Sam.” Clarke recognizes his voice, and instantly she remembers it from the other store. Fear encompasses her as she falls limp in the man’s arms. The man holding her tightens his grip on her arm and shoves her against the nearest wall. She tries to wrench herself free, but she’s trapped under his strong grip.

“Are you fucking stupid or some shit? Stand up, bitch,” he snarls in a low growl. “I said stand!” Clarke whimpers as tears fill her eyes, blotting her vision. Before he can do anything further, Sam puts his hand upon the man’s shoulder with a small smile.

“Easy, you don’t want to frighten the poor woman,” he says gently. Clarke is about to thank him when Sam’s lips curl into a wicked grin. “It’s a lot less fun when they’re scared, Jimmy.”

When the words make their way out of his mouth, Clarke shrieks. Jimmy and the other man pin her against the wall. Jimmy snickers as Clarke tries to struggle out of their powerful grasp. The other man slaps her hard against her face, and Jimmy releases his grip so the other man can throw her down to the ground. Clarke lands against the cold floor with a hard thud as she gazes up.

The distinct sound of a belt unbuckling fills the tense silence as Clarke sees Sam step over some fallen merchandise to get to her. The unmistakable bulge in his pants causes Clarke to attempt at crawling away. Her efforts are fruitless, however, because her bleeding hand is almost useless. Tears are streaming down her face as she shakes her head.

“Please,” she begs, “don’t do this, I don’t… I didn’t do anything wrong!”

Sam chuckles at her comment as he unzips his pants and unbuttons his jeans. He reaches inside of his boxers and tugs at his stiff member, a iniquitous smile playing at his lips. “Who said you ever needed to do something wrong? The only thing that you had wrong was your timing, my dear. Go on and try to scream all you want. No one is going to save you, woman.”

Clarke cries harder as she covers her face with her hands. Sam kneels down and yanks on the waistband of her jeans, drawing her closer to him. He claws at the button on Clarke’s pants as suddenly, she kicks him in the thigh with all of her force. Sam grunts painfully as Clarke shimmies out of his grip. The other men are around his side, both turning to glare at Clarke.

Sam clenches his fist, his smirk growing.

“Oh now,” he mutters as he licks his lips, "now you're asking for it, honey."

Before he can move, a sharp ding and the sound of footsteps interrupts them.

* * *

Lexa bursts through the door of the shop, out of breath from her near panic attack at the hardware store. The first thing she sees is Clarke crying and bleeding profusely from her hand. She notices, however faintly, the other men in the room, but her first instinct is to reach for Clarke. She pulls her best friend into her arms and gently rubs her thumbs over her cheekbones as she feels Clarke’s wet skin. Her best friend’s fear radiates into Lexa’s body as she soon grows anxious, too.

Lexa’s head swivels to see Sam; his is belt undone and hands clutch his thigh, the smirk now having
dropped clear from his face. The two other men standing beside him wear equally baffled expressions. A newfound anger courses through her bones her eyes spot the dead clerk at the tills. The two men at Sam’s side stand, fully erect, to glare at her menacingly.

But for Lexa, her panic is gone, only to be replaced by rage.

They charge at her, but Lexa quickly pulls out years of guerrilla-style training and puts it to use. She lands a roundhouse blow to Jimmy's midriff as he rushes her from the left, before finishing up with an elbow to the face of the man coming at her on the right. They both fall to the ground, winded as Lexa screams. She runs at Sam, and with full force, tackles him to the ground.

“Don’t you fucking touch my best friend,” she snarls as she pins him to the ground. "You fucking perverted sick fuck, I'll fucking kill you!” Her screams are high pitched and shrill, laced with fury. She grips his shirt collar in one hand and in the other, raises her fists. She hammers one blow after the other into his face, her rage blinding her from her reality.

“Lexa, let him go! We have to go!” Clarke cries out as she staggers to her feet. She clambers away from Jimmy and the other man as she watches Lexa deliver relentless punches to Sam’s face. Lexa can’t hear her, however, as she is now entranced by her anger. In her fury, she realizes that Sam is no longer making any noise, nor is he fighting back. But it doesn’t matter.

She's not here right now. She's back in Afghanistan, with the man who almost raped her laying beaten beneath her.

“Lexa!” Clarke calls out louder, reaching forward to tug on her best friend’s arm. Lexa whips around manically, still in her defensive state. Her fist remains raised as she glares at Clarke. The younger best friend lets out a faint cry of fear as she stumbles backwards. Once she registers that it’s Clarke, Lexa looks to the damage she has done on Sam’s face.

His face no longer resembles the general visage characteristics. His nose is broken off clean, and his lip is busted in two. Blood gushes from his forehead and eyes, which are both swelled shut. Lexa lets out a faint gasp, but her adrenalin is still pumping. She reaches for Clarke and tugs on her good hand, dragging her away from the store.

They sprint back to the apartment in seconds flat, avoiding military and anyone else. Once in the safety of the elevator, Lexa can finally breathe. She gazes at Clarke trembling beside her and takes a deep breath to regain her composure. She glances down at her fist to see that it is covered in blood. Lexa turns her attention back to Clarke as she lowers her fists.

Without any words, Lexa, very gently, reaches for her best friend and wraps her arms around her shaking frame. Clarke flinches, still horrified after witnessing the death of the clerk and the remorseless beatings Lexa delivered to the man with the scar, lets out a stifled cry. Lexa closes her eyes in dejection as she puts some space between them.

“I can’t talk to you right now,” Clarke chokes out. "I know that you saved me and God, thank you for that, but you just... his face…” Lexa nods, understanding why Clarke can't finish her statement. Her best friend is pale and sickly, looking like she's just seen death, but Lexa gets it. She understands. The elevator doors open and the best friends make their way over towards Clarke’s apartment building. The younger best friend shakily opens the lock and lets them inside to where Niylah is waiting.

The minute she sees her injured girlfriend, Niylah stands up and walks over to her briskly. Her eyes widen in fear and worry as she looks at Clarke’s dishevelled state. Her eyes then land on Lexa’s
bloodied fist as caution flickers in her light eyes.

“What the fuck happened to you two?” She demands, scared. Clarke shakes her head, silently letting her know that she cannot talk about it. Lexa doesn’t answer either, but instead points at Clarke’s hand, still cut from the shard of glass.

“You need to take care of that,” she whispers in a barely audible tone, “before it gets infected.” Both women, Clarke and Niylah, shiver at the word. Lexa realizes the double meaning and quickly winces, physically apologizing. Clarke nods as she looks down at her palm.

“I can take care of it myself,” she says in a strangely calm voice, turning away from Lexa. The older best friend sighs and nods as Niylah leads Clarke towards the stairs. “I’ll be right up, I’ve just got to get the first aid kit.” Clarke doesn’t reply as she shakily stumbles up the stairs. Once she is out of view, Niylah is over to Lexa’s side in a flash. Her hands grip Lexa’s collar as she shoves her into the corner of the kitchen isle with a snarl forming upon her lips.

“I don’t know what the fuck is wrong with you,” she growls defensively, “but you need to stop dragging me and Clarke into more of a mess. Ever since this has all gone down, you’ve done nothing but get us deeper into shit we don’t need. Back the fuck away from her, because you’re not protecting her, Lexa. No, at the rate you’re going, you’re going to get us killed.” Niylah’s words are harsher and more painful than a shot to the chest. Lexa swallows hard and nods, whimpering in Niylah’s cold grip.

They don’t say anything as Niylah lets go and trudges back up the stairs to tend to Clarke. Lexa slumps down on the barstool, feeling the tears leak from the corners of her eyes as she slowly begins to digest Niylah’s brutal words. She closes her eyes, seeing the man from the other day and the three men from today flash thorough her mind.

All the while, she can’t help thinking that maybe Niylah is right.

Maybe she will get them killed.

* * *

Clarke hears the knock upon her bedroom door as she freezes while reading her book. All the lights in her room are on as she slowly stumbles out from the bed. She twists the door knob to see Lexa standing before her, head drooped down low and body leaned up against the frame of the wooden door. She gives Clarke a small nod as she gazes down at her bandaged palm.

“I know you said that you don’t want to talk, but I just wanted to ask if you got hurt anywhere else,” she mumbles quietly. Niylah is in the room downstairs preparing a late dinner. Clarke takes a deep breath as she shakes her head.

“I’m fine, Lexa. It was… I just got scared, that’s all,” she murmurs back honestly. Lexa nods and takes a deep breath.

“Clarke,” she begins in a soft voice, “I’m sorry about leaving you. We should have stayed together. I knew how scared you were and how much you wanted me there and I didn’t listen. I’m sorry.” Lexa feels the guilt soak through every word as he glances up at Clarke with an apologetic glance. The younger best friend sighs as she runs her good hand through her greasy hair.

“I’m fine, Lexa. It was… I just got scared, that’s all,” she murmurs back honestly. Lexa nods and takes a deep breath.

“Clarke,” she begins in a soft voice, “I’m sorry about leaving you. We should have stayed together. I knew how scared you were and how much you wanted me there and I didn’t listen. I’m sorry.” Lexa feels the guilt soak through every word as he glances up at Clarke with an apologetic glance. The younger best friend sighs as she runs her good hand through her greasy hair.

“It’s not you, Lexa, it’s just… he…,” Clarke struggles to finish her sentence as the memories of Sam undoing his belt fill her mind. “He was going to… to me… if you hadn’t come…”

Clarke bursts out into tears as she begins to shake again. Lexa reaches out once more, slower this
time, letting Clarke know that it is up to her to respond to the gesture. Clarke gingerly throws herself into her best friend’s arms as Lexa wraps her arms around her protectively. Clarke buries her head into Lexa’s shoulder and lets her tears seep into the skin below the nape of her neck.

“If you hadn’t come…,” she can’t finish repeating her sentence as she chokes up again. Lexa shakes her head, gently placing her good hand at the back of Clarke’s head, rubbing soothing strokes over the small curls at the base of her hair.

“Ssh,” she whispers, “I’ll always be there, C. Always.”

Clarke nods and cries harder as she hears the honest in Lexa’s voice. The older best friend feels the burden of guilt after leaving Clarke for so long, but mentally vows to never do so again. Once some time passes of their embrace, Clarke begins to feel her body relax in her best friend’s strong grip.

“Can… can you sleep next to me tonight, Lex?” Clarke asks sheepishly, mumbling the words into Lexa’s shirt. There’s no hesitancy as Lexa nods, rubbing the back of her head with more dignified brushes as she gently places a kiss to Clarke’s cheek.

“I will, baby. I will,” she mumbles gently, kissing away another lone tear that makes it way down Clarke’s cheek. The salt meshes with the saliva on her tongue, but Lexa doesn’t care. She owes Clarke anything and everything at this point.

It was her fault this happened.

* * *

The ominous sound of roaring thunder fills the small room with a frighteningly loud noise. Clarke stands in the doorway, watching as Lexa pulls out the duvet and beckons to it with her hands. In the dim flash of lightening, Clarke makes out the rough scratches on her best friend’s knuckles. Taking a hesitant step forward, Clarke shuts the door behind her. Niylah is in the next room sleeping. Clarke pads across the small space of the room and swallows as she eyes Lexa’s hand again.

“You didn’t clean it properly, did you?” Clarke asks timidly, her gaze now meeting her best friend’s. Lexa looks to her knuckles as she grits her Lexth and shakes her head, no. Clarke walks over to the private bathroom and flicks on the light.

“Come on,” she says softly, “I’ll help you.”

Lexa waits a moment, but sure enough, the feeling of Clarke’s hand tugging her hers draws her to following her best friend. Clarke gently closes the door behind her best friend and opens up the cabinets above the sink, her eyes searching for the rubbing alcohol and bandages. She hums delightfully as she finds her items, before grabbing them and turning to Lexa. She nods at the closed toilet seat.

“Sit,” she says in a soft voice. Lexa obeys and takes a seat, nervously shaking her leg.

“Sit,” she says in a soft voice. Lexa obeys and takes a seat, nervously shaking her leg.

“It’s not gonna hurt too badly, is it?” Lexa asks, her voice cracking. Clarke holds up her bandaged palm and rolls her eyes playfully. “I had it worse, Lexa. I was lucky the cut on my palm didn’t need stitches.”

Lexa bits the soft inside part of her cheek at Clarke’s comment, instantly feeling guilty. She hangs her head in shame and nods pathetically. Clarke sighs and closes her eyes, regretting her choice of words instantly. She takes a seat on the bathtub next to Lexa.

“I didn’t mean it like that, Lex,” Clarke mumbles, reaching for her hand. Lexa remains silent as her
body quivers in anticipation. “I didn’t protect you, Clarke.” The younger best friend draws a sharp breath at Lexa’s words and places the items on the ground. She rests her elbows on her knees as she gazes at Lexa with sympathy.

“Yeah, you came late, but Lexa, you came,” Clarke says gently, “that’s all that really matters to me.”

Lexa’s head slowly nods up as she looks at her best friend, broken hearted. The two of them stay in silence as Lexa murmurs something incoherent. Clarke’s shoulders slack as she registers the self-loathing processing in Lexa’s mind. Tears burn at the older best friend’s irises as she vividly remembers the past few hours. Clarke’s hands find themselves at Lexa’s back, rubbing soothing circles upon the crinkled shirt.

“Hey,” Clarke whispers, “Lexa, it’s okay. Just relax for me, okay?” Lexa nods and sighs, blinking away the tears. Clarke gently reaches for her wounded hand, holding in her own. Taking some cotton balls, she dips them in the rubbing alcohol before hovering above Lexa’s bloodied knuckles. She watches as her best friend tightens up.

“It’ll be okay, Lex. Just take a deep breath. It’ll be over before you know it,” Clarke says, nodding reassuringly. Lexa takes a glance at her best friend and nods, hearing the truth in her words. Clarke lowers the gauze and they both brace themselves.

It feels like fire. Clarke knows this feeling because Niylah had done the same with her own palm. Lexa shuts her eyes so tightly, Clarke is almost convinced the thin skin of her eyelids will tear with the sheer force. Clarke finishes the job as quickly as she can, rubbing over the bruised skin and cleaning out any dirt or dust.

After she wraps up and bandages the wrist, Lexa and Clarke both rise from their positions in the bathroom. The older woman gazes at the back of her hand with a perplexed gaze, licking her chapped lips. She turns to Clarke and gives her a courteous nod.

“Thanks, Clarke, really,” she says honestly, looking back at her wrist. Clarke steps forward, gently cupping Lexa’s jaw in her undamaged hand. It takes her a moment to notice that their wounded hands were both different. Lexa glances down and notices the same before their eyes meet.

Clarke leans up on her toes to place a gentle kiss upon Lexa’s mouth. Her best friend’s eyes close at the contact, sighing in content as Clarke licks over her bottom lip. Lexa parts her mouth slightly, granting her best friend the access that she seeks. Their tongues roll over each other like perfectly timed tidal waves, pushing and pulling in a constant need of dominance.

As Clarke’s eyes shut, she sees Sam, undoing his belt and grinning at her slyly. Her eyes jerk open and she pulls away from Lexa, breathless. Lexa’s eyes open and glance at Clarke in worry as she slowly reaches for her best friend.

“Clarke?” Lexa asks, concern dripping from the consonant sound of her name. Clarke shakes her head and bows it, unable to look at her best friend. Each time she blinks, she sees Sam.

Maybe it’s the fear, or maybe it’s the raging storm outside, but Clarke can’t think straight. Her feelings are bouncing around like gaseous molecules. Lexa can feel her heart beating faster as Clarke’s head snaps up, her eyes lit with a lustful fire. Clarke’s hand finds the back of Lexa’s neck and she pulls her best friend closer to her, placing a rough kiss upon her lips.

“I need you to make me forget him,” Clarke hisses in a sharp tone, “make me forget, Lexa. Make me… come.” Lexa’s insides churn at the words, partially out of lust and partially out of confusion. She removes her lips from her best friend’s to glance at her.
“Clarke…,” Lexa trails off as Clarke’s hands roam over her body. The roughness of the bandage feels good against her bare skin as Clarke snakes her hand under her night shirt. The younger best friend’s lips are attached to Lexa’s neck, sucking harshly upon the flesh.

“I want it, Lexa,” she groans in sexual frustration, “I want it hard and I want it fast. I also want you to….” she trails off, pulling away from Lexa. The older woman is slowly forgetting about common sense as Clarke grabs the waistband of her pyjama pants. She leans in so that her lips are hovering over Lexa’s bent ear.

“I want you to use your cock, Lexa,” Clarke hisses, shoving her bare hand down Lexa’s front. "I want you to ram it into me, hard and fast. Rough." She shoves the older best friend against the wall, her hands cupping her still soft bulge. Lexa feels a jolt of electricity rush through her as her back his the cool floral wallpaper. Clarke’s mouth is back on hers, leaving Lexa dazed.

“I want you eight inches inside, Lex,” Clarke whispers in a raspy voice against Lexa’s lips, “can you do that for me?” Lexa is now completely gone. She groans in seeded anger as she nods furiously. Clarke grins as Lexa pulls Clarke out from the bathroom and points to the bed.

“On the bed. Clothes off,” her orders are sharp and clear. Clarke rips off her clothes as quickly as she can while Lexa tears off her own shirt and bra before she sifts through her suitcase for a condom. She strips off her pants and gazes at a now nude Clarke. She looks between her best friend’s thighs to see the wet folds of her pussy glistening with cum. Lexa raises the condom to her lips and puts her teeth in the plastic, ripping it open with a noise so rough it makes Clarke shiver. But not out of delight.

Clarke pushes down the burbling fear building in the pit of her stomach. She watches as Lexa unzips the front of her jeans and fishes her semi-hard cock through the front hole of her boxers. She gives it a few rough tugs before spitting on her hand and administering a few more. The sight usually turns her on to no end, but something about the way Lexa eyes her salaciously as she slowly rolls the condom down her length makes her want to stop this. But she knows she must to stop overthinking this and to just move forward with her plan. And her plan? Replace the image of Sam's rough hands fondling her with Lexa's own.

Normalize it. Forget it.
Become it.

“I guess I don’t need lube, then,” Lexa says cockily, adjusting the condom around her length. Clarke glances between her legs before spreading them. Lexa bites her bottom lip and pauses, simply taking in the sight of Clarke open and bare in front of her.

“Stop talking and fuck me,” Clarke retorts shakily, her eyes shimmering with determination. Lexa rips off her pants and in a flash, is on top of Clarke. Her hands are on either side of Clarke’s face, her breath bouncing from her lips to her best friend’s.

“She said I could fucking talk?” Lexa is past the point of no-return, and Clarke knows this. For some odd reason, with all that has happened, she welcomes Lexa’s rough side. She shakes her head as Lexa lets out a pleased grunt.

Grabbing the shuddering dick, she slides the shaft of her length up and down Clarke’s slick slit, collecting the juices that have accumulated there. Clarke’s head gets thrown back as she lets out a throaty growl, closing her eyes in ecstasy.
“Fuck…,” she drawls out the word rather loudly, causing Lexa to stop. Kneeling, Lexa takes her good hand and places her palm over Clarke’s mouth roughly. The scratchiness of her scarred palms causes Clarke to reimagine Sam's hands again, but she shoves it down once more. This isn't him, this is my best friend, my best friend whom I trust would never, ever, hurt me…

“Do you want to wake up the entire neighbourhood? Your girlfriend is in the next room, and I doubt this is something she'd like to see.” Lexa's voice is a quiet, but dominant hiss. Again, Clarke shakes her head, just wanting this entire thing to be over with. This is Lexa, she keeps telling herself, this is not Sam. I'm okay. It's okay. Lexa keeps her hand firmly over Clarke’s mouth, allowing just enough air to pass into and out of her lungs. Lexa's lips curl into a wicked smile. “Good. Keep quiet, or I’ll stop.”

Clarke nods again, but as she looks from Lexa’s hand to the dominant fire in her best friend's dark green eyes, she can’t help but flash back to Sam's menacing smirk as he'd been looming over her, with his hand gripping roughly at her belt and jeans. Fear is running through her body, but it’s the same fear that is propelling her to act this way. Her heart wants Lexa to fuck her, to use her, but at the same time her mind wants her best friend to stop. It's confusing and causes her insides to tear apart.

Her heart always wins.

Lexa grabs the head of her cock and presses it past Clarke’s entrance. Clarke’s eyes close in pained pleasure as slowly but surely, Lexa is fully inside of her. The older best friend stays still for a moment, trying to absorb the feeling of filling Clarke. The tip of the soft flesh pushes against Clarke’s special spot deep within her, causing the younger best friend to gasp sharply.

Lexa’s head snaps up to see tears in Clarke’s eyes. The wet salted drops drip upon the hand covering her mouth, snapping her back to reality. Her grip loosens immediately as she looks down at her cock buried deep within her best friend. Lexa’s heart lurches as she remembers Sam. Her hand leaves Clarke’s mouth and they both stay in silence. Finally, after some time, Lexa speaks.

“Clarke,” she whispers her best friend’s name in a gentle hum. Clarke’s eyes refuse to meet Lexa’s as she shakes her head and grips the sheets tightly in her fingers.

“No, keep going. I need this,” Clarke cries out in frustration. Lexa feels the churning return to her stomach, but this time, it’s not lust. No, this time, it’s guilt and fear.

“Clarke, no,” Lexa says in a shaky voice as she reaches down to pull out. Clarke’s good hand clasps over Lexa’s as her head tilts back downwards. Their eyes meet, and the look in Clarke’s hazel depths scares the living daylight out of Lexa. Her pupils are blotted out lustfully, and she can feel the desperation coming off of her in waves.

“Fuck me, Lexa,” Clarke growls in a lisped rasp, “I want you to fuck me.”

Lexa doesn’t know what to do, but as Clarke starts to gently grind up and down, she slips back into her trance. As she loosens her grip on reality, her hips automatically begin to move for her. Clarke grins as Lexa begins to push into her harder now, the head of her cock hitting her in all the right places. Lexa is deep inside of her, and they are now both loving it.

Lexa’s hands clasp around Clarke’s as the older best friend’s back arches. Lexa leans down and roughly captures their lips in a heated kiss. Lexa grinds into Clarke harder, each pump leaving her best friend breathless. Clarke moans into Lexa’s mouth, the bed creaking now as Lexa rocks into her at a quickened pace. Her fingers claw into the backs of Lexa’s hands. She can feel the burning pain as the bandage on her hand moistens. She welcomes the pain, and as she tightens her grip, Clarke
can see that Lexa is feeling the same way from how her muscles tense and the veins in her neck strain with each harsh, deep pump.

It doesn’t take long, with Lexa rutting into her at her fastest speed, for them to both reach their heightened climaxes. The sound of their slick flesh slapping together mixes with the thunder and crashing lightening outside. Clarke mouth detaches from Lexa’s bruised lips as her head is thrown backwards. A silent scream is birthed from her lips as Lexa looks down and barely makes out the tan-fleshed cock appearing and disappearing with each hard pump.

An explosion of pleasure rocks through both their bodies as Clarke’s hips jerk upwards. Lexa, matching her move, slams her hips down, trapping the darting orgasm between their bodies. Their bodies jerk and gyrate against each other, trying to retrieve every ounce of their orgasm. Lexa keeps herself inside of Clarke, even though her arms are burning after holding her weight up for so long. Sweat drips down her temple and the small drop lands square upon Clarke’s chest.

After recovering in a silence filled with rushing breaths and slowing hips, Lexa’s head drops, her hair brushing against Clarke’s damp forehead. Slowly, the older best friend slips out of Clarke and shakily slips off her filled condom. She casts the tied casing, coated in both of their juices, into the trashcan beside the bed. Clarke uses the remainder of her strength to crawl under the covers, tiredly patting the space next to her. Lexa finds herself beside her best friend, breathing in her post-coital scent.

Suddenly, Lexa’s decision to fuck Clarke so rough hits her dead in the face. She glances at Clarke through her drooping lids to see the younger best friend staring, glossy-eyed at the ceiling. They say nothing, for they both cannot seem to find the words. Instead, they both rest their eyes and hope that slumber can erase the guilt festering within themselves.

Hope only gets them so far.

* * *

Lexa watches Clarke’s breaths leave her body as new air enters her lungs. Her best friend is still beside her, sleeping soundlessly in her arms. From the windows, she makes out the pale dawn as it creeps over the concrete skyline. She swallows hard and slowly removes herself from her best friend’s body. She pulls on a pair of boxers and then her old jeans, and throws on her heavy parka over a pair of one of Clarke’s shirts. She shoves her wallet in her front pocket as she grabs the spare key from the bowl at the front. She gazes back up at the stairs to where, in her room, Clarke is still sleeping.

She doesn’t know how she manages to do it so quickly, but soon enough Lexa is back where she once was yesterday. There is yellow caution tape all around the entrance of the grocery store. As she passes it, memories flood through her veins, sparking the anger to make an infamous return to her body. She walks faster and more briskly as she finally approaches the hardware store.

She opens the door and finds the man from earlier. He gives her a wide, welcoming smile, but it instantly falters the moment he sees the look of determination and vengeance on her face. She pulls out her wallet and places it in front of him, giving him a dead serious stare.

“I want to buy the gun.”
Mama, I Just Killed a Man

Chapter Summary

“The spirit finds a way to be born. Instinct seeks for ways to survive.”

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings: Mentions of Gender Dysphoria, Rape, and Blood/Gore/Violence.

Don't ask me why I decided to update this… I just did.

So here ya go.

The quote in the summary is from Toba Beta's "Betelgeuse Incident: Insiden Bait Al-Jauza".

* * *

Day 10

Lexa’s alarm clock buzzes, waking her from her slumber. The ex-soldier shifts in her bed, empty now that Clarke has resumed sleeping with Niylah. She glances at the time on the phone to see that it's roughly six-thirty in the morning. Lexa lays her head back against the pillow and groans, her head aching as she swallows thickly. She wraps her body in the warm blankets, shivering at the cool winter air.

Reluctantly, she drags herself out of the bed and grabs her clothes. She opens the door and makes her way over to the bathroom. From below, Lexa can hear shuffling in the kitchen. Cautiously, the woman makes her way over to the top of the stairs. To her relief, she spots Clarke bustling about in the room while humming to herself. Lexa’s heartbeat returns to normal as she slips inside the bathroom.

Glancing at herself in the mirror, Lexa is anything but relaxed. All three women had received their job selections three days ago, but the letter stated nothing but where to meet and what to bring. Clarke and Niylah were both instructed to bring notepads and pencils, whereas Lexa was expected to bring warm clothes, combat boots, and heavy duty gloves. As she looks at her reflection, Lexa still wonders what it is they have been chosen to do. She knows that her job placement was likely due to her past service, but there was a reason why she was honourably discharged. Lexa stares at the mottled scars that litter her torso and shoulders and she has to fight herself from gagging.

Her eyes then shift away, instead to peer at her angled jaw. She places her hand on her cheek, feeling her insides twist as she feels a degree of scratchiness meet her worn palms. Pulling her hand away, Lexa opens up the medicine cabinet and glances inside to a few remaining needles. Gulping, she takes one into her hand and grabs the rubbing alcohol and the cotton ball from beside the needle.
Lexa quickly pours some of the alcohol onto the swab before gently rubbing the injection site. She takes a breath, trying not to focus on the fact that she can feel every ounce of her body aching for some sort of escape from the constant anxiety. She places the used ball in the trash before reaching for the capped needle. She stares at the offending object with a deep seeded anger, one that makes her flash back to her younger days before she had transitioned. She remembers her life as Alexander, the 'prodigal soldier and golden boy', as her parents used to call her. But, as she looks back to the needle, she realizes that Alexander died on the battlefield long ago, his ashes forgotten.

"It's E-day, isn't it?"

Lexa jolts at the sound of Clarke's voice. She turns slightly to see her best friend sympathetically gazing over at her from where she leans against the door. Unable to come up with a coherent response, Lexa just grunts and nods before sighing down at the needle. She's frozen, afraid, scatterbrained. It's all too much. The war, the quarantine, the chaos…

"Lex," Clarke hums as the blonde places her bandaged hand over her own, "give it to me. Let me help you."

"I can do it," Lexa mutters back, shaking her head. "I've done it all these years."

"Doesn't mean you won't have bad days," Clarke whispers as she pries the needle from her grip. "Now let me help, Lex."

Unable to respond, Lexa just meekly nods and allows Clarke's reassuring noises and touches bring her back to reality. She nudges herself into Clarke's side as the sound of the needle being uncapped breaks the silence between them. Clarke presses her lips to her shoulder, glancing at her in the reflection from the mirror. She waits until Lexa meets her gaze before she offers a calming nod.

"Ready?" Clarke asks softly, her finger tracing a circle around the injection area. Lexa gulps and nods, leaning forward with a sigh.

"Just… just get it over with."

Clarke doesn't reply, bare for seamlessly injecting the hormones into her bloodstream. She uses another cotton ball to wipe away any speckles of blood that ooze out before discarding the needle in the biohazard bin within the cabinet. She places a small bandaid over the small hole before pecking Lexa's shoulder once more. Sighing, Lexa just closes her eyes and reaches up to her face, feeling her jaw.

"I need a shave," Lexa whimpers in a somber voice. "I also only have three more doses of estrogen and progestin."

Clarke remains quiet as Lexa opens her eyes, staring at her from the mirror with an empty expression. Lexa grits her teeth, turning around to face Clarke with a distraught expression. Clarke's arms weave around her shoulders, her face tucking itself into the hollow of her neck.

"I'm not a man," Lexa says, her voice shaking despite its steady tone. "I'm not--"

"I know," Clarke whispers, rubbing her back gently as the muscles threaten to snap under the tension. "We'll figure something out--"

"I just need space," Lexa breathes out as she wrangles herself free of Clarke's embrace. She feels wrong, like she's being pulled apart, that her insides are about to implode. She can't look at Clarke—Hell, she can hardly even look at herself. Lexa wraps her arms around her chest, suddenly feeling far too exposed. She glances up at Clarke pleadingly, hoping the other woman will take the hint.
After a few terse moments, Clarke sighs in resignation. "Alright, just... don't lock the door. Shaving sticks and cream are in the shower."

Lexa nods, unable to speak. Clarke waits a few more seconds before she turns and heads for the door, letting Lexa know breakfast will be ready soon and to not take too long in the shower. Lexa follows her back silently, watching like she's anticipating Clarke to turn around.

But, she never does.

* * *

The act of shaving is one that Lexa never enjoyed.

Even when she was a teen, before the self-acceptance and pre-transition, she hated shaving. She hated the sensation of a blade upon her face, of the stubble or the bumps that remained after a close cut. She hated that genetically, her facial hair was one of the biggest problems with her gender dysphoria--she had her father to blame for that. Gustus was a bulky man with a full beard, one that mimicked a modern-age Santa Clause. Between her parents, he was more accepting of her, even if it took him awhile to adjust to the concept of no longer having a son, but instead a daughter. It was because of him that she didn't slip further down the rabbit hole into an inescapable pit of depression and self-loathing. Luckily, Lexa was never one of those people who self-mutilated or self-harmed, but her relationship with her body always fluctuated even after she started her steady pattern of hormone therapy. She thought it'd died done recently.

But now, with only a limited supply left, Lexa can't help but feel herself slip back into old thoughts again.

She looks at herself in the mirror, foam lathered on her chin, cheeks, and jaw. The razor sits uncomfortably in her hand, the metal gleam of the blade glinting off the harsh lighting from the bathroom mirror. As steadily as she can, she raises the blade and slides it down, just like Gustus had taught her when she started growing hair at the age of fourteen. *Clean and long strokes*, he had told her, *take it slow.*

And so she does it, slow and steady.

Through it all, Lexa only draws blood once.

* * *

After a hot, quick shower, the stiffness in her body is temporarily relieved.

Wrapping a towel around her chest, Lexa ducks into in her room to dress. After slipping on an old pair of jeans and a faded navy shirt, she grabs her belt and ties it around the loopholes snugly. Her face still feels a little raw, but after tying up her hair into a short, messy ponytail, she feels the sensation ebbing into nothingness. After she's done, Lexa opens the closet door to grab some socks. When she opens it, however, she is faced with the hunting rifle she had purchased two days ago. The long, wooden finish of the gun calls to her, and Lexa shivers. Clarke was still in the dark in regards to its purchase. Instead, she grabs the Glock laying atop her wooden dresser and quickly tucks it into the back of her jeans. After drying her hair, she heads down the stairs to see Clarke sitting with her back to her, reading a book and eating oatmeal. For a moment, Lexa freezes, because this scene looks like any other morning. She feels a familiar sense of home as her lips curl into a soft smile. She pads towards her best friend, clearing her throat gently.

Clarke turns around and gives Lexa a weak nod before turning back to her book. They don't talk
about what happened earlier, and for that Lexa is grateful. She maneuvers around Clarke in order to open some of the cabinets to scope out some breakfast. She hears Clarke flip the page with her thumb and her spoon dip back into the bowl. Lexa turns as her best friend slowly lets the hot cereal enter her mouth. She watches how thoroughly Clarke chews and how intently she reads her book. Her immense level of concentration always intrigued Lexa.

“I made some extra in the pot over there,” Clarke breaks the silent in a muffled voice. Lexa gives her a grunt of acknowledgement as she grabs herself a bowl and helps herself to some of the creamy oats before sitting next to Clarke. From the corner of her eye she can see her opened envelope from three days ago.

“I don’t like how our jobs are split up,” Clarke murmurs, gazing in the same direction as Lexa. The younger best friend puts her book down and sighs. “It’s just… I’m guessing Niylah and I are doing something that’s not to do with hard labor.”

“And you’re saying that I am?” Lexa interrupts with a hollow chuckle, cocking her head over her shoulder to stare at Clarke.

“I know just as much as you, Lex. I’m just worried, that’s all. I don’t want you to get hurt. I don’t like how we’re separate, that’s all.” Lexa digests Clarke’s words before turning to her oatmeal. She picks up the spoon and shovels some hot cereal into her mouth. Before Lexa can say anything further, the sound of footsteps padding down the stairs fills the tense silence in the room. Clarke and Lexa both turn to see Niylah yawning as she trudges down the stairs. Clarke gives Niylah a half-lipped smile as she swallow the rest of the oatmeal.

“Hi darling, how are you doing?” Clarke asks, her voice a little too high pitched to be considered genuine. Lexa rolls her eyes and turns away as soon as Niylah’s eyes meet hers. The model bites her bottom lip and yawns, ignoring her response—or lack thereof.

“Tired as fuck. Having to deal with agencies during the apocalypse is worse than the apocalypse itself,” Niylah attempts to joke as she shakes her head. When neither Clarke nor Lexa laugh, the teasing tone is dropped and replaced for something more exhausted.

"Anyways," Niylah murmurs as she looks at Clarke, "are you ready to go yet?" Clarke nods and quickly places the empty bowl into the sink, glancing at the time. She looks over at Lexa sadly as the older best friend nods and follows, grabbing the envelope as they get ready.

“I’m heading to the subway, what about you two?” Lexa asks as they all enter the elevator. Niylah reaches into her back pocket for her envelope and glances at the instructions on the paper.

“The marketplace near the stock exchange,” she answers in brief. Lexa nods and closes her eyes, trying to make the short ride seem longer in her mind.

Sure enough, the doors open after the soft ding. All three women wait for a moment, simply staring at the empty lobby in front of them. For a moment, she wonders if anyone besides them lives here anymore. She feels a slight brush against her knuckles as Lexa gazes down to see Clarke glancing up at her worriedly.

“You’ll be okay, right?” Clarke asks in low whisper. Lexa’s heart tightens at the question. So much has happened in the past week that even she can’t answer Clarke honestly.

“I hope so,” she murmurs as she glances again out of the doorway. Clarke hangs her head as she turns to Niylah. The two of them clasp their hands together as they make their way out of the elevator. Lexa watches them walk together, shoulders pressed against each other and speaking in
hushed voices. Lexa steps out of the elevator to see Clarke cock her head over her shoulder. There are tears in her eyes as she gazes at Lexa.

Lexa shoves her hands into her pockets and makes her way out the same doors, but heads in the opposite direction. Her breath clouds up in a misted steam in front of her as she briskly makes her way to the entrance of the subway. She can see other people making their way in the same direction, but most of them seem to be tall and burly men. Lexa hunches her shoulders in anxiety as she approaches the main entrance to the subway. She spots a crowd assembled at the bottom. She can hear some sort of discontent weaving around the crowd.

Before she can investigate further, a hand roughly places itself upon her shoulder and whirs her around.

* * *

Clarke and Niylah walk towards the marketplace, their shoulders brushing lightly.

Their mouths are buried deep inside their scarves to protect them from the bitter cold that sweeps through the streets. Their frozen hands are clasped tightly together as they weave their way through the near lifeless streets. Clarke recognizes a few of the women as more people start to accumulate around her. Up ahead, Niylah makes out the familiar mop of coal black hair on a shorter woman.

“Costia!” Niylah calls out, her voice dry from the lack of use. Clarke’s head snaps up to follow her girlfriend’s gaze. Costia turns around and gives them both a relieved smile. She jogs over and wraps both women in a tight hug. After she lets go of Clarke, she pauses, frowning.

“Where’s Lexa?” She asks, perplexed at the absence of her ex. Clarke swallows harshly and blinks back tears.

“She got sent to the subway,” Clarke explains softly. Costia’s eyes widen at Clarke’s comment, causing panic to spread through her small body.

“What’s wrong?” Niylah asks, equally worried. As much as she blames Lexa and dislikes her, she cannot help but feel worried for her girlfriend’s best friend. Costia rubs the back of her head as she winces at Niylah’s quiet question.

“Rumour has it that the subway work sectors are being spilt off to two junctions; one of the jobs is held in the sewers and the other in the actual tunnels,” Costia explains in a hushed whisper. She glances around before turning back to face Clarke. “According to someone I met earlier, it’s the worst job. Mainly those who get chosen are men and ex-criminals.”

“They’re letting criminals out?!” Niylah asks in shock. Costia nods, biting her lip.

“The military keeps saying that they need everyone’s help. I’m sure they’d keep the two groups separate, though,” Costia says as reassuringly as she can. Clarke’s heart beats faster than a cheetah and louder than a kick drum as she listens to Costia’s words. Niylah glances down and swallows hard, placing her hand calmly upon Clarke’s shoulders.

“I’m sure that it must a rumour, you know, the whole criminal part. The military wouldn’t do that. It would defeat the purpose,” she whispers bleakly, before shaking her head and offering her girlfriend a reassuring smile. ‘Besides, Lex is ex-military. She's tough.” Clarke nods, trying to listen to Niylah’s soothing words, but all she can think about is the safety and wellbeing of her best friend.

* * *
Lexa whips around to see Lincoln staring at her with a relieved expression. Lincoln was more than just another soldier in her regiment, but family, too. He was a cousin, twice removed or distantly related by some measure that was too complicated to explain. They both found each other after a few years of surviving the system, and eventually the two enlisted together when they were of age. It was always three of them—Lincoln, herself, and their other close friend-turned-family Anya. The three of them were inseparable since they’d first met.

Lexa’s shoulders slack as she lets out a deep breath, a tentative smile creeping up on her as she feels the anxiety slowly ebb away from her taut limbs. She swivels quickly, giving Lincoln a warm hug and burrowing her head into his muscled shoulder. Lincoln rubs her back as he closes his eyes, sighing in relief. They’re both trying to keep calm, but both of them know that if they’re both here, it must be bad.

“What are we doing here, Lincoln?” Lexa asks and despite coming in around roughly five-foot eleven and one-hundred and fifty pounds of muscle, she can't help but feel incredibly small in his arms. Lincoln pulls them apart and stares at the crowd at the base of the steps.

“I heard from Monty that it’s some sort of oil operation. Apparently, since we have no communication or affiliation with the outside world, we have to provide for ourselves resourcefully as well.” Lexa’s heart sinks at Lincoln words as she gulps.

“Fuck. Well, it's all gone to shit, hasn't it?” Lexa chuckles in disbelief she breathes out shakily, looking over to the crowd with an apprehensive gaze. As the two inch closer towards the crowd surrounding the podium, Lexa sees no other women within the vicinity.

“Why did I get chosen for this job?” Lexa asks, staying close to Lincoln's side as men objectively glance at her from every direction. Lincoln places his arm around Lexa’s shoulders protectively as he warily watches everyone around him. “I dunno, Lex, but I don’t like it either.”

They come to stop in the middle of the crowd as everyone falls silent. A few military men take the podium, dressed in full combat armour, with guns slung over their shoulders. Lexa watches as a few more men come up to the stage. Her jaw drops when she recognizes the last two soldiers that come up from a few days ago. Their eyes meet, and Lexa makes eye contact with Carl, and then the other man. The taller man gives her a sly smile and nods his head. That’s all it takes for Lexa to suddenly feel everything around her collapse.

“Welcome,” the taller man with the shaggy hair and piercing brown eyes calmly says into a megaphone, “to your new job.”

* * *

Clarke and Niylah freeze as a female officer comes to stand in front of the market place, her gaze strict as she eyes the ground. She stands atop a metal crate and crosses her arms behind her back, distinctly alerting her authority over the crowd. Clarke shrinks as the woman’s stares at her for a brief second before walking over towards a microphone.

“You are the lucky ones,” she starts off in a husky voice, “for the others have had jobs far worse than yours. We send our apologies, but in order to keep and hold a sense of control, we need to establish some… rules.” Niylah clutches Clarke’s hand tighter as the woman clears her throat.

“Your job includes being in charge of giving out and managing the rationing services here in New York City. You all have been chosen based on previous credentials, or by random draw,” the woman continues, “and we expect no problems amongst you all.”
“You will begin your actual work tomorrow, as today you will simply be taught of what your specific occupation entails. If you have any issues,” she pauses to raise her brow, “which you shouldn’t, considering this is the best job, do not hesitate to contact me or my superiors. That is all. If you are last names A to Q, you will report to Lieutenant Harper at the eastern quarter. The rest of you will come with me.”

Clarke follows Niylah and Costia as they make their way over to a much nicer looking lady. A few other people come over to join them as they all come up to meet the woman in charge. Lanchier gives the crowd a warm smile as she gestures to a few military men beside her.

“Good morning, everyone,” she says in a gentle tone, “I’m sorry for my colleague’s rough start, but assure you, things will be okay.” Clarke eases up at her kind voice, and beside her, she can feel Niylah relaxing as well. The woman nods and then purses her lips again.

“I’ll just explain how things work around here.”

* * *

Lexa shifts from one foot to the other as she waits in line to get her work pack. Luckily for her and Lincoln, criminals are working the dank tunnels and they are working in the sewers. As gross and horrifying as it may sound, Lexa is still grateful that she isn’t with the ex-convicts. There are a few other women in her division, but Lexa doesn’t know them, nor does she want to. They are tall and brawny, covered in tattoos and piercings. Even though she has her fair share of ink, her size makes her seem less intimidating than the other women. In the slow moving line, Lexa feels more like a kid and less like an adult.

“Woods, Lexa,” a gruff voice calls out. Lexa’s head snaps up as she sheepishly puts her hand up.

“That’s me,” she says in a cracked voice. When Lexa peeks over the shoulder of the man in front of her, she recognizes the taller man with Carl, standing with her bag. Lexa’s breath hitches as she makes her way to the front of the line. She avoids looking at either of them as she reaches out for her bag. Carl snickers as he crosses his arms.

“Where’s the potty mouth today eh, Woods?” He asks, sneering. ”Your old title will get you shit here, you understand me? Huh, sunshine?”

Lexa raises her head just a notch, biting back a growl as she licks her chapped lips. “It’s not going to make an appearance again, sir,” she says as respectfully as she can without snarling in frustration. The taller man hands her the bag and keeps his stare calm and unfazed.

“I’m Sergeant Bellamy Blake,” he states, “and this Officer Carl Emerson. We are your CO’s for the duration of the job-ration program. You’ve been selected because you have shown to be a good leader under pressure and have expert combat skills. It’s a shame you didn’t stay with the military, Woods. You could have been on our side of the playing field,” he says, glancing her over steadily. Lexa’s eyes flutter shut as her heart sinks to the pit of her stomach. She can feel the gun--sitting loosely in her jeans--suddenly feel oddly welcoming.

“Here’s the deal, Woods,” Bellamy whispers, leaning in. Lexa feels his hot breath upon her ear as he glances at the rest of the line. “If you follow our orders, nothing will go wrong,” he states clearly, “for you or your beautiful blonde companion.” Lexa’s teeth grind together in frustration as she nods reluctantly, fighting the urge to just plant a bullet in the arrogant man’s forehead and be done with it. Instead, she swallows her anger and jerks her chin up, challenging him to say more. Bellamy nods, a faint smile playing at his lips as he pulls back.
“Next,” Bellamy calls out as he peers over her shoulder, "Sam Sturges."

Lexa’s head snaps up as she recognizes the name of the man from the shop. She follows his limping gait as he walks down the line. Their eyes meet, and in Sam’s pale blue depths she sees a flash of fear. Lexa’s shoulders stiffen as she glares at him. Sam gulps as Lexa sees the bruises and stitched cuts upon his face. She looks down to her still recovering fist and takes a deep breath. A thought suddenly runs through her and she lets a vengeful smile tug at her lips. Everyone knows better than to make decisions out of revenge or anger.

Right now, though, Lexa doesn’t.

* * *

“Where is she?” Niylah asks as she kicks off her shoes and locks the door behind her. Clarke strips off her jacket and worriedly shrugs.

“I don’t know. Do you know when her shift is supposed to end?” Clarke asks in concern. Niylah lets out a sharp breath as she shakes her head, plopping down on the couch.

“I’m sure she’s okay, Clarke. Who knows, maybe she actually read it wrong and got a different job or something.” Niylah tries to reassure Clarke, but it doesn’t work. Finally, Niylah waves her fingers at her girlfriend, patting the spot on the couch next to her.

“Come here, darling,” she mumbles in a tired tone, “it’ll be okay.” Clarke paces around the room, still in disbelief that Lexa got assigned to a different job. Their rationing job consists of numbers and statistics, and Clarke knows no one else that is better at math.

“I just can’t stop thinking about what she could be doing, or where she is.” Clarke grumbles, holding her head tightly. The woman bites her nails anxiously. Niylah gives her a sympathetic look and pats the seat again.

“Clarke,” she says calmly, “Clarke, look at me.”

Clarke sighs and reluctantly gazes at her girlfriend. Niylah offers her a small smile and opens her arms, gesturing for Clarke to come and embrace her. Folding, Clarke complies and rests upon the couch. She lays her head against Niylah’s shoulder. Even though Lexa’s embraces can create a sense of safety in the most horrid conditions, Niylah isn’t too far from comfort. She snuggles into Niylah’s side, gripping her t-shirt tightly in her fingers.

“She’ll come home soon enough,” Niylah murmurs, kissing Clarke’s cheek, “she’ll come home, baby.” Clarke turns her head as Niylah’s lips meet hers in a soft kiss. She closes her eyes, imagining Lexa’s lips instead of Niylah’s. It’s no use, however. Lexa’s kisses are soft and tender, whereas Niylah’s are more rough and sloppy. Clarke doesn’t mind, but desperately she wants Lexa to return.

Somewhere in the embrace, they both fall asleep waiting.

* * *

Lexa leans against the brick wall of the now-looted police building next to the subway entrance. A part of her scoffs at the idea that it took less than a month for complete chaos to take over the city. There are floating papers on the streets, trash littered all around and floating in the small gusts of wind. She can’t believe that this city, once full of life and hustling with people, has been reduced to a ghost town.

Her lungs breathe in the fresh air gratefully as she turns her gaze away from the empty streets. Her
job was to work in the sewers and drill for oil or any other kind of sustainable resource. Lexa saw the whole thing as ridiculous however, because she knows just as well as anyone that oil is not found in New York City. Yet, she has no choice so she obeys out of the pure fear of potential harm to Clarke. She told Lincoln that she found the entire operation to be sketchy, and her cousin was quick to agree that something didn't add up.

But, that was the least of her priorities right now.

Out of the corner of her eye, Lexa spots Sam tiredly walk out of the entrance of the subway, slugging his pack over his shoulder as he limped forward. Lexa quickly ducks behind the second wall, out of sight from Sam as she follows his movements. She smiles as she sees him pick up his pace and head north towards the lower district. Lexa’s hand curls around the barrel of her gun that sits snugly in the small of her back, her hands firmly gripping around the handle as she pads forward silently, following his trail without a single sound.

The area is far too open for her to take him down now, so Lexa simply follows him at a vigilant distance. She pulls her hood over her face, shielding her identity as she constantly scans around her. She walks about twenty five steps behind him, and when he stops, so does she. She discreetly glances around to see that there is nobody, except for the occasional military Humvee conducting a patrol in the street.

Finally Sam stops, after coming to a small house on the outskirts of the central city. Lexa ducks behind the wall of the house on the opposite end of the street as Sam looks around once more. He gazes in all directions before he hastily fishes his keys out from his pocket and fumbles with unlocking the door. It takes him a matter of seconds to disappear into the house before the door clicks shut. Lexa leans against the cold wall and tightens her grip on the gun. A million thoughts are whizzing through her head at the moment, but the only one that is clear to her is the one that she--in the back of her head--knows she shouldn’t choose.

But still, she pursues it. She craves it, even.

Looking both ways, Lexa sees that the coast is clear. She darts across the street and comes to stand on the porch of Sam’s house. She takes a deep breath and stares at the chipped wood of the door, rethinking her decision. At this point, her adrenalin has kicked in and she can’t think about anything else than seeking revenge. She lifts her free hand, the one still bruised from the punches, and knocks on the door hard.

A few seconds and the door swings open to reveal a shocked Sam. His eyes widen in fear as he stares at Lexa’s angered and cold face. They say nothing as he puts his hands up defensively. His breaths quicken as Lexa takes one step closer to his rigid body. Lexa is half a foot shorter than him, but her eyes burning with vengeance scream out that she is the one holding authority.

“Hello, Sam,” Lexa’s voice is dripping with seeded anger. "Remember me?"

Sam gulps as he backs away into the house again, shaking his head. “Please, I’m sorry,” he gasps out, “I’m sorry, I was just trying to protect my family! Look, we didn't have food and I just needed to make sure that I got enough.” Lexa’s head cocks to the side in confusion. Lexa chuckles with a shake of her head as she raises the gun and clicks the safety off, her eyes narrowing as she steps further in the room.

"You know, I'd believe that. I would," Lexa calmly replies as she continues to force the man back. "But here’s the thing. You didn't go in there looking for food. You weren't there to provide for your family," she spits the word like venom, "you were there for one thing, weren't you? Or did I read that wrong when I walked into see your hand on your dick and my friend laying there, seconds away
from being raped?"

"Please," Sam begs as tears slide down his cheeks, "please just listen. It was a mistake. I got carried away, I swear, I was just playing a role! I thought that if those guys thought I was intimidating enough I would be able to get the food I needed for my family."

“Family?” She echoes his last word in a hushed whisper. Sam fervently nods his head as he takes a deep breath, giving Lexa a fearful look.

“Yes, family," Sam repeats again shakily, "you have got to understand that I'm sorry. I didn't mean to take things too far. I... my family is all I have left and I just... I didn't know what would happen to them, okay? I panicked. I fucked up, I did. I'm sorry."

After a moment of just silent glares, Lexa's hand suddenly jerks out, clutching Sam’s shirt in her fingers. She slams him against the door, and with her other hand, she forces the gun against Sam’s slick forehead, her lips curling into a snarl as she clenches his shirt tightly.

“Family?!” She screams into his face, “what the fuck do you know about family, you fucking perverted psycho?! You honestly want me to believe that you almost raped a woman for your fucking family?” Sam tries to speak but Lexa presses the gun harder into his forehead.

“You were going to rape my best friend, you fucking vile piece of shit,” she growls, shoving him against the door again, “and you are doing it to protect your family?! That's bullshit if I have ever heard it.” Sam’s eyes widen as sweat drips down his forehead. Lexa’s fingers are dangerous close to the trigger, and with her rage and experience with this type of gun, all it'll take is one small move to end his life.

“W-what happened to your best friend...,” he stutters nervously, eyes shifting with fear, “I... I never meant it like that. I told you already! It was a sign of authority, I swear I wouldn’t hurt her. That wasn’t me back there--”

“Shut the fuck up,” Lexa shrieks, pulling Sam from the door and barreling them backwards so they are both on the ground. Lexa presses her knee into his abdomen, the gun still pressed into his forehead. Her hand is trembling as tears form in her eyes.

“If I hadn’t gotten there, you would have done it.” Her voice is a scathing whisper as she glares down at him. Sam whimpers like a dying animal as he shakes his head. Tears are flowing from his eyes, only to drip into the hardwood floors beneath them.

“Please,” he begs, “I didn’t mean it. I just needed the supply in the back of the shop for my family's sake. With the rations they give out now, we won’t be able to survive. I have to protect them. Please! Please, she's all I have left, I can't do this without her, please…”

Lexa can’t hear him. Well, she can, but she chooses not to. Instead, Lexa leans over, her lips just grazing his ear. She grips the collar of his shirt tighter, rage flowing like lava through her veins. Her heart is beating so loud, she can’t hear anything else but the sound of the organ drumming deep inside her ears.

“You talk about protecting your family, huh?” She whispers in a sneer. Sam cries harder as he tries to get out another ‘please’, but it’s not use as Lexa pushes the gun harder into his head.

“Sam,” she whispers again, “what do you think I’m doing right now?” Sam can’t reply, because the words are stuck in his throat. Lexa shakes her head, gritting her Lexth in fury.

“Let me ask you again,” she whispers a bit louder, “what do you think I’m doing right now?”
“Answer me, you son of a fucking bitch, what the fuck am I doing right the fuck now?!” Lexa pulls away from his ear to look furiously into his face, spitting the words in loud scream. Sam shakes like a leaf beneath her.

“Please,” he begs again, “please, for my family.”

Lexa scoffs and shakes her head. She looks back down at Sam. Her hand holding the gun trembles as she looks at the fear laced in his eyes. As much as she has a deep hatred for him and all that he has done, Lexa can’t seem to find the strength to pull the trigger. She simply stares at Sam crying beneath her, the adrenalin now leaving her body, replaced by an overwhelming guilt and sadness.

“I have family too, you know,,” Lexa says softly, her grip weakening. “I have family that I love, that I need to protect and feed and provide for.” Sam stays silent, but his eyes beg for mercy. His bottom lip trembles as more tears push past his bloodshot eyes.

“Please,” Sam pleads again. Lexa lets out a sharp breath, feeling tears drip down her own face. The reality of her situation hits her full on. She stares at the gun in shock, but somehow her hands can’t seem to move. They stay in silence, simply looking at each other, waiting for someone to make the first move.

“Daddy?”

Lexa and Sam whip their heads up to see a little girl, about seven, standing in the doorway of what seems to be a kitchen. There is a look of terror on her face as she gazes at the strange woman putting a gun to her father’s head. Lexa’s mouth drops as she stares at the gun in her hand, realizing that she has left it at the door. She stares at Caroline, tears welling up in her eyes.

“Caroline, honey,” he whispers as calmly as he can, “go play in your bedroom.”

Lexa can’t seem to take her eyes off the little girl. Caroline shakes her head, starting to cry. Lexa looks down to see Sam crying again. “Please, don’t do it in front of my girl. You can take the supply I stole, just don’t hurt my family. Please. I’ll do anything just don’t hurt her.” He stares at her pleadingly. Lexa feels panic flow through her as she looks back at Caroline, teary-eyed. There is another tense silence.

Suddenly, Caroline lets out a bloodcurdling scream, causing Lexa to jump. There’s a sharp ringing in her ear as she looks up to see Caroline pointing behind her. She turns her head around to see the man from the first shop. Lexa clambers off of Sam’s body, failing to recognize that he’s no longer moving. In her desperate move to get away, Lexa realizes that she left the gun at the door. She stares up at the slumping man.

His jaw is hung open, displaying rotted Lexth and pus-filled gums. His face is covered in blood, some fresh and some caked. The long wound in his forehead is past the point of infection, and both of his eyes contain greyed irises. He walks with a slouch, groaning as he reaches out for Lexa. Out of fear, the woman covers her face.

There’s a loud thump as Lexa removes her hand from her face. The… thing, is now on the floor, after having tripped over Sam’s motionless body. Caroline cries louder now, causing the woman to turn around to face the petrified girl. Lexa spots the kitchen entrance from across the room and scrambles to her feet. She points to the sliding door as she looks at Caroline.
“Go in there,” she orders, her voice shaking. Caroline shakes her head and cowers away from her, crying harder. There’s a loud groan as Lexa turns around. The man sinks his grimy and yellowed teeth into Sam's left shoulder, violently ripping out the chunk of his flesh before gorging on the stringy muscle. Lexa gags as she quickly shields Caroline’s eyes. The young girl trembles even harder than before as Lexa forcefully drags her into the kitchen to find a place to hide. She opens the cupboard and roughly shoves the little girl inside.

“Stay here and don’t come out,” Lexa orders, shutting the door. Caroline continues to cry as Lexa grabs a steak knife from the counter. She makes her way back into the living room to see the man slowly getting up, yellowed saliva dripping from the corners of his jaw. Taking a deep breath to regain her stamina, she grips the knife as tight as she can. She clutches the knife in her hand as she rushes him.

Lexa digs the knife into his softened skull, hearing the sickening crack of the bone splitting into two jagged parts. The man lets out a muffled scream, shaking as he tries to pry himself off of her. Lexa is relentless, she shoves the knife in as far as it can go; a murky bloody substance squirting from the laceration paints her clothes a dirty crimson. Lexa closes her eyes and screams, pushing as hard as she can until she hears a loud squelching sound. The man falls limp in her arms and they both tumble to the floor.

Lexa looks up to see that the man still has his eyes wide open. She gasps and shoves him off of her, rolling away from the body. Lexa can make out the knife lodged deep into his brain and gags. This time, she can’t stop the acid from pushing up her esophagus like a volcanic eruption. She crawls over to door and leans over the porch, vomiting over the side and upon the white snow. Her stomach churns as she retches harder.

Once she is done, Lexa slumps down to see Sam’s feet sticking out of the door. A breath leaves her lungs, sucked up by the bitterly cool air. Lexa stumbles towards the entrance, her hands and shoulders shaking after having killed that thing. She licks her chapped lips, tasting the acrid vomit on the trembling flesh. Finally, she sees the full image of Sam’s body. Lexa freezes, her mouth hanging open almost as wide as the man she had killed with the knife. As she gazes at the still man with a bullet in his head, it hits her like a slap across the face.

Sam is dead.

Lexa realizes that after Caroline had screamed, she must’ve accidentally pulled the trigger. She looks to the gun beside his limp body and shakes her head. This is not what she had wanted. She had wanted to send a message, to scare him off, to make him think about his fucked up actions. Lexa feels her head spin as she leans agains the frame of the door, tears streaming down her face. She stumbles to her knees, leaning over Sam’s body. She makes out the large portion of missing flesh from his right shoulder and gasps sharply.

Lexa feels something moist on her abdomen. She looks down to see that her shirt is completely soaked through with blood, partially from the man and partially from Sam's own spray. She gazes up further to distinctly make out the hole in his head, the same hole that Sam had put in the forehead of the clerk. She stares at the blank look in his eyes and his blood-covered face.

She shakes her head again in disbelief. It can't be real.

Lexa's killed before, but never like this.

Never has she killed out of cold blood.

“No,” Lexa breathes out in fear, “no, come on wake up.” Lexa shakes him, but his body is colder
than the steadily falling snow outside. Lexa’s heart is beating in her throat as she looks to her bloodied hands. Her eyes widen as the tears drip like acid down her cheeks.

Lexa hears a small creak, causing her head to crane upwards fearfully. Caroline is standing at the doorway of the kitchen, mouth agape. She stares at her father’s bloodied body and cups her hand over her mouth. Lexa watches as the little girl’s pants darken with urine. Lexa stands slowly, her knees wobbling. Caroline backs away, sobbing in fear.

“Daddy!” She screams in pain. Lexa’s heart shatters at the word as she hangs her head. Caroline slips on her own liquid, but doesn’t feel the pain as she cries harder, her shoulders shaking as she pulls her body tighter into itself.

“Daddy!” She repeats again in agony, curling into a ball on the floor. Lexa feels an anxiety attack rip through her as she looks from Sam, to the man, and then to Caroline. She has to do something and she knows this, but her body is frozen. She picks up the gun and suddenly, the object feels ten times heavier in her hands. She glances at Caroline as she shrieks in grief, staring at Lexa.

“It was an accident,” Lexa pleads, looking at the little girl. Her voice is shaky and low, filled with an infinite amount of remorse. “I swear, I didn’t mean it.”

Caroline doesn’t listen to a word that Lexa says and instead she cries louder and harder. Lexa’s breaths are quickening to a point in which she can’t tell if air is even making it through to her lungs anymore. Lexa steps backwards as Caroline’s howls pierce her ears. She looks at Sam one last time, her hands shaking and eyes blurring with tears.

“I’m sorry,” she breathes out, “I’m so, so sorry.”

Caroline’s bawling is now more raw and scratchy as she hugs her knees close to her chest. One last harsh scream of ‘daddy’ makes past her lips as she closes her eyes, shaking her head. Lexa’s thoughts are all over the place as she chooses to do what she always does best.

She runs back to Clarke, leaving the little girl alone with the dead.
Keeping Secrets

Chapter Summary

“A man that flies from his fear may find that he has only taken a short cut to meet it.”

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings: Mention of Death and Mild Gender Dysphoria.

The quote in the summary is from William Goulding’s, "The Children of Húrin".

* * *

Day 11

The pale blue sky cascades over the concrete skyline as Lexa finally stops running. Her chest burns with exertion and she feels black spot start to creep up on the edge of her vision as the world spins around her in a maddening haze. The gun is gripped tightly in her hands as she ducks into a side street, her back slumping against the brick wall. In the distance, Lexa hears the engine of a tank and instinctively she cowers behind a large trash bin, trying to catch her breath. Her eyes close and open slowly, as if trying to physically blink the darkness away. She throws her head back against the cold metal. Her breath clouds in front of her, her lungs struggling to breathe out toxic oxygen.

Her shirt reeks of blood and sweat from beneath her heavy parka. The rancid smell of rotten flesh and brain matter engulf her senses, but she's too weak to gag once more. Lexa's chest heaves as she cocks her head over the bin to gaze into the street. She swallows harshly and gazes down to see a tank roll off into another side street, continuing its patrol. Sighing in a mix of relief and exhaustion, she looks back down at the gun, feeling tears claw at her eyes as she replays the events that occurred barely even moments ago.

Lexa remembers the look of terror on Caroline’s face as she closes her eyes. She remembers the shrill wail, the teething cry and the gnashing of her teeth as she'd cowered over the limp body of her dead father. Panic sweeps over her like a tidal wave as she trembles from the brisk wind. Opening her eyes, she thinks about what had conspired in the past few hours--what she had done. Lexa shakes her head, trying to draw herself away from the pained memories of killing Sam. She slowly begins to return back to reality.

Blinking open her eyes, she stares back down at the gun and lets the tears drip down her cheeks. They run off into the small cement gaps of the road, disappearing from her mind and her sight. She glances back at the direction that she had run from and takes a deep breath to steady herself. She knows she cannot bring Sam back, but she cannot leave Caroline, a little girl--an innocent girl--to fend for herself.

"Fuck," she whispers, "I have to go back." Lexa shakes her head and mutters another obscenity as she puts the gun to rest in the waistband of her jeans. The metal is cool, sickeningly reassuring, but it
heavy nonetheless. She nods her head up and darts back towards the house.

Lexa knows that no matter how fast she runs, her past will always catch back up in the end.

* * *

It doesn’t take her long, only a few minutes and a few shallow breaths later, as she finally reaches the house. The doors are still open and both dead bodies are still in the main hallway. Lexa glances at Sam’s still corpse and feels her heart shatter as she stares into his lifeless eyes. They’re glossy and staring back at her, the pupils now greying with decay. She kneels before him, hanging her head with guilt.

“Family,” she whispers to his motionless body, “I was just trying to protect my family.”

Lexa looks back at him, feeling her soul twist in agony. She bursts into tears, shaking her head in disbelief. She throws her head back and releases a throaty scream. Tears burn her cheeks as the salted drops cascade down her face and rest in the cracked skin of her lips.

“Oh fuck,” she breathes out, "what have I done?” Lexa waits for a response or explanation, but only silence answers back.

And so, she closes her eyes.

The winter wind that sweeps through the front door no longer feels cold. Instead, the icy blast filters into a warm summer haze. The flecks of snow turn to dust and sand and Lexa clenches her jaw shut as she feels the ground shake beneath her knees. She can hear the shouting, the gunfire, the rattling sounds of gatling guns and the booming thunder of an RPG. She can feel the blood of innocent children on her hands, mixing with the scent of burning fabric. She can feel the frayed ends of a torn backpack, the ripped pages of a notebook with math equations, the softness of a stuffed animal or a comforting blanket. She can feel everything and she's back.

Hell had never felt so close behind before.

* * *

Afghanistan had never been her first option.

When she had been younger--when she had still been Alexander James Woods, the youngest son of General Gustus Woods of the 3rd Regiment--she had been groomed to be the prodigal succession to her father's legacy. She had been in ROTC without question. She was accepted to West Point and graduated with full honours. She was trained in guerilla warfare, long and short range ammunitions, hand-to-hand combat, and even managed to do a stint in special reconnaissance. She was stealthy as a commando and she was menacing as a foot soldier; she was brutal and she was clean. She was everything the world could ever want in a soldier and more.

Alexander James Woods was a commander, a hero to his people, a leader of men.

But Lexa?

Lexa was anything but the man the world expected her to be.

Yet through it all, Lexa knew. She knew something was off. She knew that the body she stared at each morning, the deep voice that commanded orders and led her squadron did not belong to her. The hair on her face or the steel in her eyes were only perceptions of an objective reality. Her superiors never questioned her quietness, her cool and calculated demeanour or that unwavering
stoicism. None of her men saw beyond the subtle flinches whenever she had to pry her shirt off in the communal shower or show up for group inspections.

No one asked, and she sure as hell didn’t tell.

It was only during her last mission when it all fell south.

* * *

Taking a minute to recuperate from the whispers and the floating touches of dust on her skin, Lexa gazes at Sam’s body more intently. She studies his eyes, trying to replace the ones in her mind with the dull greys of his own. She stares down at him, trying to figure out why she had to pull the trigger. Lexa slowly rises to her feet, wiping her tears with the back of her hand. She looks around the room to see the other man with the knife still lodged into his head. It takes her a minute to realize something, or rather someone, is missing.

Caroline.

Lexa stands fully, knees shaking from anxiety as her eyes widen. She can still make out the small puddle stain from where Caroline had lost control of her bladder. Lexa stumbles past the dead bodies and into the main foyer, glancing at the living room in apprehension.

“Caroline?” Lexa calls out in a shaky voice. She feels the bob of her throat, the deep rasp and it all comes back again. Fear claws at her throat as she staggers her way over towards the kitchen, blinking away memories that threaten to drown her. She puts aside the screams inside of her mind and focuses on the present. She quickly searches through the cabinets and cupboards, frantically searching for the girl.

“Caroline?” Lexa cries out in a louder voice, “I’m not going to hurt you. I just want to help you. Please don’t be scared.”

She doesn’t know why she tries, because she knows that if she was in Caroline’s place, she wouldn’t trust her either. Lexa has seen what her actions do to others. She is familiar with the disgust and the fear. She is a soldier and her hands are soaked in blood. No matter how hard she tries to escape, she knows that what she’s done will never be forgotten. Caroline fled because Lexa killed her father.

Sam was there, pinned to the ground, and she had shot him through the head.

Lexa gulps down the swirling pit of nausea and tries to ignore the sickening feeling of pleasure that gnaws at her throat. She clutches her forehead as she looks back to the living room. Lexa’s fingers dig deeper into the skin covering her skull as she swallows hard.

“Fuck,” she swears, “no, fuck, no. Not again…”

The need to find the girl becomes a sick obsession, one that festers like a parasite within her flesh. She runs into the living room, checking under the couch and behind small enough spaces for a child of Caroline’s height to hide. After finding the main room to be empty, Lexa bolts up the stairs and onto the second floor with the private bedrooms. She scolds herself for not being able to remember the kid’s face as clearly as she needs to. She opens one room after the other, but they’re all empty. Finally, she comes across the master bedroom.

She reaches for the knob, but as soon as she twists it, she’s met with resistance. Lexa draws a sharp breath as she knocks on the door. “Caroline,” she says as gently as she can, “I’m not going to hurt you, just come out please.”
No response.

Lexa knocks again, harder, but nothing comes again. Lexa slams her hands against the doors in a manic rush, but she gets no reply. Taking a few steps back, Lexa rushes the door, slamming her shoulder into the wooden frame. The first few attempts are useless, but after a few more hard tries, the door finally breaks and Lexa meets the cold floor.

Lexa shuts her eyes and rests her head against the hardwood floor, groaning as she clutches her shoulder. She rolls onto her stomach and blinks open her eyes to stare at the master bedroom. The bed is done, and the room is fairly bare. Getting to her feet, Lexa staggers her way over to the bedroom. She spies pictures on the wall and gazes at them.

Sam and another woman stand in the photos with Caroline. They look like any other family in their photos. Lexa scans over them as she notices that the woman, as Caroline and Sam age, ceases to appear. She frowns as she spies a crumpled document on the dresser. Grasping it loosely in her hands, she glances over the words, her heart sinking to the pit of her stomach as her eyes ghost over the last two sentences.

Sam’s wife died of cancer two years ago.

“Shit,” Lexa hangs her head in shame and crumbles to her knees, clutching the paper. She takes a moment to digest what she has just learned. She remembers why she came back and stands again, shaking. Letting the paper slip from her fingers, she looks around the room, and then in the bathroom, for Caroline. It’s no use, for both rooms are empty.

Lexa runs back down the stairs, taking the steps two at a time. Her shoes clunk against the hollow wood loudly, causing the sound to echo across the room. Lexa is about to search the living room again when she spots something peculiar in the kitchen. Gingerly, she takes a step forward and peeks into the room. When she sees what had previously caught her eye, she gasps.

The back door is open.

“Oh fuck,” Lexa says shakily. She grabs her head again and sprints towards the door. She is lead into the back yard, and from the fence in front of her, she makes out a small hole. Lexa’s eyes widen and her jaw drops as her heart lurches.

“Caroline!” She screams in fear, “Caroline!” Her voice dissipates into the early morning air, blanketing her echoes in a chilled silence. Lexa’s breaths quicken as she hears wailing sirens outside. She runs through the kitchen and back out of the main entrance, glancing back haphazardly at Sam’s dead body. She stares at the bullet hole in his head for a microsecond before shaking her head with vigour.

“I’m sorry,” Lexa whispers as she runs out the front door with tear-tracked cheeks and a shaky voice, ”I’m so sorry.”

Again she runs, leaving a trail of remorseful tears behind her.

* * *

It’s four o’clock in the morning when Clarke hears the door unlock. She awakens from bed instantly, her hands searching under her bed for her field hockey stick. She pulls it into her hands, alert as she makes her way down the steps. The sight before her jars her to the bone.

Lexa is on her knees, sobbing loudly as she grips her face in her hands. Clarke drops the stick, startling the older woman as she whips her head up. In the dim light pouring in through the boarded
windows, Clarke makes out the crimson stains painting Lexa’s pale body. She covers her own mouth, stifling a gasp as Lexa shakes her head, crying harder. Her muscles are drawn taut and trembling, ready to snap.

It takes Clarke a few moments to break free of her trance as she runs to Lexa’s side. As she grows closer, she makes out the endless blood stains upon her best friend’s clothing and skin. Clarke’s nerves bounce, and as if gravity was a myth, she all of the sudden feels airy and lightheaded. She slides to her knees beside Lexa, reaching out for her. Clarke’s eyes glance over the other woman in unbridled fear.

“Lexa?!” Clarke asks worriedly, reaching out to touch her face. Her hands frantically trace Lexa’s jaw, blood and grime coating them with each trembling swipe. "Lexa, please. Please, for the love of God say something. Are you hurt? What happened?!” Lexa shakes her head, her body heaving as she struggles to catch her breath. No words can make it out of her lips as she bawls her eyes out. At the sight of Lexa crying, tears scratch at Clarke’s eyes too. She reaches out for Lexa, pulling her body, slick with blood and gore, flush to her own.

“Lexa, what’s wrong? Please, are you hurt?” Clarke asks in concern, her voice quivering. "I just need to know if you are hurt, baby. I want to help you." She caresses Lexa’s face gently with the pads of her thumbs. Her flesh soon becomes damp with Lexa’s tears as Clarke brings her closer towards her. She can distinctly smell the acrid blood now crusting upon her best friend’s clothing as she stares at Lexa’s face.

“Lex, please,” she whispers, her voice croaking with the effort to keep her sobs under control. “Please, just tell me what’s going on.”

Lexa doesn’t talk, but instead slowly reaches behind her. Clarke waits patiently as Lexa’s hands jerk at something, before finally, she is able to pull the object from the back of her jeans. Clarke gently smooths back Lexa’s greasy hair as the older woman sniffles. Shaking harder, Lexa holds out the Glock for Clarke to see. The ex-soldier's hands are unusually steady considering her trembling frame.

Clarke gazes at the gun, stopping her movements. She looks at it intently, struggling to figure out exactly what Lexa is trying to tell her. In the back of her mind, Clarke somehow knows, but she refuses to accept it. Lexa can’t speak as the gun slips from her clammy fingers, clattering to the floor loudly. Clarke watches as her best friend’s face scrunches up into one of remorseful terror.

“Lexa,” Clarke says in a voice as firm as lead, “what happened?”

Lexa shakes her head again, let out a pained cry. The noise that leaves the back of her throat reminds Clarke of a dying animal. It leaves her cold in her bones. Clarke gulps down her worries as Lexa stares at the offending object in her palms with a mix of disgust and hatred. She grips Clarke tighter as the younger woman’s heartbeat escalates in fear. Finally, one word makes it past Lexa’s trembling lips.

“Sam.”

Clarke freezes at the name, shifting Lexa so they are face to face. Lexa can’t look at Clarke, and instead keeps her eyes shut tightly. She falls backwards, but before she can hit the ground, Clarke’s arms instinctively wrap around her shoulders. She looks back at the gun in disbelief. Lexa cries are near deafening now, and somehow, much to Clarke’s amazement, Niylah manages to sleep through them. Lexa’s body quakes as Clarke rubs her back absently, her mind clouded with a million different thoughts.

“What happened, Lexa?” Clarke’s voice grows deeper as she asks the question again. Lexa buries
her head into Clarke’s neck, gripping her night shirt tightly in her hands. Clarke knows, but she needs to hear the words make their way out of her best friend’s mouth. She waits, simply listening to Lexa’s hiccupped cries as she remains still with shock. Her hands absently stroke the back of her best friend’s hair, accumulating grease on the tips of her fingers. Everything within her is crying at her to run, to distance herself from Lexa, but she can’t.

“I…,” Lexa starts, choking out the words, “I… I killed him.”

Clarke closes her eyes at the words as Lexa stops breathing in her arms. She feels her best friend’s heart stop beating for a millisecond as the truth spills out into the air. Clarke’s lungs implode as she draws a sharp breath at the words. She wants to deny it, but with the blood on Lexa’s shirt and the gun, Clarke knows that Lexa is telling the truth. Clarke remains still, shocked into a stunned silence.

“I killed him, Clarke,” Lexa repeats, awestruck. She pulls away to look at the gun in a dazed expression, before glancing at her bloodied hands. “I put a bullet in his head and now, he’s dead. I killed him like he meant nothing.” Clarke’s breath hitches as fear encompasses her. She looks at Lexa. This woman is her best friend, her lover, her soulmate, and at the same time, she is a murderer and a criminal.

"It… it was an accident, Clarke. I swear to you, I didn't go in there to kill him. I just… I was so angry with what happened and he was at my work and…,” the older woman trails off before growling, "I got scared and pulled the trigger.” Clarke's pulse throbs as she blinks back hot tears. Lexa gives her the most heart wrenching look the blonde has ever seen, her green eyes laced with pain and remorse.

For the first time in her life, Clarke has no words of comfort to offer her best friend.

The only thing she has is silence.

* * *

Lexa stays quiet and trembling for a few moments before she starts crying again. It's the combination of old memories and recent events that tided her over into a heaving mess. She can see the vivid expression on Caroline’s face as the little girl bore witness to the death of her father. She hunches into herself, her fingers clawing into the blood-spattered material of her jeans. Lexa can clearly hear her blood curdling screams piercing her ears. Lexa shuts her eyes as anxiety causes her head to spin and her throat to close up. Pins and needles prick at her skin, leaving her numb. Lexa can’t breathe. The room is getting smaller and she knows that soon she will black out.

“Lexa,” Clarke’s voice finally cuts in, gently rousing Lexa from her anxiety attack. To Clarke’s shock, the younger woman remains oddly calm. Lexa tries to force herself to pay attention to Clarke, but she has been awake for nearly twenty four hours now and her mind is as swirling mess. Clarke swallows hard and rubs Lexa’s cheeks with her thumbs, gripping her face tighter in her grasp.

“Lexa, listen to me,” she whispers shakily, leaning in closer. She presses their foreheads together; slick skin meets dry skin as Clarke closes her eyes. “Let’s get you cleaned up. We’ll worry about whatever happened later. Right now, I need to make sure you're okay.”

I'm not okay, Lexa wants to say, but her voice fails her. I haven't ever been okay.

Instead, Lexa just stays still for the most part, her body occasionally jerking from fatigue. Clarke holds her face straight and leans in, placing a soft kiss upon Lexa’s cracked lips. She can make out the faint taste of blood, and has to force herself to not recoil out of disgust.
She thinks that if she could see herself now, she wouldn't recognize herself in the mirror.

It all feels too familiar sometimes.

* * *

Clarke uses her strength to heave Lexa off the floor. She half carries, half drags her best friend towards the bathroom on the ground floor. She knows that Lexa isn’t strong or aware enough to ascend the steps, so she allows for a compromise. She sets Lexa down on the closed lid of the toilet seat as she turns to pull back the doors of the shower. She kneels before Lexa’s lifeless eyes and rubs her knee gently. Pity, confusion, and fear tug at her heart strings when she is met with the sight of Lexa’s cold and indignant stare. Clarke takes a deep breath and swallows nervously, trying to push aside her own swelling fear accumulating in the pit of her stomach.

“Baby,” Clarke murmurs softly, “I’m going to get you some new clothes, just wait here. Don’t move, okay?” Lexa lets out a feeble grunt of acknowledgement as Clarke nods. She gets up and quickly rushes up the stairs to where Niylah is sound asleep. She grabs Lexa her favourite sweat pants and an old band t-shirt, as well as a clean pair of boxers, before retrieving two fluffy towels from the closet.

Just as Clarke had previously instructed, Lexa does not move. Clarke returns and closes the door behind them. She reaches for the shower handle and juts it upwards. The shower turns on, startling Lexa and causing the older woman to jump in fear. Clarke feels something in pit of her stomach churn as Lexa’s eyes shift at the sudden noise, flinching at the sound. Clarke kneels again, gently rubbing Lexa’s arms.

“It’s okay,” Clarke whispers soothingly, "Lex, you're not there anymore. You're in my apartment, in my bathroom. You're sitting on the toilet and you're safe. I’m gonna shower with you, okay? I’ll clean you up and then we’ll get some rest. I’ve got you, Lexa.” Clarke leans up and kisses Lexa’s dirty forehead with a light peck of her lips. “I’m right here, Lex. You’re safe.” Suddenly, something in Lexa’s demeanour shifts as she grows serious. Her cold gaze meets Clarke’s, and with one look, Lexa manages to steal the breath from Clarke’s lungs.

“No Clarke,” Lexa replies in a distant voice, her words harshly accentuated. "Don't you ever think that this world is safe."

"Lex…," Clarke trails off as she watches Lexa's cold stare meet her own. "Baby, I think we need to get you in the shower."

"The world isn't safe," Lexa states as she stares at her blankly. "No one is ever safe."

Clarke is taken aback by the lack of emotion in Lexa’s eyes as she speaks. The five words send chills down her spine, and even in the steam of the shower, she feels like she is standing in the arctic. She doesn’t know how to respond to Lexa’s mystical foretelling, so she clears her throat and nods towards the shower stall instead. She gulps down her fear and offers her best friend a half-hearted smile.

“Come on,” Clarke says shakily, pushing aside Lexa’s frightening demeanour, “let’s get you out of these dirty clothes and into the shower.”

Lexa allows Clarke to unzip the parka, before granting her access to remove the rest of her clothing. Lexa remains unfazed and tired as slowly, Clarke joins her best friend in the nude. With the light tug of her hand, Clarke pulls Lexa up towards the shower. The two women step into the spray, but only one, Clarke, flinches as the water is scalding hot. Clarke quickly adjusts the temperature and grabs the soap from the bottom of the shower. She squirts some of the liquid gel upon the luffa and looks to her best friend, staring blankly at the wall.
“Lex,” Clarke whispers, her arms gently coming to wrap around her best friend’s waist. Her call falls on deaf ears. Sighing, Clarke begins to scrub over her best friend’s bloodied skin, looking down in shock as the dirt and blood swirls in the water at their feet. Lexa doesn’t say anything, and as Clarke makes her way lower to scrub over her legs and between her thighs, she can hear the soft sobs of her best friend standing over her. Clarke glances up to see Lexa’s tears meshing with the water from the shower.

Getting to her feet, Clarke stands in front of Lexa, scrubbing lightly over her chest and breasts. They’re small and pert, but easily one of Lexa’s biggest vulnerabilities. The scars beneath her ribs are faded and puckered, but they glare at her from under the low light of the bathroom. Clarke swipes the loofah over the mottled bruises under her breasts and the downy hair beneath Lexa’s naval.

"Clarke," Lexa hisses as the older woman latches her teeth into Clarke's neck. "I…"

"Ssh," Clarke soothes as she swipes over her thighs, tenderly avoiding the member hanging flaccidly at their apex. "I won't go there."

When Lexa seems appeased that she won’t venture further, those teeth slowly unlatch from her shoulder and instead her dips into Clarke’s neck with a tired sigh. Clarke continues cleaning until she’s satisfied that every ounce of blood and dirt has been wiped from the other girl’s body. After discarding the loofah, Clarke gazes at Lexa’s shoulder and notices a faint bruise starting to show. She lets her fingertips dance over the light purple flesh as she presses her nude body closer to her best friend’s. Lexa doesn’t flinch, but instead juts her head upwards. The water mats the hair to her face, dripping down the outline of her sharp jaw. Clarke follows each drop as it leaves her chin in silence. After some time, Clarke turns back to face Lexa, their breasts brushing in a gentle kiss between the hardened buds.

“Did he hurt you, Lexa?” Clarke asks worriedly, her voice soft and quiet. She watches as the veins in Lexa’s throat strain with a painful swallow. She shakes her head and bows it, closing her eyes. Clarke's heart skips a beat when a pitiful mewl leaves the other woman's lips.

Clarke drapes her arms over Lexa’s shoulders, gently bringing her in for a warm and comforting embrace. The water spills over them in a waterfall of serenity, the contrast to reality so sharp it has her mind spinning. Clarke softly places her lips upon Lexa’s left collarbone. She kisses up her neck softly, as if picking up the pace would break her best friend. Lexa shifts her head to the side so their cheeks brush.

Clarke’s lips, now moist from the water, meet Lexa’s in a soft kiss. It starts out as a gentle peck, as if their lips are waltzing to an archaic tune. Clarke’s eyes close shut as she loses herself in the kiss, feeling her mind find a memory from a happy place, one where she and Lexa lay beneath the stars, shrouded in the naked light of the moon and the absence of an all-consuming weight upon their shoulders. The syncopated and rushing beating of their hearts provides the tempo as Lexa pushes harder, nipping at Clarke’s bottom lip in an urge to proceed faster. Clarke complies, parting her mouth to allow Lexa a chance to slip her tongue between the sealed wall of their lips.

Clarke drops her hands to Lexa's waist, letting a soft gasp part her lips as Lexa pushes her against the wall. The tiles are cool and slick against her back, but it chills the flushed heat that simmers up the base of her neck. She can taste each ounce of anguish and pain festering in Lexa’s being as the older woman’s hands grip her own tightly. Clarke winces as Lexa’s hips press against hers in a firm push. Her cock isn't hard, but Clarke can still feel the soft member pulsing and warm against the soft skin of her inner thigh. Lexa thrusts her hips and growls into her shoulder, her hands squeezing harder than before. Clarke shivers at Lexa's soft whimper of distress.

"Clarke," Lexa sobs into her shoulder, her hands easing their grip. Clarke's eyes slide shut as she
reaches up with her free hand to curl her palm around the nape of Lexa's neck. She toys with the baby hairs and gently pulls in a soothing motion. She sees Sam in the dark corner of her mind, and she can't help the familiar fear that creeps back into her bloodstream. Clarke wills for her chest to stop thudding.

It startles her how it pleases her to know that the man is dead.

Clarke jolts at the realization and looks at Lexa, struggling to figure out what she could be hiding. She reaches out, but Lexa fervently shakes her head, unwilling to push further into the details of the night. The older woman looks to her hands and takes a shaky breath.

* * *

Even though they are spotlessly clean, Lexa still sees the crimson blood splattered on her palms. The rivulets gather and slide through the cracks of her skin, painting her body and staining it forever. She hears Caroline again, her piercing cry for help, and Lexa finally loses it. She crumbles to her knees in the shower, letting back a silent scream of agony. Clarke can only watch, petrified, as Lexa caves into herself.

“...,” Lexa gasps, “I’m a monster.”

* * *

"I'm a monster," Lexa repeats again, "I killed him, Clarke. What makes me any better than him?"

Clarke shakes her head as she covers her mouth, finally digesting the truth. She tries to come up with a reassuring counter argument, but she can't think of anything to say. Her heart feels like lead and she feels like the scalding water is melting the skin from her bones. Clarke's hands are shaking as she reaches out before pausing just as her palms over over Lexa's cowering head.

You're not a monster, she wants to say, but the words get stuck in her throat. You're only human.

And everyone knows that humans are known for making mistakes.

* * *

They finish the rest of their shower in silence and sleep in separate beds.

Throughout it all, Lexa never tells her about Caroline.

* * *

**Day 18**

Clarke ties her apron around her waist as Costia and Niylah join her at the back of the marketplace. Their job thus far has been relatively easy, and has consisted of mainly the counting and management of their supplies, as well as the correct rationing of food for each community. Clarke sits down on the table and grabs the notepad, scribbling out the latest data as Niylah reads her the lists of each item. After she is done, Costia takes the paper and jogs to the front where there are other people giving out the bagged food.

Niylah takes a seat next to Clarke, placing her hand over her girlfriend's. Clarke's head snaps up at the contact, and she gazes at their intertwined hands. Niylah leans over and gently presses a kiss to Clarke’s temple. When Niylah goes in for a kiss, Clarke subtly turns her head, letting her girlfriend's lips fall to her cheek instead. Clarke grips their hands tighter and closes her eyes, resting them
wearily.

“You’ve not been sleeping,” Niylah mumbles, pulling back. She observes the dark, puffy rings under Clarke’s eyes and frowns in concern.

Clarke sighs and dips her head. It’s been a week since the incident with Sam’s murder, and things have been a mess ever since. Niylah was in the dark, and went about her day, unbeknownst to the tense situation. Lexa doesn’t talk much to her, or anyone for that matter. She simply goes to work, comes home, sleeps, and then repeats.

It was as though a part of her died with Sam.

“Lexa’s been having nightmares,” Clarke explains in a broken voice, “she sleepwalks and I’m worried about her.” Niylah nods slightly, digesting Clarke’s words as she rubs the back of her head.

“You know, maybe Lexa should try to live on her own.” Niylah’s words are barely audible, but at the slight mention of her best friend’s name, Clarke’s head snaps up. Her eyes are lit with fury as she rips her hand away from Niylah’s grasp.

“No fucking way,” she snarls. Niylah takes a deep breath and reaches out for Clarke again, her knuckles brushing against Clarke’s. She licks her lips and gives Clarke a faint smile.

“It’s not that I don’t enjoy her presence, but Clarke,” she says softly, “she’s ruining our relationship; not to mention she's the one who got us into a bunch of shit she can't handle. I'm beginning to think that you're care more about her than you do about me, which I think is funny considering that I'm your girlfriend.” Niylah’s reasoning is seen as an attack by her girlfriend.

Clarke growls at Niylah, standing abruptly. She wags her finger under her girlfriend’s nose defensively. “Don’t you dare talk shit about Lexa, do you understand me?! You don't have a fucking clue what she is going through. She's seen shit and she needs me, Niylah.”

“Clarke, just hear me out—”

“No,” Clarke snaps, interrupting her with a sharp snarl. “I don't want to hear you talk shit about her again, got it?”

Niylah sighs and reluctantly nods. “Yeah, I understand. I’m sorry I brought it up, it’s just,” she turns her gaze up to Clarke, eyes watering with sadness, “I miss you, Clarke. I… I miss us. It just feels like Lexa's replacing me and I get it, you know, I get that you're close, but I used think that we were too.”

The last part is said quietly, but the words sound like a wailing scream. Clarke stiffens and swallows harshly. She hears the honesty dripping from Niylah’s voice and her shoulders slump. Hanging her head, Clarke takes a seat beside Niylah again, tenderly and slowly reaching back for her hands. Clarke closes her eyes and feels her heart collapse into itself deep inside the walls of her chest.

“You don’t understand, Niylah,” she breathes out. "What Lexa and I have, it's different. I've known her since she was a kid, Niy."

Niylah doesn’t seem to buy it as she raises her brow in pained confusion. She rubs her index finger over the soft skin of Clarke’s thumb.

“Why don’t you tell me then?” She asks innocently. Clarke stares at her, contemplating her question. She couldn’t tell Niylah. She and Lexa already had enough to deal with. An incessantly worried Niylah would only make things worse. “I can’t,” Clarke states sternly, “I’m sorry.”
Niylah licks her lips and bows her head. Internally, Clarke cringes. Though she is fully aware that Niylah and Lexa aren’t the best of friends, she knows her girlfriend would never wish any ill will against her best friend. Or at least, that’s her hope. She knows that her question was posed out of concern and not malicious intent to harm her best friend.

“I’m just worried about her, Niylah,” Clarke whimpers, fighting back tears. Niylah nods slowly, agreeing with Clarke’s statement. She leans forward and pecks Clarke’s cheek softly. “I know you are, baby, but I’m worried about you, too. You need to take care of yourself, okay?”

Clarke looks at Niylah, gazing deeply into her girlfriend’s light eyes. She sees the longing in her stare and something in her soul twists. She knows that she has no right to be snapping at the other woman, not while she’s the one committing adultery. Yet, her girlfriend, oblivious to the many years of her escapades, still manages to remain unaware of the little game Clarke plays. For a moment, Clarke feels pitiful that she is using Niylah, but at the same time, she knows that right now, she cannot afford to break it off with her.

“Thanks, darling,” Clarke says respectfully, dipping her head in gratitude. The pet name sounds a bit forced, but her girlfriend hardly questions it. A faint smile tugs at Niylah’s lips as she nods, too. “Don’t thank me, Clarke. I love you. It’s my job to take care of you.”

The words catch Clarke by surprise. They’re so brutally honest, Clarke has to stop herself from flinching. She gazes at Niylah as her girlfriend smiles again, leaning in for another kiss. Clarke can’t move as Niylah’s lips meet hers. The kiss is dull and Niylah’s lips are chapped, and it almost feels as though her skin chafes with each subtle movement. Even though the last time she had kissed Lexa left her with bitter memories, she still wishes the pained sensation of her best friend’s lips against hers instead of her girlfriend’s.

“Listen,” Niylah mumbles against her lips, drawing her from her thoughts. “I’ve kinda been thinking about something, but I want to talk to you about it later tonight, okay? It’s a conversation I’ve been wanting to have with you for quite some time. It’s… kinda important, Clarke.”

Clarke draws a sharp breath as Niylah kisses her once more. Her tongue licks over her bottom lip, but Clarke doesn’t part her lips. As she opens her eyes, Clarke sees the look of disappointment sketch itself across the lines upon Niylah’s face. Feeling bad for her ill-reception, Clarke nods gently. Guilt washes over her as Niylah pulls away to glance at the entrance where Costia is standing.

“I guess duty calls,” she says with a slight chuckle. She pecks Clarke one last time before getting up from her seat and making her way to the front. Clarke touches her lips and lets a breath escape from her asthmatic lungs. There’s only one thought that runs clear in her mind as she watches her girlfriend blur out of sight; Niylah doesn’t know the first thing about love.

As she thinks about it further, Clarke painfully realizes, neither does she.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! You can find me on tumblr @ a-class-act-president!

Much love, xx.
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