The Long Walk

by Diaph

Summary

Lt. Lexa Woods finally makes it home for Thanksgiving in far worse state than she left after doing the very thing she warns all her men never to do, be a hero. She finds herself in the hands of Dr. Clarke Griffin, the young and high-achieving neurology specialist who is determined to get the soldier to walk and talk again with a new surgical procedure.

It's during the mind-numbing nights spent in the hospital far away from home that the sarcastic soldier charms her way into more than just the doctor's medical observations.

COMPLETE
Chapter 1

There was a hum about the dusty village. Children ran circles around them in curious excitement, women cooked with foreign spices and old men talked up a storm with one another over long games of cards. The language was a symphony that Lexa couldn't understand, though it didn't make much difference. There was familiarity found in the humanity of these people and it was enough to stir memories of home deep within her gut. She pushed the feelings aside and righted herself, focusing on the objective instead.

"Were not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy." Lincoln broke her concentration and saddled up beside her with a lofty grin as they trudged on beneath the midday heat, shouldering their men into the heart of the thick of it between narrow roads with derelict houses sandwiched either side.

"There's no place like home." Lexa elbowed her brother and shook her head. "I'm thinking of buying a timeshare here, Kandahar has nothing on Mom." she sighed and shielded the sun with her palm.

"You talk to her?"

"Have you?" she eyeballed him.

"It's you she's angry with, you told her you'd be home for Thanksgiving. You know you're the favourite foster kid."

"That's not true."

"Aden doesn't count he's still a baby."

"His reading level is higher than yours." Lexa smirked and loosened the cap of her canteen, "We shouldn't do this anyway, we agreed to keep family talk back home. It's easier if nobody knows." she said decisively, taking a deep glug of water. "Jones, Montgomery," she eyed two of her best soldiers. "I need two fireteams mobile, we start searching the houses for the insurgents. Intel came in that they were spotted around here two days ago."

"Two days ago? Ma'am, they could be halfway to Kabul by now." Jones furrowed his brow and marched up, he was in his mid-thirties, shaggy stubble with hints of grey bleeding through that made him look older but that was nothing new, not out here. He had a broad Brooklyn accent and everything always sounded so much more urgent and so much more pointed because of it.

"Jones, your platoon commander gave you an order." Lincoln lowered his voice into the gravelly deep-toned territory that he normally reserved for recruits.

"Of course," the soldier nodded and stood a little taller. "Sergeant, Lieutenant." he nodded and span back on his feet, hollering at his men and pointing them in different directions.

"He did have a point." Lincoln leaned into his sister's ear, discretely.

"Until O'Malley comes back from R&R I'm your platoon commander too, remember that." Lexa scolded him and pointed her finger. She checked the safety over her rifle, tightened the straps of her vest and felt for her kit with an automatic muscle memory that came with the job. She finally sighed under the weight of his eyes, they weighed right into the side of her head with no mirth until she relented. "Take Alpha squad back to camp and I'll search the vehicles, we probably won't find anything here. Someone might as well get lunch."
"Ma'am," Lincoln saluted and put on a show, he turned on his feet, rallying back up the little stoned cobbles towards his men. "Alpha move out!" his voice roared with a deep echo as he disappeared round the corner.

There was a tiny speck of mirth that weighed into the corners of her lips as the sound of organised chaos followed Lincoln. She did things by the book, down to every full stop, comma and semicolon. Lincoln was an exception, a glaring paradox to the rule, she knew she ought to tell company command that he was her foster brother, that they knocked and rattled around the system together when they were little. There was an intimacy forged in that truth and it ran deeper than blood, but it could wait for another day, or so she told herself.

"Ma'am," the radio attached to her uniform buzzed and vibrated with white noise. "Fireteam is up and on the ground." Montgomery announced.

"Good," she clicked the button and held the radio. "Get on top of the roof above that building at the bottom of the street. I want the second fireteam here to search the vehicles with me—"

Lexa stopped in her tracks as she walked besides the first dinged out rusted white van. It was parked outside of the school opposite the butchers. Maybe it was just a school bus, maybe it belonged to a son or a brother to help take elderly relatives to prayer, there were a number of innocent reasons and yet she couldn't settle on a single one. There were no hanging holy ornaments over the mirror and there was no family pictures stuffed into the side of the pulled down visor and it rose her suspicion.

Carefully, deftly, she sunk to her knees and shone her flashlight under the belly of the van. "Specialist Jones?" she clicked the button on her radio and paused, face pressed against the dirt as she inched closer under the body of the vehicle, licking her lips.

"Lieutenant?" his voice crackled through the frequency.

"Woods." she smiled and breathed and pretended these things were okay. "You can call me Woods."

"I'll stick with Lieutenant if it's all the same to you, ma'am."

"Sure, Specialist." she inched closer, her knuckles white around the flashlight. "Evacuate the area and get me EOD down here." she called it in, examining the wires that wrapped around the axle and connected to what looked like a cellphone, she could just about see that much in the compromised light.

"Ma'am, have you found something?"

"No, Jones. I'm fixing to have a goddamn slumber party with the bomb squad." she hissed and rolled her eyes. There was a pause, maybe more of a hum. her eyes adjusted to the light and it confirmed her suspicions. "Yes," she sighed with an ache. "Suspected explosive device outside the school." she released her thumb off the radio and arched her neck to catch a glimpse of the rooftop. "Fireteam, you in position?"

"Setting up now, ma'am."

"Good." she nodded and breathed again, ducking back beneath the chassis. "Designated marksman, confirm you have eyes on me."

"Got you in my sights." Montgomery hummed with a soft southern drawl as he stared through the eye of his rifle and Lexa felt a little better for it.
"Do these khakis make my ass look big?" she tried to laugh, shuffling her torso further towards the device to get a better look.

"Between you and me, Woods, I'm into that."

"You better pray they send me home in a body bag before I can tell your wife, Montgomery." Lexa rolled her eyes. "How far out is the bomb squad?" she shuffled and shimmied back out from beneath the van, jumping to her feet and dusting herself off. "We need to evacuate the school from the rear exit, you working on that Jones?"

"Enemy fire!" Jones buzzed through the radio, bullets firing and whizzing past. "It's hot."

"Ma'am, you should make your way back. Hostile fire engaged, I repeat, hostile fire engaged." Montgomery radioed through as she jogged back to the rhythm of bullets, over little ditches towards the narrow roads for cover, she was sweating and her hands were trembling and her gut churned in the way it always did on the days she lost someone; like a sixth sense, though she'd never tell anyone that.

There was a tiny cry, a small thing, she looked over her shoulder and there he was. The boy was no older than six, maybe seven at a push, he was crouched by the door of the school. Bullets whizzing past as he tried his very best to take steps towards the gate before pulling himself back and freezing beside the pillar.

"Get inside!" she shouted at the boy, waving her arms furiously.

He stared straight through her, scared and afraid, he called out something in Pashto. Lexa wasn't fluent but she heard want and papa and that was all it took for her to start marching back towards the school yard. 'You've got to be kidding me.' she growled beneath her breath, wiped her brow and breathed a deep huff. "Is the back road behind the school clear?" she clicked the button to her radio.

"All quiet." Montgomery answered. "Hostile fire coming from the apartment block. One clean shot and I'll have him."

"You better take your shot fast, I'm going for the boy." she bit her lip and ran back beneath a hail of bullets, ducking as windows shattered with enemy fire. She was clear of the white dinged out van, she knew that much. She'd jumped the school wall too, maybe a metre or two away from the kid when she saw the orange circles in his pupils and his mouth open wide.

Like time had slowed to a zenith state, she heard the crack of the explosion, like god's war cry it deafened her with it's boom. Instantaneously, she lept for the boy and felt the pressure and heat from the explosion propel them into the pillar.

The dust whipped up into a great storm around them and her head was wet, she couldn't move but she knew it was wet, dripping into the back of her uniform and making her neck sticky. She wished she'd listened to Indra, wished she went home like she was supposed to.

She should have gone home for Thanksgiving.

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The waiting room smelt artificial and clean. The idea that it was somebody's sole purpose within this hospital to polish and sanitize and hide the laments of death and illness had always been an issue for her in this profession. It was so late into the night it was almost early morning. The coffee machine was broken and there was nobody around to share these little troubles between knowing
sighs or shakes of their heads. Instead Clarke shivered and blinked. She got the call as soon as she came out of a boring, routine surgery and drove all the way from Alliance, Ohio to Gary, Indiana without stopping.

There had been shrapnel damage to the parietal and temporal lobes, the soldier was in bad shape, she knew these things and yet still she was on the praecipe of her own excitement. She would fix this unfixable thing and even if she couldn't, she would be a better doctor for trying.

"Nice of you to show up, Dr. Griffin." the attending surgeon finally looked up from his computer as he finished the last of his admin. "You're in this military hospital as an esteemed guest, the least you can do is get here at a decent hour." he sneered and pushed forward a case file.

He was an older man, light blue eyes and silvering hair, maybe late fifties. He'd seen a traumatic brain injury or two in his lifetime and she could see that about him in his manner. There were brain injuries and then there were brain injuries, military cases, shrapnel wounds and craniocerebral penetration and the dirty messy hard stuff that would make her better at her job.

"I'm sorry, Major Hughes." she took the folder and folded her coat over her other arm. "It's admirable work you're doing out here." she conceded with a little nod and flipped open the folder. "So, Lt. Woods? When can I meet him?" she hummed.

"She," he added with a pause. "Was repatriated home two days ago. You wanted a soldier with a traumatic brain injury for your programme, here she is." he moved around the desk and swiped the door to the critical care unit, holding it open for her.

"What are your observations?" she walked through.

"Decorticate response to pain stimuli but other than that?" he glanced at her with a tight little frown and Clarke couldn't help but wonder how many young soldiers passed through his care with the same bad prognosis, not this one though, not if she could help it. "Dr. Griffin," he cleared his voice with a little cough, "Lieutenant Woods suffered a stroke during evacuation, that and the cranial damage... I doubt she'll talk again, let alone be able to walk or care for herself." he frowned, moving back towards the door.

"How confident are you?"

"When pigs fly, Dr. Griffin. Lieutenant Woods will be up and out of that bed." he bit down on his lip and hung the chart at his side, "Feel free to get some rest in an on call room, I imagine you'll be wanting her folks to sign the release papers in the morning to take her back to Alliance."

"Yeah." Clarke scratched her head. "Thanks, again."

"I don't know why you're thanking me, she's beyond help." he looked towards the hospital room door and there was a sadness to him, a softness, it blurred through his demeanor and he cared about this girl, he cared about all of them. It made it all the more bittersweet.

"We'll see about that." she whispered, flicking open her chart.
Chapter 2

Clarke tossed and turned, the hiss of the air vent blurred the silence of the room and the monotonous sounds of the hospital outside seeped under the door and disturbed anything that closely resembled sleep. She knitted her eyes tighter together and rolled over for a cool bit of pillow, her brain too busy with little quantitative details from her research. It was nothing new. Ever since she was a little girl her brain was always too busy and frenetic, too clever.

It was her dad who steered her towards all of this. If she tried hard on her worst days, she could still see him lying there speechless and lame, a teddy bear clutched under one arm and her mother's hand squeezing hers so tight her fingers might drop off, the doctors worked around him in that little bed and tried to fix something impossible. It seemed so silly at the time, seeing that great hulk of a man with his gigantic dad arms and stubby face asleep in such a tiny bed. The doctors tried to beat death at his own game whilst still playing to the house rules and they lost, but there was something important about staring an impossible thing in the eye and trying anyway. She didn't understand it at the time, the understanding came later, but the feeling of saving a life, of beating death even if the whole game is rigged anyway… it was something else entirely.

The noise that seeped under the door grew more pointed and frantic under the weight of fast-paced footsteps heading down the corridor. It sounded exciting and she couldn't help herself, slipping on her scrubs and a loaned M.D jacket, she slipped out the door and followed the sound of nurses rushing and scuttling like lemmings near the cliff.

"Lieutenant Woods," she whispered to herself as the lemmings lead her to a familiar hospital room, scuttling in and out as they paged for a specialist, the bigger ones hauling in to hold the thrashing animal to the bed as she growled and huffed under the weight of her failing body. She was beautiful, so alive, completely and utterly there and vibrant.

"Is she your patient?" one of the nurse's looked up from the bed with a bit of hope as she removed the last of the ventilator from her gagging throat.

"She is now." Clarke took a step towards the bed and the nurse released her hold on Lexa's wrist like a clip holding a spring loaded barrel. "You can leave," she nodded at the nurses, waiting patiently for them to file out of the room.

"Are you sure—"

"Leave." Clarke lowered her stare, waiting.

The Lieutenant thrashed as much as she could and as hard as she could for an impressive length of time. Long dark hair stuck to her forehead, damp and thick, the long strands hid the slope and slack of the left side of her face but her eyes were dark wild things. Clarke felt guilty for wondering about the sights they had seen, the people who had those eyes to thank for their lives, there must have been a few.

"You're okay." Clarke stepped closer, whispering, gentle.

The Lieutenant did her best to fight, she grew tired under the strain of her thrashing until she was a heaving pile, eyes wide, slurred vowels falling out of her dry mouth, the left side of her body didn't work and the right side of her body had lost all dexterity and she was stuck somewhere in the middle like a caged animal.
"Lieutenant Woods—"

The Lieutenant's eyes grew wider and her lips mashed together though nothing came other than an indescribable elongated vowel sound, it grew louder and frightened.

"Lieutenant," Clarke tried again to little avail, she walked around the bed, pulled her coat off so the soldier didn't have anything to grasp onto for leverage. "Lexa," she finally said her name and the Lieutenant's eyes shot up and stared at hers like she'd just woken from a nightmare. "It's okay, you're okay." Clarke whispered, grabbing her shoulders. "You're safe now, I swear it."

Lexa was still, eyes locked, her body still chuffing under the weight of her protest.

"You were in a coma, Lieutenant. Do you remember what happened?" Clarke grabbed her hand and sat beside the bed and felt the concern well up inside of her in a capacity she didn't hold for her other patients. They were transient. Lieutenant Woods was something so entirely different, her failing body was a lock and Clarke was up against time to find the key. it felt strange to think of somebody like that, to see another human being in such an objective way, but it was necessary and this was important, so much more important than either of them.

Lexa looked around for a moment and her eyes fluttered in quick little successions of one another before they stared back at the doctor holding her hand with curiosity and held focus once again. Clarke recognised it, she saw it in her Alzheimer's patients when their memory began to fade. Memory loss; the first indicator of what she was up against.

"Hey, Lexa, it's okay." Clarke tried her name on for size and shuffled closer, she smelt like smoke, like cedarwood, maybe cotton, maybe all of it and Clarke didn't know why she noticed any of those little things but she did. "Do you remember what happened to you?"

Lexa shook her head, barely.

"Okay." Clarke nodded, squeezing her hand. "You were involved in an explosion trying to save a little boy—"

She saw it rush back into Lexa like a tide. It rose up high behind her eyes and crashed against her gut and the foam frothed in the back of her throat and she could hear it through the growl and noise that fell out of her mouth. There was a sudden staunchness to her, an absolute stiffness as the memory dribbled back.

"B-buh," Lexa tried, fumbling to grab Clarke's hand with an indescribable urgency. "B-buh." she tried and Clarke watched the girl's heart fracture into two at this realisation that words now failed her.

"Relax, you're safe now." Clarke tried to soothe her, hush her, wiping back hair that hung in her face. "You were involved in an explosion, Lieutenant, there was some shrapnel damage to the parts of your brain that help control how you walk and talk…" she said softly and quietly but it did nothing to keep the air in Lexa's chest. "When they airlifted you to the field hospital, you had a stroke on the way. You've been in an induced coma since to give your brain the best chance to heal."

"B-buh" Lexa tried and clenched her eyes with frustration, flecks of spit in the corner of her mouth.

"Brain damage?" Clarke tried.

"B-buh-buh," Lexa stuttered and her fist wound tighter.
"The boy?" Clarke tried again and the lightbulb flickered on in her head.

Lexa fell into the pillows with something that resembled a nod.

Clarke grabbed the file from the side of the table, flipping through to the operation detail in the back, she scanned paragraph after paragraph and quickly decided the whole thing deserved an in depth read but on she scanned until she came to the paragraph she was looking for.

...unidentified boy, dead on arrival.

She looked up at the soldier just as the bottom dropped out of her gut, she did her best to hide it, the words grew dry on her lips and now it was her turn to be speechless and stutter. She looked away, glanced back down to the file and made sure the words hadn't magically changed to what the soldier wanted to hear. There was pensive silence that filled the room and Clarke could hear her waiting for an answer.

"He's doing well." she lied through her teeth and kept her stare on the file. "Really well." she nodded and closed it with a snap.

A sob wracked Lexa's body and her eyes glistened with relief, she had nothing except for this, just a tiny little bit of something that meant this didn't happen all for nothing. "Th-th-tha," she stuttered and stopped herself, offering a little nod instead.

"I better let you get some rest, Lieutenant, your family will be here tomorrow and then we can all figure out how we're going to get you back in those combats." Clarke whispered and grinned, rising out of the chair. She should have felt guilty for lying about something so important, she should have but she didn't and it was all for that tiny look of hope in her eyes that was barely lost to the left side of her drooping face. Destroying the only thing this impossibly brave woman had left would be somebody else's job, she decided, not hers.

Lexa pawed at her hand, her eyes grew wide and Clarke could tell from the look of her that she wasn't used to being scared of anything.

"You want me to stay?" Clarke sat back down.

There was a little nod.

"Fine." Clarke sighed through a smile and sat back down, "I'm Dr. Griffin, Lieutenant."

Lexa shook her head and there was a little turn to the corner of her lip, something that looked like a smile. Clarke looked up, just in time to see her reach to the file resting on the bed and point to one word between the little components of her name. Lexa.

"Lexa it is then. I'm Clarke." there was a pause, but it didn't feel uncomfortable or weighty. "I need to do some basic exercises with you to assess the damage—"

Lexa rolled her eyes and Clarke couldn't help but smirk.

"At least we know your personality is intact." the doctor patted her bicep and leaned back in her chair, swinging her legs over the the arm rest. "I'm not much for poking and prodding people… why don't we just have a conversation and I can test your short term memory, you won't even know I'm doctoring over you." she played with her pen and earned a quirked brow. "Yes, I know it'll be a pretty one sided conversation but do you think you can hold this?" Clarke read her mind expertly and placed the pen in her grasp.
The dexterity in her hand was gone and the grasp was lazy and slow, the pen rolled down the slope of her thumb and Clarke found herself reaching out to grasp it. "Here." she said quietly, holding her hand tight around the soldier's as she pushed her clipboard underneath the point of the pen. "I'll help you."

The family huddled round in the waiting room. It was a little strange, all of their complexions melded into a flow of different skin tones and Clarke found herself wondering how it all came to be. They seemed nice. There was the mother and the strapping son and the little scrappy kid that was no doubt the apple of her eye. They were just a normal family, like all the others that came and went in the waiting room looking for news. A normal family with an extraordinary daughter.

"Hi," she cleared her throat. "You must be the Woods." she stuck her hand out and the strapping son took it firmly in his own.

"Lincoln." he replied, keeping her hand firm in his giant paw. "This is my ma and this," he wrapped his arm around the boy and pulled him close into his chest. He had a light brown shaggy mop of hair and two light green eyes that stared up at her and she felt the weight of his expectations above the others. "This is Aden." he smiled.

"Aden," Clarke knelt down and smiled, "I bet you've been worried about Lexa, huh?"

He just about nodded.

"She's doing well, she's strong!" Clarke grinned and clasped his arm, he smiled back, there was a little bounce to him and she saw the relief in all their faces. "She's awake now. I'm not supposed to let family onto the unit but if you put this on..." she took off her doctor's coat and wrapped it around his shoulders, fiddling with the lapels, her stethoscope was the finishing touch and he looked like a dapper little M.D. "I bet we could sneak in there with no one noticing."

As if this was a tiny military operation all unto himself, he puffed out his chest and nodded. "Come on, Linc." he stood up and pulled his big brother by the arm and nearly dragged him the entire way past the nurse's station.

"Mrs Woods—" Clarke turned back to the woman who stayed sitting, bags between her feet, shoulders set in the same absolute staunchness she saw in the soldier last night.

"Indra." she swallowed, "I'm not a Mrs."

"Sorry."

"No need to be, I'm certainly not." she shook her head, "He's a gentle boy, you know." she sighed and looked down the corridor after Aden and Lincoln as they waited inconspicuously around the swipe-key door to the unit.

"She... Lexa... woke up last night." Clarke brought the subject back to where she needed it. "Indra, I know the doctors here told you there wasn't much hope—"

"Much hope?" Indra flashed her a trying look. "Dr. Griffin, the doctors told me my only daughter would never walk or talk again and I've spent the last week sifting through care homes trying to figure out how I'm going to afford getting her the help she needs so she doesn't rot away in a V.A hospital somewhere." she bit her lip and her eyes were alight, "Much hope is an overstatement."

"I'm going to help her." Clarke blurted it out, fingers tight around her chart. "Pro-bono. I work for
Alliance City Hospital in Ohio as a specialist neurosurgeon, it's a long shot but Lexa is a perfect candidate for the research I'm working on."

"I… don't understand."

"The shrapnel damage to her brain is… complex." Clarke scratched her head and thought best on how to put it in layman's terms. To call it a beautiful catastrophe or a clinical masterpiece seemed morbid but it was what she thought and felt. "The shrapnel is so small there would be no way of removing it from the brain mass without causing catastrophic collateral damage to the surrounding tissue, but, if I could work with her on a programme of stem cell therapy right into the damage itself, there's a small chance it could heal with time."

"Heal as in, heal?"

"Heal as in heal." Clarke nodded her head. "All I would need is for you to sign release forms so I can bring her back to Ohio. This treatment… it's never been done before."

"But you think you can fix her?" Indra raised her hand cautiously and the words were still ringing in her ear.

"Yes." Clarke puffed up her chest and nodded.

"What are the risks?" Lincoln spoke up from behind with stern eyes and nearly made them both jump out of their skin.

"Lincoln," Indra bit the inside of her lip.

"No, Ma! We're not sending her away just because some doctor wants to play Frankenstein. Not until we know everything we need to know."

Clarke waited for a natural pause or lull to jump in, "I know this is scary for you—" she tried.

"No, you don't." he stared at her. "Take us to see my sister. This is something we need to discuss as a family."

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"Her memory isn't great." she blurted as they stood by the window. "She's prone to bouts of aggression too. The chemistry in her brain, it's not working properly right now… she can't talk either."

"Why are you telling us this?" Lincoln bit and didn't afford her an inch of a glance as they held their stare through the open blinds at the figure in the bed.

"Because you need to hear it." she frowned and reached for the handle to the door. "Come in when you're ready. I just need to fill in a quick observation report and then I can get out of your hair." she said over her shoulder before the door closed.

"Cl-cl-clar," Lexa's eyes fluttered.

"You know, normally when I spend the night with girls I've just met they rarely remember my name." Clarke raised her brows and chuckled, she was impressed, though she wouldn't let that much on.

Lexa's scans were horrific, there was metal in all the most essential parts of her, little chunks of it,
lighting up her scans like the stars at night and she shouldn't be able to smile or synthesize information but she can and it's marvellous, wondrous even.

"Do you remember where you are?" Clarke flipped the sheet over her clipboard and started to jot and scribble things down. The soldier nodded as best she could.

"Do you remember what happened?"

Lexa held her stare and it was decimating... the way she looked at Clarke was something else entirely, she nodded again but this time there was a little smile and she was bizarrely at peace with it.

"I've got an observation report I need to fill in but there's a young gentleman suitor outside who's stolen my coat and stethoscope to sneak in here and see you. I think he's going to lose his mind if we don't invite him in." she waved her hand at the door, beckoning for her little brother.

"N-n-nuh-no," she stuttered.

Lexa's eyes grew wide and she tried to move, tried sink into the bed and hide herself. The door was open and Aden was there, eager and grinning from ear to ear. Clarke turned just in time to see the look of horror, but it was too late.

"Lexa!" Aden grinned, piling over wires and little extensions of the hospital right into his sister's side to hug her but she was frozen stiff.

"Easy buddy," Clarke leaned over and stopped him accidentally tugging on the wires that burrowed beneath her skin. "She's still a little sore."

"Can she hear me?" Aden's voice was tiny as he pulled back, resting his head beside hers.

Lexa's lips gave way to a little smile, though her eyes watered and her lips wobbled and her neck burned red and her shoulders shook. It was there and he saw it before anyone else.

"Sure she can hear you, she just can't—"

Lexa flashed her a look, it was a warning that Aden was off limits, not to be spoiled by these unfortunate truths of what she couldn't do rather than what she could. Clarke's eyes softened and she bit her lip and mouthed a tiny sorry at her.

"What can't she do?" Aden looked up.

"Tapdance." Clarke cleared her throat. "Not yet at least."

"She can't dance..." Aden laughed in that innocent way and Lexa was somehow stronger for listening to it. "she's really bad." he gave way to another chuckle.

Lexa lifted her hand and wiggled her fingers into his side. It didn't tickle, there wasn't enough force behind it, but like a puppy Aden played along anyway and squirmed to make her happy.

"I think she politely disagrees." Clarke added, scribbling more notes. She looked up just in time to see the soldier shoot her a little look out of the corner of her eyes, if she could talk, she would have said something dry and funny. She was that kind of person and Clarke could see it in her. "Don't look at me, he's the one who said you're a bad dancer."

"Hey Mowg... we were worried about you." Lincoln stood by the door with Indra at his side, as if
there was an invisible wall the separated them so completely now he didn't move further into the room.

"Y-y-you," Lexa pulled herself up and her voice was angry and her teeth gnashed and the slouch in the side of her face was obvious. There was a heat that exuded from her and it caught the room alight.

"Lexa—" his voice broke.

The beast beat out the woman and she thrashed and clawed with no thought for her gentle little brother who jumped back off the bed. "Y-y-you!" she gritted her teeth and growled from the very bottoms of her chest and the rage shook her entirely.

"What's going on?" Aden looked between them all, he reached out and grabbed Lexa's shoulder and she somehow shook him off and Clarke watched the way he pulled it back with hurt brimming in his eyes. She muttered unintelligible words to herself and her nose began to bleed and Aden had a front row seat for all of it.

"Help her." he pleaded with a tiny voice.

"Okay, Aden… Buddy, I need you to wait outside." Clarke reassured him and snapped on surgical gloves and lowered the hospital bed flat, the soldier's muscles began to contract and convulse and all Clarke could was gently hold on to her, keeping her head steady in her hands as her body gave into it, legs shaking and mouth foaming.

"What's happening?" Lincoln grabbed the boy.

"I need you to wait outside."

"I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what's going on—"

"I am trying to help your sister if you'd let me do my job!" Clarke yelled at him and kept Lexa steady, never for a second forgetting to keep her neck stabilized. "You're okay, I've got you. It's okay." she whispered to the soldier and felt silly for it, none the less, she hushed her and tried her best.

The room belonged to them once more and Clarke saw her through long after the convulsions stopped and she began to stir back around. She dabbed at the bloody nose with cotton and hummed a little song she remembered from times she'd since forgotten, stroking her head, they stayed that way for minutes that rolled right into minutes long after her body ceased in it's revolt.

"Is she okay?" Lincoln appeared in the doorway.

"Yeah… grand-mal seizure, they're common with the type of brain damage she has." Clarke frowned over shoulder, gently blotting away at her nose still. "I'm sorry I yelled at you."

"Don't be… Lexa lives for when someone puts me in my place." he scratched the back of his head and tried to pretend to be above these things. "We just, we love her a lot, you know?" his voice broke.

"I know." she promised, "It's scary but please, think about letting me take her back for the research." Clarke's eyes softened. "Your sister is a perfect candidate but she's not just some guinea pig, not to me, if you let me help her I can use the research to help other people too… other soldiers with brain injuries worse than hers."
"Worse than hers?"

"Believe me." Clarke settled and she sat back in the chair beside the bed, "I have seen brain injuries that are just... hopeless." she let out a little sigh and felt the weight of those cases on her shoulders. "But the research I'm doing? If I can help your sister, one day I might be able to help someone who never would have had a chance before this."

"She's that important?"

"Right now, your sister is the most important person in the world to me. I want to help her, if you'll let me."

"And if you can't?" Lincoln's voice burned and his eyes welled up again but he hid these slights well.

"Then at least we gave her the chance she deserved."

Lincoln offered a deep thoughtful nod and stood from the chair, he walked back out of the room but lingered by the door frame just for a second to watch over her. "We'll sign the papers before we leave." he whispered and kept his eyes on his sister, she looked almost peaceful and it seemed bitterly ironic.

"It's not my place to ask... but what was that about? Why was she angry with you?" Clarke pried and kicked herself immediately, she could never just leave things, she was always too intrigued and frenetic.

"Fix her up and she'll be able to tell you that story herself." he offered a sad little smile and walked out of the door without another word.
In the deepest corner of the apartment where the brick wall met the window frame, Clarke sat with coffee and watched the city settle with soft kinds of groans. The evening pushed on with dim shades of purple until the street lamps finally came on and lit up long needles of rain like flecks of gold before they hit the pavement. She heard the key search for the lock and finally turn in the door and her back stiffened at the sound. There are few things you can be certain of when you appraise a situation, that was the first thing they taught in medical school. But like fine clockwork she could be certain of the reckoning she would get from her best friend Raven, she'd spent enough time earning it.

"Who are you?" the brunette blinked at Clarke and came to an abrupt halt as she walked into the kitchen, she shook the rain off of herself before dropping her bags on the floor. "Listen, if it's money you're after you came to the wrong place—I live here by myself after all."

"Missed you too, Ray." Clarke grinned and took another gulp of the hot drink from her mug.

"Get that shit out of here." Raven screwed up her face. She took the coffee mug out of her hands and poured it down the drain, "I checked the schedule before I left work—you're off tonight." she explained away, handing a Budweiser from the refrigerator to the doctor who accepted without much reluctance."...I'm not letting you leave my sight until you're too under the influence to even think about heading to the lab."

The cat jumped up on the counter with long swishes of her tail and rubbed her head on the back of Clarke's hand with a little pur. "I take it someone missed me." she cooed and it stretched out it's back with a deep yawn before hopping back down and taking off down the corridor.

"See, the kids barely recognise you anymore." Raven nodded after the cat.

"You're the one who wants to send her to Sarah Lawrence when she's older," Clarke pointed sternly and pulled herself up to sit on the counter top. "Someone has to make bank to afford the tuition."

"That joke would make sense if I didn't make more money than you, which I do, comfortably."

"Clearly not comfortably enough seeing as we still live together."

Raven raised her brow and sat up on the counter top too. "That's a technicality. You've not been home since you took off for Indiana. I'm starting to think you've put a down-payment on the third floor on-call room." she took a glug of her own beer, "Speaking of which—how is G.I Jane?"

Clarke breathed out a deep sigh that was almost visible, "As well as can be expected. I'm operating tomorrow, thought I would give her a full week to settle in before I go rooting around in her brain but she's been getting worse. Her seizures are more frequent and she refuses to let the nurses feed her. They put a feeding tube down last night and set her up on a drip and she damn well nearly gave one of them a black eye."

"You tried talking to her? You have a way with women..."

"And what am I supposed to say?" she exasperatedly sighed, "Sorry you trained your entire life to lead men into war and now you can't even wipe your own ass?"

"You're a real gentlemen." Raven took the beer from Clarke's hand and the blonde wanted to argue about it but it was one of their most sacrosanct rules since internship, no drinking before a big
surgery. She eyed her as she dropped the glass bottle in the sink and Clarke couldn't help but look away.

"I'm not convinced I won't kill her." she gulped, "Do you think now is too late to switch specialities? I bet I could try my hand in your department..."

"In Ortho? No." Raven shook her head and laughed. "Since when did you get like this anyway? You're freakishly detached remember, that's kinda your thing?"

"I like her." Clarke shrugged.

"You like her or you like her?"

"Don't do that. Don't be gross. I'm her physician, okay? I'm not— you know."

"Checking her out?" Raven raised her brows, "You have a habit of picking up the wrong kind of girls... that's all I'm saying."

"Name one time—"

"Bellamy Blake, New Year's Eve 2011."

"Okay, he was definitely the wrong kind of girl but other than that—"

"Octavia Blake, New Year's Eve 2012."

"I have no regrets about that. Not one." Clarke crossed her arms defiantly.

Raven nodded with approval and a grin worked into the corners of her cheeks as she lifted the bottle to her lips. They'd started at City Hospital with both the Blake siblings in their internship programme and the four of them quickly made their long lasting, over-competitive friendship. Though neither sibling would ever find out they had competed against one another when it came to Clarke Griffin.

"To answer your question, no. I don't like her, like her." Clarke added with a little laugh.

Raven let it lie; chewing her mouth and nodding along though she didn't believe a word of it and Clarke could tell as much, but neither said anymore and these things were settled.

"Now my deposition is over I'm going to grab food from Mr Chung's if you want some too?" Clarke pulled on her jacket and grabbed her keys.

"Surprise me." Raven shrugged.

Clarke headed down the stairwell of the building and was out of the door in record time. It was blustery outside, that kind of cold weather that only seemed to exist in the dark hours of the evening with fine drops of rain that soak you through to the core. She walked fast with her arms crossed over her body, clutching at her sides to keep her warmth until she finally bundled herself in the car.

The rain cascaded down the window screen of her 1980 Firebird—old and a little dinged out as she was—there was something magic about sitting in her driver's seat with the radio cranked low. It was the best place in the entire world to think and so for a minute or maybe less, that's exactly what Clarke did, clearing out the recesses of her mind that were thick with nerves about the surgery.

As if on command, her phone vibrated in her pocket.
"Dr Griffin," she announced, tapering her voice.

"Hey Doc," Aden greeted her.

"Buddy! You know you can call me Clarke!" she suddenly breathed a relieved sigh and sat back in the chair.

There was a moment between sedating Lexa and the orderlies taking her up to the transport helicopter where the hospital room had fallen into silence and all that was audible was the aching-gnawing sounds of Aden trying not to sob. It was then she scrawled down her cell-phone number and promised the boy he could call her any hour of the day and she would give him a special update.

"How are you?" she sighed into the receiver.

"Good, how's Lexa?"

"I checked in on her before I came home and she was just signing-up for tap dancing lessons ready for after we operate tomorrow."

Aden laughed into the receiver and Clarke heard him relay it back to his mom and brother, then she heard them laugh in turn and it was exactly what she needed to hear.

"She hasn't had any more seizures, right?" Aden asked.

"No." Clarke lied and her throat tightened to a point where it hurt to breathe. "She's doing great. You should be proud of her Kiddo."

"Yeah," Aden approved with a soft relief. "As soon as she's allowed to eat, you remember the meal right?"

"I remember. General Tso's chicken and sticky rice with extra soy sauce." Clarke reeled it off and smiled. "...And I have to put a little message on there so she knows it's from you."

"You got it, Doc. I have to go now but will you give Lexa a hug from me?"

"I'm not really allowed to hug her Buddy but I think I could get away with a fist-bump?"

"Just tell her I love her."

"You got it," Clarke grinned and shook her head.

The line went dead and she pocketed the phone. The rain cleared just enough for her wipers to take care of what was left and so she drove to Mr Chung's. It wasn't much of a journey, the roads were fairly empty and the line in the restaurant was fairly non-existent.

"If it isn't my favourite doctor!" Mr Chung wagged his finger, "The usual?"

"Please," Clarke fiddled around in her bag for the wallet. "Actually," she looked up and squinted at the menu. "Do you do General Tso's?"

…

Clarke closed the door behind her and there was no sound of monitors or sign of the lieutenant. The TV blurred the darkness of the room and for a moment, Clarke was at odds. She stood there for a second before she heard the laboured breaths coming from behind the side of the bed.
"Lexa," she gasped and sunk down to check the soldier. She was collapsed on the floor in a small puddle, fine but huffing at her embarrassment, her cheeks burned with shame and she hid behind the long dark bits of her hair and mumbled unintelligibly to herself with words her brain wouldn't let her say.

"I'm going to get help." Clarke stood up and quickly, Lexa grabbed her wrist with her good hand and clung to it tight.

"N-no," the soldier stared at her pleadingly.

She should have gone and got help. She should have got the nurses and orderlies to come and clean up the mess and wash the woman off and she should have scolded her for trying to go to the bathroom even though she couldn't walk. She should have but she did none of those things. Instead, she looked between the heaving patient on the floor and the door to the hospital room and double checked it was locked.

"You're going to get me fired, do you know that?" she shook her head and knelt in front of Lexa once again. "Wrap your arm around my shoulder, I'm going to clean you off, okay?"

Lexa nodded and threw her arm over the doctor and Clarke lifted her up off the floor and half carried her to the bathroom. Her arm was tight around Lexa's waist, she was lean and solid with muscle and Clarke felt bad for her and that drowned out everything else.

She ran the water and put the commode underneath the shower stream and Lexa shuddered with indignance.

"It's hardly like you can stand." Clarke murmured and helped peel off her clothes. Eventually, that was taken care of and she helped lower her on to the seat beneath the shower. "Do you need any help?"

Lexa looked away with shame as the water drenched her long dark hair and washed away her frustration and Clarke caught sight of the army tattoos that sat proudly on her ribs and once again felt a pang of guilt.

"This breaks so many patient-doctor boundaries." Clarke shook her head and helped her negotiate the shower with a removed professionalism that she needed to use to make this okay. "Don't worry about this," Clarke sighed as she helped clean her off. "Back when I was an intern, we once had a 250lb cagefighter crap his pants when we reset his elbow. This has nothing on that."

Lexa chuckled a little and Clarke took a small victory in it. Carefully, she helped the soldier dry off and put fresh clothes on before hauling her back to bed.

"C-Clar," Lexa licked her lips and failed to force the word off her tongue. "Tha-thank,"

"Don't sweat it," she smiled and took the chart from the end of the bed. Her stats were better, no seizures, no outbursts, these things were better and it tugged at the corner of Clarke's lips. "How you feeling, soldier?" she grinned.

"Sh-sh-shi," Lexa pulled at her mouth and tried her best. Eventually, she gave up, red in the cheeks and puffing. She grabbed the whiteboard off her bed-table and did her best to make her thumb and forefinger work in a bipartisan effort from the rest of her failing body.

Shitty.

"Now, I'm not a betting woman but I think I have something that's going to cheer you up..." Clarke
flung her legs over the side of the chair at the side of the bed and pulled her take-out box out of the paper bag.

It peaked Lexa's interest. She pulled herself up a little with what was left of her good arm and her chest heaved from the effort of shifting so much dead weight. Clarke watched her with an intrigue that made her chuckle at her furious determination.

"So your brother called me earlier…" Lexa raised her brow and her mouth curled into a little confused shape and Clarke read it all perfectly. "Relax." she rolled her eyes, "I didn't sell you out. But if you don't stop giving the nurses a hard time I'm going to tell your mom everything and that includes you giving Nurse Donahue a black eye—which by the way—you never apologised for."

Lexa looked sheepish and wiped the board with her sleeve before jotting away again.

Sorry.

Clarke nodded approvingly and put down the take-out box in front of her on the tray table. "I get why you're taking it out on the nurses. You're used to being independent and I know that being trapped in this bed with people treating you like you're handicapped is killing you. I get it." she sighed and rubbed her head, "But you listen here and you listen good." Clarke edged closer with determined eyes, "I am going to take you into that O.R tomorrow and do my best to fix this. But it's going to take us both to do it. I'm going to give you one-thousand percent and I need for you to give me the same and try your hardest not to get stressed out. When you're stressed, your heart-rate increases rapidly and because of the trauma in your brain it's causing you to seize. I can't have you stressed out when you go through recovery."

Lexa wiped and wrote once more and held up the little board and there was a gnash to her teeth.

"That's easy for you to say.

"I'm prepared to make a deal. I'll take out the nasal tube they're feeding you through. I'll write in your file no one is to try and feed you, bathe you or you know, help you go to the bathroom," she swallowed and looked away awkwardly. "And I'll even let you have this General Tso's with sticky rice and extra soy sauce." she shook the paper bag and placed it back down on the table. "The trade off is that you let me help you do the things you need help with."

Lexa looked at her with a deep stare and no mirth. She chewed the inside of her lip and slowly, uncertainly, she nodded.

"Good, that's good." Clarke stood up from the chair and snapped on some gloves. "Let's get that tube out of your nose."

She stood over the lieutenant and lowered the bed until Lexa was lying on her back. Lexa stared at her and she stared back, pressing her thumb to her cheek bone for leverage as she pulled the tape away from the tube that was stuck to her face. For a moment, Lexa closed her eyes and Clarke wondered how long it had been since someone touched her face gently like this.

"This is going to suck," Clarke warned her and started to pull the tube out of her nose.

Lexa hissed and winced as it was inched out of her face and with each second her teeth and jaw gnashed together a little harder. Eventually, bloodied as it was, it came out and Clarke threw the evil thing away without a second thought.

"Better?" Clarke touched the tip of her hairline and her voice was full of concern.
"Y-yes." Lexa puffed and swallowed.

"Good," the doctor smiled and sat back down, raising the bed so Lexa was sat up once more. She opened the lid of the take-out box and grabbed the little plastic fork and shovelled some food onto it.

"H-h-how," Lexa paused and swallowed. "D-day?"

"How was my day?" Clarke looked up and smiled that soft little grin that made Lexa feel like she might poop herself like the unfortunate cagefighter. The doctor understood her with an effortless fluency and it was what drove their little interactions.

Lexa nodded.

"Well, I had a beer with my roommate and she tore me a new asshole because I haven't been home in a week and my cat took her side so I'm basically a pariah in my own home. Then I went to get Mr Chung's and here we are." she raised her brows and guided the fork to Lexa's lips.

The soldier reluctantly chewed the food and though she wanted to be indignant about it and make her position clear, the chicken melted in her mouth and the rice was salty in all the ways she'd missed and it was this tiny thing that made her feel human again.

"If I may be so bold do you have a boyfriend, lieutenant?" Clarke asked curiously.

Lexa shook her head furiously and laughed at the absurdity of the idea.

"Okay, okay! Can you blame a girl for trying to figure out if a cute soldier also plays on the same softball team." she playfully pushed her shoulder and tried to distract Lexa from her actions. she fed her another bite and Lexa tightened up again at being taken care of like this.

"G-gay?" Lexa raised her brow as she lazily chewed another mouthful.

"As gay as they come." Clarke replied, "My dad used to watch Disney movies with me and we'd talk about which princess I thought was the cutest that night. I was out before I was ever even in." she shrugged.

Lexa smiled as she listened to the doctor talk and it was only when she went to feed her another mouthful that she snapped back to reality and remembered what this all was. She hesitated before taking the fork in her mouth, almost scowled at it, and Clarke understood these things with the same fluency.

"Hey," Clarke cleared her throat and put the fork down. "Just imagine were on a date." she joked and rubbed the soldier's shoulder.

"Wh-wh-wuh,"

"Why?" Clarke narrowed her gaze playfully. "Lieutenant, I'm a moderately attractive surgeon and —"

"N-no." Lexa shook her head and grinned, "Wh-where?"

"Where?" a clarity washed over Clarke and Lexa nodded eagerly. "Venice." Clarke decided firmly and pushed the fork around the take-out box. "We're by a waterway in Venice—the real life one—not the Las Vegas knock off. The food and wine is amazing, you order the bruschetta and I take the fettucini."
Lexa nodded and laughed, "Wuh-wine?" she raised her brows.

Clarke poured a spoon full of the liquid morphine Lexa had refused to take prior to tonight. "Here, try the pinot grigio." she joked and put the spoon between her lips.

Lexa swallowed it back and winced at the bitter taste. Slowly, she raised her good hand and gave Clarke the thumbs up.

"Dry yet fruity, isn't it?" she leaned back and grinned but Lexa just rolled her eyes and gestured for another mouthful of food with a deep sigh that she'd been brought round to these things. Clarke obliged her, basking in the glow of tonight's victory, she lifted the fork to Lexa's mouth and she ate without the gnash or indignant eyes.

"Best General Tso's in all of Venice, right?"

Lexa laughed, it bursted out of her chest and rocked the room and rice sprayed everywhere. The sound was magnificent, beautiful even. It was the kind of laugh that made everything feel lighter and it filled Clarke's chest with the same mirth until she was laughing to and suddenly, neither of them were occupied with this unfortunate set of circumstaces.

"Sp-sp," Lexa almost lisped as she swallowed what was left of her food. "Sp-ain." she forced herself to sound out the word.

"Is this you inviting me on another date, lieutenant?"

Lexa shrugged and pulled her mouth into a little maybe looking shape.

"Once I've fixed your brain and you're out of ICU - we'll eat dinner in Spain."

"Ha-ppy." Lexa sounded it out softly.

"Me too, just look at that gondela go by." Clarke pointed at the nurse pushing a crash cart outside the window and breathed a deep sigh. "The sights are just breathtaking, right?"

Lexa just chuckled and shook her head again with a smile as wide as her cheeks.
Chapter 4

It was a quiet hour of the early morning when they finally finished. As if the building breathed a deep sigh and rid its lungs of passersby and interns alike, the corridors were empty and the only sound was the hum of fluorescent lights above and the wheels of the bed as she helped take Lexa, intubated and bandaged, up to recovery.

There were slaps to her shoulder and pats on the back as the team trickled out of the OR and each commiseration felt earned from sixteen hours on her feet in the deepest depths of Lexa's brain with nothing but the ticking clock to keep her tethered to reality. Finally, desperately, she blinked away her dry eyes and allowed her body to feel the drag of exhaustion.

"You did some nice work in there." Raven caught up to her and grabbed her shoulder with a grin.

"Were you in the gallery the whole time?" Clarke stopped and finally breathed a sigh of relief as the team piled in the elevator to take the sleeping soldier up to the eighth floor. "I'll be up in ten." she signalled to them as the doors closed behind her.

"Only for the cool part. How did it go?"

"Other than her heart stopping?" Clarke scratched her neck, "Pretty boring, actually. Just your run of the mill day to day crazy Frankenstein's monster surgery..."

"Yeah, sounds boring." Raven laughed with a sarcastic grin. "Come on, get cleaned up and I'll give you a ride home."

"Actually—"

"You're staying with Frankenstein?"

"Okay. Technically I would be Frankenstein. She would be Frankenstein's monster." Clarke rolled her eyes. "And yes, I'm keeping post-op observations tonight."

Raven shook her head and rolled her eyes in that playful way. "Have it your way," she shrugged and turned on her feet back down the corridor towards the senior residents lounge. "If you need me I'll be on the sofa watching Frozen."

"Same as every night then?"

Raven was a brief and necessary distraction before the trip upstairs. Upstairs was the start of the long walk towards the finish line, one that would ache them all to the very core. She climbed in the elevator and between the 2nd and 8th floor all she could do was fret on these things. Doubt herself. She allowed herself the time in the elevator to breathe it all out and the moment the doors opened again it was time to bury it back down.

"Doctor Griffin, I have the Woods family on the line. They've been calling every hour for an update?" the nurse collared her before Clarke had a chance to make more than five paces past the station. She backed up and took the covered receiver from the nurse's hand, posturing herself, inhaling a necessary breath.

"Lincoln?"

"Indra, actually." Lexa's foster-mother corrected her and Clarke heard her lean back in her chair on
baited breath for news.

"Mrs Woods, her heart stopped during surgery but we were able—"

"No," Indra's voice was barely a strangled whisper. "She didn't make it, did she?"

It was then Clarke head chaos erupt in the background, there was clattering and banging and throttled cries and she imagined Lincoln tearing the walls apart with his bare hands.

"Oh my god, Indra, she's great! She's doing great!" Clarke nearly yelled.

"Jesus f***ing Christ." Indra gasped for a breath, "Lincoln, Lincoln—" she pulled the receiver away from her mouth. "Your sister is fine, put your grandmother's urn down before I stick my foot up your ass boy."

Clarke waited patiently for a moment as the noise on the end of the phone settled.

"Did the surgery work?" Indra pulled the phone back to her mouth.

"The surgery went great, there were a few hiccups but she's strong. We removed around ninety percent of the shrapnel and her nerves accepted the stem-cell treatment beautifully. Now it's just a waiting game to see if she improves."

"Can we talk to her?" Lincoln grabbed the phone and she heard Indra gripe in the background.

"She's sedated right now but I'm about to go over and do post-op and I give you my word I'll let you know as soon as she's awake."

"Thank you for everything, Clarke." Lincoln's voice trailed off into a strained and desperately measured sound.

"You just make sure grandma's urn is in one piece big guy." she smirked into her cheeks and they said their goodbyes and hung up the phone.

She made her way to Lexa's room and it was the silence that unnerved her before the sight of wires and tubes and drips. In her profession, silence wasn't golden, it was a brassy imitation, fool's gold; screaming and crying and even elderly men inappropriately flirting were all symptoms of life threshing away for more than the hand it had been dealt. But there she lay, intubated and silent with the whir of the ventilator breathing for her and it was a sight Clarke could never conquer—it was probably why she had interns do all of her post-op work ups.

"You know, this is a lot like the first time we met." Clarke hummed to herself and checked the vitals on the monitors. "I'm definitely going to use this for a TED talk one day. I'm sure you'll complain about a bunch of mad scientists poking and prodding at you like you're a prize winning pig at a county fair but how about I buy you a beer when all of this done and we call it evens?"

She sat down and flipped open the chart, jotting away ineligible things for later use.

"You know," she licked the dryness of her lips and staved away the exhaustion that came for her with a little yawn. "What we did today is going to change the world. Once you're up on your feet, running around and talking like nothing happened, they're going to put us in the history books. They really are. I hope you scrub up well in your uniform Lieutenant because there is going to be a lot of girls at a lot of different charity galas who are going to be interested in you…and not just for that pretty brain I fixed."
The whirring of the ventilator that forced the rise and fall of her chest was the only sound to help soothe these unspoken things and Clarke felt strange seeing the soldier like this. It was too familiar. Too much like the night she found herself clutching a teddy-bear in her arm whilst doctors swarmed around her father's bed.

"Don't you dare think about not waking up," she squeezed Lexa's hand and it felt like a boundary she decided to somersault over without much caution. "Did nobody ever teach you it's rude to die for two minutes and thirty seconds on a cute girl's OR table? Asshole." she mumbled.
Chapter 5

The smell of lamb rose high into the air and unlike most days where there was an unspoken tension in the villages that came with the soldiers that wandered through their streets, today was for celebration and it didn't matter whether you were a local or an aimless traveller brought here on the high-winds of war.

There was an old woman, veiled with wrinkled hands wrapped tightly around a chipped plate, she walked slow with aching hips through the small crowd of sons and brothers and nephews who congregated outside her doorway scarfing away at their plates and spilling into the street. They scowled and put up a fuss, though the old woman cared little for it and shooed them away until they finally moved aside.

"Ant takul." she pointed at Lexa with a clawed finger and walked right into the middle of the soldiers.

"Saadiq, what is she saying?"

He smiled in disbelief as the woman finally stood toe to toe with the staunch lieutenant. She was well in her seventies and much shorter than Lexa, maybe shy of a clean five foot, yet somehow the young soldier still gripped her gun tight to her chest and swallowed nervously and that tiny action was enough to make him chuckle beneath his scarf.

"She says you must eat, Lieutenant." Saadiq grinned at Lexa. "It's the end of Ramadan, it's a time of great celebration for our people."

"Oh, no thank you." Lexa smiled at the old woman and nodded.

The old woman turned to Saadiq, her hand painting the air with harsh sounds that belonged to a language Lexa didn't understand. Nonetheless, she stood her ground and refused to return back to her home with a full plate still in her hand.

"It is a great offence not to eat an offered meal, Lieutenant." the translator turned back to Lexa.

"Yeah, I gathered that part." she rolled her eyes.

"Hey if you're not going to eat it, can I?" Lincoln called over to his sister and pulled down his sunglasses. "Logistics screwed up the kitchen shipment and we're on rations until Friday, Commander." he reminded her.

"You make a good point." Lexa called back and eagerly took the plate out of the old woman's hands. "Shukraan." she smiled at the old woman and thanked her. There was more food than she could eat; there were lamb kebabs, dumplings thick with spiced meat and topped off with yoghurt, naan bread and rice, onion salad, tandoori, it all looked delicious.

She started to eat and the flavours ran down the back of her throat in that satisfying way that came from eating nothing but dehydrated rations for four days. "This is so good." she mumbled to the translator with a kofte meatball inside her cheek and her eyes nearly well rolled into the back of her head. "Shukraan." she nodded eagerly at the old woman.

The woman nodded approvingly and crossed her arms, waiting until the Lieutenant had tried a little of everything on the plate. "Kikum," she eyed all of Lexa's men and pointed at them, gesturing for them to follow her back to the front door of her house so she could feed them as well.
"It could be a trap, ma'am." Lincoln eyed Lexa cautiously.

"Seriously, take your chances the dumplings are out of this world." Lexa wiped her mouth with the corner of her sleeve.

"You heard your C.O boys… those who want to take your chances follow me." he lead the way and followed the old woman through the group of male relatives who side-eyed them all furiously.

"That lady," Saadiq saddled up beside Lexa with his thick pashto accent as they walked towards the dusty cemented house. "She was the wife of the head of this village."

"What happened?"

"He died in a bomb blast at the council building in Walakan two years ago." he explained as they walked through the group of men.

There was a particular venomous stare they reserved for Lexa. One hissed something in Arabic and spat at her boots and she didn't bother asking him to translate the full remark because she already knew it was arabic for shameless slut. It certainly wasn't the first time someone had muttered that under their breath at her since she landed here. However, probably some combination of the food on her plate and the older woman's kindness meant it was the first time she didn't promptly punch the offender in the mouth.

"Let me guess, insurgent attack?" Lexa asked as they entered the hallway.

"Correct. The people here still hold the Americans responsible."

"Why? We're here trying to stop the insurgents?" Lexa furrowed her brow and moved through the line of her men who lined up patiently for a helping of dinner.

"The presence of the Americans and the raids on the villages before the fall of Bin Laden radicalized many of the moderates." Saadiq explained, ushering her through the corridor and into the kitchen where the old woman dished out food onto a row of plates.

"Do you know any Arabic? Maybe a little Pashto?" she eyed the Lieutenant and although her accent was thick, her English was good.

Lexa paused for a moment, looking between the old woman and Saadiq.

"He won't help you." the old woman scolded Lexa.

"No." Lexa shook her head and blushed, setting down her near-empty plate on the table. "Shukraan." she gestured her head down to the food and then pointed at the men. "Thank you for feeding us." she said slowly.

"I taught English at Kabul University for twenty-two years." the old woman told her bluntly with barely any hesitation between the words.

Lexa could see her eyes squinting through her veil and assumed it was a wry smile. The old woman took a plate from the table, topping it up with lamb and kofte. "Also you're welcome for the food. Saadiq told me of the situation back at your camp, it would be un-Islamic of us not to share what we have at Eid."

"Doesn't seem like everyone else is as eager to help us as you are." Lexa scratched behind her head.
"They don't know a better way." her voice was soft and harsh all at the same time and it reminded Lexa of growing up with Indra. "I grew up in a different time, we had something close to democracy when I was young and we lost it somewhere along the way." she frowned and passed out plates to the soldiers. "My youngest daughter, twenty-four, very smart girl. She can't go to medical school because the Taliban issued a fatwa so that the girls are not to attend university."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Lexa frowned.

"Don't be. I have watched you march your men up and down these streets for months. You've fixed the wells, brought the street lamps back on, brought doctors to the children. The men are starting to respect you and that is how we win these fights. Little things." she gestured with her finger and thumb, turning back to her pot to sprinkle saffron over the dish she was cooking.

"Thank you for the rousing pep talk."

"Get that thing off your head and tell me your name."

Lexa chuckled and removed her helmet, tucking it under her arm. "Lexa Woods." she held out her hand.

"Khaleda bint Ahmed bin Tariq Khan-Mahfouz." she nodded at the young soldier and Lexa pulled her hand away nervously. "You can call me Mrs Mahfouz." she called over her shoulder as she stirred her pot.

"Mrs Mahfouz it is." Lexa nodded and clasped her hands behind her back. "If there's anything we can ever do—"

"I'm going to teach you Pashto." she cut the Lieutenant off and took the pot off of the boil and dished it up on plates as the soldiers took turns and eagerly grabbed them. "The women and girls in the village do not speak English and they are forbidden from talking to men outside their families, including Saadiq. If you want to really learn the locations of the insurgents you will have to learn Pashto and talk to the women; we want the Taliban in power just as much as you do."

"Can't you just translate for me, Mrs Mahfouz?"

"If the men in the village learn I am giving you information they will come for my sons. If they think I am simply teaching you the language so you can chatter with the children perhaps they will look more favourably upon it." Mrs Mahfouz lowered her stare. "You will come here tomorrow at dusk with Saadiq."

"You know, in another life, you would have made an excellent army woman Mrs Mahfouz." Lexa grinned and fixed her helmet back on her head. "Alpha squad, Tango, move out." she roared at the men and they did as they were told, each placing their half-finished plates back at the table and thanking the old woman.

...

Five days had passed since the surgery with no real progress. The room was dull, there was flowers on every available service and a flag, blue and red with stars and stripes, hanging up on the window for a reason unbeknownst to Clarke. It was all so dull. As if the world was sepia and all Clarke could taste was the bitter-sweet tang of almost succeeding. Almost improving this woman's quality of life.

Lexa blinked and looked at the ceiling with unfocused eyes, there was a heavy sweat that constantly clung to her brow no matter how often Clarke wiped it away and pushed back the wisps
of dark hair that stuck to her head. The vitals beeped in a constant rhythm as if everything was okay, as if everything was fine, but it wasn't.

The I.V bags hung next to her bed dripping antibiotics into her bloodstream all hours of the day and the shunt drilled in her skull drained off the fluid but nothing brought down her fever or reduced the swelling on her brain.

On the second day there had been an attempt at words, bits of gibberish that rolled off her tongue in the hours after they took her off the vent. The third day, Clarke changed the dressing that wrapped around her head and switched out the shunt that drained the blood off her brain, Lexa grabbed her hand and looked at her for just a moment with hazy eyes, mouthing bits of stuttered gibberish in her direction.

These little attempts at escaping her prison came in waves that grew more frequent and Clarke stayed in for the long-haul to roll them out with her. She took up camp beside the bed with her laptop and made it her office for all the hours of the day when she wasn't in surgery.

"Dr. Griffin, the test results you asked for." the nurse stepped through the door and disturbed the absolute silence Clarke had unwelcomingly acquired.

"Thanks Zaina," Clarke forced a smile and stretched out against the chair.

Taking the folder from the nurse's hand, she stifled off a yawn but the nurse caught it anyway, chewed on it, spoke out against her better judgement.

"Changing her dressings and bed pans isn't much of a job for a surgeon." Zaina eyed her and crossed her arms.

"Zaina-"

"Go home. You spend more time here than the interns and it's not good for your soul." she sighed.

"I promised her I'd stay," Clarke shrugged and pushed her glasses up her nose as she flicked through the test results. "As soon as the infection clears and she comes around, she's going to have a lot of questions." she scratched the side of her neck and dismissed these things.

"You live five minutes away, Clarke. I can call you. Someone can call you." Zaina took a few paces back in side the room and wrapped her fingers around the young doctor's shoulder. "You won't be much use to her if you're running on fumes when she wakes up."

Clarke looked up at her thoughtfully, she put down the test results on the bed and rested her hand over the one clasped around her shoulder. "Don't you get tired of mothering over us all, not even after all this time?" she laughed.

"Of course not, you're all my little chickens." she smiled.

"Raven told you to talk to me, right? Make me go home?"

"This has nothing to do with Raven. This is about you taking care of yourself so you can take care of this young woman." Zaina lowered her brow and Clarke knew this fight was already lost.

Lex muttered something quietly as she stared at the ceiling, browbeaten from the infection and hallucinating no doubt. Clarke let a desperate sigh engulf her chest as she stood over the soldier.

"Lexa, can you hear me?" Clarke said slowly, wrapping her fingers gently around her shoulder to
check for some sort of response, though there wasn't much. "Nothing." she said with exasperation and flopped back down. "Three days and all I can get out of her is gibberish."

Zaina stood and blinked for a moment, almost in a trance, she took a step closer to the bed. "Say it again, slowly."

"What?" Clarke looked at her and squinted.

"I'm not talking to you." Zaina eyed her for a moment before taking up post at the other side of the rig. "Say it again?" Zaina said again softly.

"b-balaa, a-ayn—" Lexa paused, licking her lips as she stared off hazily at the ceiling. Eventually she got the words out, they were harsh on the tongue with long vowels and on second inspection Clarke almost recognised the syntax as something she'd heard before.

"La tujad aljunud," Zaina rubbed her arm, "Innah bikhayr." she hushed her gently and it seemed to do the trick and she drifted off to sleep.

"What the hell just happened?" Clarke looked between them both.

"She's talking in a dialect of Arabic… god knows how." Zaina shrugged and watched over her. "She's asking, where are the soldiers?" she looked up at the doctor.

"She's talking in Arabic?" Clarke levelled a dead stare and crossed her arms, waiting for the joke to be revealed.

"Well, hallucinating in Arabic."

"But she said something coherently, right?"

"Stranger things happen." Zaina shrugged and chuckled.

"Wait," Clarke ran her head through her hair. "She said, where are the soldiers?" she stared wide eyed.

"Clear as day." Zaina nodded.

"She put together a full sentence?"

"Stuttered and slurred, but yes."

"This whole time," Clarke's voice shook with an immeasurable joy and frustration, she looked between each of the walls and worked her wrecked nerves into wringing hands. "This whole time I thought I was losing you and you've been putting sentences together… in Arabic?" she finally laughed down at Lexa's sleeping figure and a weight was off her shoulder.

Lexa didn't reply, adrift and away with medicine and hallucinations of worlds far away from both of their grasps.

"It seems you have an overachiever on your hands." Zaina couldn't help but grin too.

"You know what I think I will go home and get some rest… this feels like enough progress for tonight." Clarke chuckled and folded her sheets of paper into a neat stack. "Arabic." she shook her head again and laughed.

"I will keep her company, don't worry about that." Zaina smiled and took up Clarke's now vacant
chair. "I'll keep you updated."

"Please, do." Clarke headed for the door with her head held high enough to nearly touch the ceiling.

"Freakin' Arabic!" Zaina heard her laugh once more in the hallway.
She came back in bits and pieces... tiny important victories. Every day there was something new, another notch chiseled, another harsh and jagged mountain climbed. Until her pupils dilated and her lungs shuddered without help and her mouth quirked into forlorn little smiles that turned into bashful grins and it was all of this that Clarke used to measure each step they took out of that dark void where a heroic mis-step on a hot day in Kandahar threatened to leave them indefinitely.

Clarke walked down the hallway with a bounce in her knees, it exuberated through each step until she relented and let her belly fill and bubble with the excitement of seeing today's new achievement. Yesterday was laughter, it was drawn out from Clarke's featherlight touch against the inside of the elbow of her bad arm whilst the doctor fussed over a catheter that sat beneath her vein and it was this tiny thing alone that set off that thick and lush feeling of excitement in Clarke's gut. Lexa was starting to feel sensation in the right side of her body again.

"Hey Colonel." Clarke swung round the open door and grinned.

"Cl-Clarke," Lexa grinned and tried to pull herself up with her good arm, "How—" she paused and licked her lips and like a saint Clarke waited patiently in this mastered way that never once felt pitiful. "Y-your—" Lexa paused again and there was a gnash to her teeth from frustration.

"My day was just… blissful." Clarke sighed and sat herself down in the visitor chair beside the bed. She kicked off her shoes and swung up her feet to rest on the edge of the mattress.

"I watched one of my ducklings fly solo today, quiet girl, the others don't think much of her but she just has these hands that know what to do… like they're already three steps ahead of herself. She's a born neurosurgeon if there ever was one."

"D-duck—" Lexa quirked her brow and bit her mouth, "Duckling?" she tried again and got the word out.

"My interns… the ducklings." she nodded and stretched out, "So what's the plan tonight? Judge Judy re-runs? Snapchat Aden? Run a 5K?" she lifted her shaped brow.

Lexa shook her head and there was a hopeful glint in her eye, her lips mashed together in that way they did when there was too many words in a sentence for her to process and so she stared at the notepad on the cabinet just out of her reach until the doctor obliged her.

"Sounds like a pretty big plan so far…” Clarke mumbled as she pulled off a sharpie cap and placed it in the soldier's weak grasp.

I want to go outside - I haven't had fresh air in two months.

She held up the page and Clarke scanned it with her eyes before quickly scoffing, "Nope. No way. You're two weeks out of surgery so risky there wasn't even—"

Lexa held up her hand and cut her off, running a line through her notepad.

"I want to go outside - I haven't had fresh air in two months.

"I know." Clarke frowned and sighed, she rubbed her head and Lexa waited patiently with green
eyes that scored the doctor to the bone. Lexa's stare was gentle and desperate and aching like an animal kept in a cage far too small for its size.

"I know you want to go outside." Clarke whispered quietly and there was a guilt that shrouded her like an impenetrable cloak.

"P-please," Lexa mouthed and pointed at the window, "It- It's, raining."

"You like the rain?"

"Love it." Lexa nodded and her chin wobbled desperately though she didn't cry. It probably would have been easier if she did, consoling tears was part of the job and Clarke was masterful in shoulder squeezes and encouraging little words but there was a deep yearn in her eyes that left a shameful film that clung to all the bits of Clarke's skin.

"I'm your doctor not your getaway driver." Clarke shook her head and looked to the ceiling. "I can't do this and I'm sorry. I'm sorry you're trapped here. I'm sorry you can't talk. I'm sorry you can't get up and walk. Most of all I'm sorry I have to tell you no… but this time I do. I promise you I am going to fix you and you're going to get better and after that, you can chase every drop of rain until the skies run dry. I promise you." her voice trailed and she swallowed it back, nodding without restraint.

"I-It's okay." Lexa nodded along too. She extended her hand and rested it over Clarke's, squeezing until the doctor finally gave in and looked her in the eye. "Not y-your fault." she shook her head and pointed at herself with a little forlorn smile, "Mine." she squeezed her hand again.

"You get some sleep, okay Chief?" Clarke said quietly and pulled her hand away.

She headed for the door and didn't stop for a second to say goodbye. Her steps were fast but the bounce in her knees was different this time, fueled with an eagerness to skip and jump and run until she was far away from room 307.

Thankfully it was a late hour of the night and there was barely anyone around to see her in this state, bent over against the wall drawing in deep breaths to calm her nerves. Quickly, she wound herself back up again and stood tall, pulled her phone from her pocket and counted out the seconds in her head until she felt the thrumming of her chest slow to a pace that felt reasonably normal. She quickly thumbed a text against the screen to Raven and waited less than seconds for a response.

Raven, I think I'm in too deep with Frankenstein. (unread)

You think?

I'm being serious. (read - 22.35)

Sometimes it's okay not to be a robot with people... you got the memo right?

For less than a second I genuinely thought about breaking her out of here for a joyride. (read - 22.35)

Sweet! Can I come?

Raven!!! (read - 22.36)

Look if you want someone as boring and straight-lace as you to nod along to this whole 'woah is me I'm such a bad person' bullshit then tell me and I will CC Bellamy into this conversation.
Asshole. (read - 22.36)

Pink and hairless or bushy and threatening?

Seriously we're doctors not teenagers I have to establish boundaries with this girl, right?" (read - 22.37)

She asked you to take her outside... not to take off her panties.

So you're saying I should? (read - 22.37)

I'm saying maybe she's not the only one who needs some fresh air. Who better to take her for a coffee than her friendly neighbourhood brain surgeon dyke?

Does every neighbourhood come with one? (read - 22.39)

Only the liberal Jewish ones.

Delete your account. (read - 22.39)

Clarke pocketed her phone and swallowed the nervous saliva that had collected beside the backs of her teeth. She shook her head and looked off at the rota board to see who was on shift, specifically if there was anyone good at keeping secrets.

…

"Okay, you ready?" Clarke called through the door, wheeling in the stolen wheelchair from the fourth floor.

Her hair was down, tucked behind her ears with a beanie covering the top of it, there was the plaid shirt under a green parka and light blue skinny jeans and chelsea boots. It was the first time Lexa saw the doctor out of office-wear and medical coat, Lexa breathed her in and realised she was one of those lesbians, the thought made her smile.

"Dude, seriously, it's now or never, you ready to break some doctor patient boundaries and go for a joyride?" Clarke pulled her car keys out of her purse and rattled them with a grin.

"Q-quick." Lexa shook herself alert and eyed her as she pulled her body up against the backboard of the bed.

"I know I changed my mind quick. I told you my roommate was a bad influence." Clarke shrugged and wheeled over the chair. "Jump in, I'll drive." she looked down at the wheelchair and winked.

Lexa eyed her sarcastically and grabbed Clarke's arm for leverage as she helped her into the chair.

"Sarcasm is a new addition to your repertoire, Miss Woods."

"Lieutenant." Lexa eyed her seriously though the turn of her lips gave her away.

"You said that without stuttering." Clarke leaned in and grinned.

She held up the hoodie from her purse against Lexa, she was skin and bone and it was a little too big but it would do the trick. "We're going undercover so if anyone asks you're my speech therapist, okay?"

"G-g-got it." she scrunched her good hand into a thumbs up and winked as Clarke dressed her,
guiding her arms through the sweater sleeves and pulling the neck gently over her bandaged head.

"Any ideas where we should go?" Clarke kicked off the brake and pushed her towards the door.

"S-Spain."

"How about the Taco Bell drive-thru?" Clarke mused as they rushed towards the waiting elevator. "Same difference, right?" she hit the ground-floor button repeatedly until the doors closed behind them.

"Th-thanks." Lexa looked up with aching green eyes and Clarke felt warmer for it as they descended through the veins and vessels of the hospital. There was a pause, quiet and necessary as they made their break for freedom.

"Any time." Clarke said quietly and wrapped her fingers around Lexa's shoulder.
The town was sodden wet, the buildings dripped and the water ran in the same direction and converged on the roads until the gutters and drains couldn't cope anymore and gave up under the rain's effort. Though it didn't stop Clarke, pushed her further more than anything, the tires of her car took to corners with precision and the water from the deepest puddles splashed up onto the windows with a noise that sounded almost like applause. It was dark and with each passing slither of light from the street lamps they passed, she peeked at Lexa out of the corner of her eye and stifled a little smile. The soldier sat tucked into the interior of the door, elbow pressed into the tiny ledge where the window met the panel, peering out on the buildings they passed and the people who nursed umbrellas against the violent torrent of rain.

"So, where to Miss Daisy?" Clarke reached over and gently grasped her shoulder.

Lexa smiled and looked to the floor, she hauled her good arm up and placed her hand over Clarke's and they sat there for a moment. "T-thank y-you." she tapered her smile and patted her hand. "I d-d-don't—" Lexa paused and bit her lip, "I don't mind." she said slowly.

"Should have took you out for dinner before I went rooting around in your brain, funny how things work out right?" Clarke wise-cracked and unfastened her seatbelt as they pulled into the side of the road; head lamps lighting up the vast empty space in front of the road where needle-like prongs of rain fell to the ground.

"Stopping?"

"Something like that." Clarke huffed and climbed over the centre console until she was balancing next to the gear stick with a foot jammed into the side panel of the driver-side door, she grabbed the I.V bag out of the med kit she brought with her and ripped the plastic off with her teeth. "It's cold out - can't let you get dehydrated." she shrugged.

"Hy-hygienic."

"Worse things happen at sea, soldier."

Clarke grinned and hung the I.V bag from the handle above Lexa's window. The thin tube snaked down into a coil and Clarke tugged it firmly, attaching it into the port that burrowed inside of Lexa's elbow.

"C-careful," the soldier looked up at her as she opened the port. "M-might deflate."

"I'll blow you back up again if you do, don't worry." Clarke winked and they both chuckled softly.

"Will I—" Lexa paused and sighed as her mouth ran dry, instead she gestured with her hands and tried to pull the words out of her chest. "G-get better?" she finally swallowed and lowered her gaze.

"Define better." Clarke leaned back in her seat and earned a deep silent scowl from the soldier. "Ah, sorry—" she shook her head. "The thing is Lexa," she tapped her thumbs against the wheel and swallowed. "You are the first person to have this type of surgery. I think you'll get better, I hope you'll get better, all we can do is keep pushing forward."

"I'm t-tired, Clarke."

"We can go back to the hospital?" Clarke eyed her and moved the stick shift out of neutral.
"No," Lexa grabbed her hand from pulling into reverse. "I a-am," she bit her lip and wound her teeth in frustration and all the doctor could do was squeeze her hand back. "I am tired."

"Aren't we all." Clarke agreed quietly. "You've been getting better every day, just be brave a little longer, okay?"

"N-num—" Lexa tried and caught herself once more. "N-num—" she huffed and swallowed.

"Take your time." Clarke encouraged her.

"Number," she forced it out with a gasp and pointed at the iPhone plugged in to the radio. "Your number?"

"I don't normally give that out to patients."

Clarke shrugged herself forward and swallowed, keeping her eyes focused on the road as the little window wipers took as much off the screen as they could.

Lexa rolled her eyes and grabbed the phone anyway, thumbing her number into the screen as it came to life and lit up her face. "T-t-there," she smiled and put the phone back down.

"You're not good at listening." Clarke shook her head.

"Nope," Lexa agreed and crossed her arms, thumbing out letters against her own phone screen. Maybe a moment or less, Clarke's phone started to buzz.

"I'm not checking that whilst I'm driving, it's against the law." Clarke eyed her sternly.

The full brunt of Lexa's expectant gaze rested on Clarke until finally she started to caved. Clarke breathed a big breath and pulled into the Taco Bell parking lot.

"You don't like being told no, do you?" she glanced at the soldier and reached for her phone.

' Maybe I just want to be able to use the full breadth of my vocabulary.' the text message popped up on Clarke's screen and the backlight highlighted the dips of her cheeks whilst Lexa watched hopefully, the lip of her hooded shirt hiked up between her teeth.

'Just don't start dropping Arabic on me again.' Clarke smiled and shook her head. Lexa grinned and her thumb worked furiously and tapped out letters and words.

'Well… don't go infecting me with brain worms again and I won't need to.' Lexa wryly grinned and somehow swallowed a chuckle.

"Hardly did that on purpose." Clarke looked up from her phone screen and laughed. "This feels weirdly normal." she looked between Lexa and her phone.

'Yeah, well, maybe I want one night off from being your favourite retard.' Lexa looked up to the roof of the car and let out a breath she didn't know she was holding.

"Do you think that's how I see you?" Clarke's face soured a little. "I hate that word you know, it's so offensive." she rubbed her knee nervously.

'I graduated top of my class at West Point. First female Brigade Commander in the school's history and look at me now…' Lexa shrugged and the pattering sound of the rain outside was all that comforted her. 'Retarded.' the phone buzzed again.
"You're not a retard."

"I c-c-an't talk—" she involuntarily paused for a moment, "b-be-cause my b-brain is in two." she demonstrated with her hands, pulling them apart from one another, biting her mouth until she could taste the metallic note of blood. "I c-can't walk." she tapped her leg, "I c-can't feel my side." she started to growl, "my f-f-face slopes down f-f-from s-s-str-oke."

"Okay," Clarke hushed her and wrapped her hand around her shoulder until the vibrations of her body stilled into one deep frustrated sigh. "It's okay, I get it… you really want me to call you a retard." she whispered and the corners of Lexa's mouth betrayed her into a soft kind of grin.

'You're not funny.' her phone buzzed again.

"And you're not anything less than what you were before." Clarke raised her brow. "You're sharp enough to convince me into breaking every doctor-patient boundary in the book, remember?"

'Well, not every boundary.' Lexa's smile widened into a bold grin.

"Gross." Clarke looked at her phone and rolled her eyes.

'So how much trouble will you get in for us being AWOL?' Lexa tapped away as they pulled into the drive through.

"A lot. Could lose my job, who knows?" Clarke rolled her head and grinned, "It's fun living this vicariously, right?" she stretched out and turned the radio on.

'I'll get an XXL stuffed burrito with extra guacamole and nacho cheese. Plus a steak quesadilla.'

"How about no." the doctor chuckled as she read the text message and looked up at the soldier in her passenger seat with the makeshift I.V pole rattling above her. "Do you want to have another stroke? Because that's how you get another stroke." Clarke scolded her with disbelief.

'What can I say, Dr Griffin. I'm a high-achiever.'

"They don't eat extra nacho cheese in Spain." Clarke fished for her purse behind the driver's seat. The phone buzzed three times whilst she was rooting around for her wallet and Lexa's disappointment was palpable. "Plus all that dairy isn't going to be good on your stomach this quickly after surgery-"

'Please just for tonight, stop seeing me as your patient.' the phone buzzed again, 'I just want to be who I was before. Just a normal girl riding around in an old muscle car with a pretty doctor… eating junk food and not worrying about my cholesterol.'

Clarke finally sat up and read the messages and Lexa watched her carefully with hopeful eyes, biting the lip of her sweatshirt and digging her thumb into a strand of thread that had came loose on the sleeve.

"How many pretty doctors have took you for a spin in their muscle cars?"

'More than you would believe.'

"Okay, so, second date, we're driving down the coast in some little Spanish town in a rusted out van and we stumble across a taverna, the kind with cheap and dirty food. I get a slice of tortilla and you get the…"
"XXL stuffed burrito with extra guacamole and nacho cheese ;)

"Okay," Clarke rolled her eyes with a grin. "What are we doing on our date?"

'Grabbing food before we move on to our next destination to solve more small town crime.' Lexa laughed and it was a pleasant light sound that drowned out the shrill and intrusive noise of the radio.

"I like that." Clarke agreed, pulling up to the order point. "Next time, I want to eat sushi and walk through a Japanese garden." she pointed her finger at the soldier playfully.

'Well you better hurry up and fix my legs otherwise I'm going to have to tuna-roll instead.' she pointed at her wheelchair that was jammed in the back pressed against the rear window.

Clarke laughed, really laughed, it rattled her chest and her mouth hung wide and just for a second Lexa completely forgot about the gnaw in her skull and the lack of sensation in her legs and the faltering of her mouth. It was all meaningless the moment she heard that sound.

…

They pulled into the hospital parking lot right towards the back where the staff entrance was tucked away at the side of the building, assured to be empty at this hour of night. The rain had stopped and much like the night in general; it was special no matter how brief, or at least it was to Lexa.

"Can I walk you upstairs to your apartment?" Clarke softly smiled and turned off the engine of the car, wrapping her scarf around her neck and mouth to brace the cold once again.

'Wait.' Lexa tapped another text message, staring right in front of her at the view of the suburbs below the hill as they existed in their lush midnight silence beneath a sky full of bright white stars.

"What are we waiting for?" Clarke pressed.

'A miracle? Lexa looked at her desperately. 'I just need a few more minutes to be a soldier sat next to a pretty doctor.' Clarke's phone buzzed again.

'I have all the time in the world." Clarke nodded along and tucked her fingers inside Lexa's clasped hand.

'There's something we need to talk about, Doc.' Lexa sat herself up a little straighter with her good hand and watched Clarke's brow furrow curiously.

"Dr Griffin, huh? Sounds pretty serious." she read the message on the screen.

'Tiny victories aren't enough Clarke. I don't want to be in pain for the rest of my life... trapped in a wheelchair, unable to talk, unable to do anything.'

Clarke shook her head and put the phone down. She stared out at the suburbs beneath them just as Lexa did, just as she was doing now. There was a silence between them and it was a manufactured, purposeful thing.

"What are you saying, Lexa?" Clarke glanced at her bitterly.

'There's these clinics in Canada for people who are hurt real bad. It's peaceful, they just give you a shot and you go to sleep and it's all over. No more pain.'
"No more anything." Clarke shot her an angry look and guffed with disbelief and the car was suddenly too small, "We're not—" she huffed, "You're not doing this, Lexa. I'm your doctor. I won't allow it."

Quietly, with an assured quickness that came from knowing the exact location of the particular photos she stared at with a hateful envy every night before she fell asleep, she passed her phone to Clarke.

"What's this?" Clarke peered up at her.

"L-look." Lexa nodded her head.

Clarke skimmed through the photos, dozens of them, she was stood tall at the top of a mountain with an American flag blowing in the wind, she was skydiving out of an airplane, drinking beer with her brother in a makeshift tavern on an army base somewhere, she was alive and grinning with a suntan that illuminated her freckles. A completely different person to whom she was now.

"W-w-watch video," Lexa pointed at the screen.

Clarke hit play and the young dashing Lieutenant came to life. It was a bright day, the sun blurred the focus of the camera and the sand and dirt swept up into a giant gust and settled back down into a dusting over everything in reach as Lexa took shelter from the sun under a piece of plastic suspended over a makeshift market with a few of her men.

"What are you doing, Lincoln?" Lexa looked up at the camera and pushed it away with her hand, grinning and trying to stifle it. She was beautiful, hair tucked back into a military approved bun but her smile and her eyes and her little mannerisms were anything but tempered. "Get that thing away from me."

"Why don't you show Mom and Aden your dance moves from last night?" Lincoln pressed her, zooming in on her face until Lexa pulled down her sunglasses.

"Soldier, I don't know how you got those names but if you continue to disobey an order—"

"Come on, Lex, no one is paying attention. It's one-hundred twenty degrees out here."

"You want a court martial?" Lexa lowered her sunglasses and eyed her brother over the top of them. "You're heading for one, believe me."

"Just say hi, come on!"

"Hi." Lexa said gruffly.

"Aden, buddy, yesterday we were in an Apache helicopter and Lexa had a missile launched on a Taliban outpost. I'll send you the video as soon as it's rendered." Lincoln rambled in the background.

"Don't tell him that!" Lexa shoved his arm out of shot. "You realise that information is classified you potato with eyes." she growled.

"But it was awesome!" Lincoln muttered. "Tell him how awesome it was."

"Okay, fine, it was awesome, okay?" she crossed her arms and wisps of hair blew in the wind.

"You saved a lot of lives yesterday, you know that, right Lex?" Lincoln asked and zoomed out so
her camouflage covered shoulders were in shot too.

"That's what we do. We are Special Ops." she shirked off the compliment and stared at the camera. "One day you will be too Aden." she winked and span on her feet, "Alpha squad, Delta, break time is over ladies! Move out!" she roared and a sea of bodies moved against each other like worker ants and loaded into giant armoured trucks.

"Okay so you were a complete fucking badass." Clarke gave the phone back and pretended she didn't know where this was going. "You still are, okay?"

Lexa shook her head gently and her thumb tapped away once more.

"This isn't who I am and when your trial is over if I'm not back on my feet they'll put me in a V.A hospital somewhere to gather dust.'

"I won't let that happen. I'll get extra funding, I'll work pro-bono, I won't ever let that happen to you Lexa." Clarke swallowed back any facet of emotion, "You can't really be considering this?"

I've already made up my mind. One year and if I'm not out of this place I'm checking out permanently. I'm tired of pain.' her eyes watered just slightly and she looked back out to the stars with a stony reserve.

"You still are you potato with eyes." Clarke pushed her shoulder and Lexa chuckled, "Seriously. One or two chair adjustments and you'll be rescuing cats out of trees and helping old ladies cross the street. You've already improved so much."

'One year and if I'm not out of the chair, still talking like Porky Pig from the Looney Tunes, I'm done. I just wanted you to know that option was on the table.' Lexa glanced at her with a forlorn little smile and patted her hand. "One year, C-cl-clarke." she swallowed.

"Good," Clarke nodded and her jaw was tense with frustration, "Because I don't need a year. I'm going to fix you up in six months, okay?"

"Y-you s-sure?" Lexa furrowed her brows.

"No, I'm not sure, but I'm damn well going to try and you better too because I'm not wasting my time or talent helping you if you're just gonna end it all in some badly decorated serenity room in a Swiss suicide clinic this time next year."

"Canadian." Lexa corrected her with a grin.

"You're not funny." Clarke shook her head and climbed out of the car. "This is the fucking worst second date ever." she nearly slammed her door and she stormed around the car to fetch the wheelchair out of her boot.

'I'll do better next time, promise Doc <3' the phone buzzed in Clarke's pocket.
The walk up the stairs of her apartment building was arduous, the lights flickered and the building hummed with the sound of rattling pipes and noisy vents. It was late but—of course it was late—there was never an early hour or an opportune time Clarke took to venture home. It was always well into the night, always filled to the brim with a special kind of exhaustion, always dragging herself through the door to collapse on the sofa and be out again for another surgery before day break.

She opened the door and lingered in the hallway for a moment, hanging up her coat and scarf, fixing her boots straight on the oak wood floor. It took a second to register the chatter from the kitchen and the glow from the hanging light.

"...So then she throws back this boomerang and catches her grandma right in the smacker, grinning ear to ear, running around doing this screaming noise. That was when we knew she was gay—"

"Hi, Momma." Clarke scratched her head and shuffled into the kitchen. She kissed Abby on the cheek and sat up on the countertop next to where her and Raven chit-chatted, pouring herself a glass of wine.

"Hi honey," Abby patted her leg. "Good day at work?"

"Eh, tolerable."

"Don't I get a hello?" Raven raised her brow indignantly and raised her hands, slapping them back down at her sides for good measure.

"No," Clarke pointed at her and forced back a wry smile, "You spend more time with my mom than I do and I'm starting to get suspicious that I'm not your favourite Griffin anymore." she took her first sip of wine and sighed.

"Do you want the truth or a beautiful lie?" Raven lifted a brow and earned a chuckle from Clarke.

"I was just telling Raven about the time you went as Xena the Warrior Princess to dress-up day during Kindergarten." Abby leaned back against the counter-top and with the motion Clarke caught a whiff of her mother's perfume, it was her favourite smell in the world, it smelt like the Bluegrass fields they lived beside when they were stationed in Virginia when she was small. Clarke couldn't help but fill her lungs and shuffle a few inches closer to her mother.

"You came all this way to tell Raven about the time I split grandma's lip?" Clarke raised her brow.

"No, I came all this way to talk to my daughter who I haven't seen since Christmas by the way." she bit and levelled a stare, "By the way, are you using the Vitamix I got you?" Abby asked and looked between them both.

"I commandeered the Vitamix." Raven crossed her arms and leaned against the lower cabinet. "I'm on a liquid only diet now Abs."

"Abs?" Clarke nearly spat out her wine and her eyes grew wider, "You call my mother Abs?"

Raven smirked and elbowed Clarke's hip, "It's not as if she can use a Vitamix in her car, which is where she lives most of the time now, down by the river shilling for bits of scrap metal to sell." Raven pulled her mouth into a wide frown and nodded sympathetically. "I'd be concerned if I were
"You."

"Shut your whore mouth." Clarke rolled her eyes and in turn earned an eye-roll from her mother at the cursing.

"How come you've been coming home so late? I called Ted in H.R and he said you've put in a hundred and twenty hours this week. Apparently the interns can't keep up with you, Clarke." she gave a long glace that seemed to never end, waiting for an explanation.

"Sorry Mrs. Government, not good enough just being the mayor you've got to subpoena Ted in H.R now, huh?" Clarke chuckled and brushed it off, "Look don't sweat it, Mom. I'm good. Everything is good. I've got it under control."

"That's not what Raven tells me…"

"Raven is a drug addict. We don't listen to Raven, okay Mommy?" Clarke wrapped her in a hug, she leaned over her shoulder and threw Raven the finger with a scowl. 'Fuck you.' she mouthed at her friend.

"You better not be giving Raven the finger." Abby murmured as Clarke kept her tight in a hug.

"She is." Raven said nonchalantly and refilled everyone's glass with the open wine bottle. "Ever since she's been busy fixing Frankenstein she doesn't have any time for little old me anymore." she sighed sarcastically.

"Frankenstein?" Abby pulled away and looked at Clarke curiously.

"It's nothing, Ma."

"It doesn't sound like nothing."

"I'm working on the trial—"

"You're working on the trial?" Abby's arm suddenly grew wide and her posture stood tall, "As in the stem cell therapy trial?" she scoffed and shook her head, annoyed as she ever was. "I can't believe you didn't tell me, Clarke."

"I knew you'd try and talk me out of it," she shrugged and slipped off of the countertop to stand on the tiles. She shirked her sweatshirt up against her body, her nose pressed into the stitching, it smelt just like Lexa and it was the strangest sense of comfort. "I applied for the funding last year and they gave it the greenlight to start looking for a candidate back during Thanksgiving."

"This has been going on since Thanksgiving?" Abby swatted her shoulder, "Believe me, you're never too old for your mother to ground you Clarke Griffin."

"On the plus side she was a rockstar in the O.R. Everyone is talking about how she brought a zombie back from the dead." Raven shrugged and smiled, "The girl, she's doing really well, right Clarke?"

"The girl?" Abby said with a raised brow.

"Yes, the girl." Clarke sighed. "Lexa. She's gaining speech back... slowly. There's also limited sensation returning in the right side of her body. It's a work in progress but so far…"

"So far it's great. It's amazing. There's no way you're not going to win the Ramon Cajal award this
year." Raven reassured her with a grin.

"My daughter… Ramon Cajal nominee and this is the first I've heard of it?" Abby huffed and chewed the inside of her cheek and her eyes glistened with a sad kind of anger. Clarke melted underneath it, looked to the floor and swallowed her words and suffered it bravely.

"You won three Ramon Cajal awards before you retired from surgery… it's no big deal…"

"Exactly. I won three Ramon Cajal awards, the highest prestige a Neurosurgeon can be bestowed. And you never once consulted with me! Didn't even have the decency to tell me you were even pursuing my old research!"

Clarke gulped back her wine and watched Raven shrivel into the wall, melt underneath the tension of it, she was glad it knocked the smile off of her face. She'd opened a can of worms if ever there was one.

"It was just a little close to home, Mom." Clarke placed her hand over Abby's.

"Exactly." Abby pulled it away and played with a piece of threat on her jeans, "What happened to your father," she shook her head and swallowed back an inferno, "We need research like this to save soldiers like your dad." she nodded at her own words, "It would have meant so much to me to have helped with something like that…"

"Mom! You still can! Jeez!" Clarke grabbed her for a hug and chuffed a small laugh, "You're acting as if you're not, like, the founding father of this kind of research. It was you who inspired me to do it!"

"It's just hard to swallow when your daughter doesn't need your help anymore. First it's shoelaces and then stem cell therapy."

"I'm twenty-eight."

"You're a newborn."

"Twenty-eight, Mom."

"Twelve, tops." Abby frowned.

"Are we really doing this in front of Raven?"

Abby nodded into her shoulder and wrapped her arms around Clarke and kept her close like a little duckling. "Your father would be so proud I'm just not ashamed to admit I'm a little jealous that you cracked it."

"There's been so many advancements over the last few years. The type of stem-cell vector were using didn't even exist before you ran for mayor." Clarke rubbed her arm, "Think of how many people you help now, Mom. You make the school buses run on time and you make sure the homeless get fed and you get funding for the elderly people so they're not alone all of the time. You're the rockstar, not me."

"Can't you both be rockstars?" Raven chipped in and sipped her wine, "Look at you guys you're the Griffins! I mean, you're like the first family of Neuroscience."

Clarke nodded in agreement to that sentiment, "I'd love it if you came by tomorrow and took a look at what we're doing. Lexa is so special, Mom and I, well, I guess I need your help with this." she
regretfully asked, knowing she would kick herself in the morning for letting her mom commandeer this thing the way she did everything else.

"Why, what's going on?" Abby pried.

"You know how Dad told you if ever he was hurt real bad we should just let him go... and then he got hurt real bad and we had to let him go?" Clarke forced her voice steady. "Do you ever wonder what would have happened if he'd of woken up with long term injuries?"

"I should go..." Raven put her glass down awkwardly.

"No, stay." Abby raised her hand and met Clarke's steady facade with one of her own. "I try not to, your father was a real guys' guy. He would have hated being in a wheelchair or lying in a bed all day."

"Well, Lexa, she's, er, she's decided that if we can't fix her, she's, she's going to seek assisted suicide." Clarke ground her jaw and nodded along to the rhythm of her own words.

"Clarke..." Abby said softly and touched her arm.

"No, it's fine," she jerked uncomfortably from her mom's touch, "we're just at the beginning and er, it's only going to get better but I could do with a fresh set of hands." she felt her chest harden into iron at the idea of Lexa quitting.

"Clarke you're crying." Abby said softly again, clutching her arm and refusing to let go. "Why are you crying about this girl?" she raised her brow curiously.

Desperately, ashamed and repulsed at her lack of control, Clarke wiped away the rogue few tears with the backs of her hands and swallowed the sore ache in her throat.

"I'm sorry, I'm not... I'm not in too deep. I promise. I'm just so exhausted." she shook it off and felt silly for the display. "Just come by tomorrow and I'll show you the results so far and we can figure out if there's anything we can do to get her back on her feet. Gotta Ramon Cajal award riding on it after all." she chuckled and hated herself for lying and pretending that she cared about something as meaningless as an accolade. That wasn't what the work was about and Abby knew it just as well, maybe even better, the real award wasn't being recognised by the world, but being recognised by one person for changing theirs.

"Okay, so long as you're sure you want my help."

"I do, Mom. You guys go back to whatever it is you were doing, come by the hospital tomorrow morning and don't bring your mayoral necklace. Just coffee."

"Got it." Abby hugged her tight.

With that, exhausted and repulsed at the display of emotions, Clarke trudged down the hallway until she found her bedroom door and hid herself behind it. She didn't brush her teeth, didn't draw the curtains, didn't change clothes. Instead, she flopped down on the mattress and inched her way up to the pillow, resting her head into the centre of it. She pulled out her phone and stared at the blank screen, no messages, no voicemails, nothing to distract herself with and so she couldn't help herself. She pulled up the conversation from the car ride and eagerly thumbed a message to the soldier.

You awake? (read - 22.56)
I am now… what can I do Doc?

Just wanted to warn you we have company tomorrow. Be on your best behaviour! (read - 22.56)

Company, you say? Is she as pretty as you? Is she single?

She's my mom. (read - 22.58)

Shit.

I know right I feel exactly the same way. (read - 22.59)

Is it too early to introduce you to the family? (read - 22.59)

Why exactly is your mother visiting me?

My mom was the head of Neuro at the hospital before she became the mayor, she's just going to help me go through the trial results. (read - 23.00)

Your mom was the head of Neuro and is now the mayor? What about your dad? Is he a supreme court justice?

My dad was a soldier, he died. (read - 23.02)

I'm on a roll tonight.

I can see that. (read - 23.03)

I'm sorry if I upset you with what I said in the car. I appreciate everything you're doing for me… I really really do.

You didn't upset me. Like I said, we're going to fix you. (read - 23.05)

I'm guessing something is wrong, why else would you text your favourite retard at 11pm?

Astute. Is it okay if we pretend nothing is wrong? (read - 23.06)

Sure how about we go on a date right now?

I'm gonna get in serious trouble if we keep going on dates, Lieutenant. (read - 23.07)

Do you want to pretend everything is okay or not? Because I'm lying in a hospital bed right now with a diaper on and I only have the resolve to manage my own shit today.

Has anyone ever told you, you're kind of an asshole? (read - 23.17)

Takes one to know one. We eating Sushi in Japan like you wanted to?

We are indeed. (read - 23.18)

Well… you better start then.

Okay, so, it starts with Kyoto. (read - 23.20)
Chapter 9

The tiny sound of laughter bled out of the hospital room into the quiet din of footsteps and rattling wheels as Abby walked down the hospital hallway with coffee in hand. She walked with a pride, back straight and smiling at the nurses who recognised her. It was different now, she was neither the former-head of neurosurgery or the city mayor, she was a dowager, the mother of Dr. Clarke Griffin. There was a great pride she took in that; to have her legend status relegated to the back of everyone's memory by her daughter's success.

"Knock knock." she poked her head around the door and grinned, "Coffee as requested."

"Thanks Mom," Clarke chuckled from the side of her patient's bed, perched there like a little bird. She smiled from ear-to-ear with a spoon in her hand that she brought to the soldier's lips, feeding her small bits of cereal. "So, after we've wagered peace and brought stability to the feudal lands of Kyoto. Do we travel back to the future?"

The soldier shook her head and Clarke was drunk on it, giggling away and barely registering her mother behind her; watching and observing these things.

"I can come back later?" she said abruptly and hid her disapproval behind a tight smile.

"Mom," Clarke cocked her head and frowned, completely above the illusion of her mother's indifference. "Come and sit down with us." she patted the visitor's chair. "Lexa's been practicing her party-trick all morning ready to meet you."

Abby placed the coffee down on the side table and picked up the clipboard at the end of the hospital bed. "Clarke Griffin," she scolded and flicked through empty sheets of notepaper. "There are barely any vital updates on here. I know you know the importance of recording data. I taught you myself—"

"Mommy," Clarke rolled her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose. "I have them right here. Everything is digital now." she passed her an iPad with endless bits of uniformed and notarized vitals.

Abby flicked and scrolled through them with a tinge of pink to her cheeks, "Sorry. Things have changed a bit since my day." she forced a smile at the soldier who eyed her curiously.

"You going to do introductions or just jump straight into research jargon." Clarke teased her playfully.

"Lieutenant, please excuse me." Abby forced a little laugh and walked to the empty side of the bed where Clarke stood from. "Dr. Abigail Griffin," she extended her hand with a warm smile and took the soldier's.

"Lexa," the soldier said and squeezed her palm. "It's a pleasure." she said slowly.

"Did you see that?" Clarke beamed with pride. "She's been practicing that little party trick all morning; no stuttering, no nothing."

Abby flashed her a little quirk of her brow and looked between her daughter and the patient. "Seems like you guys are pretty close?" she said softly and scrolled through the soldier's vitals.

"She is," Lexa paused and licked her lips, "She is a-" she tried once more but the words didn't come
to her with that flowing ease. "She's o-okay." she settled on the words and looked at Clarke with a gentle longingness that was apparent to the older doctor.

"I'm calling a multi-disciplinary team meeting next week to see how we can adapt a plan to make living independently as easy a transition as possible." Clarke finally made eye contact with her mother and took a gulp of the black coffee from the side table. "We can make Lexa an outpatient and do her therapies from somewhere a tad more comfortable. What do you think?"

"I think," Abby exasperatedly laughed, "I think you're insane." she glared at her.

"Now listen," Clarke nodded and pointed. "There's a ground-floor apartment a few blocks away from the hospital that was already specially adapted for a previous tenant. I called the V.A hospital and they made some phone calls and the Army will pay for any other adaptions we need to make." she beamed at her mother, though she didn't smile back, not even a little bit. "This is the part where you're like: Clarke, you did it! You're nearly there!" she ground her jaw.

"No. This is the part where I'm like: you're making a stupid mistake." Abby folded her arms and passed her the iPad back. "Your patient is the sole participant of a trial that could change the lives of a lot of people. You go taking her out of this place and she has an accident? The board and the Army will withdraw funding so fast you'll find yourself blacklisted from any opportunity like this again."

"This is my patient and you're not the head of neuro anymore, Mom." Clarke challenged her with a determined glare that made her look too much like her father.

"Good job I'm not! If I was, you would have been removed off her case weeks ago!" Abby finally snapped and yelled, "You don't just make special exceptions, you don't go sneaking patients out of this hospital to drive around town, you don't get personal. You don't get attached. You should know better than this Clarke, I taught you better!"

"You taught me better?!" Clarke matched her tone and volume with wild eyes and cheeks that burned with embarrassment. "The last patient you got attached to, you married and ended up killing him—"

The sound of the slap radiated and bounced around the room. It was fast and hard. Her palm stung violently and Clarke grabbed her cheek in defense, bent over and breathing in deep breaths.

"Clarke I'm sorry." she said quietly and stepped forward, cupping her face with her hands.

"Get out." Clarke whispered, chest puffing in and out.

"Clarke—"

"Leave."

…

Clarke holed herself up in the room and made pretense of being busy with vitals and reports that she could use as an excuse to stare at the tablet screen and ignore everyone else. Lexa waited patiently; silent and unwanted for more than Clarke could give.

"She s-seems nice." Lexa spoke up after an hour passed with quirked brows.

"A real treat." Clarke grunted and shook her head.
"C-come sit with m-me, Dr. Griffin." Lexa patted the bed and smiled softly.

"A little inappropriate given the circumstances." she brushed it off and continued to stare at the iPad screen and scroll through her vitals. Lexa obliged her and sat quietly for a moment, staring, chewing her cheek.

Clarke sighed and holstered the tablet on it's charging station. "Are you going to keep staring at me like that?" she lowered her stare.

"I h-have a lot of time on my hands," Lexa shrugged. "What else w-would you h-have me do?"

"I don't know, maybe you could take up cross-stitching?"

Lexa held her hands up as an example, the one that worked was gnarled across the knuckles with callouses from a life of toil and war, and the other was limp and knurled thanks to her stroke.

"Okay, I get it." Clarke shook her head and rose from the chair.

"R-really want you," Lexa licked her lips and let the words catch up to her. "Want you to lie beside me." she patted the bed.

Clarke looked at the closed door and the shut blinds that opened out onto the hallway and nurses station. It was early afternoon, time for the changing of the post, no doubt empty and likely to be that way for a little while at least.

Her chest was heavy with lead and she undoubtedly knew these things were wrong. Not wrong in anyway she recognised; Lexa was a person, she breathed and laughed and bled like everyone else, though she didn't cry which was an oddity. It was wrong in the eyes of the board; a collection of nameless and faceless people who decided all clauses of morality like a hivemind of overlords that she had to abide. Apparently, bonding and liking and growing to care for someone beyond the parameters of the profession were inexcusable.

But in a shining moment of impenitence where she cared little for any and all consequences, she stood up from the visitor's chair and shuffled on to the bed with her head on the pillow and her feet on the end like they were two sardines trapped in a can and breathed a pent up sigh.

"You choose." Lexa lazily dropped the remote on her chest.

"Judge Judy."

"No." Lexa elbowed her and smiled.

"What?" she couldn't help but chuckle, "Feels a lot like I don't actually have a choice."

"There's al-always a choice." breathed and eyed her softly, and suddenly, they weren't talking about the television at all anymore.

Clarke rolled on her side with her head resting on the inside of her arm and stared at the soldier quietly. Knees wrapped up into her chest. Lexa peered back at her with those green eyes and pursed lips.

"Do you think were, you know, too close?"

"No." Lexa said firmly and wrapped her fingers around Clarke's hand. Clarke looked down nervously and although she knew she should have pulled her hand away and got off the bed… she
didn't. "Too c-close now?" Lexa glanced up and smiled.

Clarke nodded with wide eyes and a silent mouth.

"Now?" Lexa whispered and shuffled a little closer, just enough to rest her forehead against Clarke's.

"Yep. This is probably breaking some state laws." Clarke whispered back softly and closed her eyes, head pressed against her head, enjoying the simpleness of this pleasure.

"Tell me about your dad." Lexa ordered.

"Why?"

"B-because." Lexa pulled her head away to eye her curiously.

"He was a soldier," she said and she was unsure of why she was obliging this girl; she never spoke about her father. "Not a fancy officer like you though." she shook her head and grinned, "He was an Oklahoma boy; joined up straight out of school. He got shot in the leg in the Persian War, that's how he met my mom."

"Romantic." Lexa smiled and Clarke just shook her head and stared back at the TV.

"He er," Clarke swallowed. "He died when I was five. Bosnian War; took a shrapnel injury to his brain and they couldn't fix it."

"Did y-your mom det-onate t-the bomb?"

"No." Clarke squinted her eyes and made a face.

"Then she h-hardly killed him."

"Okay, Lieutenant." Clarke rolled her eyes and sat up, "You're off base."

"No, you were." Lexa gently grabbed her wrist, "C-call your mom."

Clarke paused for a moment and chewed on the words, there was a sigh and a swallow and a shudder that moved through her body at the knowledge that Lexa was right. Undoubtedly. "I'll make you a deal," she eyed the soldier and Lexa raised her brow in response. "I'll call mine if you call yours."

"I-it's different, Clarke."

"Why, because you have aphasia? I've met your mom and she doesn't seem like the kind of person who gives a rat's ass about poor excuses like that one." she scolded her and earned a little chuckle from the woman.

"Deal." Lexa relented.

Raven sat curled up on the sofa, right in the middle of the comfiest cushions with her head lolling against the chair-arm. The television droned and filled the silence of the apartment and along with the purring cat that pawed her feet, it was almost enough to distract her from the mounting paperwork on the coffee table.
She heard the door open and close, heard the footsteps creak through the hallway and the familiar sigh from a long shift finally finished.

"Griffin!" she called and rubbed her head, "You better be game for bong rips tonight otherwise I'm officially breaking up with you and moving in with Octavia."

"Wrong Griffin." Abby called from the kitchen island.

Raven snapped her head and closed her eyes and whispered curse words under her breath. She cleared her throat and sat up straight on the sofa. "Abby, I can explain—"

"There's no need." Abby smiled and scratched her neck, bleary eyed and gravelly from an aching throat. "I shouldn't have just barged in - I thought you were both at the hospital and I just wanted to drop some things off for Clarke."

"Are you okay?" Raven made her way over and softly touched her shoulder. "You've been crying." she said quietly.

"Griffins don't cry." Abby's chest chuffed and heaved under the weight of the lie like a steam train. "Really, thank you, I'm fine." she brushed it off and sniffed it back.

"Okay, you're as terrible of a liar as your daughter. Sit down, I'll put some coffee on." Raven pointed to the sofa and ordered the mayor to her place.

"How's surgery treating you?" Abby questioned her with little distractions.

"I don't know," Raven sighed and put the pot on. "How's your daughter treating you?"

"I asked first."

Good point." Raven conceded and leaned on the counter-top. "I've had nothing but hip replacements and three private consults for torn ACLs this week. I'm losing my mind."

"What more do you want?" Abby chuckled.

"I don't know… maybe a few bone grafts? Hell, even an amputation would spice things up a little." Raven shuffled back over with two mugs. "I mean, Ortho pays well so I can't complain on that front."

"When I was the chief on the internship program I always thought you were better suited to pediatrics."

"You think I work well with kids?" Raven raised an incredulous brow and took a gulp of her coffee.

"No." Abby laughed, "You are a kid. But that aside, you have very precise hands. I was there in the gallery during your first solo surgery and you didn't hesitate once. A surgeon with hands like that is capable of working on tiny precise things; like babies."

"Alas, we will never know." Raven shrugged and kicked up her feet on the coffee table. "Maybe I'll get a research project of my own… meet a dashing soldier and pretend there's nothing going on."

"So you had your suspicions too?" Abby breathed a relieved sigh that she wasn't alone.

"After the second week she didn't come home, it was either that or Stockholm syndrome. I don't
even think Clarke knows she's in too deep with this one."

"Yeah… apparently having a soft spot for boys in green runs in the family." Abby eyed her over the cup.

"How did things go today?"

"Great."

"Liar."

"They were terrible." Abby relented and clutched her head, "Things were said and the worst of it; I don't regret any of it. She's pushing Lexa too hard and too fast and Clarke has never wanted advice from me, especially when it concerns Neuro."

"Well, Clarke's stupid." Raven shrugged and leaned back in the chair. "If my mom was half the surgeon you are, I would break my own damn leg if it meant she'd teach me how to put it back together."

"Your mom's an Ortho too?" Abby asked and chuckled softly.

"No, she was the manager of a DMV—but the point still stands."

"You're a funny girl, Dr. Reyes." Abby rolled her eyes and breathed a deep sigh that blew the upset right off her bones. She looked around the apartment, from the vinyl player to the bookshelf and off to the little pictures on the exposed brick wall and it reminded her of her own youth.

"See anything you like?" Raven teased as she caught the mayor's wandering eyes.

"No. I mean, yes, but not like that." Abby's lips caught themselves in an upturned little grin, "This place is just… so Clarke."

"Are you sure? Because I could have sworn you were eying my vitamix earlier."

"You mean the vitamix I bought for Clarke?"

"Still. I'm searching your bag on the way out."

Abby laughed and brought her feet up onto the sofa and tucked them beneath the rest of herself, "Truth is the governor of Ohio sent me one for my inauguration and I already have two. Do you think that makes me a bad mom regifting my gay daughter a vitamix from the most powerful Republican in the state?"

"Oh, definitely, no wonder she hates you." Raven rolled her eyes sarcastically. "You know I've always wanted to know… does the mayoral key actually open every door in the city?"

"Go and pack your bong and I'll tell you." Abby chuckled and rubbed her head. "It's been a long day and I walked over so I don't have the car with me."

"Wait, are you," Raven paused and was suddenly nervous, "Are you kidding or?"

"You think I don't smoke?" Abby levelled a stare.

"You're the fucking mayor of course I think you don't smoke."

"Oh honey," Abby burst into a fit of laughter that shook the room. "I'm a grassroots politician who
was born to two Woodstock hippies."

"Does Clarke know?" Raven moved to the kitchen and opened up her stash cupboard.

"Why spoil the illusion that I'm uptight." Abby shrugged.

"Okay whatever you say Bernie Sanders." Raven packed her bong. "She's going to kill me if she finds out, you know?"

On command and summoned by her name, Abby's phone vibrated in her pocket and Clarke's face flashed up on the screen.

"Later," she said to herself and let the call go to voicemail. "I'll call her back later."
Weeks passed and change came with it. Speech and physio sessions dragged on until Lexa gained her faculties little by little, step by step, wobbling on canes with legs that bent and bounced like a castanet puppet. Everyone encouraged and celebrated her progress and yet none of it was enough. No amount of hobbling and tripping and dragging herself to the bathroom and not wetting herself along the way would be enough cause to celebrate.

It was a violent early hour of the morning when Clarke finally came and found Lexa waiting up in bed, it was a routine they fell into after long surgeries and double shifts, Clarke would drag herself to the little dim hospital room and Lexa would pretend not to be expecting her. Sometimes they'd just talk, other nights they watched television, most nights something tiny and wonderful happened like a kissed cheek or a brushed nose, it was always enough to keep Lexa going for one more day in the mundane boringness of her prison.

Clarke appeared at the door and Lexa put down the book she was reading, patted the free side of the bed she saved for when the good doctor finished her shift. Wordlessly, Clarke snuck forward and closed the door behind herself.

The night sky outside rumbled and cracked beneath the force of the brewing storm and Lexa suffered the brunt of it with quiet flinches that came with each snap of thunder, teeth digging into the sides of her mouth painfully. Clarke pretended not to see these things and for that Lexa was grateful. The television droned on whilst they lay on the hospital bed in a comfortable silence with the blinds hung low, keeping them safe from prying eyes which was the most important thing above all else.

Clarke rubbed her own tired eyes and tucked her arm beneath her head and recovered with finesse from a long shift that still had it's talons dug into her. Without cause or reason, Lexa was addicted to watching the way she did it, the way she unwound her muscles one by one like a suit of armour she removed at the end of the day.

Another crack of thunder snapped the sky, "It's just the weather trying to look busy," Clarke reassured her patient after a particularly vicious flinch and earned a sloping little smile that didn't quite stick as another crack of thunder followed quickly.

The television droned on and Clarke made expert pretense that she was interested in the local news above all things, including the girl lying beside her who stole glances frequently. She was a great pretender, entirely invested in the broken riverbank that flooded a parking lot in Maidstone and the local hero who stopped a robbery in a gas station up by route nine, right up until another crack of thunder broke their reverie and earned a noise from Lexa's chest that burst through her gritted teeth. Without hesitation Clarke's fingers were wrapped up in her own.

"Hi," Clarke whispered and slung herself on her side to face the soldier, tucking a piece of hair out of Lexa's face as she did.

"Hi." Lexa smiled back softly and blushed as her racing heart battered her ribcage. Clarke's hand was soft against her cheek and she willed them to stay there, wrapping her own around them for good measure. "Sorry I-I'm not good with-

"It's okay." Clarke hushed her.

"Thanks."
"Tell me about your childhood?" Clarke tried to distract her over the sounds of brewing trouble in the skies beyond their little sanctuary.

"No." Lexa whispered and smiled.

"Oh come on," she chuckled, "You scared I won't like you anymore if I hear how much of a little asshole you were?" Clarke teased.

"I'm still a little asshole."

"Your speech therapy is definitely coming along." Clarke hummed observantly.

"I aim to please." she slurred and hated herself for it.

Clarke bit her lip and somehow kept herself in check. "Come on, tell me about what it was like growing up in Indiana?" she shuffled a little closer until Lexa could feel her breath on her cheek and the soldier was powerless to refuse her request.

"Hell." Lexa forced a little smile. "I was a ward of the state… born with withdrawal symptoms. The police found me next to a burned out whore house, someone m-must have thrown me out the w-window and left me outside but I clung on for days."

"Really?" Clarke's mouth curled into a frown, her eyes softening from shock to sadness.

"No." Lexa broke into laughter and earned a huff and slap to her shoulder. "My birth mom was fourteen when I was b-born. She skipped town when I was little and my grandma could barely keep her own kids out of trouble let alone take care of m-me." she shrugged.

"You must have hated them." Clarke shook her head.

"Never. We're all just trying to survive, Clarke." she said with a quiet solemn tone and for a moment spared a thought for the concrete corridors of the foster home she grew up in.

The corridors were freezing at night, the only reason she knew that was because the older girls made her sleep there when she fell out of favour with them. Resigned to her fate, she'd drag her pillow and blanket and sleep out there, or at least try to, sometimes one of the nuns would find her, they were the best nights, they'd bring her down to the kitchen and she'd get a cookie and warm milk. Assured in the knowledge that the older girls would be scrubbing floors all weekend. Most of the time though the corridors stayed empty except for her shivering figure, those were the nights she fantasised about a family the most.

"What are you thinking about?" Clarke stirred her.

"Nothing." Lexa lied and her mouth pushed a little empty smile.

"Are you lying?"

"Is that any of your business, Doc?"

"Fair point." Clarke replied and let it be, "Did your birth family ever come and see you?"

"Not really. I got a Wilma from my grandma's sister one year, I thought if I kept her in mint condition and she saw how neat and good I was she'd want to take me home and keep me." Lexa chuckled.

"A Wilma?" Clarke's eyebrows quirked in curiosity.
"Yeah, she was the Walmart off-brand version of Barbie." the soldier sighed and rolled on her side so she was nearly nose to nose with the doctor. "She came with her own uniform."

"Fuck." Clarke breathed through a frown. "This is the worst story ever."

"Ever?"

"In the history of worst stories." Clarke traced a thumb down the inside of her patient's good arm.

"I kept Wilma in her box and hid her behind my bed but the older girls in the dorm found the doll and took her... that was the end of t-that." Lexa blinked and knew with absolute certainty that her resolve was stronger than the gnaw in her heart at such memories.

"What happened after that?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me the truth." Clarke pried.

Lexa bit her mouth and pretended not to know what Clarke was talking about for less than a minute, eventually the facade grew weary and she relented. "I... appertained," she licked her lips and sighed, "I appertained a rotting dead toad, and when the ring leader who stole Wilma fell asleep that night I kneeled on top of her arms and slapped her in the face with it until its head fell off."

"You didn't stutter once telling that story." Clarke soured with repulsion.

"It's a great story."

"You **appertained** a putrefying dead animal?"

"I did."

"Where from?" Clarke grimaced.

"Lincoln." Lexa chuckled, "At the time, he was the little boy I played with through the f-fence that separated the girls and boys h-homes." she recounted with a smile.

"Will you tell me more?" Clarke dared to lock her fingers in Lexa's and clutch her hand

"It's very complicated."

"I'm very smart." Clarke reminded her.

"Lincoln's dad was... a bad man married to a good woman who couldn't have children of her own. He got his secretary pregnant and she gave Lincoln up the moment he was born." Lexa frowned and bit her mouth, trying hard to remember these things, ever since the accident everything felt hazy and uncertain but some memories were so deeply ingrained she recalled them like they were yesterday. "The first time I saw him he was three years old, crying because his ball landed on our side of the fence and the girls wouldn't give it back. I wrestled it off of them, took a few punches in the process, but in the end when I volleyed it over he never even said thank you. Just took it and wobbled away like a little asshole." she couldn't help but shake her head.

"Love at first sight then?" Clarke raised her brow.

"Love at first sight." Lexa smiled.
"So how did you guys find Indra?" Clarke pressed and her hand dipped under the neck of Lexa's shirt absentmindedly to examine a little mark on her collarbone.

Lexa bit her mouth and let the good doctor work with her gentle reverence.

"Are you asking me these questions b-because you want to know me, or b-because you're testing my memory?" Lexa challenged.

"Maybe an equal mix of both?" Clarke smiled.

"She was a good woman married to a bad man." Lexa humoured her. "Let's save some for tomorrow?"

Clarke nodded and rubbed her thumb over the little mark on her shoulder. They stayed there for a moment like that, tending and being tended to, until another crack of thunder whipped the ground and Lexa shuddered like a wounded predator, her body curling inward until she was small and soft and so very fragile in all the ways she hated.

"It's okay," Clarke wrapped her arms around Lexa and pulled her against her own body. "I can get you some headphones if that'll help? Whatever you want to do, I'll do, okay?" Clarke murmured against her ear, palm of her hand pressed against the smallest part of her damp back.

Clarke's hair smelled like fruit. Lexa liked that a lot, so much so that she stayed in her spot with her nose pressed into the good doctor's neck just a little longer than necessary.

"Lexa…" Clarke whispered guiltily, sighing and shrugging away from the warmth of her body against her own desire.

"Mmm?" the soldier murmured.

"I, er, there's something we need to talk about." Clarke propped herself up on her elbow and stared at the girl in a way that consumed them both. Lexa was unruly brown curls and green eyes and plump lips that slurred tiny beautiful things and as much as she was broken and trying to be the opposite, she wasn't the total sum of her damaged parts, not to Clarke at least.

"There's something I've been thinking a lot about—"

"It's okay," Lexa nodded softly and took her cheeks in her calloused hands. "I kn-know this goes against the rules." she whispered.

"You're a patient," Clarke inched a little closer. "I'm your doctor and it was my fault. It was. I should have never allowed things to get this far but—but I can't do this anymore." Clarke swallowed and nodded. "I could lose my job and if… God." she clenched her eyes and drew a breath, "If my mom found out… I can't cross this line with you. I won't." she bit her lip.

"It's okay," Lexa hushed her and moved a piece of wispy blonde hair out of her face. "Really, it is." she slurred with a little smile.

"I should have been more professional…"

"Yep. Would have been an idea."

"I just… I'm starting to like you a lot."

"You would have liked that girl even more." Lexa nodded her head towards the picture on the table
of her and Lincoln in their tactical khakis.

Clarke shook her head and before she knew it, her cheeks grew wet from little inconvenient tears. With a learned tentativeness, Lexa led Clarke down to her chest and held her there, knuckles dragging over her shoulder blade softly, lips pressed to her head. "Hey now," Lexa hummed, "It's okay."

"Do you hate me?" Clarke whispered, snivelling.

"No… not even a little bit." Lexa smiled and held her there. "We're all just doing our best to survive."

"This is so unfair." Clarke mouthed and balled her hands up in Lexa's shirt.

"Good job we're quitting while we're ahead."

Clarke felt like a child, petulant and stuck in her ways with a favourite worn old ragdoll that she could sew and put back together at whim. Clarke grabbed her in that necessary and visceral way, her hands worked over the entirety of her rag doll, though her deft fingers grew gentle and slow over the bits of her that still needed a little repair work.

"I like this girl," she whispered and dragged her nose down Lexa's nose. "This is the one I want." she admitted.

Their lips finally met in a desperate collision. Lexa leaned in to deepen the kiss first, her hands found Clarke's soft cheeks and tilted them just slightly enough to work her tongue over her tongue. It was sharp and Clarke tasted like a revelation.

"We shouldn't." Clarke leaned forward and rested their foreheads against one another.

"We shouldn't." Lexa agreed and kissed her again with a little grin. Clarke soon relented, curled against her battered and war-worn soldier with her fingers curled in her hair, kissing Lexa, breathing her in, basking in her as if she were the last dregs of sunlight before the gnawing stretch of a long winter.

"Lexa..."

"Come on a real adventure with me." her nose stretched along the beautiful vast expanse of Clarke's collarbone, breathing in the soft delicate scent of her perfume. "Forget Venice and Kyoto, I want a real date with you, Doc."

"We shouldn't keep doing—"

"If we both just lived our lives doing the things we should do..." her jaw tightened and her eyes grew earnest, "We would have never met in the first place."

"Where will. I can't believe I'm saying this," Clarke sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, "Where will we go?" Clarke bit her lip.

"Let's get in the car and I'll show you."
They were three hours in, trapped on an endless bit of interstate that stretched and bent further than they could see. There was a hazy golden glow to the treetops and the sky basked in lush shades of deep purple that melted into lilac with the rising of the sun.

They had passed the stateline miles back and it concerned the good doctor nowhere near as much as it should have. It felt freeing. It felt like the further away they were, the more she could be someone else entirely and with that came a tiny smile and fleeting eager glances at her passenger.

Lexa pretended she was unaware, curled up and pressed into the door of the Firebird with closed eyes and lips that pulled at their corners in pure joy every time a slither of morning sunlight cut a leyline through them. Clarke colluded with her in the game and other than a reserved few sighs the silence was preserved for just a tiny bit longer.

"Mmmph," Lexa made a long noise as she stretched her good arm above herself.

"Morning." Clarke smiled softly and stared in front of the winding empty highway.

"It wasn't a dream?"

"Nope. We definitely ran away." Clarke's lips pulled into a lofty grin.

"Does this mean we can just be two ordinary girls?"

"Speak for yourself, I've always been just an ordinary girl." Clarke smiled softly and glanced across the console that separated them in the old muscle car. "You like this girl?" she pointed at herself.

"Oh, I like that girl." Lexa nodded, enthralled and not too concerned with pretending otherwise. "She's a g-great girl."

"Good," Clarke bit her mouth and stifled a reddening grin. "Open the glove box."

"Are you about to ask me to marry you?"

"Shut up." Clarke rolled her eyes, "Just open the box."

Dutifully Lexa's shaky good arm extended out and the little dexterity she had recovered was enough to open the clasp on the third attempt. "Clobazam." she pulled the pill bottle out and examined the label, "You buy the sweetest gifts." she smirked.

"Shut up," Clarke chuckled again and shook her head, "take two, they control your seizures." she passed her over a bottle of water from the side door. "It's a popcap so don't worry about unscrewing it." she reassured.

"Thanks for reminding me, Doc."

"Sorry."

"Don't be," Lexa threw the pills in her mouth and took a glug of water with a shaky hand. "It's n-nice having a girl worry about me… and my seizures."

"Once the stem cells have finished healing the neurons and blood supply network in your brain—"
"English."

"Once your brain isn't fried." Clarke relayed and took an exit off the interstate into Hagerstown. "You probably won't need anti-seizure medication. And with the progress you're making so far? I mean, there's no way you're going to… you know."

"Want assisted suicide?" Lexa knitted her brow.

"Mmhm," Clarke said quietly and drove on, wishing and praying for the blissful silence they'd acquired before. "I could really go for some pancakes… what do you think?"

"Doc," Lexa said in that quiet and certain way that wrangled her stomach into nothing more than a giant knot. "Look at me."

"Pancakes or breakfast burritos." Clarke murmured and ignored her.

"I'm in pain… I walk like a string puppet."

"Definitely pancakes."

"I can barely go to the bathroom by myself," she continued, "I'll p-probably never play ball with my kid brother again. I'll never dance with a pretty girl in a bar."

"I feel like it's too early to go for maple syrup and bacon on them though." Clarke mused and ignored her companion.

"Can you stop with the fucking pancakes?" Lexa growled an angry noise from the hollows of her chest.

"No I can't!" Clarke hissed and slammed the breaks on, turning into the hard shoulder of the highway, she put her hazard lights on and the flashing indicator lights warned everyone of an entirely different kind of breakdown.

"You're my doctor, you know I'm in p-pain, Clarke."

"Of course I know!" Clarke clenched her eyes shut and wound her arms around her chest. "I, I don't want to think about losing you." she admitted quietly and they sat in silence for a brief moment. "I know I'm not supposed to feel like that, I know I'm not supposed to even think it, but I fucking do. I feel it in my gut every time you mention or talk about ending it and honestly?" she glared and let out a bitter chuckle, "It's really ungrateful. I'm working my ass off to help you and it's hard when you dangle euthanasia over my head every time I dare to breathe."

The people on their early commute to work whizzed past and it felt like the most appropriate place for them to be; stationary on the hard shoulder of the highway, watching the world spin round and round whilst they solved these little complex mysteries.

"Some things are bigger than the both of us, this c-constitutes." Lexa peered at her with sincere big eyes that weren't looking for a fight. Clarke felt that much, the passiveness, the eagerness for some peace when it came to this thing.

"You're going to get better." Clarke swallowed.

"You're not God, Clarke, no ma-matter how much you try."

"You're right." she looked away, "Lexa you are never going to be a hundred-percent recovered."
There's goals we can walk towards, speech and physical therapy helps, but if you think you're ever going to be well enough to re-inlist then I have to bring you back to reality and tell you it's never going to happen."

"How close to one h-hundred?" Lexa said thoughtfully with a raised brow.

"Maybe eighty if the stars align."

Lexa paused for a minute and sighed, "Eighty-five."

"Eighty."

"Eighty and no chronic pain."

Clarke peered at her and felt little ripples of relief follow a calming wave that washed over her from their negotiations. "Deal," she leaned over and pressed a quick kiss against her temple.

"I should t-talk about topping myself more often." Lexa murmured and tried desperately to follow Clarke's kiss but the good doctor quickly swatted her away and pulled the car out of neutral.

"Remember that time we talked about crossing lines?"

"Was that one?" Lexa eyed her with a shallow smirk that purposefully didn't rise into her cheeks in some kind of mischievous way and Clarke was drunk on it.

"A big one, Lexa."

"Blueberries and cool whip," the soldier hummed and looked out her window. "Maybe some powdered sugar."

"Don't you dare."

"I usually go for waffles but pancakes do sound so g-good right now." she grinned and looked away pretending to be oblivious, for a moment there was a peaceful little silence and nothing but the sound of tyres covering distance towards their destination.

Clarke colluded with her in the game… and other than a reserved few sighs the silence was preserved once again for just a tiny bit longer.

…

"Abby I know. Yes, Abby, I get how serious this is."

Raven nursed the phone in her hand as she bent down and rooted through the kitchen cupboard for a stray pack of ramen noodles. "I couldn't be more sympathetic with what's going on, really." she nodded along as she leaned further and further inside to feel around for something she could pass off as lunch.

She didn't hear the door shudder open against the frame or the the latch click back into place but she did hear footsteps walk round the kitchen island and hover over her.

"Abby that better be you behind me or it won't be just be Clarke's safety we're concerned about..." she whispered into the phone and slowly shuffled out of the cupboard on her knees.

Thankfully it wasn't a burglar, huffing and annoyed, Abby stood over her like the brunt of a storm dissipitating into a violent cloudling. Her shoulders were raised into mountains and her nose flared
at the sight of Raven doing the mundane whilst Clarke was no doubt breaking federal laws somewhere with that damn soldier in tow.

"Hey Abby!" Raven peered up at the older Griffin and smiled.

"Raven," Abby bit and looked off to the ceiling with an angry redness to her face. "My daughter is missing!" she bit and tamed her tone, "My daughter is missing, do you think you can hold out on lunch for an hour?"

"That depends are you buying?" she stood up and brushed herself off.

"She doesn't just skip work!" she grounded herself with a hand pressed against the counter top whilst the bile swirled in her stomach. "Do you realise how serious this is? She is missing with a patient! If we don't find her—"

"In forty-eight hours she'll be arrested and charged with felony kidnapping." Raven mouthed along with her. "You told me five times."

"How can you be so calm right now?" Abby's face twisted.

"Because Clarke is Clarke and I trust her." she shrugged.

"You're an idiot." Abby rolled her eyes and threw a jacket at her. "Come with me. We're going to look for them."

"Oh... no can do. I have a consultation with a linebacker for the Colts." Raven frowned but there was a relief that flourished as she put down her jacket back on the counter-top. "Sorry." she forced an apologetic wince over the relief.

"I rearranged it for next Tuesday." Abby shoved the jacket back in her hand and ushered her round the island and towards the front door. "You can put flip flops on downstairs." 

"Wait. What?!" Raven shrugged the hands off of her shoulders and stood her ground, "You rearranged my schedule?" she hissed.

"I made some phone calls."

"To whom? the fucking NFL?"

"You had your appointment with Curt written on the whiteboard last time I came over and, well, I do some charity work with his mom. She's a great lady actually—"

"I don't care for your devilish deceit, Abigail Griffin."

"Raven, please, I'm begging you. Help me find my daughter?"

Raven growled and stormed down the corridor. "If I'm going on some weird side quest to find Clarke I'm getting dressed and I'm bringing edibles." she huffed and padded towards her room.

"We're still good right?" Abby asked softly, almost nervously.

"Yes, we're still good." Raven suddenly appeared again and zipped up her hoody. "You're buying breakfast, lunch, and dinner tonight." the younger doctor pouted and shoved her edibles in the front pocket of her sweatshirt.

"Sure. I'll get us a room if we don't make it to Indiana tonight." she mused innocently enough and
ushered them both out of the door. Raven flashed her a glance with raised brows and a leering grin. "Not like that you little pervert." Abby clarified with a furrowed brow.

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Chapter 12

Like every morning, she started on her knees at the side of the bed having the only conversation of the day that truly mattered. Little drafts of the early breeze crept through the open crack of her window and carried her whispers up to the ether. Hands clasped, eyes closed, yawning and thinking. It was harder these days to work through the growing list of favors she needed from the big boss upstairs but still she battled through each one until her knees were sore and little quiet knocks came to her bedroom door.

"Yes?" she opened one eye and peered at the door.

Aden popped his head around the frame, bright eyed and bushy tailed and nowhere near ready for school.

"Please tell me you've at least brushed your teeth." she pinched the bridge of her nose, shaking her head. She stood up from the floorboards and wrapped her dressing gown around herself and approached her foster son. "Look at you," she ruffled his hair. "You need a bath."

"I need breakfast," he pressed his face into her stomach and allowed her to pick at his hair and rub the sleep out of the side of his eye.

"I think you're forgetting something."

"Please," he looked up with a toothy grin.

"Much better." Indra nodded and walked him out of the room.

There was a familiar sound that she had forgotten over the last few months. An evil sound. It was the noise of kit being packed and boots being polished and carabiners that held water bottles and mugs dragging across the floor.

"Indra…" Aden stopped on the staircase suddenly, "Will Lincoln get hurt too when he goes back?" he asked quietly.

"No." Indra forced a measured expression though her insides churned. "Your brother is nowhere near as reckless as your sister. Lexa… Lexa is too fearless for her own good. Lincoln knows he has to come back in one piece." she said, marching down the stairs. "And you," she paused and eyed him. "You have to get ready for school whilst I make breakfast."

"Yes ma'am." he scuttled back up the stairs and out of sight.

She moved through the house towards the kitchen though that in itself was an overstatement. There wasn't much house and nowhere near enough room to move; the stairs descended directly into the living room and the living room opened out into the kitchen and sparse for the little table that straddled the line between linoleum and wood there was barely anything to separate the two.

"Morning Maw'ima," Lexa said slowly and looked up from a pile of pancakes, grinning with a lazy sloping face from her chair at the table.

Indra paused and blinked, doing little else but that for what felt like eternity. On the inside though it was a different story. On the inside, she was screaming and jumping and thanking her answered prayers.
"I told you this was a bad idea." Dr. Griffin scolded her foster daughter and her cheeks were blushing furiously. "We should have knocked."

"Family doesn't knock," she found her words and cleared her throat. "Although, you could have warned me." she gestured her hands down towards her dressing gown.

"You look b-b," Lexa's grin faltered into a frustrated scowl.

"Say it slowly." the doctor whispered.

"You look beautiful, Maw." Lexa sighed.

Unable to hold herself back or temper her will she closed the distance between them and wrapped her arms around her daughter and pulled her beneath her chin until frizzy bits of hair tickled her nose. "I love you," she whispered and hissed. "Don't you ever do that again."

"No risk of that happening." Lexa looked up at her with knowing eyes.

"We'll figure it out," she promised and squeezed what used to be thick shoulders. Now, they were a little scrawny, they needed growing into. "Montgomery comes by every weekend to see your brother." Indra told her and joined them at the table, "He works down at the recruitment center… maybe when you're on your feet he could put you in touch with some people?"

"Wouldn't that be great?" the doctor quietly nudged Lexa's arm.

Lexa's brow quirked, "Who is Montgomery?"

"Montgomery." Indra leaned in as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "Your brother's best friend? We went to his wedding? You punched his cousin at the reception?" she rolled her eyes at the last part. "He was there when… you know."

Lexa looked between her and Dr. Griffin and earned a little reassuring squeeze from the blonde. "It's okay," she mouthed but it did little to calm the tempered look of frustration on Lexa's face.

"Montgomery. You know him, Lexa." Indra tried again with more certainty and desperation.

"I don't—" Lexa stopped herself and thought better of it, "Montgomery." she nodded and pretended to know the correlation between the name and some faceless person she couldn't remember.

The day slipped by quickly, Clarke sat on the porch and watched them all from a distance like a patch sewn onto a pair of jeans or maybe a car with a wrong coloured door, out of place like a sore thumb, entirely aware she had no right to be here.

She pushed that feeling down into her stomach and watched Lexa and her brothers sit around at the bottom of the front step talking amongst themselves and laughing like the slope of her face and the soreness in her hips and the lispy slur she talked with didn't exist.

Indra stepped out of the screen door and sat on the swing seat beside her. "I didn't think." she paused, "They said she'd never walk or talk again." she sighed.

"I'm an overachiever."

"Thank you, Doctor Griffin."

"Clarke," she smiled at the older woman.
"Thank God," Indra chuckled. "I wasn't sure what to call you."

"Doctor Griffin is my mother's name." Clarke chuckled too, "Or at least it used to be." she shrugged and folded her legs underneath herself.

Indra passed her a tall glass of something cool and with the rising sun that exuded it's midday heat, Clarke accepted it gladly.

"Your mother was a doctor?"

"She still is, I guess. She ran for mayor and won this spring so it's a little blurry now." Clarke said and shielded her eyes from the stray bits of sunlight that caught the cusp of the porch.

"A woman with ambition, I like it." Indra nodded and sipped her own drink.

"You haven't met her." she shook her head.

"Lexa… is different."

It came from nowhere and though she knew she should have expected these talks they felt foreign, as if she was here as someone else and not her doctor. She felt unprepared and maybe that was for the best, then there would be no generic over-practiced statements like the ones they teach during internship. The optimism was a small comfort.

"She isn't the same." Clarke nodded in agreement and nursed her drink. "But she's here."

"Mmhm," Indra agreed with a soft genuine sigh. "It's more than I hoped for five months ago, a little time and she'll be back on a plane to Afghanistan breaking my heart." her mom hummed, chuckling and brokenhearted in the same breath.

"Mrs Woods…"

"Indra," the older woman flashed her a glance and crossed her legs. "Mrs Woods is my mother."

"Indra." Clarke nodded and gulped, "I er—" she tried and failed to find her vocal footing.

"Spit it out."

"You know how she didn't remember her friend earlier?" Clarke whispered in hushed low tones and earned a nod from Indra. "Things like that… the memory loss and the aphasia and the limp… they might improve but chances are they'll never go away and even if they do, I'm sorry, but I'll never clear her for active duty." she looked away and felt her stomach tie itself in thick knots of guilt.

Indra watched the young doctor come undone, didn't say a single word as the truth of it settled over her. "Oh." she resigned quietly, and Clarke imagined she was blushing.

"She'll never be who she was—"

"Excuse me?" Indra narrowed her eyes.

"Nothing, just… I thought you should know. It's a lot to process and I'm sure you're feeling a lot of things right now."

"I'm proud of my daughter, Clarke." she said sternly and set her glass down.
"I don't doubt it, I mean, look how far she's come I'm so proud of her too but—"

"No, listen to me." Indra inched in closer. "When you're a mother," she shook her head and swallowed the blistering heat in her throat. "When you're a mother and you watch your children grow up, there comes a point where they make decisions by themselves and you're left standing on the sidelines hoping and wishing they do what you spent the best years of your life teaching them to do. Every now and then, they'll surprise you and do something you never thought possible and you feel this overbearing, choking, violent sense of pride because in some small measure they have lived better than you." she tempered her tone, "I am proud of my daughter and you won't pretend she is anything less than the hero she is."

"I wish my mom was like you." Clarke felt a sad little smile push her cheeks.

"You whine too much." Indra glanced at her and leaned back in her swing chair, "If you were my daughter I'd of slapped you upside the head and put some sense in you."

"Wow. Okay." Clarke chuckled at her bluntness.

"I know a fancy brain doctor all the way from Ohio isn't sat on my porch drinking lemonade because she has nothing better to do." Indra scolded her, "So whatever it is you're running from, you have until tomorrow to figure it out and then I'm calling your mama for you."

"You're kinda mean."

"I'm a mother, it's what we do." she grabbed a cling-filmed jug of cold lemonade and topped up their glasses.
"When do you deploy?"

Lexa wobbled over as the intermittent pings of bullets hitting targets littered the afternoon like exclamation points. Clarke and Aden giggled and fired wadcutter pellets with air rifles around the corner but this section was reserved for real guns that fired real bullets, and Lexa did well to hide her flinch at every bang and exclamation point.

"I'm not g-going to ask you again." Lexa's nostrils flared.

"Good," Lincoln replied with a smirk and earned another few pings that echoed from the tiny orange targets that were the furthest away from them.

"You still hurt about what happened at the hospital?" she finally relented now they were out of Aden's earshot and set down her sticks to lean against a bit of wooden post, staring at her brother and crossing her arms the way she saved for the rare few moments when genuine talks were necessary.

"Are we really going to pretend you even remember that?" Lincoln moaned and pointed the barrel at the ground, flashing his sister a glance.

There was a little flicker of hurt that moved across her face like a wisp of smoke, though she swallowed and tempered her expression Lincoln felt bad none the less. Lexa was Lexa but somehow not quite Lexa enough; it had nothing to do with her legs that refused to obey her, or the semi-circle shaped scar healing around the back of her hair line or the way she stuttered through a sentence. In retrospect maybe it had something to do with all of those things. Maybe. But most of all it was the lack of laughter and the soreness that came from remembering the days they spent on this firing range talking about the dust bowl one of them would be deploying to the following morning.

"Sorry." Lincoln mumbled and lifted the barrel of his gun.

"No you're not." Lexa chewed and used her cane as an extension to bring the barrel back down to the ground. "W-What is going on, Linc?"

"You blamed me!" he gnashed his teeth and quickly recognised the tapering off of Aden's laughter in the background as the universal signal that they had been heard. "You blamed me," he leaned in and lowered his voice, "And I haven't stopped blaming myself since."

"Oh boo-hoo!" Lexa rolled her eyes and instantly became more Lexa than he could swallow.

He gritted his teeth and stared through his scope towards the dirt hill behind the targets and fired off quick shots that served to do nothing more than drown out his sister.

"You're all out." Lexa shrugged and smirked as the trigger soon stopped firing exclamation points into the hill behind the targets. "And for what it's worth, I don't blame you. I'm glad I sent you back to camp that day."

"You looked as if you blamed me the last time we saw each other."

"I was working through some stuff." she shrugged.
"Mmm," Lincoln murmured a little noise in agreement and pulled his canteen out for a glug of water. "Listen, do you know if your doctor friend is single because I've been doing P90X lately and I feel like—"

"Shut up." Lexa chuckled and looked away.

"Oh," his eyes widened and teased her, "Should I buy a suit for the wedding?"

"Nope," she tapered her grin into a demure little expression, "But you'll need one for your f-funeral if you try anything." she shoved his shoulder and earned a toothy grin.

Clarke and Aden appeared on the dirt track behind them with air rifles hanging over their shoulders and grins plastered ear to ear. Lexa spotted them first and swallowed, "Reload and give me that thing." she eyed her brother.

"You sure you're still a good shot?"

"Better than you." she promised.

It was Aden who came bounding over first with his hole-ridden sheet of paper, huffing and panting with excitement. He shrugged off his rifle and waited with clasped hands for his sister's approval.

"Nice work," she lisped softly and held it up to the light with her good hand, squinting at the peppering of holes all clustered near the same spot. "Where's your sh-sheet?" she smirked at the doctor.

"There was nothing left of it."

"She didn't hit it once." Aden giggled.

"I blew it up." Clarke dead eyed her, "I was like Rambo out there."

"Rambo huh?" Lexa raised her brow.

"She didn't even hit it a single time." Aden leaned in and whispered up to his sister.

"We'll t-t-teach her." Lexa winked. "Step right up, Doc." she gestured towards Lincoln's personal armory.

Clarke moved towards the post, Lincoln pattered her on the back and earned a deep glare from Lexa but none the less, the lieutenant took shaky steps forward on her canes and hid the gnawing pain in both her hips well.

"I don't think I can shoot one of these things." Clarke mused and felt how heavy the rifle was in her arms, she pressed her eye up against the scope and the heaviness of the gun swayed her shoulders.

Lexa chuckled and leaned against the post at the side of her, "That's ad-d-dorable."

"What?"

"You thought we were going to let you shoot a Springfield M1A?" Lexa stifled a little smirk and her brothers burst into a little fit of sniggers. "You fire th-that thing with your eye pressed up against the scope like that and you'll be black and blue for weeks."

"I have no idea what that means." Clarke lifted her chin whilst they recovered from their laughter.
"Just c'mere." Lexa shook her head and wobbled a little closer, "I er, need help holding my arms straight." she explained with a little blush to her cheeks.

"I'm sure Lincoln is probably more qualified—"

"Yes, but I don't want Linc wrapping his arms around me, he's a big bear after all, m-might get mauled." she teased and Clarke rolled her eyes and obliged her with an eager little smile.

"Don't forget that he has bad aim." Aden stuck out his tongue.

Lincoln pointed at him and furrowed his brows, "Five dollars says I hit more targets than you do with that thing." he nodded towards the air-rifle.

"Easy money." Lexa winked at her littlest brother. "Go sh-show him how it's done, Kiddo."

With that Aden grabbed his little gun and ran for his section of the firing range, "You're on!" he called over his shoulder and Lincoln grabbed the spare air-rifle in quick pursuit.

"If she needs anything," he paused and nodded towards his sister who balanced precariously on the post in front of Clarke. "Just call for me."

"I know," the doctor mouthed and softly smiled.

Soon they were alone and the sound of her brothers playing echoed further and further into the distance. The trees swayed and watched them, judging Lexa at this proving ground of sorts; though she hid her nerves well. "Can you wrap your arms around me?" Lexa asked quietly.

"Like this?" Clarke asked and pulled the soldier into her chest with her hands moving under the lip of her t-shirt.

"Mmhm," she said and relinquished a little of her grip on the post that was keeping her upright. "Can you t-take my weight?"

"Gladly." Clarke teased her and earned a little eye roll, though she didn't see it, she felt it and smiled anyway.

"Okay, can you pass the handgun?" Lexa got herself stable and turned to glance over her shoulder at the good doctor.

Clarke reached for the handgun first and immediately doubted her ability to bear it's weight with either of her slack arms yet she kept that idea under lock and key in the chasm of her gut. "Here," she placed it in her waiting hands and kept her own arm wrapped tight around her slim waist.

"Woah," Lexa grunted as she took it in her good hand.

"Too much?"

"No," Lexa shook her head. "Feels just how I remember it." a little smile crept up into her cheeks, "I'm going to stretch out my arms and square my shoulders, I need you to keep me as steady as possible." she trailed off and breathed big breaths as she hoisted the handgun in the air along with her bad arm.

"I like this," Clarke hummed and breathed in the smell of Lexa's neck.

"Put your ear protectors on, Doc." Lexa ignored her and grinned, closing her eyes and simply enjoying how normal this all felt.
"This is a really great date." Clarke whispered in her ear and pressed a kiss to her temple as she slid Lexa's own mufflers over her ears.

The shells hit the ground in quick succession and Lexa wasted no time pulling the trigger between each burst, exclamation points littered the air, along with little pings from targets hit. The sounds made her grin grow wide and her chest puff with pride and Clarke was drunk on all of it.

They turned into the street and uniform little prefabricated houses lined either side with paint flaking off the panels and garage doors that were an off-white shade of weather worn and Clarke was painfully aware of who was waiting for her at the bottom of the road. It was a sixth sense. She kept her concern to herself though and chewed her mouth and kept up appearances whilst Aden chattered in the front and asked her all kind of questions about what brains looked like and whether monkey brains could be transplanted into people like pig hearts.

"You know, I know just the lady qualified to answer that buddy." Clarke trailed off as they pulled into the drive.

"Why is your mom on our porch?" Lexa looked over at her from the front passenger seat, concerned and nervous in all the ways that tied knots in the good doctor's gut.

"Who's the cute chick?" Lincoln nearly drooled as he turned the ignition off and stared at the dark haired girl chatting and taming his mother on the swing chair.

"My roommate. She's an orthopedic surgeon in her spare time."

"In her spare time?" Lincoln flashed her a look in the rearview mirror.

"Apparently her day job is being a pain in my ass." she groaned and got out the car, moving towards them as they sat on the swing sipping lemonade with Indra. The chatter amongst them all quickly faded as Abby and Clarke set eyes on one another.

"I just want you to know your mom made me pull Lexa's details. Other than that, I had nothing to do with this." Raven eyed Clarke's furious glare sincerely and sipped her lemonade. "If it was up to me, I would have let you go down for felony kidnapping." she shrugged.

"Thanks." Clarke rolled her eyes and crossed her arms and waited for her mother, sat there with her neutral look of disapproval, to finally talk.

"What does she mean f-felony kidnapping?" Lexa spoke up beside her.

"Er, well, let's just say I should have signed you out at the front desk." she tried her best to offer a little reassuring smile.

"I have never been so disappointed in you." Abby chewed and stared at her daughter from where they all sat together on the swing set like sentinels.

The sound of car doors closing and footsteps working up the path and the grinding of swing swaying on the porch all seemed to taper off under the weight of her authority.

"You should be thankful the Woods aren't going to press charges." Abby added and shuffled in her seat.

"Th-thankful?" Lexa interrupted incredulously and braced herself against her canes, looking
between them all. "Lincoln, take Aden inside." she said quietly and he obliged her, ushering the youngest of their clan away from this no man's land.

"It's okay, really." Clarke tried to pacify her.

"No," she shrugged her off and her jaw worked like two tectonic plates ready to cause an earthquake. "You're so hard on her." she stared at Abby with glowing eyes. "It's my family who are thankful… without Clarke," she shook her head and a heat grew thick in her throat. "Without Clarke I wouldn't be here."

Abby sat up in that lofty staunch way, "Forgive me, Lexa, but this really doesn't concern you." she challenged the young soldier.

"Yes, Mother, it does." Clarke pinched the bridge of her nose. "All of it concerns her and you know it."

"Okay whatever this is we're not doing it here on this nice lady's porch." Raven interrupted them all and put her glass down. "Clarke, you're being an asshole. Abby, you're being an asshole and Lexa," she eyed the soldier and paused on baited breath, "Well, I have nothing bad to say about you Lexa you're a hero… thank you for your service." she trailed off and earned a little nod from the soldier.

"Everyone get your things together. We're driving back to Alliance and if we're lucky, and I mean very very lucky, Clarke won't go to jail." Abby pinched the air and rolled her eyes.

"Do what you want with your daughter but leave mine out of this mess." Indra stood from the porch and shielded her eyes from dappled sunlight that set behind the neighbor's house across the street. "Lexa isn't leaving tonight."

"Mrs Woods, she needs to go back to hospital until she's formally discharged." Abby followed her down the porch steps with hands that painted the air around them with how serious all of this was.

"My daughter has had a long day and she's tired." Indra flashed Abby a warning glare, "I have been more than hospitable to all of you and I'm sure you're used to getting your own way back in Alliance, Mayor Griffin, but Lexa is staying here tonight."

"Lexa should be under the care of her physician… I should stay too." Clarke cleared her throat and tried her best to stick to her pretense though none of the other women were under any illusion. "I mean, there's medication and equipment she needs and it would just be impractical." she stumbled over herself and dragged it on.

"You gonna stay with me tonight, Doc?" Lexa grinned and tried her best to hide it.

"I don't have much choice." she hid her smile and shrugged.

With that they hobbled up the steps and disappeared behind the screen door with a back and forth small talk between them that grew quieter and quieter with distance. It was Abby who broke first, lungs chuffing, hands on her hips and staring off into the sky above her. "Why is she so stubborn." she whispered.

"You want to talk about stubborn? My daughter was supposed to be back for Thanksgiving last year and I'm convinced she got herself blown up so I couldn't whoop her butt for being late."

"I think she's got you beat, Abs." Raven nodded in agreement.
"You drove all this way out here to come find your daughter and here she is," Indra mused for a moment and looked up at the little house, "You should stay tonight and try and talk to her. We can make room for you both."

"You'd just let three strangers stay in your house like that?" Abby chuckled and waited for Indra to laugh too.

"Your daughter is the reason I still have a daughter." Indra raised her chin thoughtfully. "I'm a God fearing woman, Mayor Griffin, I believe you're all here because this is where you need to be." she admitted and walked up the porch steps, "Dinner will be ready in half an hour, get washed for the table." she called over her shoulder.

Raven and Abby stood there for a moment, dusk setting around them, quiet and glancing at each other from the corners of their eyes. "I like her." Raven muttered and kicked her feet in the dirt.

"Me too." Abby admitted with a small sigh.

"I can sleep in the car if you want… wouldn't want to make things weird."

Abby stared at her with soft eyes. "Things are already weird, Rey." she patted her arm and walked towards the steps.
Chapter 14

Long into the night, giggling and talking amongst each other over long tall glasses of long island tea, the women sat around the small table between the kitchen and living room playing cards and putting the world to rights and somehow it was the exact prescription necessary to make everything palatable for Abigail Griffin.

Raven sat quietly sipping her drink, there was a stillness that exuded from Abby and maybe that was what drew her in the most; like she was an abstract painting and Raven was the only one who could see the bigger picture: the bit that was missing.

Clarke was entirely Clarke, filling the silence with mundane chit chat and glancing over at her beau in the discreetest of indiscrete ways. It pulled at Abby's cheeks though that was entirely the alcohol's fault.

"I can't remember the last time I had fun like this," Abby squinted her eyes in disbelief and looked at her glass. "How much booze did you put in this thing?"

"Mmm enough," Indra chuckled and topped up their drinks. "There's nothing a game of cards and truth talking can't fix." she eyed the women around her table and put down an ace of hearts, winning another hand. "Y'all are making it too easy. I say mothers vs. daughters."

"Whose team am I on?" Raven sat back in the chair.

"Share some of that stuff you've been hiding in your jacket and you can have your pick." Indra hummed and set down her cards.

"I don't smoke marijuana—"

"Save it." Indra raised her hand and cut the other young doctor off. "There was a news profile saying it's good for pain relief… right? Not as heavy on the liver?" she softly murmured and looked to Clarke.

"Lexa is already on pain management medication." Clarke stared into the depths of Raven's soul with the heat of a thousand suns and dared her to cross this line and Abby couldn't help but recognise herself within her daughter's expression.

"She's been quiet for the last hour." Abby cleared her throat and nodded at Lexa, watching the soldiers eyes widen in response. "And she can't stop flexing her hands which probably means she's too stubborn to ask for more. I say if she wants a little natural relief, have at it." she shrugged before her daughter could cut her off.

"Okay Bob Marley, who asked you?" Clarke squinted her eyes and her shoulders tensed up into mountains. "It's not good enough chasing me across the country now you have to prescribe—"

"Hey!" Indra growled, "You don't fight with your mama in my house." She warned the younger Griffin.

"Sorry."

"That's what I thought," Indra mumbled and nodded between them, shuffling the cards.

"What do you say, Lieutenant?" Raven leaned in over the table with a daring grin. "Wanna give it a
Lexa looked at Clarke with sheepish eyes and a little cheeky grin of her own. At first, Clarke ignored her, too busy staring at her drink and tensing her jaw in frustration though she quickly came around once a rough quivering palm rubbed her knee reassuringly.

"Come on Doc, what do you think?" Lexa whispered.

"I'll supervise."

Raven rolled her eyes at that, because of course Clarke would never trust her alone with one of her patients. "You do realise I am an M.D too, right?" she snipped.

"Raven you got your certification out of a cereal box."

"Hundred and eighty-thousand freakin' dollars." Raven muttered and glanced over at Abby. "Must have been some good cereal."

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"Mind if I join you girls?"

Clarke burst into a coughing fit that earned little chuckles from her company and tried to hide the puffing cloud of smoke that escaped her nostrils, handing off the rolled up joint between her fingers back to Lexa. "Sure Mom," she coughed and her cheeks blushed as red as her eyes, "It's not what—" she stumbled, "It isn't what you think."

"We'll talk about it in the morning." she pretended to be stern but caught Raven's eye with a little knowing wink. "How are you feeling Lexa?" she sat down and crossed her knee over her lap.

"Better," the soldier sighed and leaned back with a lazy smile. "A lot better."

She looked better too Abby decided. Maybe it was the good company or the small town air. Lexa somehow sat taller when she was around her daughter like her spine was set in steel rebar rods. The soft slur of her voice was still apparent but Abby couldn't quite imagine her without it now she'd spent some time with her.

"What's on everyone's mind?" Abby cleared her throat.

"Me?" Raven glanced up and sighed hard enough for her bottom lip to wobble. "I'm just thinking about this girl..." she trailed off and stared back with deep brown eyes that somehow saw the whole universe.

"Dr. Hotshot's got a girlfriend," Lexa teased and both she and Clarke dissolved into little giggles.

"Wouldn't go that far." Raven rolled her eyes and took a deep pull that filled her cheeks, "She's just a glass of cold water in a draught."

"Wet?" Clarke raised her brows and nodded.

"No, necessary. You fucking pervert." Raven rolled her eyes.

"Definitely wet." Clarke turned to Lexa and earned a nod in agreement.

"I was trying to be poetic."
"I'm sure if she heard you talk about her like that... it would make her happy." Abby softly smiled, "I'm sure you're her glass of water too."

"Mom are you flirting?" Clarke leaned over on her knees with a silly grin.  

At that Abby chuckled and slapped her daughter's hand. It was strange how easy it was to lie, how easy it was to pretend that there was even a little bit of resistance to it. Raven was a cool breeze. Fleeting and refreshing and easy to get caught up in but definitely not meant to last for more than a few tender moments. 

Raven nudged Lexa. "What's on your mind, G.I Jane?" she asked and took a burn off the joint.  

"A glass of water too." she bit her tongue. 

"Oh yeah?" Clarke raised her brow and tapered her smirk. 

"Yeah," Lexa nodded. 

"Ergh," Abby made a noise and rolled her eyes at the sight of her daughter fawning. "Give it to me," she leaned forward over the coffee table and took the small rolled up joint out of Raven's hand. Raven obliged her, tentative and nervous with off little looks to Clarke. 

"Mom?!" Clarke narrowed her stare. 

"Don't Mom me," Abby took a pull that filled her lungs. "Your dad and I were cool once too."

"Mom what are you doing?" Clarke lowered her voice and peered at her with those big concerned eyes that always thought they knew best. So much like Jake. 

"What are you doing?" Abby countered and nodded towards the soldier. 

"Don't do this." she exasperately sighed.

"Tell me there's nothing going on between you two?" she said, entirely teetering between teasing and disapproving. Lexa looked away in embarrassment and swallowed, throat flexing and jaw grinding like two tectonic plates. "I have never seen you look at anyone the way you look at Lexa." she took another deep pull and handed the joint to her daughter. 

"It's nowhere near as fun if your mom gives it to you." Clarke bristled and passed it off to Lexa. 

"Okay, you know what, I have an idea." Raven rubbed her hands on her knees. "We'll go round the circle and everyone can say whatever shit it is they've been hiding and we can all just clear the air?" she looked between them all with annoyed eyes and emphatic hands. 

Abby was the first to stare at Raven, heart in her mouth, panicking, signalling for her to take it back. Instead Raven just sat there chewing on her cheek, sipping a beer, fingers dancing over her knee cap. 

"I'm not hiding anything." Clarke shrugged. Lexa gently elbowed her and gave her the look, the one that dared her to hide the soldier away like she was something to be ashamed of. 

"Don't make me tell your m-m-mom for you." Lexa stuttered and glared at the good doctor. 

"Okay, okay!" she squirmed, "Me and Lexa—were—you know." she trailed off. 

leaned in over her knees with her chin pressed against her hand.

"I don't think we know either." Clarke looked at her soldier with soft languid eyes and a little smile, "I like her, Mommy." she offered a frowny little pout like a child pleading for a puppy. "I like her so much."

"And you?" she flashed a trying glance at the soldier.

"I'm a f-foster kid." Lexa cleared her throat and stared her dead on. "Never really made attachments, then I joined the army and the tendency became a habit. But Clarke? Clarke is a g-game changer." she chuckled and it spread to the slack side of her cheek too. "I care about your daughter very much Dr. Griffin."

"It's Mayor Griffin." Abby mumbled and fully conceded a fight she anticipated to win. It irked and pleased her in equal parts how easy it was to like the recovering soldier who derailed her daughter so effortlessly. Reminded her of a man she once knew.

"What about you Raven?" Lexa passed the baton and slipped her calloused hand inside Clarke's and somehow a weight was lifted from them and Abby watched her daughter sigh and melt into the lieutenant; like they were a spectrum of wonderful mistakes.

"Abs." Raven cleared her throat and stared at her.

She had that look in the eye. Tired and ready to admit their secrets like a prisoner fed up of biting their tongue. Abby tried to ward her away from the edge she teetered on but Raven was ready to jump. She took a long pull on her joint and leaned back in the chair, biting her mouth and pausing for a moment.

"What's going on?" Clarke tensed and looked between them both.

"Raven don't you dare." Abby hissed at the girl. "Clarke, I can explain everything—"

"Ray, what's going on?" Clarke snapped nervously at her friend and set the drink down. The world stopped. The cicadas ceased in that grinding song that goes well into the night and the moon hung like a static picture and the walls Abby built around this tiny thing that brought her so much fleeting easy happiness teetered and fell until she was left bare and grasping and desperate. It remained an entirely private affair that slugged it out in her gut, though, she knew it wouldn't be private for much longer.

"Do you remember the night you came home and me and Abs—" Raven breathed and took a sip of dutch courage. "Me and your mom," she corrected, "were talking in the kitchen and she was telling me about you going to kindergarten as Xena for dress-up day?"

"Yeah, I think."

"We started hanging out a lot and..." she paused with big guilty eyes and bit her mouth. "Clarke I'm so sorry." she said quietly and shook her head, and Abby felt her gut slug and slosh away.

"Mom what's going on?" Clarke furrowed her brow in confusion.

"I never meant for it to happen." Raven swallowed and muttered. "She had been crying and then the next thing we kissed and, just, I don't regret it." she bit her mouth and peered at Abby with smouldering eyes and a mouth that was entirely untameable. "I don't regret it. Not even a little bit." she promised her.
Without hesitation Clarke pounced like a bobcat leaping off it's hindquarters. Arms stretched out, legs folding underneath herself, swinging and reaching over the coffee table that separated them. Raven caught a slap, and another, then a winded gut that forced the air out of her chest. All before anyone could pull Clarke back like a pitbull with the full ferocity of its sinewed muscle resisting them entirely.

"Clarke, don't!" Lexa tried and lunged for her.

With an arm wrapped around her waist and strength Lexa didn't know she still possessed she pried her good doctor away the few inches necessary for Abby to force herself between both girls and shield Raven from the brunt of it.

Abby glanced over her shoulder and eyed Raven first with her cut lip and shuddering pained gasps and felt her heart grow tight.

"You motherfucker!" Clarke sobbed and shuddered with a rage Abby had long since forgot she was capable of possessing. "What is wrong with you?!" she caught a second wind with gritted teeth and tried to push past her mother to reach Raven's hunched over figure.

"Enough!" Abby growled and caught Clarke's chin with her hand, forcing their steely stares to meet. "Don't you ever put a hand on her again." she warned her daughter in that quiet calm way she reserved for the very worst offences.

"Mom..."

Clarke broke and dissolved into tears that had been overdue for so long they had both lost track of the time. Melting against Lexa's chest, hands balled up into tight fists that she raised and locked behind her neck like it was the only thing keeping her tethered here, Abby watched her crumple like a ball of newspaper.

"I know," Abby hushed her and clutched her shoulders. "I know I've hurt you, I know, but you were never supposed to know about this." she said, half reassurance and half disgust for her paramour's outburst.

"You never dated anyone after dad—" she chuffed and her body forced her to take a deep gasp. "My best friend?" she asked with pained eyes.

"Listen to me," Abby hushed her and clutched her cheeks, "I will always, always, love your father..."

"Don't you dare talk about him." Clarke thrashed and shuddered away from her touch.

"I'm sorry this has hurt you, sweetie, I'm so sorry." Abby sighed and felt her lip wobble and her throat ache. "But I am so happy." she broke too and couldn't even begin to help the way her lips stretched into a sad smile or the tears that dripped along the crease of her cheeks.

"Are you saying you're in love with her?" Clarke's face screwed up.

"I'm saying," she took Clarke's hands in her own, "That I am content. Okay? I am happy and I am content and if we all want it to be... this is a good thing." she sighed. "Aren't you tired of not following your heart? Imagine how I feel Clarke. It's been twenty years of denying myself. I'm human. I need love too."

"So I... I wasn't good enough? My love isn't enough?" Clarke laughed in disbelief with angry sulphur eyes, "But Raven?" she threw her hands in the air like a punctuation mark. "Oh, Raven gets
in your pants and now you're suddenly content!"

Abby felt Raven's touch, her fingers gently dug into the soft part of her back reassuringly as her daughter's words slashed her guts into ribbons.

"If you ever talk to her like that again I will pop your head off your shoulders like a fucking barbie doll." Raven growled and suddenly her face was a long pointed snarl and Abby knew wholeheartedly she wouldn't lose a second round against her daughter.

"Both of you!" Abby bit and grabbed them, "Raven, don't ever talk to my daughter like that again." she hissed and the young doctor dissolved into a sulky frown that Clarke revelled in. "And you," Abby pointed at her daughter, "you are not in any position to tell anyone who they are and aren't allowed to love." she nodded off towards the good soldier who kept an arm firmly wrapped around her waist just in case.

"I think it's time for bed." Indra appeared from the screen door and cleared her throat. She crossed her arms with bleary unamused eyes, and with it, everyone suddenly grew a slither more sheepish.

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Her hands grabbed every nearby surface and her legs dragged across the wooden floor in the dark but Clarke kept her eyes clenched shut and pretended to be asleep. The sheets rustled and she felt Lexa's warm shape slip between them and inch a little closer towards her until eventually they were two little sardines lying on the pull-out sofa.

"Hi," Lexa mumbled and pressed a kiss to her shoulder blade.

"Hi," Clarke forced the word from her gnawing throat and she tried to hide the evidence that she'd been crying.

"Wanna talk?" Lexa whispered.

"No."

"Liar."

"We ran away and look what happened… look what followed us." Clarke blurted with wobbling lips.

She rolled on her back and pressed her forehead against the lieutenant's neck until frizzy bits of dark brown hair tickled her cheeks.

"You want to run away with m-me tonight?"

Clarke felt Lexa's assured gaze cut a leyline through her even in the confines of this dark little room. It was comforting. It made the tension in her stomach dissolve into bite-sized chunks that she could deal with piece by piece.

"Where too?"

"A safe house." Lexa grinned, the covers rustled around them and her hand snaked over her stomach until it finally settled along the dip of her hip. Clarke hummed and couldn't stop herself melting into this domesticity, fingers gently dug into the soldier's collarbone, kiss pressed against her lips.
"Where?"

"Manila."

"That's oddly specific." Clarke chuckled.

"Clarke."

"Mmm?" she made a little noise and pressed her nose against her jawline.

"Do you… find me attractive?" she said slowly and Clarke heard the effort that went into dampening her permanent slur into something much softer.

"You're kidding, right?"

"D...d...do I look like I am?" Lexa shook her head and the tiny crack of light that spliced through the total darkness of their room illuminated her pooling eyes for Clarke to see.

"You know you've got me falling head over heels for you right?" Clarke climbed on top of her and straddled her hips with bare thighs that slunk down either side of her stomach. "The first time I saw you I thought, wow, look at that girl... she's gonna sit on my face one day." she whispered and rubbed her shoulders.

"The first time you saw me I was on a ventilator."

"The implication was that the ventilator wouldn't be part of the arrangement." Clarke leaned down and breathed in her ear.

Lexa pouted and it was somehow enough to make all the little bite-sized chunks dissolve away like a soluble thing that held no weight within her. She was free. Lexa was beautiful, it was an indescribable type of beautiful, she was beautiful in the kind of way that merited prose and stars named after her wry little smile and stories that turned into legends about the dimples at the bottom of her back.

"Can I?" Clarke asked tentatively and tugged at the hem of her shirt.

"Nothing you haven't seen before, Doc." Lexa chuckled and sat up a little so she could be undressed.

"I know but it's different this time." Clarke pointed out and caught the soldier's hand, kissing the tips of her fingers. She guided them to the hem of her own borrowed t-shirt and the soldier's mouth coiled into a surprised little oh.

"I don't want you to date other people." Lexa blurted and Clarke helped her pull the shirt over her head.

"I wasn't planning to unless you have some hot friends I don't know about." Clarke earned a little punch to her shoulder and giggled. Lexa's fingers traversed the ridge between her breasts and traced a line over her heart. "You like this girl?" Clarke hummed and pressed her hands into the soldier's hips.

"Yeah, I love that girl." Lexa leaned and caught her in a soft kind of kiss, her nose pressed against the slope of her cheek, tongue gently painting promises in her mouth. The kiss deepened and Clarke dipped and eventually they were pressed against each chest to chest like they were connected by the heart.
Clarke took the lead out of necessity and Lexa conceded it reluctantly. It was this that left a tiny little pebble of pity in her gut for the woman in the videos and pictures she’d seen, climbing mountains and quelling wars, and though it was sad and she mourned for those parts of Lexa she couldn’t think much past worshiping at her altar and reverently kissing and rubbing the bits of her she had grown to love the most.

She glanced up from the spot beneath her belly button that she’d settled on and Lexa smiled. Really smiled. It was a happiness that exuded from her like mist from the morning sea and Clarke basked in it.

"I don't normally put out on a first date." the soldier groaned and chuckled as Clarke slipped her underwear down her taut legs.

"I'm a lucky girl." Clarke promised and ghosted between her thighs, "The luckiest girl in the whole world."

"Nah, that's me." Lexa whispered and bunched up blonde bits of hair to hold gently in her grasp, "I'm gonna take care of you." she promised too in a moment of languid weakness.

"As in sexually or…?"

"In any way you want." Lexa laughed and left the good doctor hungry for more.

...  

Abby brushed her hair and took out her earrings and pulled off her rings and there was an absolute method to way she unwound herself in front of the little brass mirror. She pretended expertly not to feel Raven's eyes on her, watching her, waiting for her to talk first.

"C'mere." Abby finally sighed and beckoned her over to where she sat. Raven got up off the bed and slinked closer with her face hidden behind contoured shadows that were cast from the bare light of the room.

"I'm sorry." Raven's voice quivered.

"Sh," Abby wrapped her in a hug and rubbed the small of her back. "Sit down and let me clean you up." she leaned back and caught the young doctor's chin between her fingers.

"Clarke's never going to forgive me." Raven mumbled and sat down on the edge of the bed whilst Abby appraised the damage; namely the cut beside her nose and the fresh swelling over her cheek and scratch across her neck.

"Clarke is Clarke." Abby mused and ran her thumb over the tender bits of Raven's battle wounds. "She'll come around." she promised.

"Abby I think I'm falling in—"

"Don't." Abby stopped her gently and sat on the edge of the bed beside her, "Please, don't." she softened and cupped Raven's cheek as she tried to move away. "You are young and brilliant, and so smart." she chuckled and fell in love with the wrinkle of her latin nose. "Don't fall in love with me… my years are in the rearview mirror and yours? Well, yours are right in front of you. I'm not the Carol to your Therese and this is just fun, okay?"

"So what am I supposed to feel?" Raven frowned.
"Content." Abby smiled and it was the simplest thing, "I think we're supposed to be content for as long as we can be and when it's time to let go, it's time."

"Do you think—" Raven bit her mouth and looked off to the window in embarrassment whilst the doctor tended to her little cuts. "Do you think just for tonight we could pretend?"

"Pretend?"

"To be a real couple." Raven looked at her with giant sad eyes that were hungry and lonely in equal measure. "I just want one night with you where were real." she whispered.

"Raven—"

"Please." Raven inched a little closer and locked their fingers together. "Just one night." her voice gnawed and throbbed.

Somewhere deep within the chasm of her chest something wound tighter and tighter like a coil that locked away the little vulnerable parts of herself. It snapped. It snapped and everything burst and even though one night would never be enough for either of them, she couldn't refuse it.

Abby climbed up the bed and ran her fingers through her loose blonde hair with a sigh that shuddered her and patted her chest. It was the universal sign for: come here, let me hold you like this just for a minute or so. Raven eagerly obliged her and wiped almost-nonexistent tears with the backs of her hands and crawled up over the other doctor's shape.

"I probably look disgusting now I've been maimed." she muttered and pressed her face into the nook of Abby's neck.

"I can't even bare to look at you." she hummed and teased, running her finger over the taut bit of stretched skin that connected her neck to her collarbones. "Can I ask you something?"

"Hmm," Raven hummed and kissed the soft slope of her jaw.

"Why would you want an old woman like me anyway?" she chuckled and shook her head. "You're a beautiful young doctor bursting with life—"

"Stop," Raven hushed her and sat up on her hips, clutching her hands, wrapping them around her waist. "Do you know what I see when I look at you?" Raven whispered and moved a bit of hair out of her eyes.

"No, what?"

"Everything." she whispered and kissed her.

She tasted like fire. She tasted like the hubris of her own twenties and she smelled like sunlight on skin and she felt like a memory of her youth. Abby felt selfish, though she didn't care enough to stop herself deepening the kiss and moving her hands up Raven's spine bit by bit.

"I won't hurt you." Raven promised tenderly and pulled away from their kiss just enough to run a line over her nose with the tip of her own.

"I don't think you could if you tried." Abby brushed it off and slipped hands around the small of her back. "Just, humour me?" Abby shook her head and Raven pulled her own t-shirt off over her head and made it exponentially more difficult to focus on anything at all. "How would we make it work, you know, if we were a real couple?"
"Oh, you know… brilliantly." Raven grinned and unhooked her bra.
Chapter 15

The weekend came and went, and with it they returned to Ohio after she finally managed to pry Lexa out of Indra's tearful embrace. Clarke wasn't sure what she expected to return home to, it felt easier not to think about it, not to get too caught up in the consequence when she wasn't quite finished enjoying the crime. It was these thoughts that kept her below the speed limit missing the occasional left turn so she could drag it out a little longer. Sure enough, like all things, it couldn't last forever and so she found herself back in the hospital parking lot where it all started with her dashing soldier in tow.

The nurses rushed out to the car; empty wheelchair rattling and medical kit jangling around the shoulder of one particularly disapproving woman with port red cheeks and a scrunched up mouth. Lexa's body tensed into a rigid shape that was brittle enough to snap, her eyes pulsing with frustration, and Clarke watched her suddenly remember what her life has been for the last five months: people in scrubs touching her and babying her and treating her as if she were nothing more than a child that needed people to act in her best interest.

"It's going to be okay." Clarke whispered softly and took her hand, "Don't give them a reason to put you on the psych floor… just do what they say. Let them run their tests and I'll come find you before dinner okay?"

Lexa turned and looked at her with frustrated eyes that melted and waned after a moment, "Okay, you better b-b-bring chinese food." she huffed, her jaw grinding like two tectonic plates.

"You're buying the beers." Clarke pressed a chaste kiss to her cheek.

Clarke got out of the car and pushed her keys into the palm of a young nurse without a word exchanged between them. To talk seemed unnecessary. They wouldn't understand why she did what she did, and even if they could, it would still be the talk of the staff room for months to come. So instead she saved the words for someone who would at least pretend to care and walked towards the main building whilst a gaggle of nurses surrounded Lexa's door like a hoard of the undead from one of the movies Aden insisted on showing her over the weekend.

The chill in the air nipped at the skin on her lips and so she shirked the coat up around her face with her hands dug into her pockets. Footsteps caught up behind her and she recognised the sound of her jangling car keys.

"Doc?" the nurse called after her and Clarke turned around. She was a young girl, probably fresh out of school by the lack of dark rings worn into her face. She had wide eyes and stopped with maybe a metre of distance between them, and Clarke recognised that these little things were a total sum of half pity and half fear. Clarke couldn't quite decide which one she loathed more.

"Mmm?" she hummed some small acknowledgement.

"Chief Kane wants to speak to you, Dr. Griffin."

"Oh, I'm well aware." Clarke forced a little smile and turned on her heel.

"Doc?" the nurse called back once again.

"Yeah?"

"What should I do with your keys?" the nurse offered them forward.
"Leave them with Lieutenant Woods," Clarke said with a wry little smile, and she was entirely too tired of this masquerade to keep quelling it. "We'll need them when I take her home tonight. Will that be all?" she mused out loud.

If the nurse replied or even so much as muttered her disbelief Clarke certainly didn't hear it. She was so high on a mixture of adrenalin and excitement that she could barely breathe. It felt like a pair of hands throttling her. It was a nauseous, exciting, bold feeling to say it out loud. To say in so many words, 'The gossip is true... I fell for the soldier and I'm taking her home.'

It renewed her entirely.

…

Kane's office was a strangely normal affair that almost offended her. He was running late, and the coffee machine on his side table was out of decaf, and the pager on the desk didn't stop ringing for him; because the hospital was always a war zone in its own right and Kane was the five-star general who somehow kept the whole thing ticking over just long enough to see them all through another day.

The door opened and Kane breezed through, clipboard in hand, shrugging off his white coat and hanging it on the back of the door. Clarke sat crossed legged in his swivel chair the same way she did on the nights the babysitter cancelled and her mom tucked her away in here with colouring books to occupy herself with.

He glared at her with dark eyes and nostrils that nearly pulsed with his frustration, "You know Clarke, it was a lot cuter when you were eleven." he walked towards her and pulled out a chair in front of his desk. "Sit." he pointed.

"Happy to see you too." she murmured and moved to her rightful seat in front of the mahogany desk.

Kane sat down and set away his pager in the draw, it was this small action alone that turned Clarke's saliva into gasoline, because nothing was ever important enough for Kane to set away the little pager that existed as his lifeline to every corner of the hospital. Nothing except for this apparently.

Kane's mouth curled into a precarious frown and his nails found purpose in scratching his stubble whilst he sighed a disappointed kind of noise. "I was this far away from calling the police," he held his thumb and forefinger in the air. "The little girl in Pediatrics. The new mother in ICU who's waiting on a heart transplant. I could have spent my weekend helping those people, trying to bump them up the organ list, but instead I've been sat here waiting for Abby to call me to say she's found my renegade Neurosurgeon and the soldier she decided to disappear with!" he hissed and slammed his large hands on the surface, and the stapler and keyboard jumped up and crashed back down again.

"I know it's hard to see… but I thought I was doing what was best for my patient." Clarke said exasperatedly and fortified herself. She sat a little taller in the chair. It would be easier to play this game of pretenses if she were in her white coat, stethoscope around her neck, pager beeping away in her pocket, but she had none of these items to hide behind — all Clarke had was her jeans to wipe her clammy hands down and her beanie hat to catch any drops of perspiration before they rolled down her brow and it was in this moment she realised that she had transfigured from being the doctor into a civilian bystander.

"What would you have done if she had another stroke?" Kane nearly retched at the thought of the
paperwork that would ensue such a fiasco. "What would you have done if she just, I don't know, died in the night?" he yelled with such anger that it bounced off the walls and glass.

Clarke couldn't and wouldn't think about those possibilities, because they weren't possibilities, they were the fuel of her nightmares. "You're right. I let my heart get in the way and I know I can't be her doctor anymore. I know that." she defended herself with tense shoulders, "Marcus—"

"Chief Kane." he levelled a glare, "Don't you dare Marcus me right now."

"Chief Kane," her mouth curled into the words with a bitter taste, "She is stable and her stats are good. She's responding to treatment in a way that is shattering everything we know about traumatic brain injury recovery. She has been to hell and back, and if risking my job means she gets a single second of her life back, then I'll roll the dice, and I'd do it again in a heartbeat." she whispered softly and leaned in on the edge of her seat. "I can't be her doctor anymore but I can still have her best interests at heart, and I'm telling you, she deserves to be discharged."

"You did what was best for yourself!" he snapped. "You threw caution to the wind and now you're going to ask me to clean up this mess for you… I expected so much more from you Clarke!"

"Maybe you're right," Clarke conceded with a nervous tremble to her words. "If you want to punish me that's fine and I deserve it, but leaving her lying there in her ivory tower whilst the world goes on without her... it's killing her, Kane."

"So you want to discharge her?! Six months ago she was in a coma, dependant on intubation, with decorticate response to stimuli... do you know what that means?"

"Do I know what that means?" Clarke blinked away the violent kind of disbelief that threatened to pour out of her mouth and she could barely suffer this any longer. "My father had the same injury and the same prognosis... did you know that?" she cocked her head and narrowed her stare.

Kane leaned back quietly and there was a shame that exuded off of him like fog that existed to dampen her resolve, though it failed miserably. Of course he knew about Jake's injuries. He was the one who held Abby and contained her implosion within the confines of his arms when the machines that mastered his body into nothing more than puppetry finally stopped hissing and playing their sick game.

"Shrapnel trauma to the parietal and temporal lobes," Clarke forced herself to say the words out loud, "Massive haemorrhaging too. He stroked out again and again until he was just lying there... so many tubes coming out of him I didn't even recognise him. Mom turned his life support off because he was brain dead. If I didn't find Lieutenant Woods when I did? Let me assure you, there would be a Purple Heart and a folded American flag on a shelf in her little brother's room instead of the football we tossed around this weekend." she near on hissed through gritted teeth. "I brought her back from the dead... it's time to let her start living."

"Clarke," Kane softened and scratched his head, "I don't think you're fully grasping the gravitas of this situation." he exasperatedly sighed.

"I know that!" Clarke huffed and hated herself for being in this position, "I know how this goes; you suspend me and I sit around at home for a month until the board lets me back. You palm Lexa off on Octavia—who by the way is nowhere near competent enough to deal with any of this research—and whilst all of this goes on, I'm stuck doing lab work until next Thanksgiving."

"Would you prefer me to just fire you?" Kane raised his brow. "Best case scenario, you're on a three month suspension and when you come back the Department of Defense overlooks this black
mark on your record and continues to fund your research."

"That's best case?" Clarke raised her brow. "What's worst case?"

"Worst case is the board revokes your medical license." Kane chewed and grimaced on the taste, "I will do everything in my power to help your cause… but if I let you discharge Lieutenant Woods, it's not going to do you any favours when your professionalism is called into question if there's a hearing."

"Then discharge her and I'll resign and save you the trouble!" Clarke nearly begged.

"You would go that far?"

"At this point, I'm begging you not to push me, because I don't know how far I'm willing to go for this girl and I don't want to find out." she admitted, ashamed as she was.

The feeling washed over her like a wave that cracked over the breakers and soaked her wet through. She saw the way Kane's brows furrowed into mountains and his eyes softened into pearls and with absolute certainty she knew she had won. But to admit her weakness, to stare him in the eye and tell him the truth; that she would rather resign than keep her forbidden love locked in her ivory tower left her vulnerable in all the ways she hated.

"She'll stay with me and Raven." Clarke continued and soured at the last part, "I know it's a little unorthodox, I know that, but where better for her to be than with the world's foremost expert in the recovery of neurologically compromised soldiers with pathophysiological damage to the brain structure?"

"You're the world's foremost expert now?" he levelled a stare.

"I'm the only one who's ever succeeded at it. So yeah, I'm the world's greatest." she crossed her arms and raised her chin.

At that he rolled his eyes, "You really love her, don't you?" Kane asked, half shame and half disgust.

"Enough to burn down my life apparently." Clarke reasoned quietly and folded her arms, "She's been ready to be discharged for weeks, Kane, and I don't know if I love her. I don't know if she's the one. I don't know any of the answers to the big questions. I just know that somewhere between being her doctor and being a civilian on the sidelines, the feeling of wanting to take care of her has never gone away."

…

It was long after dinner time when she finally awoke, groggy and dishevelled from the drip they'd hooked into her vein pumping painkillers she couldn't even pronounce through her system. She rolled over and the sound of a plastic hospital gown crunched and followed her. It was the most depressing sound in the universe.

She had to go to the bathroom. That was the first thing on the agenda before she even so much as opened her eyes. There was no way come hell and highwater she was letting some nurse young enough to make daisy chains with Aden put her on a commode, so instead she inched towards the edge of the bed, eyes still closed, legs lazier than usual thanks to the painkillers which though she was certain she didn't need she was in too much of a blissful state to even think about complaining. Her legs bumped into something as she swung them off the edge of the bed, it was enough to force her eyes open.
"Hey Soldier, you were out for a while." the good doctor grinned that sloping smile and suddenly Lexa felt like she could breathe again. "You ready to go home?"

"Hi," Lexa slurred lazily and yawned. "Home?"

"You've been formally discharged… you can come home with me if you want to." Clarke burst into a grin, "Or, you know, you could stay here if you want too..." she teased.

"Home with you p-please." Lexa pouted.

The painkillers gnawed and distorted her depth perception and the bit of balance she was able to cling on to on her better days. Lexa sagged boneless and fell forward but Clarke was quicker, the good doctor slipped her hands around the soldier's waist and propped her back up in the sitting position.

"How much did you drink whilst I was gone?" Clarke hummed and did well to hide the knot of disgust in her gut that an incompetent intern somewhere pumped her beautiful girl full of painkillers and sedatives for no good reason other than because they could. Lexa needed pain management, but the brief list of administered medications on her chart were the equivalent of killing a blue bottle fly with a grenade.

"I think th-they gave me s-some stuff." Lexa raised her arm so the good doctor could see the bruised pin-pricked skin inside of her elbow, "I think you should kiss it better." she pouted.

Though it was wrong, Clarke couldn't help but find her big bad soldier adorable like this. "Is that your official prescription Dr. Woods?" she smirked.

Lexa nodded and Clarke chuckled; the good doctor obliged her and pressed little kisses to the crook of her arm and tucked a dark coiled piece of dark hair behind her soldier's ear. "Better?"

"Much better." Lexa slurred and squinted, "Can you take me to the bathroom?" she asked quietly.

"Sure can," Clarke assured her and wrapped one of her arms underneath her armpit so she could take most of her weight. "One, two, three," she encouraged and stood her up with a big pull.

"The very pinnacle of romance right?" Lexa slurred and teased as Clarke lead her towards the en-suite attached to the room. "Normally couples have to be together for at l-l-least sixty years to achieve this kind of intimacy." she mused.

"You are so high right now."

"I must be…" she agreed and sat down on the toilet. Clarke gave her some dignity and went back into the hospital room to finish packing. "I think I'm g-going to keep this hospital gown and wear it as my wedding dress so we never forget where we started." she slurred loudly from the bathroom.

"So high right now." Clarke muttered to herself and rolled her eyes. "That's nice, Lex!" she called back and finished folding her sweats.

…

It was a late hour of the night when Raven plucked up the courage to go back to the apartment. Between the ground floor and the four flights of stairs she concocted a slither of hope that the place would be empty except for a tiny cat that was ready for its dinner. She turned the key in the door and got as far as the kitchen counter before the glare from the silenced TV diluted the darkness of the living room.
"Hi! Clarke listen—"

"Sh!" Clarke hissed and turned her head to glare at her.

Raven moved towards her and could just about make out a blanket covered figure lying horizontal on their sofa with their head in Clarke's lap. She stood there for a moment not quite sure until it all fell into place. "Clarke… is that Lexa?" Raven asked quietly.

Clarke nodded.

"Please tell me I'm not harbouring a felon right now—"

"Fuck off," Clarke enunciated each word quietly so not to wake her sleeping beau. "She's been discharged. We're going to stay here for a while until I put a deposit on somewhere more accessible."

Even in the darkness Raven could see the dark circles carved underneath Clarke's eyes and the sallow of her skin. She hadn't slept. It was nothing new, Clarke rarely got as much sleep as she should and neither did Raven. It went hand in hand with being a doctor, but this was different, this time her lack of sleep came from a stress that Raven knew she was the cause of and it left a stone in the pit of her stomach.

"Can we talk?" Raven asked softly and pulled down the hood of her sweatshirt.

Clarke was too enthralled with the creature in her lap, stroking the tiny baby hairs that sprouted off of Lexa's hairline whilst she slept off the dregs of the painkillers that rain their course through her system.

"Clarke?"

"What could we possibly have to talk about?" she finally looked up and set her jaw, "How is my mom by the way?"

Raven sank into the back of the chair and nervously picked at her skin, "Do you think I wanted any of this to happen?"

"Raven—"

"I know!" Raven pinched her brow, "I know it's my fault." she repeated quietly and tempered her tone as the soldier furrowed her head and stirred just slightly. Clarke tamed her, stroked her head and hushed her until the soldier curled her face into her stomach and drifted back asleep.

"I am on a three month suspension and I might lose my medical license. I think I'm now officially dating a girl who just so happens to have brain damage that I'm not allowed to fix anymore and my best friend is screwing my mom. I don't have time to make you feel better about your terrible decisions." Clarke mouthed and reached for the glass of merlot on the coffee table, "I barely have enough energy to fart." she added after a long glug.

"Do you think just for tonight we could be friends? You can totally go back to hating me tomorrow morning but it sounds like you need someone." Raven mused and picked up the bottle and took a pull of her own, "Did you crack open the vintage without me?" she asked with narrowed eyes.

"Maybe."

"I take everything back, you can go fuck yourself."
Clarke laughed, she bit her mouth and she tried not to but it poured out of her chest and she resented herself for offering this inevitable olive branch. "How did my life come falling down over the space of three days?" she closed her eyes and shook her head.

"I'm asking myself the same question." Raven shrugged, "I know what you're thinking though, I know that you hate me, but surely you get the whole liking someone you're not supposed to thing?" she nodded down towards the soldier in Clarke's lap.

"No. Don't do that. Don't compare this to what you did." Clarke wagged her finger, "You didn't come out of her vagina — it's a whole other deal."

Raven nearly vomited in her mouth, "That's disgusting."

"My thoughts exactly." Clarke glared.

A second passed between them and without missing a beat the brunette could no longer hide her curiosity, "How did you even get her up the stairs?" she blurted and took another swig of their most expensive vintage.

"I carried her." Clarke sighed, "I think I owe the intern that put her down with enough benzos to kill an elephant an apology… if she was sober enough to realise what was going on she'd make it some big thing and drag herself up four flights of stairs. The girl has a lot of pride."

Raven chuckled and somehow felt a little better than she did before she walked in the apartment. Clarke was okay. Well, she wasn't okay, but she would be okay, and somehow that was okay enough. She sat there tending to her little ragdoll soldier and it was a strange thing to watch her be so glaringly in love with someone. Clarke never brought girls home, let alone carry them up four flights of stairs.

"Your back must be killing you…" Raven mused.

"Nah," Clarke shrugged it off. "She lost so much weight since the accident… she's like a hundred pounds soaking wet."

"Well, at least you have that going for you," Raven thought out loud and stood from her chair, "Come on. I'll help you take G.I Jane to your bedroom and maybe we can talk?" she offered a hand.

Clarke rolled her eyes but conceded anyway. "Lexa?" she whispered quietly and nudged her shoulder, "Lex, honey, come on." she stirred her soldier and finally the girl in her lap responded with a long groan. "We're going to bed now, come on, let me give you the grand bedroom tour."

At that Lexa opened her eyes and mumbled herself awake.

"Of course the dashing soldier would wake up at the mention of your bedroom." Raven rolled her eyes.
Chapter 16

The men had congregated outside of the Mahfouz house once more. It was different this time, Lexa was alone in the village scarce for a band of female medics here to tend to the emergency centre. Though the men showed their disapproval with globs of phlegm spat at the dusty ground — they let her pass unimpeded this time.

"Lexa!" Mrs Mahfouz said her name with a grin in that husky warm sounding accent. The soldier gingerly toed inside the house with a widening smile. "I was beginning to worry you had gotten yourself shot. I haven't heard from you in at least a week." she scolded the young woman and pushed a hot spoonful of something delicious straight from the pot to her lips. "Try this." she ordered and Lexa obliged.

"I'm very good at not getting shot believe me, people have tried and failed before." she assured her and grinned into the taste of warm soup. Filled with laughter and life, this home was always a sanctuary away from the world outside it's broken door. It always reminded her of the little house she grew up in back home.

Their lessons had carried on for some weeks now and Lexa was becoming a novitiate in the language. She could say small things like the animals and her numbers, she could exchange pleasantries and now they were beginning to dip their toes into the more advanced stuff.

Mrs Mahfouz always fed her well during their lessons too, as if Lexa needed anymore encouragement to get away from the bureaucracy of war. The soldier was permitted a taste of whatever was slow cooking on the gas burner on any given day and no matter what was cooking it was always assured to be better than the dehydrated food shipped in back at camp.

"Mohammed come here," Mrs Mahfouz called over the young boy sat at her kitchen table colouring with broken crayons. "This is my friend Lexa Woods." she patted the lieutenant's shoulder and pulled her by the arm towards her grandson proudly.

The boy said something in his own language shyly and hid behind his grandmother. He was maybe seven or eight years old, shaggy hair and a Power Rangers t-shirt tucked into his shorts though Lexa wondered whether he'd ever seen the show at all. It took her a moment to see the vibrations in his knees but the boy was sure enough cowering away from her.

"You don't have to be afraid of me." Lexa said softly and shirked off her rifle and outerwear until she looked as close to a civilian as she could possibly get, dressed in just her boots, khakis and a green general issue t-shirt tucked into the lip of her belt.

The boy peered at her with wide eyes and desperately muttered something to his grandma once more — pointing at her the entire time.

"You don't have to be afraid of me." Lexa said softly and shirked off her rifle and outerwear until she looked as close to a civilian as she could possibly get, dressed in just her boots, khakis and a green general issue t-shirt tucked into the lip of her belt.

The boy peered at her with wide eyes and desperately muttered something to his grandma once more — pointing at her the entire time.

"Come on," Lexa made herself small and crouched, "what's so frightening about me? After all I don't eat children this close to lunchtime — it spoils my appetite." she chuckled.

"He says," Mrs Mahfouz craned her neck down to get a better ear for her grandson's mutterings, "He says you're the reason he's dead." she translated.

"What?" Lexa blinked.

Quiet and calm, as if they were merely talking about the weather or school. Mrs Mahfouz listened to her grandson's whispers once more and repeated them back to the soldier with a strange smile
plastered into her cheeks as if they were talking small pleasantries. "He said if only you had ran a little faster. Tried a little harder. Did your job a little better… maybe he would have survived the car bombing."

The walls began to bleed. It dripped through the brick grouting and ran down the broken plasterboard, then it began to slosh and pool on the floor until their feet grew sticky in it.

"I," Lexa mouthed, "I, I, don't know what you're talking about." she stumbled backwards though her legs moved with thick slow movements as if she were wading through sand.

The back of her head stung, she moved her fingers to the base of her neck and felt around for the source of the pain — there was something lodged there. She tugged and wiggled at the hard object jutting out of her head and finally gave it an almighty pull.

In her hands was a gnarled fragment of metal with thick globs of blood hanging off it's jagged ends; her hands vibrated nervously and she dropped it to the floor where the pooling at their ankles swallowed it out of sight.

Mrs Mahfouz's face flickered between the warm smile Lexa knew well and silent wide mouthed hollow sobs as if two divergent versions of Khaleda Mahfouz occupied the exact same space.

"I, I," Lexa felt her head spin, "I don't understand?" she swallowed with a burning heat licking up her back like the flames of hell.

She clenched her eyes for a mere moment but when she opened them again Mrs Mahfouz and her grandson were long gone — in their stead Indra and Aden stood in their place.

"Mawma," Lexa said her name so small and tiny, "I, Mawma, I don't know what's happening—"

Aden stared at her with sullen eyes that sank into his face. He was dressed in Mohammed's clothes, his dusty sandals squelching as blood lapped at his toes. His left arm was hanging off save for a few stringy bits of tendon and he was covered in a thick coating of rubble and dust.

"Wake up, Lexa!" he screamed and startled her.

"I don't understand—"

"Wake up!" they both said in unison, "Wake up Lexa!"

…

It was way too early in the morning to find herself in this kind of predicament. Clarke had taken her morning jog around the block and Raven had just managed to drag herself towards the kitchen to fetch a glass of water when she heard the screams.

She found Lexa squealing like a lamb in a slaughterhouse with her knuckles white around the covers. Clarke's side of the bed was undisturbed and Raven only imagined that meant she slept on the sofa last night.

"Lexa!" she grabbed the soldier, "Lexa wake up!"

Lexa began to thrash, her jaw grinding into a crescendo of blind fear, the colour ran flush from her face. Raven grabbed her, hands wrapped around her shoulders and pulled her upright. "Wake up, it's okay, you're okay." she rubbed her back.
"Jesus Christ!" Lexa finally hissed a breath and felt the quilt attack her legs with proximity. Raven was above her and the walls were not bleeding, whatever that nightmarish world was that she'd concocted in her dreams — she was free of it now.

"I don't know what just happened but I think I levelled up." Raven wiped her brow and slapped the back of Lexa's shoulder. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, just a n-n-nightmare." Lexa stuttered and pressed her palms into her eye sockets. Heat clung to her like a lover on a cold night and all she could do was pull the wet material away from her skin.

Raven instinctively pressed the back of her hand against Lexa's brow and quickly pulled it away again. "You're burning up, come on," she offered a hand and pulled the quilt away from Lexa's bare legs. "Let's get you a cold shower."

"One doctor bossing me around is enough, don't you think?" she bristled but took Raven's hand nonetheless — her legs were loose and unwilling to co-operate against the ground. Raven seemed more adept with these things though and held her body up effortlessly with the side of her hip pressed into Lexa's gut for stability whilst she fixed the canes in each one of her hands.

"Better?" Raven nodded down to her grip on the sticks.

"Better."

"I think two doctors busting your balls is better than a dozen back at the hospital… if I were you I would try and not give Clarke buyer's remorse," Raven teased and lead her towards the bathroom, "she'll take you back to the returns department otherwise." she nudged her ribs with an elbow.

The drugs were still in Lexa's system — she felt hazy and sweaty from the last dregs of the painkillers. It was apparent enough to Raven as the cause of her sluggish movements and damp skin; painkillers were the general entree of choice for most of her ortho patients and she made a career out of being good at prescribing them.

They both heard the front door open and close before they reached the bathroom. It was quickly followed by the sound of Clarke's breathy panting from her morning jog along with the soft thud of her sneakers getting kicked off.

"We're over here," Raven called out down the hallway and Clarke quickly poked her head around the corner with a perplexed little look.

"Morning," she eyed them both and busied her hands with tieing the messy bun on her head, "I'd be shocked to find either of you awake this early… but two of you? Who died?"

Lexa straightened herself on her canes and forced her wobbling legs to submit to her will. It was a tiny thing but it was a statement nonetheless, it said: no matter how bad you think it is — I'm still standing tall.

"Oh you know," Raven shrugged and wiped her own brow, "just night terrors… nothing a cold shower can't fix."

"Night terrors?"

"Th-the boy from the explosion," Lexa shook her head and blushed, "I thought, I, I dreamed that he died but it was just a dream. He's alive. I'm alive. we're all alive. It c-could be worse."
Clarke burned with a peculiar guilt, swallowing and chasing it back down her throat into the pit of her stomach. She didn't expect Lexa would remember her white lie from when they met in Indiana — it horrified and pleased her in equal measures that there was clearly no memory deficits.

"Yeah," Clarke nodded and breathed, "just a dream baby."

Raven shuddered and made a disgusted little noise, rolling her eyes and looking between them both. "It's definitely the drugs wearing off." she said in her best doctor voice.

"Ah, about that Lex." Clarke scowled and footed closer towards them, "The interns definitely gave you the good stuff last night, you might feel a little sick today but it's nothing we can't take care of." she shrugged her sweater over her head. "Right Ray?"

"We?" Raven looked between them. "Nope, I have to see someone about... a thing." she fumbled, "Don't get me wrong I like you and everything G.I Jane but you're on your own." she patted the soldier's shoulder.

Lexa's mouth widened into a grin, "A thing?" she raised an accusing brow.


Clarke crossed her arms and hung her head back, breathing through the desire to pummel her to the floor one millisecond to the next. "Raven, I'm suspended, if she needs a fluid drip I can hardly run down to CVS and grab one."

At that Raven pulled her lips into an exaggerated big frown. "Sucks to be you." she shrugged and footed gingerly towards her room, she stopped before she passed the door frame, turning, sighing, caving. "If you need anything just call me — I'll be ten minutes away tops." she mumbled.

Lexa chuckled, "If I-I die, on your head be it."

"Duly noted." she scowled and closed her bedroom door.

Clarke pinched the bridge of her nose and walked the length of hallway towards her wobbling soldier. Lexa was messy bed hair and sticky skin; a sweatshirt burrying her with it's size. Clarke slipped her hands underneath it and over the skin that covered her jutting hips, kissing the underside of her jaw.

"Come on let's run a shower," Clarke sighed and pulled back to kiss her lips, though Lexa uncharacteristically refused and moved her mouth. "Okay, what's going on?" the doctor raised her brow.

"You don't have to help clean me, I'm not a child." Lexa pouted.

"I wasn't—" she bit the insides of her cheeks, "I thought we could shower together but you know, if that's not what you want..."

"I retract my previous statement." Lexa softened and leaned for a kiss.

"Nuh-uh," Clarke pushed her chest with a little laugh, "you've got to earn it now."

"Well..." Lexa simpered, "How about I run the shower and you grab the towels, divide and conquer as th-they say." she leaned in and tried for a kiss once more.

Clarke held her shaking hips as she braced herself on the canes and rolled her eyes, forfeiting this
small game and pressing her mouth into a soft kind of lingering kiss. It felt strange to be domestic like this, to begin this game that she'd never played before. It was new ground.

"I want to go Home Depot later and grab some handrails and stuff so you can get around easier—"

"I love it when you talk dirty to me, Doc."

"Lex," she slapped her shoulder and immediately regretted it when the soldier wobbled on her canes. "Shit," she grabbed her with a mortified expression, "sorry."

"As soon as I get out of this shower I'm calling a helpline." Lexa pretended to bristle.

Lexa ran the shower and Clarke heard her all the way from the laundry room bustling around on her canes, it was a sound she could get used to, there was a reverie to this whole domestic thing that Clarke settled into with ease. Lexa was easy to love; though she was nowhere near ready to cross that bridge.

Clarke loved few things. Important things. But what she loved she would die protecting, the thought of adding Lexa to that small list made her stomach bunch into the shape of an origami fan.

The doorbell rang and disturbed her search for the good towels her mom bought for Christmas.

"Coming." she called, padding down the hallway as it rang again.

Clarke opened the door to be greeted by the face of a stranger, though she knew this woman couldn't be a stranger to everyone in the apartment. She wore the familiar black uniform and green cap that Clarke had so often seen in Lexa's pictures.

"Can I help you?" Clarke suddenly grew lofty shouldered.

"Lieutenant Lexa Woods." the woman blurted almost violently, "I came back from tour three days ago, I've been trying to find her but the hospital out in Indiana said she came to the hospital here and when I got there, they said I should come and talk to you, so here I am. Where's Lexa Woods?"

"She's here." Clarke confirmed and staunchly held her place as the soldier in front of her tried to barge past. "Hey now, I didn't say you could come in, I don't know you." she scolded and leaned into her stare.

The soldier groaned and flexed her jaw, for a moment Clarke wondered whether it was a general issue expression all military personnel possessed. Though this woman seemed less restrained than Lexa; her eyes had an angry inclination and her mouth curled into a precarious kind of snarl.

"My name is Lieutenant Anya Green. I am her best friend and the woman who pulled her out of there during evac so if you want to shoot the shit with me, go ahead, but her commanding officer is recommending her for the Distinguished Service Cross and I'm not leaving until I talk to her." she growled. "Try me."
Chapter 17

Anya burrowed into the doctor's words with a manacled expression, musing on each tidbit with a need to know more. She saw the memories of Lexa's dust-covered face in every blink and felt the warm stickiness of her blood between her fingers at every mention of traumatic brain damage, but it wasn't enough. She needed to know everything. She needed the information so she could trace her way back through every second of that day and figure out if she could have done something different, something better.

Clarke seemed nice, beautiful and somewhat blithering and nothing like Lexa's types before, but nice enough. She tried to preoccupy herself with those bland little descriptions as soon as the topic moved to Lexa's current condition.

Clarke used phrases like 'a little forgetful' and 'quiet with her words.'

She said them with the pause and hum of a woman setting out the reality of the situation in the mildest terms possible and Anya didn't know whether to be grateful for that small kindness or insulted that this girl, smart and insular, with no real clue of the things they see at war thought her in need of milder words.

She decided to stick with grateful, it left her feeling an iota less indignant.

"I, er, I've read the reports from what happened that day." Clarke scratched the back of her neck and settled backwards into the armchair with a mug of black coffee.

"You have?"

"Well I am—I mean—I was her surgeon. So yeah, I read the reports."

"Then you know she's an idiot." Anya couldn't help but sigh, "Nearly got her head blown off and for what? One boy. I know I'm the bad guy for saying that, I know she's a hero, I know it's who she is… but what a complete reckless idiot." her mouth grew tight around the words.

"Insane." Clarke nodded in surprising agreement.

"I mean who runs through a valley of gunfire past a confirmed explosive, who the hell does that?!"

"Has she always been like that?"

"First female valedictorian of our class, brave and heroic and stupid is her thing," Anya rolled her eyes and softened.

Clarke chuckled, "Even in school?"

Clarke chewed the inside of her cheek. It was a symptom of contemplation and Anya could only wonder what it was the pretty doctor had to contemplate over. "Oh yeah, definitely in school. This life is all she's ever know, it's all any of us have ever known, really." Anya's shoulders shrugged forward in thought, "Yes ma'am, no ma'am, thank you ma'am. It's how she processes each moment to the next."

Clarke gave a thoughtful expression and chewed the inside of her cheek. It was a symptom of contemplation and Anya could only wonder what it was the pretty doctor had to contemplate over.
She had her own ideas of course, Indra had called over the weekend and caught her up with the basics, she told her about the doctor, their impromptu visit. Somehow Indra kept control over her aching voice as she painted the stark reality of Lexa's limp and stutter. It was the kind of conversation that left a residue in Anya's mouth, acidic and violent, that washed out her words until she was stuttering her goodbyes to Lexa's mom on the phone. Though it was a conversation Anya needed to have. It gave her precious days to prepare herself for this meeting.

"You're dating her, right?" Anya sussed quietly and looked around the warm little apartment. Clarke's eyes grew wide and a nervous small laugh escaped her lips. "It's okay," Anya waved it off, "I get it, you spend so much time with someone that suddenly everything else becomes secondary. I'm not going to do the whole self-righteous speech thing."

"Thank god—"

"But if you hurt her." Anya leaned in with a precarious growl and lowered her voice, "If you get this wrong. If you build her up just to knock her down again…"

"You said no self-righteous speech." Clarke pointed out quickly and swallowed a last mouthful of coffee. "I know that you want to understand all of this because she's your friend, I get that. I know what it's like to want your friend to be happy but just… with someone different. I know. I'm probably nothing like girls you've met before but I don't just go around destroying my life for one-night stands."

"Good, that makes me happy." Anya said, unseated by how quickly this girl settled her. "And as far as Lexa's concerned, you really do not want to see me unhappy. Am I clear, Doc?"

"So crystal rainbows are refracting off of you." Raven interrupted them, pulling on her coat and bag. "Sorry. Clarke's roommate. Love a woman who knows how to put that one in her place though." she pointed to her scowling friend with a wry smile.

"Raven was just leaving."

"Yeah, stuff to do." Raven nodded at the soldier positioned stiffly in their ottoman chair. "Clarke, I think I'll be back before dinner but you can call me whenever if you need help."

"Gotchya." she waved off the brunette as she head out the door.

Anya watched the girl leave. There was something polarising about her. Something quirky and different in the way she spoke. The sounds of a shower faucet turning off and the thumping of canes against bathroom tiles filled the apartment and Clarke's eyes flitted towards the end of the hallway.

"I should probably go and tell her you're here."

"It might be an idea." Anya bristled.

Clarke disappeared quietly and pulled the wooden separator behind herself, obscuring Anya's view of the long hallway. It did nothing to obscure the sounds of the bathroom door opening, small hushed talks, the fan in the bathroom whirring away to clear off the steam. Anya existed in the small sounds with perking ears that listened for Lexa's voice, or maybe her laugh, or just something to confirm it was her.

There was another sound that distracted her and it came from the streets below the window pane. It was an argument of sorts, or rather a losing battle.
"No, I'm not, we're not doing this Abby."

Anya focused in on the words, busied herself with them so she didn't have to bare the hollow imaginations of Lexa's state.

"She knows! How can you not see that the hard part is over? I know. I know. I get that. I know it isn't easy but we're not doing this here."

Tentatively, Anya stood from the chair and placed her coffee mug on the table. It felt intrusive and so completely unlike her to care about the peripherality of her day but nonetheless she found herself peering over the window ledge with a knee jammed against the top of the radiator to see what was going on.

"You know what, fuck this! I'm coming over right now. Yes, I am. I'm coming and we're going to talk this through." Raven paced below with her phone in hand.

Raven glanced back up to the apartment building by chance. Anya quickly darted back inside and gulped an embarrassed sigh, their eyes had met and now to this stranger she would forever be the voyeur who watches the passing world out of windows.

With any luck Lexa would break up with the pretty doctor sooner rather than later and she wouldn't ever have to worry about bumping into Clarke's roommate again.

"Bean…"

Anya suddenly stiffened at the sound of her nickname. Slowly, tentatively, curious and cautious and terrified of who that voice belonged to, she turned back from the window.

"Lex!" she gasped and earned a wide grin from her friend.

Her hair was wet and brushed back, scrawnier and paler, a little hunched and a little banged up, dressed in sweatpants and a vest, leaning on two wooden canes with Clarke behind her just in case. But nonetheless, she was wonderfully and impossibly and most definitely 1st Lieutenant Lexa Woods.

There was no hugs. That wasn't who they were. Instead there was a shared chuckle and two wide grins that whispered 'Hey buddy, boy am I glad to see you.'

Lexa dragged herself forward and Anya took a step closer too.

"I'm still pretty, right?"

"No." Anya replied tersely, "Definitely not."

"You're d-disgusting."

"You're alive."

"I think so? Doesn't seem like much of an accom..." she lost herself in the syllables of the word but recovered quickly, "accomplishment."

Clarke plumped up pillows on the sofa and gently guided Lexa into the seat. "Hey, I don't shit all over your achievements." she softly scolded her with a little beaming grin.

Lexa looked at her girlfriend in a way that unsettled Anya. It was this sweeping monstrosity of a puppy-eyed besotted stare that suffocated the room. Lexa was staunch and dry and funny but she
wasn't personable. It was how Anya had preserved her in memory during the months on tour when she was certain she'd return home to see her comatose in a curtained off room at the V.A hospital.

But here she was, puppy-eyed besotted stare and all.

"You look good Lex." she tightened around the words.

"You're a bad liar."

"Well, I thought you were going to be a vegetable." Anya blurted and the months of emotional inactivity came rushing back to her voice. "I, I didn't want to come home from tour. I was terrified. I prepared myself for seeing you like that, comatose and dribbling. Lincoln hating me for not doing more. Your mom asking questions, talking her through everything I did between the blast site and the hospital. I was ready for it."

Anya drew in a breath and ground her jaw.

"I prepared myself for all of it but here you are, stupid and alive as ever, and I don't know what to do with it now."

"Sorry to disappoint you." Lexa smiled.

"Such an asshole." Anya rolled her eyes and glanced at Clarke, "Can you route around in her thick skull and fix that?"

"I can look into it?" Clarke shrugged. "I'll give you guys some privacy and see if I can find any research papers online."

"God... don't have t-too much fun." Lexa chuckled and reached for her hand.

Clarke rolled her eyes and tucked a piece of wet hair off of Lexa's face. She kissed the side of her jaw and cupped the other side with her cheek. "Be good." she warned her battered soldier.

"Yes, because I've been playing the long-con all along so Anya and I can disappear into the dust with your vitamix." she slurred with a grin.

Clarke left on another eye roll and Anya smirked without restrain.

"What do you think?" Lexa asked after the sound of Clarke's bedroom door clicked shut.

"Of the girl or your state?"

"Both."

"Beautiful." Anya softly smiled and patted her friend's hand, "The girl isn't too awful either."

"Did you just call me beautiful?" Lexa teased and shoved her shoulder as Anya flopped on the sofa beside her.

"Don't get used to it." she warned, "I'm still convinced they're turning you into Captain America with some kind of secret super-formula. I evac'd you out of that mess. I saw it with my own two eyes and you shouldn't have survived." she assured her with stern eyes.

"It's classified stuff... straight from the president kind of shit." Lexa nodded along.

"Makes more sense than some cute doctor inventing a whole new thing to save your life. You are
literally Frankenstein's monster."

"Monster in the streets… killer in the sheets." she winked and earned an exaggerated retching sound from Anya.

This felt unreal, she wanted to pinch herself, wanted to slap Lexa just to make sure she was tangible and real. Here they were sat on a sofa in downtown Alliance drinking coffee and shooting the shit and none of this should be real.

"I know you didn't come all this way just to ruin my plans for the day." Lexa announced with expert intuition.

Anya closed her eyes and inhaled, she went as far as pulling off her green beret to rub the top of her head. "Lex…"

"Sp-spit it out."

"They're recommending you for the Distinguished Service Cross. It's crazy, you probably won't get it, but they're recommending you for trying to save that boy's life and I wanted you to hear it from someone you know."

"Trying?" Lexa's eyes flickered at her curiously.

"It's a wonder you're alive." Anya shook her head, "When we got there he was just... parts."

"Shut up!" Lexa hissed and began to mumble to herself, rubbing the back of her neck, "You're wrong. He lived. I know he lived. Wh-why are you lying to me?" she stuttered through each little sentence.

"Lexa." Anya grabbed her forearm and tethered her, "He died and I know that because I called it in. It's sad and it's tragic but it's war… you did everything you could." she wrapped her fingers around the back of her friend's neck and clung there. "You tried."

There was a numbness that washed over Lexa, the little colour left drained out of her face and her lips pulled inward between her teeth and she was left hollow and vacant.

"I dream about him." she mumbled and looked to the floor, "I have these dreams and in them he blames me. At first he's frightened, then he's covered in dust and blood, then he blames me. Always."

"They're just dreams."

"No, Anya." Lexa shook her head, "They were dreams… they were dreams because I got to wake up and believe he was alive and now?" her voice caught in her throat, "They're not just dreams anymore."

"Okay." Anya softened and took her hand. "But one failure doesn't equate anywhere close to the people you did save. Dozens of them, maybe hundreds of them, all alive and kicking dust in their little shit-bowl desert thanks to you."

"You can tell them I don't want their fucking medal." Lexa shook her head and furrowed into this new found truth. "I, I can't walk or talk properly, probably never will again, and I can't remember my brother's middle name or Costia's face or how I got this scar on my knee." she traced her finger over her kneecap and listed these little impertinent deficits.
"It'll come back—"

"There's stuff missing, Anya. Important shit that I can't remember and there's no redeeming arc. There's no one who benefitted from any of this. So no, I don't want their medal."


"Lex?" Clarke peeked around the wooden separator and looked between the two soldiers. "What's wrong baby?" she softened at the sight of Lexa's crumpled shoulders.

"I don't even want to look at you right now." she spat and shifted herself out of the chair with her canes.

Lexa hobbled right past her girlfriend and clambered down the hallway. Clarke stood in shock for a second, looking between her now vacant seat and the bedroom door she slammed behind herself.

"Don't." Anya warned the doctor as she set off after her. "I mean it."

"So I'm supposed to just leave her like that?" Clarke threw her hands in the air.

"Absolutely." Anya shot her a look. "She isn't a child, let her have some time to adjust."

After a pause Clarke took up the vacant seat. It was an uncomfortable, suffocating silence but eventually she spoke first.

"I think it's my fault."

"Oh I'm certain of it." Anya scolded her. "It was you who lied to her, wasn't it?"

"You weren't there!" she bit and chewed on the words. Anya watched it come back to her in dribs and drabs, memories of how she found Lexa, and though she wished she didn't — she empathised with the doctor on that much. "She wanted… she needed something good to cling to. I know I shouldn't have, but I didn't exactly think I would be sticking around long enough to see the aftermath of one white lie."

Anya shook her head and sighed, "I should go. I think I've caused my fair share of unwanted trauma for today."

"Please don't."

"Excuse me?"

"Stay." Clarke glanced up at her, "I heard what she said, about her knee and her ex and her brother, there's an entire life that existed long before she met me and I don't want her to forget any of it. I think if you stayed it might help her connect the dots between then and now."

"Have you ever considered that maybe she doesn't want to remember some of it?" Anya mused, loosening her tie and the collar button on her white dress shirt.

"You seem pragmatical enough to know it doesn't work that way."

"And you would know all about how pragmatical I am from the whole hour we've known each other?"
"So it seems." Clarke shrugged. "Just think about it for her? You could stay here for a few days and take her... fishing?"

"Fishing?" Anya narrowed her eyes.

"I don't know what the fuck it is you soldiers do in your spare time. I'm just ad-libbing here." Clarke groaned in frustration. "I just... I want things to be good, you know?"

"You love her." Anya nodded.

"Yeah, I'm sure that's exactly what she's feeling right now, loved and respected."

Anya closed her eyes and pinched her brow. It was apparent to her now why Lexa was so fixated with this girl, they were so different and yet so alike in all the most annoying ways, staunch and dry and determined.

"Fine." Anya bristled. "If it's all the same to you, I'm gonna grab a shower and get out of this uniform."

...

An hour passed, or maybe ten minutes, or maybe a day; time wasn't really a tangible agent as she sat on the edge of the bed trying to piece together a lost hot day in Kandahar. It was an impossible task. Memories were like black holes, she could see the edges and everything pulling towards the centre but then there was just darkness and there was nothing to fill it with.

"Can I come in?" Clarke peeked around the door.

Lexa nodded and hung her head.

"I know you probably don't feel like talking to me right now," she footed over and kneeled in front of the soldier, hands pressed to her kneecaps, chin resting over her fingers.

"I know I lied to you. I know I could have told you. You trusted me and I acted like a coward, but I'm new to all of this and I don't know how to break your heart because I've spent the last six months trying to fix every other bit of you and I just wanted to keep that one thing pure and untouched from all of this."

"I'm not mad at you."

"I thought I was but I'm not because you're a d-doctor and it's your job to patch things up as best you can. You're new at this and yes, you fucked up, you really really fucked up Clarke... but only because I messed it all up in the first place."

"You can't just forgive me like that." Clarke wrinkled her nose. "I got myself ready for tears and shouting, so if you need to hate me for a little bit or curse me out, I can be brave--"

"Clarke I am in love with you."

"What?"

"I'm in love with you." Lexa said it again and bit her mouth. "I can't hate you for little mistakes or fuck ups or hiding behind white lies because I am in love with you and I only have a rudimentary understanding of what it all means, I'm trying to feel out the edges, but I know I can't be mad at you for this."

Clarke blinked and opened her mouth and closed it again, she leaned forward against her chin until
her head pressed into Lexa's belly and broke down her confession into bite-size chunks of information that she could process one bit at a time.

"Have I broken you?" Lexa whispered and stroked her hair.

"I've never done this." Clarke admitted shamefully, "I've never loved someone the way I love you and it's terrifying. It's big and it's scary and it eats a hole through my chest every time I look at you."

"So you love me too?"

"Of course I do you idiot." Clarke groaned and peered up from her hunched shape, "I just... there's a power differential. I'm your doctor and I'm not supposed to love or feel because it's exploitative and dangerous but you nearly got yourself blown up and that's a lot more dangerous than falling in love with someone."

Lexa looked away in shame but Clarke quickly cupped her chin and brought it back.

"I know it's going to be bumpy but I want to be your girlfriend for this part, okay?" Clarke kissed the tips of her fingers. "I want to help make it right again."

"Clarke, I don't think it can ever be made right."

Lexa found herself wrapped in her girlfriend's arms, tucked into the nook of her collarbone, fingers clenching at the loose shirt material around her belly. Clarke held the soldier and positioned herself between her legs, she dug her nose dug through dark tendrils of hair and pressed kisses to her forehead.

She felt the wetness of tears against her skin, shameful embarrassed tears that Lexa wasn't proficient in handling.

"We're going to find a way, baby." Clarke promised quietly.

"Yeah?" Lexa's voice gnawed.

"Yeah, because I love you and we're in this together now."
Chapter 18

The apartment was tidy. The coffee table was clean. The magazines by the lamp stacked neatly. The oven free of grease stains. The towels in the bathroom fluffy and fresh. Anya didn't even realise what she was doing until she found herself lifting the toilet seat to check that was spick and span too. She leaned back on the bath with a groan and rubbed her sore neck, aware and unable to avoid the fact she was a civilian now... discharged, paid in full, left with just the routine and craving for busyness.

Clarke was at work, even though she wasn’t supposed to be. Lexa was at physiotherapy, which was probably why Clarke was at work. Raven was busy with the cougar girlfriend nobody seemed to like talking about. And so it was just Anya, ghosting around an apartment that didn’t belong to her in a city she wasn’t from.

She planned on staying for a few days maximum but now she was going into the second week. It definitely wasn’t intended, the sofa was hardly the Hilton, but busying herself with Lexa meant she didn’t have to figure out the issue of permanency. It meant she didn’t have to anchor down roots and find an apartment and another job just yet.

“Wow...” a mesmerised voice echoed from the hallway. “I didn’t realise you were a trained assassin and the woman from the Ariel detergent commercial in your spare time.” Raven called out. Anya cringed, not because she was house proud but rather because she could hear the thudding noise of Raven’s dirty shoes being kicked off against the wall.

“I’m not an assassin I’m a medic.” The reply came with movement in the bathroom, a flushed toilet to mask the fact she sometimes sat on the edge of the bath just to gather her thoughts. “I mean I was a medic. It’s complicated.” Anya huffed loudly and moved to the living room where Raven was now flopped on the plumped sofa.

“What? Are you and your last job still sleeping together but leading separate lives?”

“Something like that. I left in the night and took the children but we hook up sometimes after visitation.”

“I have no idea what we’re talking about at this point. I’m just gonna put that out there.” Raven said bluntly, pushing forward an extra coffee from the place on the corner. The coffee there was good, sometimes in the morning Anya stopped by after her run to grab something. She saw Raven in there once or twice, never said hello, always kept her head down and let the doctor get on with her day without disturbance. “Here,” Raven motioned again, “Black with three sugars.”

“You know my order?”

“Maybe.”

“Should I expect flowers and chocolates next?” Anya sassed and took a sip. It was good coffee, tasted even better knowing somebody thought to buy it for her.

“I’m just not that kind of girl.” Raven smirked and took a sip of her own coffee. “What did you get up to today? Other than making this place look like a showroom?”

“Other than that?” Anya mused for a moment. She should have had a long list of other things, like looking for a new job, for a place to live, for school programmes now she had her free tuition. Cleaning was about the only thing she did today other than take a run this morning and masturbate
in the bathroom—hardly appropriate to bring up in casual conversation though. “Nothing much. There’s an army bar down on Park Street that I jogged past this morning, thought I might take Lexa tonight. We haven’t drank together in a while.” She leaned back further into the armchair.

“Mind if I tag along?” Raven asked casually.

“I don’t know if it would be your thing… those places get rowdy.”

“Oh come on! It’ll be fun!”

“Don’t you have a grandma to bang?”

“That’s a low blow.” Raven swung her legs and sat up on the sofa, flicking the television off. “Only Clarke is allowed to say that and get away with it.”

“Oh yeah? Why is she so special?”

“Because it’s her mom.” Anya undid all of her meticulous work, spat coffee over the table and floor, she managed to even reach the lamp too. “Yeah,” Raven swiped away the flecks of black coffee from her cheek. “That seems to be the general consensus.”

“Her mom?” Anya’s brow furrowed.

“She’s other things too, an amazing cook, a city mayor, an accomplished surgeon. She’s smart and funny and beautiful and so much more than just an mother or an older woman. Everyone’s a feminist until the topic of conversation is a woman over the age of forty and then suddenly it’s a weird and gross and… and… they’re just expected to wear elasticated trousers from QVC and become invisible. It’s stupid!” Raven exasperated and grew antsy. “Sorry.” She mumbled after a moment.

Anya felt guilty. It wasn’t a usual feeling, normally, seven days a week, her feelings were muted to the point of absence because that is what it took to live her last life. It irked her slightly that the feeling of guilt is something she’s still capable of so easily, but, nonetheless, she sat for a moment and felt guilty for all the little jokes.

“Don’t do that.” Raven bristled and moved to the kitchen counter where the takeout she brought home sat awaiting her.

“Do what?!?” Anya followed and slipped along the other side of the counter.

“Look at me like that… like you don’t know what to say.”

“What am I supposed to say? Like cool. Moms are your thing. There’s nothing wrong with that I guess.” Anya shrugged and made it a non-issue, reaching for a slice of warm pizza. “Least you’ll have someone to rub your back when you’re puking.”

“Whatever. But we are going to that army bar tonight, I want to go.” Raven reconfirmed and leaned on the marble with her elbows. “I’ve been in surgery since four this morning and if I don’t drink and dance and forget about my terrible decision making I’ll have a breakdown. I’m on the edge of one after the last few weeks.”

“Roger that.”

“So is that a yes?”
“It’s a consideration.”

“Tell you what, take me to your army bar tonight and whenever I’m working nights or not here, you can crash in my room. How does that sound?”

“Appealing. I’ll give you that.” Anya stretched and felt her sore back plead for something other than that sofa. “Fine, okay, deal!”

…

Kane’s office was as it was usually, empty and eerily quiet against the background noise of the busy hospital outside. The coffee mug was still half full on his desk, that was a good sign, it meant he must have at least had half a dozen sips before something eye-wateringly boring and urgent called him away to one of the wards upstairs. Hopefully he would be in a half decent mood.

Lexa’s physio appointment was just finishing up and Clarke knew well that the soldier didn’t like her around when she went for speech therapy which is why she found herself here. It was one of her hard limits, so Lexa said, right before Clarke made her girlfriend burn red with embarrassment over the other usage of the term hard limit. It felt strange to call Lexa that, her girlfriend, her real life homosexual monogamous girlfriend whom she kissed in public and slipped a hand round the small of her back. Strange but nice.

“Feet. Off.” Kane waved as he breezed through the door.

Clarke sighed and removed her feet from the top of Kane’s desk, standing from his chair and circling round to the one in front of the sign that read: You don’t have to be crazy to work here, but it helps. Never have words rang so true, Clarke decided as she sat down.

“You’re a week early.” Kane commented with mild displeasure, sitting himself too.

“I knew you already made your decision about what you would say to the board. Had a feeling you probably made it on the day we spoke.”

“The day we spoke, or the day you stormed into my office after kidnapping a patient to tell me she was your lesbian lover and you were taking her home, Clarke?” The distinction was made clear.

Clarke leaned back and pulled a face, released a noise that was somewhere between a laugh and a grimaced gurgling noise. It faded quickly, she sat herself back up and stared at him. “Do you have to make me sound so… deceitful?”

“Well…”

“Don’t say it.”

“Alright,” Kane conceded and rested his hands on the desk. “I did make my decision. The board convened on Thursday morning with Julie Vinegar from the military’s research funding programme—”

“Vinegar Tits?” Clarke gasped and closed her eyes. It may as well be over and done with now, Julie Vinegar was a sour faced dragon in sheep's clothing who never once looked up from her clipboard or saw past the tick or cross on the forms. “I’ll pack my things from the lab and save you the breath.” She began to stand.

“Do you have to be so theatrical? Sit the hell down and let me finish what I was saying.” Kane chided and soured on the taste of the cold coffee on his desk, placing it back down and wiping his
mouth with the corner of his sleeve. "Julie was gung-ho, felt that your *indiscretions* risked the reputation of the programme as a whole. She was adamant about your removal."

"From the research?"

"No Clarke, from your job."

"Oh fucking Christ!" Clarke yelled and blinked rapidly, bracing herself for the unemployment check she would be signing up for before day’s end. She wondered for a moment what colour her shopping cart would be when she lived down beneath the bridge by the river. Whether her mittens would match and how long it would take to lose one of her front teeth—for some reason all the homeless people she treated in the clinic seemed to have one of their front teeth missing. Always.

"But," Kane hesitated and relaxed his expression slightly. "I showed her the results. I told her what a damn fine surgeon you were. Who your mother is. Who your father was. What you and your family gave for this country and the work you tirelessly pour yourself into so nobody goes through what you went through again. I told her all of that."

"And?"

"She still wanted you fired."

"Kane!"

"So," Kane continued. "I told her if she didn’t let this go, Alliance City Hospital would never work with the military research programme again. I told her, very passionately, that I would push my doctors towards every research programme in the nation but never, for as long as I am chief of this hospital, would we work in partnership with them. To which she settled for a written warning on your record and a month suspension, of which you have two weeks left to fulfill." Kane ran a hand through his mop of hair and leaned back, still angry about this whole mess. "If you ever cross me again."

Clarke was gobsmacked, absolutely and entirely speechless. She licked her lips and rubbed her cheek for a moment, swallowing and gathering herself. Eventually the words came, "I… I can’t believe you did that for me."

"It wasn’t for you." Kane made that clear. "I made a promise once that I would take care of you, that I would bail you out of trouble when the time came. It’s a one time deal Clarke. If you mess up again, if you screw up just once,"

"I won’t." Clarke swallowed.

"Good," Kane nodded. "You’re no longer Lexa’s primary physician. You’ll continue your research using the data already collected and if you need anything else Octavia will take care of that. When the time is right you’ll work with new research patients."

"Wait." Clarke lifted a brow, "You’re… you’re not kidding? Octavia is Lexa’s neuro?"

"Would you rather me make her the lead on your research too?"

"That’s my research. You couldn’t—"

"It’s the intellectual property of this hospital in conjunction with the U.S Army. If you step out of line Clarke…” Kane hesitated again and stood from his desk. "Just you watch me call Julie Vinegar."
“Sounds like a great i…” Lexa hesitated for a moment and swallowed. “Idea.” she made the word roll off her tongue cooly with a smile.

Clarke stood in the kitchen and blinked nervously, the dish rag in her hand stopped her digging half-crescent moons into her palm. For that she was thankful. She wasn’t entirely sure how many half-crescent moons she had left before there were permanent scars in that particular spot of skin, Lexa was patience testing to say the least.

It was a warm afternoon, bright and searing through the windows with promises that it wouldn’t rain again like it did this morning. It was that kind of bright spring afternoon where the rare sounds of people actually enjoying there day was audible through the open window by the sofa, the kind of day that required sunglasses and a beer. Suddenly Clarke realised everyone was looking at her, waiting for her to say something.

“I mean?” A little exasperated chuckle was forced, “the medication Lexa is taking…”

“Are perfectly fine to drink alcohol on. I already checked.” Raven raised her finger and bit her bottom lip, her eyes growing wide with excited expectation. She inched closer, her shoulders wiggling and her head tilted to the side. “Come on doc, what do you say? Let’s show these soldiers how we do things?” She chirped and planted herself on the opposite side of the kitchen island.

“Nope. Definitely not.” Clarke swallowed and shook her head, drying the last of the cutlery. The room deflated with a collective sigh but Clarke stayed strong, kept her resolve steely and absolute. “If she seizes in a bar—”

“Okay hold on now!” Lexa interrupted angrily and crossed her arms. It was enough to make Clarke snap up with surprise. It was a beautiful sight, seeing her stand there all puffed out and glaring. It was a symptom of life in-bloom, like a lily unfurling into the searing light of the sun, drinking in the heat as if it was sweet cream. “Clarke, can we talk in private?”

“Come on Anya, let me give you the tour of my bedroom. You can keep your crap in the spare drawer…” Raven nudged Anya, and they quickly made themselves scarce down the hallway.

“Do not look at me like that.” Clarke murmured towards her puffed up girlfriend.

“Don’t you dare speak about me like I’m not in the…” She was forced to pause and gather the words that dared to slip into the slur she was training herself out of. “Like I’m not in the room then!”

“I get that I’m not your doctor anymore but-”

“But nothing!” Lexa snapped and took a few unaided steps towards the kitchen counter. “This is it now. That was the deal. You and me, doing girlfriend things, no doctoring. No putting yourself in charge.”

“Okay, okay listen to me,” Clarke moved around until she was in front of her furious sergeant, slipping gentle hands along her neck. “I am always in charge. That is the deal. That is what it means to be my girlfriend, because I don’t know how to be anything other than me and the me I am loves you so much that she is constantly terrified of what ifs and maybes, and it has nothing to do with the accident. It has nothing to do with the limp or the slur or any of that stuff.”

“Wait did you just say you love me?”
“What?”

“Did you just say you love me?”

“Oh god.”

Lexa gloated, and for a moment Clarke wasn’t sure how one person could go from furious to absolute exuberance so quickly. It spreaded across her face like wild fire, the smile and the glint in her wide green eyes. Clarke covered her blushing cheeks and nodded, because embarrassed as she was, she wasn’t ashamed. Yeah, she did love that stubborn girl.

“C’mere,” Lexa tsked and opened her arms. Slowly Clarke pushed forward and slipped her hands around the small of her girlfriend’s spine, fingers dug into that one divot of a scar that made a crater in Lexa’s back, she tucked her chin onto the flat of her shoulder and gently released a sigh. “If Afghanistan couldn’t kill me what chance do you think a d…dive bar has?”

“I’m gonna miss your stutter when it’s completely gone, you know that right?” Clarke complained and pulled away just enough to give her a look.

“Don’t change the subject.”

“Ergh, fine whatever, you’re right. I know you’re right. I know I’m being insane. I know I’m incredibly difficult to date. I know I hog the bed. I know I ate your ice cream and then said it was Raven even though we both knew it was me. I know I’m not easy, but I’m not used to this, and I’m really trying.”

“Okay idiot, you can relax with the unabridged list.”

“Can I come though? Tonight?”

“I want to know what you’re like when you’re drunk. I’ve got a running bet with Anya, she thinks you’re a cryer.”

“And you?”

“Definitely a dancer.” Lexa grinned and tucked long pieces of blonde hair behind her ears. “A terrible one.”

“You know if you’re well enough to go drinking, you’re well enough to take me on a dinner date right?”

“I’ve got a pretty good lump sum from the Army, just name the place…” Lexa pushed forward and whispered into her neck with a kiss. “Although, if you could pick somewhere without stairs I’d be grateful.” She nodded down at her wobbling legs with a chuckle.

“You think we have time for a quickie before we get to the bar soldier?” Clarke already began to pull on the collar of her t-shirt, stumbling backwards towards the bedroom with giggling kisses.

“Two if we shower together.” Lexa whispered into lips with a grin, slipping a hand around the small of her back as they made their way down the hallway.

“...THAT WAS THE GRAND TOUR, BUT AS YOU CAN SEE THE WALLS ARE SO THIN. VERY THIN. SO INCREDIBLY THIN, CLARKE!” Raven shouted loudly as they passed her door.
Clarke waved her hand and winked at her blushing girlfriend, “She’ll get over it.” She chuckled and pulled Lexa in her bedroom by the collar.

... 

The place bustled with loud country music and an ocean of bodies waiting to be served at the bar, lapping against one another like the high tide waiting for their drinks. There was a dark corner with a little wooden table, stools and a bowl of dirty peanuts in the middle, that was where they settled and Clarke couldn’t help but wonder if this was the kind of place her father would have drank in.

Her and Raven stuck out like a sore thumb, there was an understanding look the patrons gave them, they were civilians, just guests in a place that was reserved for people who earned their right to drink too much and make small talk over the sound of awful music until the small hours of daylight.

“Shot. Drink it. Now.” Anya iterated as she came back from the ocean and put down eight tequilas on the table, limes wedged in each rim and overfilled tequila dribbling over the peanuts.

“Come on, two each is excessive.” Clarke complained with a little laugh and shook her head.

“Nope, try again.” Anya pushed one each towards her and Raven, setting three in front of herself and Lexa. “You remember how to do this or has it been too long?” She asked Lexa.

“Funny, that was the exact last thing I said to your mom before I left for Afghanistan.” Lexa eyeballed her with a smirk and lifted the first to her lips.

“Lexa don’t-” it was useless finishing the sentence. Clarke sat back and watched her girlfriend throw each shot glass down her throat without so much as blinking, let alone wincing into the venom of the alcohol. Anya did the same, slower, but equally as tough.

Raven took half a shot with a sip and let it rest back on the table, choking on the tequila until her breath was enough to make Clarke’s eyes water. She wiped her lips with the back of her hand and made a disgusted noise, leaning in towards Clarke’s ear. “I know you’re the voice of wisdom but can we just admit that was super hot to watch.” Raven pointed at the two soldiers opposite them.

“Okay, agreed.” Clarke muttered quietly behind the cupped hand over her mouth.

“What was that?” Lexa raised a brow.

“That you drink irresponsibly and I’m not going to rub your back when you’re throwing up tonight. Not even a little bit.”

“Sure you will.”

“Will not.” Clarke snorted.

“Yeah, you will. You can’t help yourself, you love doctoring over people.” Lexa chuckled and pushed her foot forward until it nudged Clarke’s high heel. “You’re way too beautiful for this place by the way, that dress should be illegal.” She smiled softly and eyed the low cut cleavage the little black dress offered.

“You think I’ll go home with a cute soldier tonight?” She lifted a brow at her girlfriend and nailed the shot with one gulp, not flinching.

There was a look that Anya and Raven shared with one another simultaneously. It was understated
and quiet, not quite an eye roll or a smile. Still, they both knew what it meant. It was a look that said, ‘Can you believe these idiots? I feel like gagging.’ It was a look that made them both smile in commiseration.

“Come on,” Anya spoke up as the music changed. “Come take a spin with a bona fide war hero.” She extended her hand and nodded to the dance floor.

“That’s what you’re calling yourself now?” Lexa laughed in disbelief.

“It works with the ladies, trust me.” She patted her best friend’s shoulder and followed after a laughing Raven Reyes.

“Raven isn’t a lady.” Clarke reminded the pair of them and finished the half shot Raven had left on the table. “But don’t let me spoil your fun though, go! Dance! Enjoy yourselves!” she shooed Anya away towards Raven’s embarrassing shimmy dancing.

“Thank you for coming tonight.” Lexa said earnestly once they were no longer in ear-shot. “It really means alot to me.”

“Thank you for putting me in my place earlier. I had that much coming.” Clarke replied and stood from stool so she could take up residence in Anya’s empty seat instead. She got herself comfortable and took a sip of Lexa’s beer, placing her left hand on her girlfriend’s thigh as she did. “I like being out with you like this, makes me wanna put my hands on you so any hot army girls in here know that you’re taken.”

“Is th...that so?” Lexa said with a briefly frustrated look at the stutter.

“Mmhmm. They can look at my beautiful girl, but, touch they cannot.” Clarke whispered and placed a small kiss on the pink skin at the top of her ear. “She’s all mine.”

“Damn it.” Lexa sighed and her shoulders slumped in defeat.

Clarke pulled away in confusion, cocking her head. “What is it?”

“I owe Raven ten bucks. She said you were a horny drunk but I refused to believe it.”

Clarke burst with laughter and blushed with embarrassment, covering her face with her hands and groaning a long noise. She shook her head and sat back up, steadying herself and glancing at the hot soldier beside her.

Lexa was always beautiful, always and entirely jaw-droppingly attractive, but there were little moments like this one where she was just completely irresistible. It was those long dark loose curls and that smouldering green eyed gaze that did it to her, that rendered her a complete mess like putty in Lexa’s hands. Even in the very beginning, in that very first moment back at the military hospital, Clarke knew she was in trouble. There was just something about this girl that was meant only for her.

“Why are you looking at me like that-”

“C’mere idiot.” Clarke pushed forward and kissed her like she deserved to be kiss. It was slow and passionate, hands slipping around that stiff neck until Lexa relaxed and reciprocated with languid slow lips, and for just a split second, the entire world ceased to exist.

“Peru.” Lexa whispered with a smirk.
“What?”

“Right now, if we could go on any...date? I would choose Peru, Machu Picchu. We’d sleep in hammocks.”

“I think I have a better idea...”

“Oh yeah?” Lexa grinned and slipped her hand along the small of Clarke’s spine. “Where are you thinking?”

“Burger King.” Clarke closed her eyes and made a hungry noise, “Burger King down on Fifth and then back to our place...” her lips pulled into a wicked smile, “I’m so hungry, for the Burger King and your-”

“Have it your way.” Lexa cut her off with a giggling kiss.
Raven awoke with a gasp at the sound of the front door closing shut, probably Clarke and Lexa leaving for breakfast or something similar no doubt. Breakfast was off the table today, her head pounded like the beat of a wardrum inside of her skull. The feeling made her want to vomit, but from the emptiness of her rumbling stomach and the gross acidity clinging to her sore teeth, she was sure she’d done that already. She flopped back down with a groan and closed her eyes, the brightness through the window blinds was too much light for her to deal with. Luckily, there was no surgeries today, no stress or human matters that needed fixing.

The sound of feminine breath snoring made her suddenly open her eyes into the searing brightness of the blinds once more. Raven snapped up and looked at the woman beside her, the very lean, very young, very naked woman who was definitely not Abby Griffin.

“Shit.” She whispered in a panic to herself and flopped back down, staring at the ceiling.

Anya stirred and lifted her messy blonde hair from the pillow, her eyes wincing the same way Raven’s did just a moment earlier. She was far quicker to adapt though, wiped her mouth with the back of her wrist and swallowed away the remnants of the night before. She rolled over and fixed her eyes on Raven, smiling as she did.

“Morning,” Anya whispered with a cracking voice and laid back down.

“Morning.” Raven squeaked.

Anya’s ears piqued and she opened her eyes again, “Okay, that is the voice of a woman who definitely doesn’t remember the several orgasms I gave her last night…”

“Several?” Raven panicked and clenched the bed sheets, “We? You know? Did? Several?” She became stuck on the last part with a horrified expression.

Things weren’t great with Abby, they weren’t great to begin with, were rarely great for more than five minutes at a time. It was hard and difficult and required work every day to make it something amazing, which it had to be. To sleep with her best friend’s mom and get away with it relatively unscathed? She would have to marry that woman one day.

Sometimes, once in awhile, what her and Abby had was brilliant. Abby understood her in a way most didn’t, and she never laughed at her or treated her like she was wasted potential. Sometimes she just looked at Raven with one glance, and it was the highlight of her day, just being seen like that.

“You look as if you’ve seen a ghost?” Anya said, eyes appraising her burning expression.

“I look like I’ve just fucked one.” Raven practically hissed and pulled the covers up to her throat.

“Well rest assured, I won’t tell anyone your dirty secret.” Anya sneered with a hurt laugh and shook her head. “Anyway, we didn’t even-”

It was then an arbitrary universe played it’s greatest joke, chewing Raven up and spitting her back out again. The bedroom door creaked open and there wasn’t any time to push Anya out of the bed and hide her, not that it would have worked anyway, but at least she would have been able to try.

Abby’s voice was light and cheery as the door opened, “Ray? I thought you would be hungover so
I brought you over some… oh.” She blinked and stared at them both.

“I can explain!” Raven jumped out of the bed and started pulling clothes on.

“No, there’s… there’s no need.” Abby looked away in embarrassment and swallowed. “Soup, your favourite kind with the noodles.” She lifted the paper bag and placed it down on the chest of drawers, patting it as she turned to walk out of the room.

“Abby! Wait!” Raven called after her.

“Mom?” A bleary voice echoed down the hallway out of view. “What are you doing here?”

Shit, here we go. Raven thought to herself.

“I, er, I was just leaving. I have to go.”

“Mom why are you being weird?”

“I’ve got to go, I’ll call you later honey.”

Raven stood there frozen in her position like a topless statue, the front door closed again and Clarke’s feet thudded down the hallway. “Raven? Did you and my mom have a fight? Why is she… oh my god.” Blue eyes jerked away as the door was pushed open again, then her face suddenly twisted with fury as the realisation dawned on her.

“Clarke, seriously, I can-”

Anya had never seen a woman fly before, not until today at least. The sentence didn’t even make it out of Raven’s mouth before she was pummelled into the floor by the lurch of Clarke’s weight.

“I will kill you, I swear to god, I’ll fucking kill you Raven!” Clarke hissed and wrapped her hands around Raven’s throat.

Raven spluttered and slapped at the hands cutting off her oxygen, she gasped for breath, fought for it with everything she had as the room began to spin. She locked her hips behind the small of Clarke’s back and clinched her in, determined to try and flip her on to the floor.

“My father’s widow, my mother!” The veins in Clarke’s neck bulged and her neck was throttled harder.

“I… didn’t… mean… to…” Raven spluttered with the little breath she had.

Anya’s slim arms came into focus as she pulled Clarke’s thrashing body away. There was shouting, Clarke cursing and Anya cursing her back mainly. Raven rolled onto her side and gasped for air, forcing it into her refusing lungs as the tunnel vision started to wean off.

“Don’t you put your fucking hands on her again!” Anya spat and dug her knee into the bottom of Clarke’s spine, a hand pressed into the side of her jaw to keep her prone on the floor. “So help me god if you ever put your hands on her again…”

Raven turned just in time to see Lexa’s forearm slip around Anya’s throat and pull her backwards into a chokehold. There was a black fire in her eyes, it burned like an entire screaming world on fire. Raven groaned and flopped back for a moment, because how did a bar fight follow her home to her bedroom?

“You don’t ever t…touch m…m…my girlfriend!” Lexa roared and somehow tossed Anya over her
shoulder onto the ground behind her.

“Then keep your dog on a leash Donald Duck!” Anya hissed and swiped back, kicking Lexa’s legs out until she landed in a pile on the floor head first with a crack. “Shit!” Anya suddenly realised what she’d done, “Bean? Bean talk to me?” She crawled from her pile and put a hand on her winded belly. “Are you okay? I didn’t think about your head… fuck!” She leaned back and cringed.

“Lexa?!” Clarke’s voice became shrill and panicked, crawling over to her side too. “Is she unconscious?!”

Raven stood on shaky legs, her stomach plummeting into her asshole. She footed towards the prone body on the floor.

“Cunts.” Lexa spluttered and flopped back down, “All of you.”

There was a brief moment of respite where everyone deflated with relief and exhaled at the same time. Clarke sunk back on her knees and let her mouth hang in relief. Anya’s head hung with a tiny thank you to the benevolent god who softened the parquet flooring.

Raven just stared and blinked while a moment of gratitude washed over her, mainly for the fact she wasn’t responsible for killing Clarke’s girlfriend and cheating on her mom in the space of the same day. That kind of combination was a long-weekend event at the very least in this household.

“If I ever see you on top of my girlfriend again I will die and let you think it was your fault d...do you understand me?” Lexa glared and pulled herself up, grabbing on to Clarke for leverage.

“You won’t have to worry about that. I’m out of here on the first bus home!” Anya snatched herself off the floor too, dusting her naked body off. “As soon as I find my damn underwear!” She growled and stalked out of the bedroom, slammed the door behind herself with her bare ass the last thing all of them saw.

…”

“It’s just a bruise.” Clarke winced into the antiseptic wipe.

“Shut up and let me work.” Lexa mumbled and held her chin still, dabbing the red scuff mark where she had skidded the floor. “You had no business strangling Raven like that, Clarke.” Her disapproving frown was enough to ignite her again.

“Speaking of which, nobody fights for me.” Clarke glared and chewed her jaw. “You had no business getting involved.”

“So I’m supposed to just close the door behind me when I see my girlfriend getting her face planted into the floor?” Lexa laughed in disbelief and put hands on her hips. “Great logic Clarke. Let’s not even go there.”

“Screw you, let’s!” Clarke reared up and felt the anger swell her throat. “You have a brain injury. There are chunks of your brain and skull missing Lexa. One bang to the head, one misjudged step, that’s all it takes and I lose you forever!” She snapped and the rage was palpable.
“It must be terrifying for you… me living my life like an actual human being instead of a little helpless dolly in a hospital bed that you can keep in bubble wrap.” She rolled her eyes with frustration.

“How fucking dare you even.”

“85%” Lexa said it through gritted teeth.

“Really? You’re going there?” Clarke pulled away further up the bed so she didn’t have to exist in that shared personal space. “Fighting like a street hooker is the 15% you’re so sorely missing right now?”

“What did you just call me?” Lexa growled and stood up on her cain, puffing her shoulders out. The crack of lightening that became her voice jarred Clarke, and for one shining moment the sergeant skydiving in photos was right in front of her. “You have some damn nerve.” Lexa twisted on the words.

Clarke looked off to the window and swallowed back the rage. She was new to this, arguing with a girlfriend, loving somebody enough to even bother fighting when it was always so much easier just to toss her rucksack over her shoulder and disappear. Is this what love is? She wondered briefly. Liking somebody enough to stick around for the fights?

There’s a box on the windowsill filled with tiny bits of nothing, pictures of her father and a little journal he once kept with notes and musings on all the places he had been. His medals lived in the box too, plus the cufflinks he wore to his wedding. All of it was just tiny monuments that Clarke could visit when she needed to remember he once lived.

“Lexa?” Clarke steadied her wavering voice, her eyes not tearing away from that trinket box for one iota of a moment.

“What?” She replied sternly.

“Why is my memory box half open.” She felt her shaking fists clench.

“Oh,” Lexa grew sheepish and rubbed her arm, the anger dissipating like a swell of rain. “When you were in the shower a couple of days ago I just-”

“Went through my father’s things.” Clarke swallowed and nodded, trying to make that sentence make sense. “Did it not fucking occur to you that if I wanted you to see those things, I would show you?!” Her voice grew shrill.

It wasn’t that Lexa looked. It wasn’t that Lexa wanted to know about her dad. It was that the one thing she had that was definitively him was touched by another set of hands. The fact that her girlfriend had opened that box and slipped her fingers through the ghosts of his life, that she in some tiny way met her father and Clarke didn’t get a say in it.

“So when you lie to me for six months about that little boy surviving… that’s okay, that’s just fine. But I b...break one of your unspoken rules that you don’t tell me about until it’s t...too late and all of a sudden I’m a terrible person?” Lexa’s hands became animated.

Clarke couldn’t remember the last time she cried. Her tears felt all the more pathetic and stupid because of that, they dribbled down her red cheeks and she did all she could to hide them away, but it wasn’t enough.

“Oh god, Clarke.” Lexa quickly became apologetic as tears were desperately wiped away. “I’m
“You’re going to hold that little boy over my head for the rest of my life.” Clarke quietly nodded in realisation. “Every time I’m angry with you, every time you do something that hurts my feelings, it’ll be, ‘Oh yeah, you know what Clarke, remember that time you lied to me about the boy?’” Clarke bitterly chewed the inside of her mouth and shook her head.

“Maybe.” Lexa nodded and swallowed. “I touched something I wasn’t supposed to touch. You convinced me for six months that I was in that hospital bed for a damn good reason – that I saved that little boy. We’re not perfect people, so m...maybe.” Lexa said earnestly, crossing her arms over one another.

“Call your brother and tell him to come and pick you up.” Clarke grabbed her bag from the closet and slung it over her shoulder.

“Wait, what?!”

She urgently stuffed things into the bag, her car keys, a book, fresh clothes. “Call Lincoln or Anya or god knows who and tell them to come and pick you up! I need time to think!” Clarke exasperated and rubbed her temples.

“Don’t you dare.” Lexa pulled at her arm until Clarke was stood facing her. “You don’t get to make me fall in love with you and then run away at the first sign of storms ahead. You don’t get to do that to me.”

“I’m not doing it to you, I’m doing it for me.” Clarke snatched her arm away and slipped the bag over her shoulder. “I’m going to my mom’s, I’ll stay there tonight so you and Lincoln can sleep here and leave first thing in the morning. We’ll talk in a few days and figure stuff out-”

“Clarke,” Lexa’s voice grew serious and her eyes cleared with an absolute clarity. “If I leave, I am never coming back. Do you understand that?”

“We all have decisions to make.”
Chapter 21

Potential Spoiler Alert: Guys fair warning, this is a difficult chapter and I know trust is a difficult thing to ask from perfect internet strangers... but trust me. I will guide us through it safely!

Between the car journey and the grand front door with its solid brass knocker, Clarke regretted it all. It was an immediate sense of guilt that wrung out her insides like a damp towel, and the worst of it was that there was no doubt she was the one to blame for all of this. Well, Raven too, absolutely, but she couldn’t just palm off responsibility of sending her girlfriend out of state just so she could have some breathing room.

Sometimes Clarke couldn’t help but wonder if she was a thirteen year old girl still. It was immature bullshit like this that convinced her maybe.

“Honestly I’m fine, you don’t need to worry!” Abby sighed and rolled her eyes as hurricane Clarke rolled through her hallway, dropping her rucksack on the wooden flooring as she kicked off her sneakers.

“I’m not.” Clarke mumbled.

“Worried or fine?”

“I’m not fine.” Clarke ached and stared at her mom with searing eyes. “I miss my dad.”

“Oh honey…” Her mom’s face changed. It was a precarious expression, sympathetic and unsure. Clarke couldn’t blame her really, she’d never exactly gave her mom a chance to do this — to be the one she came to concerning her dad. It wasn’t purposeful, not in the slightest. She’d just never done this before either, never cried or admitted that she wasn’t okay. “Clarke,” she stepped forward and touched her arm softly. “I miss him too.” She nodded reassuringly, her eyes glassing.

“It made me feel closer to him, loving Lexa. It made me feel like I saved him in some tiny way…” Clarke shook her head with the stupidity of it and wiped her eyes. “I don’t think I’m built for loving people like that. Probably a good thing he died before I could let him down too.” She grumbled and rolled her eyes.

“Do not ever let me hear you say that again. No. I won’t accept it. Your father would have adored the woman you grew up to be. You’re unlike him in all the ways he would admire.” Abby shook her head and pulled her daughter in for a hug. “What the hell did you fight about with Lexa, Clarke?”

“I lied to her. I told her the boy she hurt herself trying to save made it out alive… and she said it was fine. She said she forgave me… but then we fought earlier and I saw it in her eyes. The resentment. The kind of ‘fuck you’ that never goes away.” Clarke sighed and rested her chin on her mom’s shoulder. “It scared me.”

“Love is supposed to be terrifying. If it isn’t, it isn’t the right kind of love.”
“Loving my dad was terrifying?” Clarke grew curious.

“Loving your dad was the most frightening thing I ever did and then loving you is a close second. You only have that kinda love a few times in your life kiddo, there comes a point where you just can’t handle anything more than ordinary anymore.” Abby sighed and stroked her hair. “It doesn’t help that you’re stubborn either.”

“Stubborn?”

“Painfully.” Abby chuckled and released her daughter.

“I always thought in my head he was like this…” Clarke hesitated and realised how vapid it sounded. No one was perfect, well, other than the ones who leave before their time. It’s hard to pick fault with what isn’t in front of you. “I just thought he was always this easy thing to love.”

“Easy to like, harder to love. That’s the deal when you fall in love with soldiers. They’re not solid, they’re not permanent structures, they’re here one moment and then drinking coffee in a war-zone in the asshole of the earth, emailing you for pictures of the kids because they’re not coming home for another ten months. Easy to like, fucking impossible to love. I don’t think I did too bad of a job loving your father. I tell myself that.” Abby nodded as they moved into the kitchen.

The television was droning in the corner and the coffee was brewed during the interim of the commercials. Her mom muttered tidbits between tending each coffee mug, something about not being so head strong, something about getting the girl before the girl goes away. It’s all truth, Clarke knows that much, but for a moment all she can do is sit there and enjoy a single selfish moment to herself without the imposition of everything else in her life.

“There’s still time to turn this around. There’s still time to stop and go home and keep the girl… you know that right?” Abby blew her coffee and drank a slurp.

“That sounds way more romantic than it actually is.”

“It’s not about romance. It’s about telling the people you love that you love them before that opportunity passes you by. If I can come around to Lexa? If I can put my personal feelings on your gross professional negligence aside?”

“Okay, easy mom.” Clarke scolded and rolled her eyes at that.

“I’m just saying.” Abby raised her hand. “Can you not just for once believe that maybe that was the universe giving you a sign that this girl is worth the embarrassment of saying, I’m sorry. I made a mistake’ aloud?”

“I just need a second to breathe!” Clarke whined and buried her head forward against the coolness of the kitchen island counter. “I just need a second. Just a minute even! Because if it isn’t you fucking my best friend, or, I don’t know, Lexa! It’s the hospital trying to fire me! Or it’s something worse! There’s always something worse around the corner. And I just need a fucking hot second.”

“Fine. Pick another topic, you’ve got fifteen minutes to get it together and then I’m driving you back to your place and you’re going to pull your big girl pants on and be the adult I raised you to be.”

Clarke mused… if she only had fifteen minutes, she may as well use them well she decided. “So… Raven…” Clarke spoke up again with an open question into the lip of her hot coffee mug..

“Don’t.” Abby warned and took a sip of her own. “We were never exclusive, it’s fine. I’m actually
kind of relieved, I didn’t want her getting too attached to me.”

“As new-age and empowering as all of that sounds do you mind if I stay angry for a while that my best friend cheated on my mom? Can we just do that for fifteen minutes?”

Abby sighed and look at her watch. “Five minutes. Let’s make it count.”

...

Raven sat quietly on the bed. Her knees were pulled up to her chest, fingers drumming her kneecaps, mind overworked with the transpired events of this morning. She tried to piece together last night, her and Anya stumbled into a cab together after last call… and then… nothing. Not even the briefest iota of a memory after that.

She listened to the sound of soldiers footsteps shuffling around, bags being zipped, awkward silence prevailing the apartment. Tentative footsteps crept towards the bedroom door and all she could do was wince into the prospect of having to talk to either of them.

“Hey,” Anya appeared at the door, stoic and unconcerned. “Mind if I get my shit?” She nodded to the drawers by the window.

“Knock yourself out.”

“You really don’t remember last night, do you?” Anya huffed and narrowed her eyes in exasperation. “I fucking told you we should have left at 1.” She shook her head and stormed past the bed with her empty duffle in tow.

“The sex couldn’t have been that great.” Raven scoffed and bit back. “Last night was a mistake. A huge, terrible, fucking mess of a mistake,”

“We didn’t sleep together.”

“Wait.” Raven snapped and held her breath. “But you. This morning. You said—”

“I was kidding.” Anya huffed, her hand slipping around the back of her neck to scratch the top of her spine. She was guilty, and the transparency of it hung off her. “I thought you would remember last night, laugh, maybe say I was gross… I would never take advantage of you while you were drunk.”

“You were naked.” Raven simmered. “I was naked.”

“You threw up on me… and then yourself.” Anya explained with a wince.

“Jesus Christ!” Raven sat up and rubbed her face. “So I didn’t cheat on Clarke’s mom?”

“Praise be, no you did not.”

“Thank you god.” Raven mumbled and collapsed with relief. Slowly, she turned and watched Anya’s slow moving figure make a path for the drawers. They were pulled open and emptied of their meagre contents bit by bit, and the act of watching the weary traveller pack up her things made her ache… though she wasn’t sure why. “Anya?” Raven cleared her throat again.
“Yeah?” Anya turned over her shoulder.

“Why do I feel like you’re not telling me the full story?” Raven asked quietly.

There’s a brief pause and a sad smile that pushes up Anya cheeks. Brief as it is, stoicism reigns again supreme. The sad smile is pushed away in favour of a reserved expression of indifference and the small glimmer in her green eyes is replaced with something stern and almost disappointed. “Sometimes it’s better to just read the cover notes.”

“Or, you know, we could go cover to page on what the hell happened last night?” Raven pulled a t-shirt over herself.

“Let’s leave it at that, no need to overcomplicate the matter. I managed to get hold of Lincoln while he was on base. I promised I would have Lexa back at her mom’s for meatloaf… so please let me just focus on how I’m going to make a fucking six hour car ride work with Giggles The Clown next door.” Anya groaned and lowered her tone.

“Yeah, she’s going to be a real barrel of laughs.” Raven empathised and lingered with a brief look towards Clarke’s closed bedroom door. Lexa was no doubt behind the wood, packing and muttering and chewing on this morning too. Raven had heard the cacophony of their break-up through the thin walls of the apartment, in fact, she was certain half of the city heard. There were definitely unabridged cover notes for that mess. Raven turned back to Anya, “Do you think we should check on her?” She asked with a frown.

“She hates being checked on.”

“She’s your best friend?”

“I don’t see you racing for the phone to call Clarke?”

“Good point.” Raven turned back and grabbed her sweatpants from the floor. There was a vomit stain the size of Wyoming across the crotch, disgusting and yet still not disgusting enough to stop her pulling them on. “I’m going to check on her.” Raven settled on it and kicked the blankets off.

“On your head be it.” Anya shrugged and finished the last of her packing.

“Well, let’s hope it’s one of ours and not Lexa’s. And yes, before you ask, that was a brain injury joke.” Raven called back over her shoulder as the short journey to Clarke’s bedroom door was made. She tentatively knocked the wood twice, “Lexa?” She called and opened it a crack.

“Seriously this is stupid.” Clarke’s voice echoed down the hallway as the front door clicked open. Footsteps made their way inside and the front door closed again. “I can’t break up with my girlfriend and then run back thirty minutes later. There’s no gravitas to that.”

“Poor you.” Abby’s voice sighed next.

Raven stood awkwardly and stepped away from the door as the two Griffins turned the end of the hallway. Clarke was first, then Abby quickly behind her shoulder as they tailed down towards the bedroom.

“Good morning.” Raven said sheepishly and cleared her throat.

“Good morning, home-wrecking slut.” Clarke growled and stormed past her.

“About that. Great news. It turns out I didn’t—”
“Not now.” Anya appeared in the hallway too. “Oh. Er, Mrs Griffin. Pleasure to meet you.” She forced a strange scowl that was some mild attempt at a smile in the direction of Abby. “I didn’t sleep with your girlfriend. That was a misunderstanding.” She said hurriedly.

“And as you said a few moments ago… one I don’t care to get into the technicalities of in this particular moment in time.” Abby forced a courteous cold smile. “Why don’t we all just go about our day and give Clarke and Lexa some privacy.”

While the other three women made an attempt at banal polite small talk outside in the hallway, Clarke allowed it to blur into a quiet nothing as she stepped into her bedroom. The blinds were still drawn closed and the bed unmade, though there was no sign of Lexa. It made Clarke wince, surely Lexa didn’t just grab her things and leave that quickly. No. Clarke knew Lexa. Knew the way she thought. Knew the way she liked to do things. The bed was always made and the curtains were always drawn open. Was this some kind of bitter goodbye?

“Lex?” Clarke called into the room and looked around. Her eyes caught the duffel bag on the bed, still half-packed and open. “Lexa?” Clarke said it again urgently.

She stepped around the bed, and for the briefest of moments, her eyes passed over Lexa’s slumped body as if there was nothing wrong with the sight. As if it was entirely ordinary. It took her a second to process it, took her until she leaned and peeked around the other side of the bed for the information to make some kind of sense in her brain. That was when she lurched like a stick-gear kangarooing into drive.

“Lexa!” The noise was a yelp. Clarke couldn’t work fast enough, her hands couldn’t and wouldn’t move as quickly as she needed them too. She felt her pulse first, faint and there. Her pupils were next; the left was completely blown and the right wasn’t much better. “Mom!!” Clarke wailed and pushed her slumped girlfriend onto her back. “Lexa, come on! Come on baby?!”

Her mom is cool and professional as the room is burst with frantic bodies pushing to try and help. There isn’t even a period of adjustment. There is no fear, no panic, no reservation. Abby is there with two hands that know exactly what to do. Raven too, there’s a phone in her hand and an operator on the line, and in the ball Clarke hunches herself into over Lexa’s grasped ankles, she can just about make out the kind of jargon spewing from Raven’s mouth that on any ordinary day would make perfect sense.

Today it doesn’t.
Chapter 22

If the cellphone in her hand could speak, it would scream with pain from how hard she clenched it.

Clarke sat in the waiting room with everyone as they rushed Lexa upstairs—wounded and stuck in the moment Kane peeled her tight fingers off of the side of the gurney and forbade her from stay.

She is still white-knuckled; drawing in wasteful breaths too big for her lungs. The waiting room smelt artificial and clean. The idea that it was somebody's sole purpose within this hospital to polish and sanitize and hide the laments of death and illness had always been an issue for her in this profession, but now as a relative, a passer-by, a woman with the particular skill capable of fixing these things but stuck in this plastic seat nonetheless, the stench of industrial sanitizer and mopped floors clings inside her nostrils and threatens to turn her whipping stomach into a natural disaster.

“Clarke.” Her mom appears beside her suddenly, a hand on the small of her shaking spine. “Listen to me, this isn’t your fault. It isn’t your fault, and I need you to say that out loud so I know that you know-”

“Just shut up!” Clarke sneered and shirked away, refusing the constant need to cry. “Of course it’s my fault! It’s Raven’s fault for starting that fight! It’s Anya’s fault for pushing her! It’s Kane’s fault for not letting me stay on her case! It’s your fault for siding with him! But most of all it’s my fault for not being there when she needed me!” She exploded and swung a fist backwards into the emergency fire extinguisher, slowly melting forward with elbows against her knees and hands in her brow.

The waiting room yielded to the uncomfortable silence. Mouths drawn tight, small talk ceasing, even the clock on the wall seemed to stop ticking. The latter didn’t make much difference for Clarke, in the four hours since they had arrived she could have sworn it was seven, twelve, fourteen, an entire day, a week practically, on at least four separate occasions. One minute Lexa was upright and furious, and the next she was lying there… still.

“You’re not her doctor, Clarke.” Abby tried to reassure and explain simultaneously. Her hand found its way to the small of Clarke’s damp spine, and though the contact was unwelcome she hunched forward with her head in her hands and allowed it anyway. “Whatever happens-”

“Stop.”

“It might not be a stroke Clarke-”

“Mom, shut up!” Clarke exploded again, flinching away from the hand on her spine. She turned and stared at her, all steely blue eyes and teeth on the edge of themselves, fraught and churning with a million different equally awful possibilities. “I am a neurosurgeon! I was her neurosurgeon! I should have seen that there was something wrong. She, she fell over,” Clarke began to fracture and stutter with furious tears, “she fell over and hit her head and I did nothing. We fought and I left and if I had stayed… if I had stayed I could have saved her. I could have saved her life.”

“Look at me!” Abby snapped too and grabbed her daughter’s wet red cheeks, bearing and refusing the slaps to her arms and attempts to pull away. “I am your mother and so help me god you will listen to me! I raised an extraordinary woman. I built and made you into perfection, from the moment you were born to days like this when you think I am the worst person in the world! And I am telling you, as a surgeon and as your mother, you stopped being her doctor the moment you fell
in love with that girl. You gave her time she would not have had otherwise. You gave her good time, with her mother and with her friends and then you loved her. You loved her Clarke and she is still here, she is still alive, and so you can choose to be furious with yourself or you can get ready for what comes next. The next part, good or bad, is going to be a hell of a lot harder than this.” Abby cupped her cheek and hesitated, “I’m going to be here no matter what because I am your mother and that’s what I do.”

“What if she dies?” Clarke tried to say those words, but they became a heaving mess in her mouth against the torrent of her tears. Abby took her against her shoulder, hushing and moving a hand along her back.

“If my daughter dies, I will thank God for giving you the gift and talents that made you capable of giving us the time we had with her.” Indra’s voice said softly from the door. ”But, Dr Griffin. You’re mistaken if you think my Lexa would ever give up so easily.”

“Oh god, Mrs Woods.” Clarke became flustered, wiping her tears and standing straighter. “I’m, I’m so sorry. I didn’t think.”

“Stop.” Indra raised a hand and somehow managed to be the calmest person in the room. She removed the bag from her shoulder first, then her coat; slipping them both over the back of a plastic seat adjacent. “We were in Drewfield for a special sermon, I have to believe God placed me so nearby for a reason and so all I ask is that we show strength and faith in the Lord’s ways. Aden is with Anya and your friend Raven, I asked them to join us for a group prayer after I had a moment to speak with you.”

“Of course, anything you want.” Clarke said quickly and looked back to her mother for support. “We’re waiting for Lexa’s doctors to run some tests. They should be back soon but we do know a few things. She hit her head so it could still be a concussion for all we know.” Clarke tried to make her voice sound light and optimistic, a stark contrast from the earlier tears.

Indra sighed that frustrated motherly sigh, the specific one moms do when they know a child is lying to them. She shared a knowing look with Abby, folding her smooth dark arms and taking a seat. She folded a knee over the other and waited for a moment, the room falling silent behind her pause. “Mayor Griffin, would you like to be the one to tell me what you all know so far?” She suggested with a raised brow.

“Abigail or Abby is fine… you don’t have to say Mayor Griffin every time.” Abby mumbled and scratched her neck, and in the twenty-five years she practiced medicine she too never quite dealt with a woman as pragmatal as Mrs Indra Woods.

“Abby, will you please tell me what your daughter is apparently afraid to?” Indra clarified, quietly exasperated.

“Well we know it’s very unlikely it’s a concussion,” Abby said. “We don’t know what the cause is yet, but we do know that she was unable to breathe independently and what kind of brain injury she may have consequentially to that is yet to be seen. I really cannot tell you anything other than that she had three of the most capable doctors in America plus a specialist trauma medic at her side from the apartment to the hospital. Your daughter has a habit of defying the expectations of her specialists and no matter what they say when they walk in here—today will be no different. Okay?” Abby assured and squeezed her daughter’s hand too.

“Oh okay.” Indra swallowed the information, the breath in her lungs stammering just slightly. Cracking her knuckles, Indra leaned back in the chair and hummed against the din of the hospital, centring herself. “That damn girl will be the death of me.” She finally exasperated.
Not if I’m the death of her first, Clarke thought to herself and said nothing, just squeezed her mother’s hand tight before letting it go completely. Indra didn’t know the extent of their relationship, Lexa made that clear in the quiet museful moments when they both were drifting asleep. She wanted to tell Indra, but something about church, and something about god, and something something about why fix what isn’t broken, and at the time Clarke didn’t care but now she does. Now she wants nothing more than to be the perfect girlfriend and hold Indra’s hand and share wonderful tiny stories, if only selfishly to make herself feel better.

“How old was Lexa when you adopted her?” Clarke asked suddenly, throwing caution to the wind. She walked over and took the seat beside Indra. “When she was going through speech therapy she told me a story about a dead toad and a Barbie doll from Walmart and I never thought to ask her more about where she came from.” She explained, scratching the back of her neck behind the collar of her plaid shirt.

Indra laughed a genuine warm laugh. “She told you that?” Indra gave her a surprised side look. “Gloatingly.”

“My ex-husband had an affair with his secretary, she had a baby boy who she gave up to the care system. He was passed around for a while but finished back at the home, when my husband told me about the child I couldn’t let that be.” She rubbed the back of her hand and relaxed into a brief smile, “I drove to the home on my lunch-break, everyday. I’d sit there in the car and just… stare at him. Lincoln was cut from the same cloth as his father, and I hated him for it. God did I hate him for it!” She exasperated and rubbed her forehead, “But he was a soft boy, always off by himself or poking his nose through the fence to stare at the girls—which in all honesty has never really changed. When I found out my husband had an affair… my faith was rocked, Doctor Clarke,” Indra said quite seriously. “I couldn’t have children of my own and the thought of him being with another woman made me feel inferior. Pathetic even. But, I realised God had made these things so because I was supposed to love that boy. I left my husband and found my son, and when I went to the home to collect Lincoln I felt this small tug on my pant leg, and when I looked down there was this little girl with a drawing scrunched in her hand that she did just for me. She didn’t have a brown crayon so drew me in green and Lincoln in lighter green instead. She was careful to make sure I knew that.” Indra laughed, and both Abby and Clarke couldn’t help but join in. “She asked me if I would try and be the best mommy I could to Lincoln, and I knew there and then that everything that had happened, all those terrible things, were meant to be so that God could give me the reward of a daughter too.” She patted Clarke’s hand.

Clarke sat there dumbfounded for a moment at Indra’s perseverance. At the sheer strength it must take to forge herself in such steel and determination to make life beautiful and ordered. It was a faith that she didn’t know how to possess, something she was untrained in. Perhaps she didn’t have to be an expert though, Clarke thought for a moment. Maybe instead she could just choose to hold faith that these things too shall pass, and be brighter all the more for them.

“You’re a strong woman, Mrs Woods.” Clarke exhaled, her mother nodding along in turn. “My children are a gift, Doctor Clarke. I believe that above all other things in this world.”
Chapter 23

[The penultimate chapter guys, only the grand finale and maybe an epilogue to go...]

She shouldn’t be here in the gallery.

None of them should.

Not her, or Raven, or Abby, least of all Anya. If Kane knew about this he would throw a fit but here they are regardless of protocol, pensive and quiet and staring down at the still sleeping body on the table with wires pouring from the skin like branches from a sapling. Not a single one of the surgeons or nurses beneath willing to page the chief and tell him about their visitors in the gallery upstairs.

Indra stayed in the waiting room with a sleeping Aden sprawled over her lap waiting for Lincoln to call her back, and the rest of them all made their excuses and disappeared one by one to come and sit in this domain reserved for the indifferent.

Lexa’s lungs push up and down in mechanical rhythm with the ventilators.

It makes the acid wash up the back of Clarke’s throat.

“What are you doing now?” Clarke slammed her hand against the intercom and blurted the question as Octavia’s hands moved behind the surgical screen.

Two dark eyes looked up over the edge of her surgical mask, “Trying to save your girlfriend’s life and find this bleed if you would let me do my job, Griffin.” She said sternly.

“What can you see?”

“We’re not doing this.” Octavia warned and looked over at Abby, “Either you keep her quiet or I am paging security.” She warned.

“Honey, sit down,” Abby leaned over quietly and grasped her wrist gently.

Clarke trembled and refused to be pulled back into her seat, instead, she stood there pensively—barely breathing even. She watched Octavia’s eyebrows furrow into a thoughtful stare at the open delicate brain in front of her that Clarke couldn’t see. She imagined the worst as she looked at Lexa’s peaceful sleeping face. She imagined a tiny brain bleed stuck somewhere unreachable to Octavia’s hands. She imagined Lexa’s very life open on the table, her memories slowly ebbing away with each second of her surgeon's pause; her ability to talk becoming more and more indistinguishable and slurred, Aden’s horrified expression as home nurses made a permanent career out of wiping the spittle from the corners of her mouth.

No. It would be worse than that.

It would be Indra wiping the dribble from the corners of her mouth, humming a small chorus and pretending that everything was just fine and God’s will. It would be Indra at seventy, and seventy-five, and eighty, cleaning broccoli off of her chin and changing her diapers and pretending that the wailing slurs of her fried daughter were distinguishable conversation.
Then it would be Aden.

Clarke clenched her eyes and clawed at her chest, stuck in the thought of Lexa’s kid brother having to become her parent. She clawed and gasped and felt different hands grab and anchor her, and none of them were enough to stop the hurricane blowing her way from devouring her whole.

“I am sat in a room with three surgeons right now and not a single one of you has an expression that says anything less than my best friend is going to die, or worse, she’s going to be a fucking cabbage for the rest of her life, and so I’m going to need someone to crack a fucking joke before I lose it!” Anya shouted with sudden exasperation.

Clarke turned suddenly and stared at her, watching her chest shudder through the t-shirt she managed to throw over her head from the bedroom floor before they all careened down in here in the back of the car. Her blue eyes became a fixed icy stare, furious and palpating, almost.

“We’re trained to be indifferent,” Clarke said dumbly and stopped, gathering herself for a moment, “we’re trained to be the unbreakable steady calm that never falters, never breaks, never cracks for a moment… and so you should be scared Anya.” She turned, “You should be terrified. I am. We all are, because—if—she wakes up? she’s probably going to wake up a toddler.” Her throat clenched and refused to relent.

“Clarke stop that!” Raven hissed and stood from her chair.

Octavia’s voice boomed over the intercom, “Whatever is going on up there Abby you’ve got ten seconds to simmer it down before I page Kane here to do it for you!”

Clarke span around and slammed her hand against the intercom again, “You!” Her voice boomed and shuddered, “You have your hands in my girlfriend’s skull! You stay the hell out of this!” She sneered and removed her hand.

“Do you want me to kill her?” Octavia stopped and took her hands away from the table, “because if you want I can stand here staring into my patient’s open brain trying to figure out where the hell this bleed is coming from while you go all Full Metal Jacket upstairs, and I promise you, it won’t make me go any faster or work any cleaner. So unless you want me to fry my patient, Dr Griffin, I suggest you leave my viewing gallery. If you cannot be a doctor right now then go and be a girlfriend where I do not have to watch!” Octavia sneered and held her stare, slowly glancing across the pale tired faces of everyone hunched over the window in the viewing gallery. “All of you are medical professionals, act like it!”

Octavia turned back and set to work again, steadier this time, her utensils put back to work.

It was strangely reassuring in Clarke’s mind. It finally gave her the sense of control to sit down and think like a doctor.

“If you’ll excuse me,” Anya stood up quiet and shaken, “I don’t think I can be a medical professional right now,” she whispered with shameful tears in her eyes and left the room.

“I should go and stay with her…” Raven added and stood up too.

“Try not to cheat on my mom this time.” Clarke bristled under her breath. It earned a hard slap to her arm from her mother’s own hand.
“Wait here,” Abby muttered at her daughter and stood up too, “Raven I need to speak with you outside, I’ll make it quick.”

They walked out together into the quietness of the hallway and watched Anya slink off into the distance towards the waiting room. Abby closed the door to the gallery behind them. In truth she wasn’t sure exactly what it was she wanted to talk about, it definitely had something to do with them, with how absurd them even was, how now wasn’t the time nor would there ever be a time for a them. Raven already looked pensive and aware of these things, it made Abby give an apologetic little smile.

“I know,” Raven sighed and rubbed the back of her neck.

“You do?”

“That it looked bad this morning, that it looked really really bad, but I promise I never cheated—” Abby rolled her eyes and softly smiled, “Stop,” she placed a hand on Raven’s forearm.

“I never cheated on you.” Raven promised with wide brown eyes.

“I don’t think Clarke cares about the finer details of whatever happened, my daughter and I have that much in common,” Abby exhaled a little sigh, “I’m not angry, I’m really not I promise.” She reassured and hesitated, “It’s just that yesterday everything was fine and my daughter was in love with a difficult very much alive soldier and it didn’t matter so much that I made a selfish decision to have you… but today everything has changed. I have to be her mother today, and me and you? It was a beautiful terrible decision, Raven. One that was never going to last.”

“Abby…” Raven stared painfully, her heart full of hopeless longing. “It doesn’t have to end like this? We can make it work?”

“Oh Raven,” Abby laughed sadly and pulled her in for a hug.

They stayed there for a moment, Raven slumping on her shoulder in quiet defeat and Abby rubbing the small of her back. Abby closed her eyes and wished it wasn’t like this. Maybe in a different world, years ago, it would have worked. Maybe. But Jake Griffin was one hell of a persistent ghost and maybe, just maybe, that wasn’t such a terrible thing after all—maybe one great love is enough for one lifetime, Abby hoped so at least. In turn she hoped that was a lesson Clarke wouldn’t have to learn just yet, the thought made her chest shudder into Raven’s ribcage.

Above all things, she wished that harder than anything for her daughter: a thousand difficult life lessons before the hardest one of all.

“I knew it couldn’t last forever, I just hoped it would go on a little longer. Just a little longer.” Raven said with embarrassment as she pulled away and wiped a rogue tear off her cheek.

“Honey all everyone wants is just a little bit longer,” Abby said knowingly, “but you know what they say, all good things. Still, maybe you’ve got a better thing sat right there waiting for you down the hall in need of a shoulder to lean on?”

“Nah soldiers aren’t my style Abs, that’s definitely a Griffin thing.”
“Never say never. I’ll text you later and make sure you’re alright,”

“Don’t,” Raven said it without malice, her fingers coming undone from Abby’s hand with an understanding nod. “Take care of Clarke, I’ll go and check on Anya. Just keep Clarke together.”

Abby watched Raven turn and start a slow walk down the dim hallway towards the waiting room back downstairs. “Raven?” She called out and made her stop in her tracks.

Raven turned and looked over her shoulder. “She’ll forgive you, you know? Clarke doesn’t hold grudges half as much as she likes to think she does.”

“Tell me that again after Lexa gets out of surgery, okay?”

“I will,” Abby nodded certainly.

Lexa was going to make it out of this surgery alright. She dug deep down and found a tiny ember of faith that hadn’t quite been beaten out of her yet and clung to it tightly.

Abby walked back into the gallery and hung by the door for a moment, Clarke was bent over her knees in the chair. At first it looked like she was crying which Abby could completely empathise with, but upon closer inspection, her hands were clasped and her lips moved silent and quick.

“Praying?” Abby asked curiously and sat down beside her. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you pray before,” she stirred in the memories of a six year old whip of a girl who refused to say her prayers at dinner because Mommy made the food and not this man called God everybody seemed to talk about.

“Not praying, just, asking dad for a favour?” Clarke slipped her eyes up over the ball of her shoulder and blushed with embarrassment, her hands coming undone from one another and rubbing her thighs instead. “I have to be a doctor. I know that. I have to sit here and watch Octavia—who wasn’t even the second best in her class—root around in my girlfriend’s brain looking for something that could be an innocuous easy fix, or it could be an unreachable bleed, a thrown clot that is causing her to have a massive ischemic stroke on the table as we speak and we won’t find out about it until she wakes up and doesn’t know who I am anymore,” Clarke stuttered and felt her throat burn with the need for a thousand acidic tears. Her insides clenched and clenched until she thought they might start to fray like an overwound knot. But she had to be a doctor now, and so she remained stoic and unphased on the outside.

“And so you’re asking dad for a favour?” Abby nodded reassuringly.

“And so I’m asking dad for a favour, because right now? I need it to be the former rather than the latter.”

“Tell me what you think is going on, what you would do if you were down there.” Abby said and peered through the glass at the open patient below.

“I can’t do this.” Clarke wiped her nose with the back of her hand.

“Do it.” Abby demanded again and turned to her, “Tell me what you would do, what you would look for, how you would fix it. Right now you and Octavia are the only people who know what her mind looks like from the inside out, and I’m sure she can use all the help she can get. So think like a doctor and tell me what you would look for.”
“Octavia won’t let me see the scans, I don’t even know what I am supposed to be looking for—”

“The scans are only half the picture. I taught you that, remember?” Abby encouraged and leaned back in her chair. “I started the research project, and you ran with it, and now it’s in Octavia’s hands—literally. So tell me like her doctor what the cause might be. We have a patient in front of us, seven months post-surgery, who experienced blunt trauma to the posterior,”

“Bleeding in the temporal lobe, which at this stage, even if we caught the bleed, she would probably be blind for the rest of her life.”

“Or?”

“The rear parietal where I had to leave some of the fragments, one of them could have shifted… she could be paralysed, might not even be able to blink.” Clarke exhaled a shaking breath.

“Or?” Abby pushed further.


“Look at the monitor,” Abby pointed at the tiny screen where her stats piqued a constant rhythm, “she’s not brain dead yet so we can rule out the temporal lobe.”

Clarke breathed in and nodded with just a tiny slither of relief. Lexa wasn’t brain dead yet. It shouldn’t be a comforting concept, and yet somehow it’s the best news she’s heard all day.

“It’s not the Basilar, she wouldn’t have made it out of the apartment door alive.” Clarke ticked another off of the list.

“We can rule out the anterior entirely, Octavia would have spotted it immediately. What else could it be? Did Lexa present with any symptoms before this morning?”

Clarke clenched her eyes and searched her scattered memories of the last twenty four hours. There was the bar, then the love making that went to daylight, and then the fight, and Clarke could not move past the fight. “I don’t know I wasn’t looking for symptoms,” Clarke blurted and rubbed her eyes in frustration, “we went to the bar and she got drunk quicker than she thought she would and so we went home and… hung out together.” Clarke fumbled and tried to think harder.

“She got drunker than usual?” Abby pressed.

“Mom she fell over this morning and hit her head, it’s obviously,”

“When is anything ever obvious with the brain?!” Abby interrupted in exasperation, “If it was obvious, we wouldn’t spend our entire lives honing the art of this craft. You said she got drunk quickly, what happened?”

“She was wobbling on her legs, which isn’t anything out of the ordinary, her speech was slurred, which again isn’t exactly out of the ordinary. She was drunk, Mom! Case closed!” Clarke bristled and stared at her mom.

“Clarke, did she vomit this morning?” Abby pressed again further, digging for more, suddenly pulling on a loose piece of string in Clarke’s mind.
“Of course she vomited this morning! We were hungover and she was running a fever— oh my god.” A thought crept into Clarke’s head as something began to unravel. “A loss of coordination, vomiting and a fever.” She muttered to herself and became lost in thought, trying to decipher what these symptoms might mean. “Mom it’s not a brain bleed!” Clarke snapped back to reality with one blinding eureka moment.

Clarke lurched from her seat to slap her hand against the intercom again, but before she got there, before she could depart the life saving information to Octavia below, the world beneath her began to fall apart. The machines in the operating theatre below became furious and loud, the monitors jumping and crashing and starting to dwindle. Clarke watched them pull the resuscitation cart. Lexa was crashing.

“Clarke it’s time for you to go!” Octavia shouted up from the table.

Clarke jumped back to life and slammed the intercom button, “Octavia I know what it is I can save her! It’s the shunt in her brain! She’s throwing a clot from the stitches and she’s running an infection from the shunt!”

“I can’t see a clot here, Clarke!” Octavia stumbled and blinked as Lexa’s still body became a cacophony of failing organic processes. They were running out of time, and it didn’t take a neurosurgeon, or rather three of them, to figure that one out.

Clarke quickly span around in a panic, “I’m going down there.”

“No!” Abby stopped her from sprinting off to the theatre downstairs, “You’ll lose your medical license, they’ll send you to prison for negligence,” Abby fumbled and settled quickly on what to do, “Clarke, I’ll go! Just tell me what I’m looking for!” Abby grabbed her daughter’s hand and started sprinting with her in tow.

“You haven’t practiced in two years they’ll send you to prison for manslaughter!” Clarke barked and hurried.

“Only if she dies.”

“Only if she dies?” Clarke hissed as they sprinted.

“Who do you trust more?! Me or Octavia?!”

“Good point!”

They ran down the hallway, ran down the stairs, lurching through each set of double doors towards the operating rooms beneath. Clarke arguing and Abby remaining adamant that she would take the fall and assist in the theatre—she started the research, she knew it just as well as Clarke. This was the only way she could protect Clarke, she could take the fall this time.

“She needs antibiotics, betas, stabilisers, epi, give her everything and get her stable and then take the shunt out before she has a stroke!” Clarke ran through the list for the third time and helped her mom scrub up. “You need to get that shunt out of her fast!”

“Go and wait with the others, I will come and find you. You can’t be here for this part Clarke.”
Abby said it quickly as the apron and gloves were pulled on.

“Mom promise me something?”

“I can’t make promises Clarke, you know that.”

“No, not that, not that you’ll save her,” Clarke grew frantic as the surgeons beyond the glass worked to get her girlfriend’s vitals steady, “promise me you’ll let her go if you can’t get the clot? Promise me you’ll let her die with a little dignity?” Clarke began to break and bend.

Abby paused and swallowed.

“I promise you,” her mother whispered and meant it.

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Ending

Chapter Summary

Wow, it's been quite the rollercoaster and I am sad to see this mammoth go. I want to thank everyone who stuck with me and went with this story... it's been a learning curve! I will post an epilogue in a few weeks but until then I leave you with the finale.

May you forgive me.

When a person, a patient, a human that ostensibly belongs to another dies; they use soft words. They use their apologies and their hopeless sentiments, and Clarke knows in her deepest beliefs that none of them are truly meant. There is not enough time to mean them, to grieve, to regret, to think. Not for surgeons. And so instead they make their eyes soft and whisper tiny apologies for those in abundance of time to grieve their dead and then they journey onwards to the next case, indifferently. They trudge forward to the next opportunity for a wisping life to maybe be saved if the world is feeling generous that day.

Clarke dragged her sore arm from around Indra’s shoulder as her people walked through the door one by one. Abby walked in first and refused to look up, simply stood there on the linoleum and chewed her bottom lip. Octavia entered next, Kane after. Someone would have to call Raven and Anya, it dawned on Clarke briefly; they had left three hours ago to pick Lincoln up from the airport and were running later than they could afford to be.

“Clarke,” Kane cleared his throat and forced an apologetic smile, “would you wait outside please? We have to update the family now.”

“She can stay,” Indra said immediately and rested on top of her hand.

“Clarke wait outside,” Abby spoke suddenly, urgently, too abundant in her feelings for a woman who has done this a thousand times and then some.

This would be her last wisping girl. Her last soldier. The truths hung from her torn expression like cobwebs in the crevices of somewhere ancient. Clarke could see it, even though she wished above all things that she couldn’t. It was the expression of a woman absolutely exhausted with telling other mothers their children were gone.

“What happened?” Clarke blurted and her body refused to move.

“Abby take her outside,” Kane urged.

Octavia interjected with a whisper pushed towards Kane. “I will, I’ll be the one to do it,” she said.

Within a meeting room down the whitewashed hall, sat in uncomfortable swivel chairs at the table while the early morning sun began to peak above the park in the distance, Clarke and Octavia sat eye to eye.

Everytime Octavia tried to speak Clarke stopped her.
“Clarke—”

“No,” Clarke did it again, rocking forwards slightly.

The sounds of Indra wailing screams haunted the veins of the floor. It sounded like a lamb being lead to slaughter, pushed and shoved further and further towards the abattoir door against its braced bleeding knees.

Octavia paused and sat with a strange expression.

“Ohay,” Clarke worked up the courage after a moment, her cheeks made taut by her hung mouth. “You can tell me she’s dead now. I’m ready. You can say it.” She exhaled quietly.

In the pause for breath that Octavia drew, Clarke made a whole life for the both of them.

There was a house in the suburbs with good white bedsheets they never used. In the mornings, Lexa would come downstairs and flex her spine until it popped and Clarke would tell her off in that way wives do. There would be a plain gold wedding band that gathered dust on the bedside table and Clarke would be so mad at first. She would get so angry and make Lexa wear it. But Lexa just isn’t one for jewellery, doesn’t like the way it sits constant and present on the skin. Once the years became a thick yield Clarke wouldn’t care anymore. Instead she’d make a game of savouring the moments Lexa did wear it, reserved exclusively for Christmas and anniversaries and maybe a birthday here and there.

They would take their babies and make fine women of them. Oh, they would make doctors. Physicians and researchers who were far better and smarter than all of the ones who had came before put together. They would make a soldier too and that would be the one they lost sleep over. Clarke would be proficient at coming to terms with postings abroad and tours overseas, but Lexa never would. Her heart just wouldn’t be up for the task. Instead, she would be the one who cried in the quiet hours and got her fingers stuck in old baby blankets and videotapes, and she would learn the hard way of what she put her own mother through.

In the mere second between one breath and the next, Clarke made a life.

She lived it well enough for the pair of them.


“They shouldn’t bury her in a military cemetery,” Clarke nodded to herself and mumbled mindlessly. She simply went through the motions of pretending to listen. “She should be somewhere close to her mom, somewhere that’s a little scruffy and beyond the pines. I think she’d like it there.” She stretched around the words and tried to seem brave.

“Clarke,” Octavia repeated loud enough to blow through the somber overcast. “Lexa is alive and stable. She isn’t dead.”

“What?” Clarke looked up and felt an ember of hope bloom in her gut.

“She’s alive and stable, we got the clot and removed the shunt. Lexa is alive.”

“Wait, what happened?” Clarke repeated again, suddenly uncertain.

“Lexa didn’t feel like dying today.”

“So.” Clarke blinked and stopped. “She just...lived? Just like that?”
“We won’t know until she wakes up but her brain activity looks good. Do you want to go and see her?” Octavia offered tentatively.

The wailing screams from the waiting room rang on, and Clarke couldn’t make sense of it. If Lexa was okay, why was Indra screaming like that? Why was the quiet lull of her own mom hushing her the only respite from the morose sound?

“If Lexa is okay… why… why is?” Clarke stumbled and blinked into the long hollow sobs that blistered the distance. “Why is Indra…?”

Octavia sighed and scratched the back of her neck, “I’m not supposed to say anything. Your mom made me promise—”

“Speak now before I rip your asshole out through your mouth!” Clarke snapped and glared with no patience left for today.

“There was a car accident,” Octavia said quietly. “They were driving back from the airport and, well.” She took a deep breath and made her chest sturdy, “It’s not good news for Indra.”

“Wait. What are you talking about?” Clarke became angry and confused.

There couldn’t be a car accident, this wasn’t the kind of day for a car accident, this was absolutely not the day for a car accident. Clarke supposed there was never an opportune time but this, here, today, was definitely not it. She felt her knuckles grow tight and her throat begin to clench and make it hard to breathe, nonetheless she fought her body and won, drawing in deep breaths through her nose.

“Tell me they’re all okay, please, just, tell me everyone is alive?” She levelled a stare at Octavia.

“We don’t know all the details yet. They took Raven and Anya to Thompson East, they’re fine, badly shaken but otherwise alive.”

“And Lincoln?” Clarke leaned forward and urged, “Please tell me he’s okay because Indra…” she paused and the screaming wails down the hall became all the more unbearable, “Indra is crying as if… as if…”

“Indra is crying as if she has just been told her son couldn’t be saved.” Octavia admitted reluctantly and swallowed something thick in her throat.

“No, no, no, no,” Clarke lurched and choked with wide eyes, the air leaving her like a wisp of steam. “That’s not—” she shook her head and lost the words, rubbing and beginning to claw her throat in despair. “You are wrong. You’re not, you’re not making sense.”

“Lincoln wasn’t wearing a seatbelt and—”

“You’re wrong!” Clarke spat and slammed the table, “It was supposed to be Lexa! We all prepared ourselves for it to be Lexa! Lincoln can’t—” Clarke lost her breath, “He can’t just die in a car accident. That doesn’t make sense. She was in surgery and, and, and her vitals started dropping,” Clarke began to wave her hands nervously, “and I sat with Indra all night and we waited for you to tell us. We waited for you to tell us that it was Lexa!” Her voice became an uncontrollable shout.

“Clarke you need to calm down!” Octavia said.

She quickly learned the hard way that there was no calming down from this. Not for Clarke. Not when the best news she could have received became tainted and darkened and made somehow the
worst by these cruel and meaningless events.

“They were just here! Raven and Anya were just here a few hours ago!” Clarke exasperated and shook her head as if she might find enough plot holes in the concept of what Octavia was telling her to unwrite Lincoln’s death. “It was supposed to be Lexa!” She hissed again in absolute fury and felt her stomach ring itself in guilty knots.

“Well it wasn’t!” Octavia stood suddenly and glared, “It was Lincoln! And it sucks! And it’s tragic! And it’s awful! And it makes absolutely zero fucking sense because tragedy never does! And god knows— god knows —how the hell that poor woman is going to get through this. But it was Lincoln, Clarke.” Octavia leaned in close, “Lexa lived and Lincoln didn’t and it isn’t right, okay? It’s not right and it’s not decent but your girlfriend is asleep upstairs and she is still untouched by this…but in a few days when she wakes up?” Octavia swallowed and let the question hang. “None of this is decent but she lived. The girl you loved survived.”

“Yeah,” Clarke wiped a tear and somehow felt it was the worse of the two options, “It’s just I had this idea in my head that I could be strong enough for the both of us. But after all the suffering? the pain? the torment that she has been through? I’m about to ruin her life this time.” It dawned on Clarke and made her feel sick. “I’m really going to ruin it with this one.” She slumped forward and rubbed her head.

Octavia sighed and grew quiet.

“Well. Without the pain, and the suffering, and the torment? You two have nothing.” Octavia offered thoughtfully.

Two days later and Lexa still had yet to wake up. Clarke was grateful for it, which in turn only made her all the more guilty. The minutes dripped into hours, the hours into night, the nights into days, and still she sat there in the uncomfortable plastic chair by her girlfriend’s mechanically pushed chest and hoped she would sleep for a few more days, at least.

“How you doing?” Abby appeared at the door, sheepish.

“Dandy.” Clarke sighed and leaned back, looking her mother up and down with an expression that made it clear how not-dandy she was doing, in fact. “Did you see Raven and Anya?”

“I did.”

“And they—” Clarke’s throat clenched against the taste of the question. “They know?”

“They know,” Abby hung her head and nodded. “They’ll be discharged tomorrow, other than a dislocated shoulder and a few lacerations between them, they got away pretty unscathed.”

“It’s not fair, Mom.” Clarke said dumb and quiet.

“I know.”

“We thought it was Lexa.”

“I know.” Abby said it again sadly. “I think half of your guilt is because you’re so thankful it was Lincoln instead, Clarke.”

Clarke swallowed a long guilty ache of her throat. “No,” she whispered and dried a slim tear. “All of my guilt is because I’m so thankful it was him instead of her, not half of it. I don’t know how to look Indra in the eyes because I’m scared she’ll see it, and I’m scared she’ll stare right back and
I’ll see how much she wished it was Lexa instead of Lincoln.”

“I keep trying to imagine what Indra is feeling right now but my mind won’t wrap around the thought of losing you. I try. I really have tried to imagine it. But every time I picture someone telling me you’re gone you walk right through the door and say ‘No I’m not!’” Abby quirked a sad expression and leaned against the door frame. “My heart just won’t even let me fathom it. Not for a second.”

“They’re good people, Mom. They didn’t deserve any of this and I can’t help but feel like I’m somehow to blame.”

“Don’t even go there, Clarke.”

“It’s true!” Clarke exasperated and rubbed her aching jaw, “I keep playing the why game, it’s a game where I keep asking why until I run out of questions to ask. Why did Lincoln get in the car? Because Lexa was sick. Why was Lexa sick? Because of a blocked shunt. Why was the shunt blocked? Because I didn’t spot it. Why didn’t I spot it? Because I stopped being a doctor and decided to love her instead. Why was I her doctor in the first place?” Clarke stared and swallowed, stuck on her ultimate answer. “Because my father died and I have never been able to let go of the idea of being a hero and stopping other families hurting the way we were made to hurt.”

“Clarke…” Abby sighed.

“Where did all of it get me, Mom? Where did it get Lexa? I saved her and the world took her brother instead.”

“Please don’t ever let Indra hear any of that, because I’m certain the only thing that could make her feel worse right now is hearing you blame yourself for all of this when the only reason Lexa is alive is because you dared to try. That’s all any of us can ever do Clarke.”

Clarke sighed and turned back to her girlfriend. Her closed eyelids fluttered once in awhile, in fact last night she managed to splutter just once against the ventilator and then slipped back into its mechanical push. They were all good signs, of course. Soon Lexa would wake up, and the thought excited and terrified Clarke in equal tandem.

“How is Lexa doing?” Abby changed the subject and tried to sound upbeat.

“Still asleep for now,” Clarke forced a little smile and found herself squeezing Lexa’s fingers. “Indra came by this morning, we didn’t talk. I went to the cafeteria and disappeared for a few hours. But she did come and see her.”

“Indra will be here when Lexa wakes up but right now Aden needs her.” Abby rubbed her slack jaw thoughtfully, “Everything has happened so fast I have no idea how the poor woman is even upright.”

“Has Indra been to see him?” Clarke swallowed.

“Twice. I think she’s hoping Lexa will wake up in time to say goodbye to him properly.”

Clarke bit her bottom lip and shrugged, “If Lexa and I hadn’t fought in the morning I might of—”

“Stop.” Abby interrupted and walked towards her, “I won’t hear it, this was not your fault Clarke. You didn’t kill anyone.”

“Easy for you to say,” she rolled her neck and blinked rapidly. “Has Kane said anything about what
“Yes, unreserved and unabridged. But you leave me to worry about that, okay? I got Lexa through surgery. You get her through the next part. That is still the deal.” Abby lowered her tone and squeezed Clarke’s shoulder.

Clarke just nodded and slumped in the chair.

She stayed slumped in the chair for another twenty-four hours, rarely got up to stretch her legs or go to the bathroom. It was all worth it in the end when Lexa finally began to choke and splutter against the intubation kit; thrashing and gasping and incredibly alive. It was Clarke who pulled it free, who was there with hands clasped around her confused face as she took that first gasp and rapid blink of her eyes.

“I’m here, you’re alright, it’s okay, I love you and I’m not going anywhere.” Clarke whispered and chanted and held her cheeks gently as the doctors and nurses rushed in responsively.

By the time Octavia flew in like a scattered and exhausted mess from the bedside of the on-call room, Lexa was already gone again. Fast asleep and breathing by herself.

“Did she try and say anything?” Octavia grunted in Clarke’s direction as she examined a comatose Lexa in the bed.

“She knew who I was.” Clarke said it certainly after a moment.

“What?” Octavia quirked her brow, “What did she say?”

“Nothing.” Clarke shook her head and felt relieved. “I saw it in her eyes, she looked at me and I knew that she knew who I was.”

“That will make plenty of sense in the paperwork. Thanks Clarke.” Octavia mumbled under her breath and finished her exams.

The doctors and nurses dribbled out one by one until eventually it was just Clarke again. There was something comforting about the solitude of it, of being the last remaining sentinel at Lexa’s bedside. Difficult as the days had been, they filled her with purpose nonetheless. This was her job: to take care of Lexa, to protect her, to be the one stood in the trenches rooting for her.

Sure, the details of the job had changed, doctor to girlfriend, professionalism to romance and all that came with it—but the mission objective still remained. Lexa was the only thing that mattered and each independent pull of her lungs for a breath of air was music to Clarke’s ears.

She leaned forward and took Lexa’s slim fingers in her hand. “You know I didn’t mean it, right?” She whispered and felt suddenly guilty. “That stuff I said to Octavia. That it was supposed to be you. I said it and I meant none of it and I am terrified that you’re going to wake up and see how happy I am that it was you who got to live. I think it’s going to break your heart even more and I don’t want to be the cause of anything that makes your heart hurt, love.” Clarke leaned forward and pressed a kiss to her nose.

“You underestimate how strong she is.” Indra spoke up by the door.

Clarke snapped back and stared at her like a deer in headlights, then melted in absolute unreserved shame. The kind of shame that chewed into her stomach and made her feel sick.

“I’m sorry you heard that.” Clarke licked her lips and sat straight as a board.
Indra shook her head dismissively and walked inside the room with her purse held to her stomach. She pulled up a chair and sat on the opposite side of the bed, swallowing and holding back tears.

She was the imagine of dignified as she pushed out a tentative hand and stroked Lexa’s hair. Indra made herself completely reserved and unconquerable and worried for nothing but her daughter.

Clarke finally understood where Lexa got that from.

“I came to thank the chaplain and see your boss to make this whole business about your mother disappear. They told me Lexa was breathing by herself and so I rushed as quickly as I could to be here. In case you’re wondering why I’m here so late in the evening.” Indra swallowed and explained.

“Business about my mother?” Clarke clarified nervously.

“Something to do with criminal malpractice for intervening when she did. I will not hear of it or press charges,” Indra waved dismissively again and delved inside her purse for a tissue. “If it wasn’t for you and your mother I dread to think of how many of my children I would have had to bury.”

“Indra I am so sorry.” Clarke blurted and winced into the wonder of how much Indra heard. Lexa made it crystal clear how they had to act around her mother. Clarke grew fearful that she was about to understand why.

“For being in a homosexual relationship with my daughter, or, for admitting you’re glad that she wasn’t the child that was ripped away from me?” Indra suddenly glared.

Clarke had never seen her glare before, it made her shrivel internally. Though again, she was quick to realise where Lexa got that look from.

“I’m sorry for anything I’ve said that makes you uncomfortable. It was thoughtless and unfair.” Clarke stumbled and swallowed.

Indra held her glare and finally softened with a nod. “I think she always thought I wouldn’t love her if I knew she was a homosexual. And maybe that’s my failure as a mother, because the years went on quietly until it was clear she didn’t want to talk about it—not with me at least. And not once during all of it did I tell her that I think God loves her all the same or that I love her all the same. I was just grateful that she didn’t share that part of her life with me, that she didn’t make me have uncomfortable conversations. There’s things in this world that make a simple and unkind woman of me. Things that I don’t understand because my faith tells me I don’t have to. Things that I’m going to have to understand now if I don’t want to lose her too.” Indra stopped in her tracks and cleared the wobble from her voice.

Clarke watched her throat clench around the idea of losing another one. “You know I think it has less to do with her not wanting to tell you because you wouldn’t love her, and more to do with not wanting you to think for a second that there was a woman in her life more important than you.”

“Don’t try and sweet talk me, Doctor Griffin. It’s beneath you.”

“Yes Mrs Woods.” Clarke made herself stiff again.

“I will make myself understand though, who and what you are to her. I think my son would like that.”

Clarke licked her lips and blurted it again, “Indra I’m sorry—”
“You’ve already apologised for what you said.”

“I know,” Clarke nodded and her voice became small. “I’ve put off telling you that I’m sorry you lost your son. And I am, I’m sorry more than I can tell you. I’m sorry that I didn’t get to save you and your family the way I wanted to, Indra.”

Indra held her stare until her otherwise dignified face fell into a low frown that ate into her jowls. She nodded eventually and understood perfectly what Clarke meant.

“I was always going to lose one of them,” Indra said.

“You think that?”

“I knew it the moment they both joined the army. I’ve had nearly a whole year of getting to believe we cheated the universe out of something fated and written.” Indra began to cry, shamefully. “It was a great year, wasn’t it?”

“The best year.”

“I’m not ashamed to tell you my faith has been rocked. That there wasn’t a brief moment that I hated you for intervening. That I hated God for doing this to me. But it’s all meaningless in the end, isn’t it? I mean, that day in Afghanistan? It was supposed to be Lincoln. He was supposed to be the one who ran into gunfire and saved that boy. He said so himself.” Indra leaned back and grunted a frustrated sigh, “The world is beautiful and cruel Clarke, and I don’t think we’re meant to understand it in this life.”

“No, I don’t think we are.” Clarke agreed and nodded.

“Do you think God is real?” Indra posed the question thoughtfully, “Because I’m not sure anymore.”

“Is it okay if I answer when I’ve had some time to think about it? Because if there is a God, I’m not sure I’m ready to deal with what it means for me.” Clarke answered the question honestly enough.

If there was a god, if there was a man sat on a cloud somewhere with his cheek slack against his hand—watching the little people below hurt one another in an endless circle of war and famine that never stopped; then Clarke wasn’t sure she wanted to give him the satisfaction of her faith. It didn’t matter how much joy there was left in the world when a six year old girl with a teddy bear stuck under her arm had to watch her father die. That a mother who chose her children and stitched them into her heart should have to sit and wonder why God was so hellbent on snatching one of them away. None of it was decent, and none of it made sense.

“I appreciate your honesty,” Indra spoke up and thought about it too. “You know I’ve decided something. I’ve decided if God is real, he’s definitely a man.”

“You think so?”

“Oh yeah, only a man can be as cruel and show-offish as God can be. Hurricanes and tsunamis? A woman would be far more artful. He can be gentle sometimes, he’s benevolent more than he’s wicked. But I’ll be damned if anyone is going to tell me that he is not cruel when he feels like it.”

“You think God can be wicked? I thought he was supposed to be all-loving according to the big book?” Clarke wanted to roll her eyes.
“If we’re made in God’s image doesn’t it stand to reason that even he’s capable of fucking up sometimes?”

Clarke realised she’d never heard Indra curse before. She nodded and leaned back in her chair, “It would stand to reason.”

“There is a reason we’re made to be God-fearing, Clarke. Nobody likes to think too much about why it is we’re supposed to be afraid of God. I think once I understand that, I’ll be able to forgive him and be thankful again.”

“I never thought about it like that.” Clarke said earnestly.

“When I have the answers I’ll share them with you, but for now I will try to be thankful that God gave me a year to be truly grateful for my children—and I will try to forgive God for taking my son.” Indra exhaled with a shaky breath and seemed lighter for speaking the small truth.

“Please do. Tell me the answers, I mean.” Clarke said and tried to push conversations of God into the small recesses of her mind. “Would it be okay if I went and took a nap while you’re here with her? I could use some sleep.”

“I’d like that. I want to spend some time with her.” Indra smiled softly, “Get some good rest, Doctor Griffin.”

“If anything changes—”

“You’ll be the first to know.”

Clarke paused and nodded slowly, she stood and felt the exhaustion sit on her shoulders from the sleepless nights she had accumulated. A few hours of sleep would do her some good, maybe a hot meal and a cup of coffee too. A small vain voice in the back of her mind told her a shower wouldn’t be the worst thing, Lexa wouldn’t thank her for sickly sweet smell of sweat when she awoke.

“See you in a few,” Clarke walked towards the door and rested a hand on Indra’s shoulder for a moment. “You’re a good woman, Indra.”

“I know.” Indra agreed.

Clarke departed and Indra remained at Lexa’s side. The room was dimly lit and warm, and she couldn’t help but wonder how it was Clarke managed to stay awake this whole time. Well, that wasn’t entirely true. She understood why. The young do silly things in the name of love. But today wasn’t the day for wrapping her mind around that truth just yet.

She rooted around in her purse for her reading glasses, and then for a book in particular. It was a special small book that she had read to all of her children before they went to sleep. One that she couldn’t quite bring herself to touch since Lincoln had died. Every time she tried to find some comfort inside its pages, each word felt tainted and touched by the inescapability of his death; memories of his wide eye boyish face and tooth-missing grin were replaced with unbearable images. The sound of his laugh when he was five years old muted and silent against the image of his still and rugged chest.

Bravely, Indra pulled the dog-earred book from her purse.

“I, er, I’ve kept this in my purse every day for twenty-five years.” Indra looked up at her sleeping daughter and pushed a slow smile, “It brought me comfort when you and Lincoln were away from
home. Whenever it felt like you were too far away and I couldn’t keep you safe I used to pull it out and read it to myself and suddenly… you were both knee-high again.” A hopeful smile crept up her cheeks.

Lexa breathed and did little else.

“Yes! I know I’m sentimental!” Indra bristled and rolled her eyes into an otherwise perfect silence. “Would it be so bad if I just read a few pages to you?”

Lexa exhaled.

“Thank you, was that so difficult?” Indra kissed her fingers and planted it on Lexa’s cheek. She opened the book and settled on the first page, “Where The Wild Things Are always was you and your brother’s favourite. You’re never too old to be a wild little beast, not to me.” Indra looked up with a small smile.

“It was yours...”

“What?” Indra snapped her eyes across and watched Lexa wince into the slow state of being conscious. “Lexa did you just say something?”

Lexa winced harder and exhaled a long groan.

“Don’t you dare go back to sleep!” Indra grabbed her arm rough and urgently, “Lexa it’s your mother, you listen to me, I need you to be awake. I need you to be here with me.” She demanded with a quivering voice. “Talk to me, please?”

“It was your favourite not ours,” Lexa grunted and kept her eyes closed.

“What?”

“The book,” Lexa groaned and licked her dry lips, “Lincoln said it was your favourite, not ours.”

Indra stalled and blinked, her fingers growing tight around the spine of the book. “What do you mean Lincoln said it was my favourite?”

Lexa swallowed dryly and spluttered. It was enough to have Indra up and out of her seat like a flash, not even bothering to grab a glass but just the jug instead. She lifted it carefully to Lexa’s lips and gave her a little taste of water.

“There you go,” she hummed and let Lexa take tiny sips with her eyes closed.

“My head hurts.”

“Mine too.” Indra commiserated and sat on the side of the bed, stroking her hair.

“He’s at Grandma’s house, eating pie out of the pan with a big spoon.” Lexa mumbled and weakly lifted her hand. It was too heavy for her arm and fell right back down again, but still she stayed awake, barely.

“You’re not making sense, Lexa.” Indra said slowly and rubbed her hand.

“Lincoln.” Lexa said his name and managed to crack her lids open, “We were at Grandma’s house and he walked me off the porch. He was eating pie out of the pan with a big spoon.” She paused, and for a moment it seemed she had fallen asleep again. “He’s dead, isn’t he?” She opened her eyes a little wider and looked at her mom.
Indra didn’t utter a single word. Eventually, reluctantly, she gave a small nod of her head.

Lexa chewed her jaw and closed her eyes again. “There was a man who took me to Grandma’s house. I watched them root around inside of my head and then he tapped me on the shoulder and took me to them.” She said weakly.

“And your brother was there?” Indra’s eyes filled with unshedable tears.

“Mom, I told him to get a plate,” Lexa grunted defensively with her eyes closed. “I said you didn’t like it when he ate out of the pan.”

Indra found herself laughing inexplicably, crying and laughing and stuck in the thought of Lincoln with his socks on the coffee table and pecan pie in the corners of his mouth.

“It sounds like Heaven.” Indra soothed and squeezed Lexa’s sore hands.

Lexa opened her eyes again and fixed her stare, determined to stay awake. “I told him I was sorry for blaming him for what happened to me. He said it was okay, just not to blame myself for what happened to him. Where is Lincoln, Mom? What happened?”

A knot formed in Indra’s throat. It was so thick, so unyielding, she thought she might choke. Lexa stared with soft green eyes and in her deepest beliefs, Indra knew her son was well. She felt it soothe the pain in her heart. Felt it hush her worries and calm her nerves. Yet still the knot would not unravel and the words would not roll off of the tongue.

“Just tell me, it’s okay, just tell me he’s gone.” Lexa almost begged for the truth.

“You were sick and we didn’t think you were going to make it. He flew into the airport as soon as he heard and on his way to the hospital there was an accident. Lincoln didn’t make it, Lexa.” Indra said softly and watched her face almost wince inwards.

“Where is Clarke?” Lexa gulped and tried hopelessly to steady her voice. “Is she still mad with me? Does she still hate me? We had a fight.” She blurted and stopped, looking cautiously at her mother. “A friend fight.”

“Clarke hasn’t left your side for days, she’s been right here this whole time. If it wasn’t for her mother storming into that theatre and helping to save your life, she would have no doubt gone herself and got in serious trouble, so I’m told.” Indra reassured and swallowed, “She loves you very much and you don’t...you don’t have to hide who you are from me because I love you too, Lexa.”

“You know?”

“I know.” Indra said.

“He said you did.” Lexa whispered and closed her eyes.

“Who said that?”

“You know who.” She opened them again and stared sadly, before it dawned on her. “I can’t believe he’s gone,” she croaked and curled inwards.

…

It was morning when Clarke awoke. She spent most of the night tossing and turning, the hiss of the air vent blurred the silence of the room and the monotonous sounds of the hospital outside seeped
under the door and disturbed anything that closely resembled sleep. She knitted her eyes tighter
together and rolled over for a cool bit of pillow, her barely awake brain still too busy with little
thoughts of Lexa. Whether she would still be mad. Whether she would hate her entirely. Whether
she would blame her for Lincoln.

“Are you awake yet?” A voice jarred her.

Clarke rolled over, bleary eyed and blinking. She peered through the pieces of blonde hair stuck to
her face and saw her mom standing over her. “If you’re here to tell me to go home and rest…"

“Not now, Clarke.” Abby came alive and threw fresh clothes at her, “Get dressed. Lexa is awake.”

“What do you mean Lexa is awake?!” Clarke jumped up so fast she nearly fell over. She started
pulling on her jeans frantically, barely getting each leg up her thighs before she tossed the shirt
over her head. “Did no one think to come and wake me up?!”

“She told us we weren’t to wake you up under any circumstance. She wanted you to get a full
night’s sleep.” Abby couldn’t help but smile.

“Why are you smiling?!” Clarke glared furiously and buttoned her shirt. “If Indra told you not to
wake me up it’s probably because Lexa hates me, probably blames me even—”

“It wasn’t Indra who told us to let you sleep. Lexa wanted you to get some good rest.” Abby
pushed half a smile, “I’ve seen her myself… all her marbles are intact.”

Clarke stalled with the information. Her body would not move.

“You’ve seen her?” She looked at her mom nervously. “Did she... does she know what happened?”

Abby paused and retracted her smile into a hesitant, thoughtful expression. “There’s something I
need to warn you about.”

“Does she not know? Do I have to be the one to tell her about her brother? Is that it?” Clarke
panicked and felt the vomit rise into her throat. Her hands grew antsy and sweaty at either side of
her thighs, she found herself wiping them on her stomach and breathing heavy and nervous.

“No, no, not that,” Abby was quick to reassure. “It’s just…well…she knew her brother had passed
away when she woke up.”

“What? Who told her??”

“He did, apparently.”

“That doesn’t make sense, Mom.” Clarke’s expression twisted into confusion.

“Oh it makes perfect sense if you think about it.” Abby pushed her eyebrows up thoughtfully,
“You were at her bedside for days while she was in an induced coma. Everyone who came to speak
to you, spoke with you in front of her. I think she was conscious on some level and her brain
ordered and processed the information. She thinks she saw and spoke to her brother in Heaven. I
think she synthesised the information around her as best she could.”

Clarke felt weak at the knees and sat down on the edge of the small bed. She covered her mouth at
first, then rubbed her taut slack jaw. “I guess…that makes sense.”

“You have a duty as a doctor to make sure that gets published with the rest of your research,
Clarke. She was able to synthesise and process information while in a coma—that is important to the nature of the research project. It might be what wins you a Ramon Cajal Award.”

Clarke blinked and inhaled thoughtfully, nodding along to her mom. She made her decision as quickly as the urge to draw a breath.

“No,” she briefly smiled and stood from the bed.

“What do you mean no?” Abby blinked, “Clarke, all of this began with the research. It began with the science. You worked your ass off and you deserve that award, and in terms of qualitative research, this is big—”

“No.” Clarke said again and leaned forward to grab her jacket, “It started with the science and it ends with her, she’s all that matters to me. I can’t bring her brother back but I can give her this, and giving her this means more to me than that stupid award anyway.” Clarke explained and pulled her arms through the jacket. “So as far as we’re concerned, as far as anyone with a vested interest in the research knows, this is an act of God. Okay?”

“O...Okay,” Abby said, taken aback.

Clarke tried to seem collected and reserved as she walked through the hallways. She made it perhaps ten feet before her slow and dignified march became a tearing sprint through double doors and up flights of stairs towards the right floor.

By the time she made it to the right room she was an out of breath, panting mess.

“You ran all this way just to see little old me?” Lexa teased from her bed with sharply pointed brows.

“Oh sorry I must have the wrong room. I was looking for a different soldier. Blonde hair, tall, great dancer, have you seen her around?” Clarke grinned and stared at her very alive, very loudly laughing, very persistently not-dead girlfriend.

“No but do you mind if I keep you company while you wait?” Lexa smiled and didn’t seem to care too much at all that the faintest hint of a slur persisted.

Clarke was grateful that it did, she wasn’t sure she would be truly Lexa without it now.

“I’d like that,” Clarke walked inside the room. “I see there’s a vacant seat?”

“My mom has been in the chapel for the last few hours. Something about straightening things out with God.”

“I feel sorry for him, she is a scary lady to have mad at you.” Clarke said thoughtfully and sat on the side of Lexa’s bed instead. “Hi baby,” she pushed forward slowly and took a gentle kiss from her girlfriend’s lips. “I missed you so much.” She whispered and wiped a stinging tear from her cheek.

“I saw him you know,” Lexa whispered back and cupped her face.

“Yeah,” Clarke forced a small smile. “They told me.”

“No, no, I’m not talking about Lincoln.” Lexa shuffled and made room for Clarke. She responsively laid down and curled up beside her on the pillow, her hand slipping around the small of Lexa’s spine. “Your father was there too.”
“How would you know? You never saw him.” Clarke laughed and dismissed the idea.

“How would you know? You never saw him.” Clarke laughed and dismissed the idea.

“How would you know? You never saw him.” Lexa gave a shallow smirk and nodded.

Clarke found herself stuck, wanting to believe and knowing in her deepest beliefs, that it was absolutely, completely, entirely, not possible.

Lexa nudged closer and kissed Clarke again, soft and careful this time. “You stood at his bed while he was asleep with a teddy bear under you arm and told him you’d remember to feed his cat every single day even though you hated her.” Lexa said slowly.

Clarke flinched and stared in disbelief, “That’s not possible.”

“He said you were a liar but that he loves you anyway.”

“That’s not possible. I’ve never told anyone that,” Clarke instinctively shoved Lexa’s belly and shuffled backwards, wide eyed and stuck, confused and thrumming with old wounds. “When they asked what I said to my dad I told them I said goodbye. I was only six. I didn’t understand what it all meant.” Clarke admitted in quiet disbelief.

“He was listening,” Lexa pushed a slow understanding smile. “I saw them Clarke and I know you don’t know how to believe me, but it was real. I saw them.” Lexa emphasised.

“If I did believe you,” Clarke licked her lips, “which I’m not saying I do, because I am a literal doctor of neuroscience and it’s impossible. But if I did believe you, I would ask what did my father said to you?” Clarke’s eyes flitted.

“He said you forgot to feed the cat more times than he cared to count.”

Clarke laughed and cried, simultaneously.

“I wish I remembered more and I’m sorry that I don’t, but he smelled of cigarettes and slapped my shoulder a lot and I can’t help but feel like he was probably the best dad in the world.” Lexa said softly and leaned forward to dry her tears.

“He was the best.” Clarke ached and nodded, “I know Lincoln was the best brother too.”

In her deepest beliefs Clarke knew it could not be true. The mere idea went against the very cornerstone of her beliefs. There would be reasonable enough explanations if she looked hard enough. Ever since she was a little girl her brain was always too busy and frenetic, too clever.

But just this once she decided not to bother looking for evidence.

Just this once, Clarke decided to believe in the impossible.

“I love you, Lexa.” Clarke whispered and swallowed, searching those soft green eyes. “I am in love with you and I promise you I will never walk away again, no matter how hard it gets.”

“I know,” Lexa sadly smiled at the thought of her brother and slipped herself into the clinch of Clarke’s arms. “We didn’t get a happy ending but we did get each other.”

“How are you feeling?” Clarke craned down and gently kissed the top of her sore bandaged head.

“I miss him already, Clarke. I miss him and I don’t think it’s ever going to go away.”

“I miss him already, Clarke. I miss him and I don’t think it’s ever going to go away.”
It won’t go away.” Clarke assured quickly, “It just aches less and less, and you love the people around you more and more, until eventually you’re as close to being whole as you’ll ever be able to get. I don’t need you to be brave or strong. I can be brave and strong enough for the both of us, so you take as much time as you need and I will hold you down.”

“If I could trade places with him.”

“I know.” Clarke flinched and hurt at the mere thought. “He wouldn’t want you to do that though. He hated the idea of you being a hero.”

Lexa nodded and sniffed back a tear. “Yeah,” she fortified her voice. “I called Anya and Raven and told them I don’t blame them. I couldn’t help but think how funny Lincoln would find it that the only one who didn’t end up in a hospital bed was you, the doctor who gets herself in constant trouble.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, Anya and Raven found it funny too in a macabre kind of way.”

“Well I’m sorry to let you all down,” Clarke crooned gently.

“It’s okay, we’re planning on pushing you in front of a bus to complete the circle when we’re all out of hospital.”

“Shut up!” Clarke sneered and held her closer, “You might think your tough but I know the places where your skull is missing. One jab of the thumb? You’d be done for.”

“In case you haven’t noticed I’ve got a great track record of not dying.”

“I’ll give you that. You are persistent, and I find that charming about you.”

“Charming enough to be my wife?” Lexa looked up with those soft green eyes and offered a thin small smile. “I know you’re going to stumble over yourself for days until you finally, reluctantly say yes. But I politely remind the honourable lady that I also have a habit of falling into comas and I would really like an answer before the next one.”

Clarke blinked and said nothing.

“I’d really like you to be my wife. I’d really like it if we could make it our life’s work to put each other back together until we’re as close to whole people as we can be.”

Clarke blinked and said nothing.

“Am I moving too fast? I don’t want to scare you, Clarke.”

“I’ll marry you.” Clarke said dumbly, still in absolute shock. “Is there a ring?” She pushed her hand out eagerly.

“I’ve been in a coma for nearly a week, where do you think I’ve been hiding a ring?”

“Oh yeah, sorry, of course,” Clarke suddenly realised and nodded, still in shock. “I’ll marry you.”

“You will?”

“Yes,” Clarke nodded, smiling and blinking. “I’ll marry you, have I said that part yet?”
“You’ve said it three times.”

“Good because I’m going to marry the hell out of you.” Clarke pushed forward and kissed her plump mouth eagerly, “Do you mind asking me again when we’re not in a hospital though? You have a habit of nearly dying in hospitals.” Clare blurted and earned a laugh.

Lexa slipped her arms around Clarke and drew her to her chest. She settled with a hand over Lexa’s heart, her crown tucked under her chin. Lexa rubbed the small of her spine and let her lie there in pleased, dazed, wonderful shock.

“We’re not in a hospital,” Lexa pointed as the orderlies pushed an empty hospital bed past the door. “Just look at that gondola go past.”

Clarke laughed so hard it lifted the room, “A gondola?”

“Gondolas were always your favourite. It can be an English Shire horse if you prefer?”

“What? We’re in Victorian London?” Clarke twisted an unimpressed expression.

“Ugh, fine! The Orient Express?” Lexa tried again.

Clarke just nuzzled closer and grinned into her throat, “I don’t care where we are so long as we’re together, that’s happy ending enough for me.” She promised.

There never would be a perfect happy ending, not for people like them at least. But if there was one thing they both knew how to do with equal vigor—it was find tiny little slithers of happy to forge into gifts for one another.

Even if they had to improvise half the time.

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