Lilac Sweet

by Star_Gazing_Knight

Summary

Set after Season 2 Finale, stress and tension runs high as the Voltron Team spirals down into chaos trying to locate their missing leader. This causes a series of events which results in Lance being separated from the Team after he takes a hit from a Robeast while defending Keith.

As the team attempts to locate their missing two team members, Lance tries to discover his own way in the universe without the assistance of Team Voltron, and ends up in a place and position he never thought he'd be in.

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Lance wasn’t sure where, or how, everything went so wrong. Thinking back on it, he supposed he should have expected it. Everything had been going so well, and Murphy’s Law just couldn’t allow that, now could it?

Shiro got his bayard, finally. They formed their sword and stabbed Zarkon, or at least his Voltron-esque armor. Zarkon’s response had been to grab the head of Voltron, to grab the Black Lion, to grab Shiro… It was at this point that Lance’s memories go fuzzy. The rest of the battle blurred in his mind; a stomach twisting mixture of yelling, screaming, and flashes of light. He had the impression that Shiro used the bayard, because he had a vivid image of the Sword of Voltron going up in flames.

Then again, that could have been some sort of hallucination. In which case, Lance had to stop someone right there. He had enough crazy stuff going on in his life right now. Hallucinations were not needed, or wanted here. He didn’t want those Girl Scout Cookies. Nuh-uh. Nope. Nada.

Besides the possibly hallucinatory flaming Sword of Voltron, Lance thought there was an explosion of light and sound. It hurt to even think about it, although, it was hard to tell if the pain was actual or just remembered pain of being ripped away from the team. He knew they were forced to drop Voltron’s form. He couldn’t remember dropping the form, but he was feeling the aftershocks of it.

The best way Lance could describe the sensation was to imagine being a piece of paper being torn into five pieces. The edges are ragged, torn. It left Lance feeling raw, broken, and sore. Like it was his limbs being torn from his body. And, as far as he could remember, they were torn apart at least twice during the battle.

Now, though, everything was dark and quiet. The steady presence in his mind told him that he was still near Blue, probably still in her. Which made sense, as he didn’t recall leaving her, but then again there was a lot that he didn’t remember right now.

The best thing for him to do was probably to stay where he was. That was like the Number One rule of a lot of disaster things like what to do when injured or lost. Speaking of injuries, Lance was pretty sure he was fine. His limbs were sore and numb, but he could still curl his fingers. Nothing broken then, right? The following sensation of pins and needles, or ants crawling over him was both annoying and a relief.

Man, he hated it when any of his limbs fell asleep. Those sensations were the worst… but, at least it meant he still had sensation there. He rolled his shoulders, and instantly regretted it. His neck hurt, but it wasn’t the dangerous kind of hurt. It felt more like the ‘I fell asleep sitting up in the car and my head fell at a weird angle and now I have a crick in my neck’ sort of hurt.

Static crackled in his head, like a ringing bell in an ear after swimming, or a song getting stuck on repeat in someone’s mind. Except, this is static, or maybe lightning. It crackled and popped, only noticeable in the quiet emptiness of the darkness around him.

Lance breathed in deep, regretting this action almost instantly, once again. The air caught in his throat, and for a moment, he couldn’t breathe. It passed in a second, and in the next, he curled
inwards, arms wrapped around his chest as he coughed.

He felt dry. It felt like he thought it would be a grand idea to swallow some sand and then decided that perfect chase was some cotton. He’s familiar with swallowing sand. Anyone who’s spent as much time on the beach as Lance has would be. The second part was just speculation.

Lance took another deep shuddering breath, and ignored how once again it gets caught – this time in his chest. The coughing fit wasn’t as bad this time. Brightside, he didn’t taste blood, so, if he had any internal injuries, it wasn’t flooding his lungs with blood.

There was a flicker of something at that thought. “Blue?” He doesn’t need to call out to communicate with his Lion, but he’ll take the sound of his voice over the static silence any day. “You there, girl?”

A shudder ran through their bond in response before her steady presence swelled in his mind. Lance grinned, ignoring the sharp pain of a cracked lip from the action. “How’ya doin’, girl?”

Blue shuddered again, rising up to meet him before receding again. Light flickered in the darkness as the screens inside Blue slowly come back to life, giving Lance’s eyes time to adjust.

It was like watching a creeping vine slowly climb up a building. In his mind, he felt Blue’s lack of appreciation at the comparison, and he switched it up, comparing this more to how a river slowly carves it way out of rock. A quiet rumble tells him just how much Blue prefers this analogy over the last.

Everything isn’t all peachy keen, however. The default light blue of the screens was replaced with a shade of red so bright it looked like it belonged to the Red Lion. Reassuringly, there’s no alarms blaring; but perhaps alarms weren’t needed when the red light cast off from the screens was worryingly enough. Lance sucked on his teeth, studying the flashing Altean symbols on the screens. One of them – the communications screen – was continuously flickering. None of this promises anything good.

Alright, nevermind. The red light wasn’t the most concerning. No, Blue’s lack of response to his question was more pressing, especially since he could feel pain leaking through their bond; like a rain slipping through a hole in the roof, one tiny drop at a time. It won’t be long until the water damage worsened to the point they’d have a hole in the roof and rain flooding in.

Blue purred in delight at the water analogy, although there was a definite twinge of discontent at the subject of the comparison. She’d rather be an inspiring ocean, mighty river, or glacier of ice instead of something as insignificant as rain.

“One drop raises the sea, darling.” Lance informed her quietly, distracted by the flashing Altean symbols, and his own attempts to reach through the bond to see if Blue was alright. It wasn’t like he needed much to respond the way he did, as much as he was subjected to ‘Dinotopia’ growing up, he’s pretty sure he could quote the entire script.

After a few minutes of trying to read the mess on the screens, Lance sighed and leaned back into his seat, running his hands over his face. His sigh turned into a groan, and he let his head tilt back until he was hitting the back of it against the chair. “Ugh.” He drew the sound out. “This sucks.”

Naturally, Blue agreed.

Lance’s Altean was limited. Not as limited as Pidge’s, who was limited to what she’d learned through that program. Lance had learned the old fashioned way, pressing buttons and things, and
the age old method of asking someone who actually spoke the language, ie Allura and Coran. Regardless, his level of comprehension was well below the level required for these screens still, although, what he could make out on the screen wasn’t promising. At all. Most of these repairs would have to wait until they’re back at the castle.

Speaking of… the last time Lance remembered the castle, it was being hit with its own reflected attack. He’s about 99% sure he heard Coran, and possibly Slav, after the fact though, so it probably survived. It has to have survived. Lance didn’t even want to entertain the mere idea that it hadn’t.

He resisted the urge to bite his lip as he thought through options. He broke that habit years ago, and he doesn’t have any chapstick available to fix the additional damage that action would cause.

Oh chapstick, how he missed it so.

That and coffee. Quiznak, he could go for a nice hot cuppa mocha. Or a frozen frappe. Or a marbled macchiato. No, no, no. He could really go for the wonderfully delightful ‘Butterbeer’ off the Starbuck’s secret menu. It was diabetes in a cup with 12 pumps of syrup, but it tasted so good. Maybe he could convince Allura to let them stop by Earth and get some essential human needs.

Blue snorted at that, or at least, preforms the sentient alien robot cat version of a snort. She prodded at him, as if to say, ‘quit getting distracted’.

“Oh please, you enjoy my distractions.”

But, as she usually is, she’s right. So, he leaned forward again, and resumed trying to make sense of the words in front of him. He understood maybe every third word, but he’s always been good with context clues. He had this in the bag.

Blue would help, and to some degree she can. However, talking with Blue wasn’t really talking. Communicating with Blue was more than talking. There was really no other way to describe it other than saying that it was more.

Blue was feelings, thoughts, emotions, ideas. She was a gentle suggestion, a nudge in the right direction, or a tug away from danger. She didn’t speak so much as Lance just knew. It’d been this way since he first met Blue.

Sometimes, the other relate, but for the most part, they don’t understand. How could they when they didn’t talk to their lions like Lance did. The closest Paladin to a bond with their lion like Lance’s with Blue was Shiro and Black; and the only reason he knew that was because he could feel it whenever they formed Voltron.

Just like he could also feel the distance between himself and some of the others… but thoughts for another day.

Allura and Coran had their theories on why Lance was so quick to bond with Blue like this. Lance was well aware of them, and no matter how much he refused to think about those theories, Blue was always up for the topic. Even just thinking about it sent quivers of excitement through their bond. Blue wanted to explore the idea, the theory. She has since Coran and Allura first brought it up. Even now, she offered it as a distraction.

“Looks who’s distracting who now.” Lance remarked. “If you want to talk that badly, how about you tell me what’s wrong and how to fix it?”

Lance rolled his eyes at her silent response. Of course there’s no response from Blue. Brightside: she’s left the dark corner of his mind where he shoves things he doesn’t want to talk about alone
now. He leaned back away from the console, heaving another sigh. It looked like most of the repairs would need to be done outside of Blue. Which would be great and all if he knew where he was. Maybe Blue would at least answer that question.

“Any clue where we are?”

Blue shrugged, or at least Lance was taking it to be a shrug. Finally, she let a little of information in through the bond. She wasn’t done scanning herself, and she was pretty sure her navigation is off. Where they were? She really couldn’t tell him.

Well, that was helpful. But maybe she could at least answer this question: “Will I die if I go outside?”

The impression she gave him was distinctly ‘probably not’.

“That’s helpful.”

Lance tapped his fingers against the armrests of the chair. The song he tapped out was soothing, something he’d been humming ever sense he was a child, although he didn’t know what the song was. His gaze roamed across the different screens, never settling on anything for too long before it fell on the flickering communications screen. The tapping stopped.

“Have you finished running scans on communications?”

If he can get that taken care of, it’ll be a whole lot of help. Magical self-repairing sentient robot lion or not, if he wants to get out of here, that needs to be the first thing he takes care of. If no one picks him up once he’s done with that… well… then he could worry about how he’s going to fix Blue with his lackluster engineering skills. He was certainly no Hunk.

Blue’s response to his question was an uncertain waver.

“You can answer the question or….” He let the threat hang in the air. The easiest way to see what was going on would be to… well, see what was going on. He’d have to sync with Blue. It couldn’t be forced, but… Blue wouldn’t leave him hanging if he pressed for that. Hopefully.

Blue’s response was instant. She slammed down some walls, her growl echoing around him. She didn’t want him in. He projected an image back at her of him standing, arms crossed, as he glared down at a small blue house cat.

“Bad kitty.”

Another growl reverberated across the cockpit. The look she mentally gave him was cold enough to kill. If looks could kill… if looks could kill. BUT… Blue loved him. She wouldn’t kill him. He’s her Paladin, and she loved him.

She returned instant denial, followed by a scattering of complaints. He’s annoying and obnoxious. He compared her to plants, tiny creatures, and insignificant things like raindrops. Doesn’t he know who she was? How dare he disrespect her so!

Lance made a face, settling in to his chair as he listened to her barrage of complaints against him. He crossed his arms, tapping his fingers against his arm to the same song he’d been tapping them to before. Honestly, he’d be offended from Blue’s words if it wasn’t for the fact he could feel her undercurrent of affection belulling her irritation.

“Me thinks the lady doth protest too much.” Lance didn’t know where the quotes from, but if
anything fits this situation, it’s this quote. Blue fell quiet with an unhappy ‘hmph’.

“That’s better. So, let’s try this again.”

A warning might have been nice, but Blue did not feel like being nice. There was sudden twisting in his gut and then he was pulled, for lack of a better word. Syncing with Blue was usually… an experience, but he couldn’t recall the last time she did this to him.

She crashed into him, surrounded him, and drowned him in herself. This is just like the first time, except he wasn’t panicking this time. It was only experience that stopped him from clawing at the nonexistent water, from kicking away and up to a surface that didn’t exist.

Syncing with Blue like this was like being caught by a strong undertow. It was unexpected, and kind of terrifying until one learned not to fight against the current but to move with it. But, not every sync with Blue was like this. More commonly, it was like being dragged into an admittedly chilly deep-sea diving session. He could still breath. He wasn’t drowning.

This was not a diving session. This was Blue being irritated at him, and just shoving him where he’d been demanding to go.

Flashing alarms and lights passed by him, and he brushed against a strong current of pain and weakness. She steered him away from all that.

Opening his eyes wasn’t an actual act of opening his eyes. It was more than that. It was, as Allura was fond of saying, more than science could explain. It was the diving lesson from before, the whole ‘seeing through your lion’ that they’d all attempted to do so very long ago.

The first thing that Lance registered was that they were laying on their side, which wasn’t comfortable for poor Blue, for them, at all. It was actually quite painful and annoying. After all, laying on their side got dirt and dust in their joints and gears, and their face was being pressed into the ground. Said ground appeared to be a moon. Yay. Note the sarcasm.

They wanted to back on the castle ship. In their hanger. Where their pride could be easily reached, and they could all help each other through their repairs. Where the funny Altean man who helped service them along with the Yellow Paladin took care of them when they couldn’t do it themselves. They missed the warmth of Red, and the friendly protection of Yellow. They wanted to know what new mystery Green was interested in, and what her Paladin had installed into her now. They wanted the security of their pride leader.

Everything hurt. So much hurt. Why did everything have to hurt so much. Why had the pride been ripped apart? Why had Black allowed their pride to be hurt like this? Why…

It was hard to say which one of them disentangled themselves first. Which one pushed the other away first. Lance panted, a hand already pressed against his face, wincing at the sudden phantom pain of having it smashed against something hard and unforgiving. Another hand was at his side, pressing against the phantom wounds from the impact.

Sorrow and apologies washed up on Lance. Blue hadn’t meant for him to feel her pain like that. She hadn’t meant for them to join like that. She hadn’t meant it.

“It’s fine.” Lance bit out. “It’s fine.” He swallowed thickly; took a deep breath, held it for a moment, and then released it. He blinked some tears out of his eyes, and stood. He triggered the face guard of the helmet, which sealed him up so he could go outside, and then headed for the emergency hatch.
While Blue wasn’t able to open her mouth for him, he was still able to shimmy out between her sharp teeth. The jarring impact of the crash probably did that, and while he was sure it hurt, at least it meant he could still get in and out that way.

He took some steps away before turning and surveying Blue. The crash looked… actually better than how it’d felt. That being said, She still looked bad.

Well… priorities. Blue was pretty much out of commission until she was done scanning – which she should have been by now. Which meant something was wrong with that system. So, he was back to what he’d originally assumed. He needed to get the communications back up and running.

“Don’t suppose you have any tools?” He rested his hands on his hips as he looked her over. She gave him a quick unsure negative. Lance sighed. “Yeah, I didn’t think so.”

He sucked his teeth again, and looked up at the ‘sky’. “Let’s hope someone comes to get us soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Look at this fantastic art by my roommate based on this chapter!!! I highly suggest that you guys check her stuff out! :D
Meeting

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: The Voltron team has succeeded in defeating Zarkon but the end battle has scattered them. Blue and Lance crashed onto a moon and are stuck with a most of Blue's systems down including communications. Lance wanted to try to fix that, but lacked the tools to do so.

Honestly, the last thing Lance expected was help. Well, let him rephrase that. The last thing Lance expected was help from a stranger. The universe wasn’t some friendly neighborhood. People didn’t just ‘help’ other people out. If he was staying with the whole neighborhood comparison, then the universe was a neighbor being controlled by a gang. This was Zarkon’s universe, and his experience, people didn’t try to help others.

That being said, Lance was actually expecting help… in the form of a gleaming white and blue castle-ship. Not in the form of a clunky old trader ship.

Just looking at it brought flashbacks of the last time he’d seen something like it. He’d already learned this lesson. People in junky trader ships were not to be trusted. They’d handcuff him and steal his lion; and out here he didn’t have a castle to call for help. No team to back him up and get Blue back.

So, yeah. His interest in being handcuffed again nonwithstanding, Lance was so not interested in repeating the lesson Nyma and Rolo had taught him. Back then he had the back up safety net of his friends, now he was on his own. He couldn’t afford to lose Blue again.

Then again, if she continued this slightly mom-ish nagging about the things he needed long term, he may revise that determination. He was well aware that he needed things like: water, food, tools, chapstick, coffee… and okay, so those last two weren’t actually on her wishlist of items, but whatever.

Regardless of her nagging, it didn’t stop him from glaring down the trader ship or the person who left it. Humanoid builds weren’t always promising. The Galra had a humanoid build, and so did Nyma and Rolo. The fact this alien did as well did nothing to reassure Lance like it might have once-upon-a-time.

He jumped off of where he’d been sitting on Blue. Sliding down off of her before landing in a crouch and standing. Lesson learned or not, if this was someone legitimately wanting to offer help, he wouldn’t turn it down. He adopted an easy post, resting his hand on his hip, while the other dangled close to the energy compartment where they all kept their bayards just in case.

“Can I help you?” Lance asked. Silence reigned for a second, two, three, and then, the other spoke.

“I feel it is I who should be asking you that.” The returning voice was distorted by the helmet they wore, although, if Lance was honest… the other sounded male. Then again, it could have just been an alien who sounded male even if female. It was hard to tell in space. It was also possible that this species of person doesn’t have genders. “I saw the crash,” the other continued, “from the Planet.” They nodded in the direction of the planet.
Lance didn’t bother looking at it. He knew the planet was there, and frankly, looking at it would give this person an opportunity for something. Instead, he waited patiently for the other to continue.

“I thought I’d stop by and check to see if you needed assistance before I continued on my route.”

Oh yes, Lance was sure. Stop by and see if Lance needed assistance. Definitely. Of course. But… then again… he couldn’t hear much due to the distortion, but this person did sound sincere. Then again, if this person wasn’t actually friendly, Lance was not looking forward to the chewing out Shiro would be giving him – again – about blindly trusting someone.

In the back of his mind, Blue growled and tugged at a memory to offer her two cents on the matter. The Memory she pulled up was of a conversation that Lance wasn’t supposed to have heard. He’d been looking for Shiro for a ‘talk’ and instead ended up listening to Allura talk to Shiro alone on the bridge.

“It is not Blue’s way to judge before.” Allura explained. “Blue has always given their trust easily. Red does not trust easily. Yellow will always chose based on the others and circumstances. Green often sides with yellow, but can be distracted by curiosity. It is Black’s job to decide in the end.”

It was true. Hunk was usually better at gauging who was actually good and who wasn’t. Meanwhile, Lance was trusting Nyma and Rolo, a mysterious mermaid queen and her people and almost causing Hunk to become brainwashed mermaid monster food, and spilling his life story and information about the team to the Yupper.

But, surely there were moments where Lance’s trust in people and things had been good. His trust in Blue, for starters. He’d trusted Allura and Coran. He’d trusted Keith and Shiro and the rest of the team. He hadn’t opposed the Blade of Marmora people. He could do this. He could try this. Trust.

Lance took a deep breath, and shifted his weight as he crossed his arms. The alien took a step back, as if expecting Lance to advance on him, but Lance stayed as he was. Nyma and Rolo’s unease echoed in his head, along with an imagine scolding from Shiro.

“I appreciate it, but I think I’m good.” Blue’s discontent was evident in the low rumble in the back of his mind. It gave him a mere second to mentally brace himself before he was hit was a flood of nitpicking and nagging.

Tools, she basically cried. Tools, we need tools. For a moment, Lance actually thought he heard her speak… but nah. Not possible. Blue cannot talk. Not like that anyways.

“I get it.” The alien held his hands out. As it turned out the universal sign of peace and surrender was indeed universal. “If I had a ship like that, I wouldn’t want anyone else messing with it either.”

Lance continued to tap his fingers against his arm. Ugh. He wanted to trust this guy… and Blue was right. He did need tools… and supplies if the repair took too long. This was a one-time opportunity. Once this guy left, Lance was on his own until the others arrived. If the others arrived.

No. No. They’d never left him before. Last time they were separated like this, Pidge had found them within what… a day? There was no way he’d be left.

In any case, Lance could already imagine Shiro’s disappointed frown and the following lecture. That’s all he ever seems to do: disappoint people. Excluding Blue, because he can already feel her swell with protest.
“I just want to help.” Lance must have taken too long to respond because the alien continued. “This universe is hazardous enough, so I understand your caution.”

Blue has always given her trust easily, and so has Lance. He doesn’t want to trust this guy, but… “I can understand wanting to help.” He muttered, because he can.

Really, wanting to help was why he was a Paladin in the first place… if one ignored the fact that he’d been forced into the role once he’d stepped foot in Blue. And… Blue was right – of course she was—he did need help. And it didn’t look like he’d be getting it from the castle anytime soon… and besides, maybe he could make a friend and an ally.

Blue slyly pushed two considerations forward: chapstick, and coffee. This guy was a trader… he could probably find those things….

Lance sighed and his shoulders slumped. In the back of his mind, he heard the satisfied roar of Blue. She’d be the one dealing with the fallout from Black if this went south. Black and Shiro. Her response to that was grumbling acceptance, tainted by certainty that there would be no fallout from those two. Besides, she’s already won, so it was ‘whatever’ now.

“The name’s Lance… and if you’re offering assistance, I guess I wouldn’t mind some water or a couple tools.”

The alien took a step back and to the side, gesturing towards their ship. “Welcome aboard.” The alien offered.

Lance took a look at Blue, who immediately mentally nudged him in a silent version of ‘go on’. What was he? A kindergartner being pushed to go make friends by their mom? Blue nearly lit up on the idea. Okay, yeah, no. Lance was so not into that.

He turned away from her, stalking past the alien and into the alien’s ship. Behind him, he could feel Blue’s smugness radiating out.

He waited for the all-clear readings from his helmet to pull it off. Not all Aliens breathed the same air as human and the last thing Lance wanted was to die because he didn’t want to wear his helmet. He held t under his side before turning and… Quiznak. Lance’s hand flew back down to the energy compartment before he could even begin to speak.

“You’re a Galra?”

“Half, actually.” Now that the trader mentioned it… he wasn’t exactly… furry. It looked more like he just has purple skin… and purple and yellow glowing eyes. Which was actually really kind of cool. His long white hair is half up in a ponytail, presumably easier to manage with the helmet, although a couple loose strands fell in front of his face.

Half Galra, huh? Well, Lance already knew one of those, and while annoying, Keith wasn’t all that bad. Besides, there were good Galra out there… and he’d already committed to trusting this guy.

“That must be rough.” He smiled at the other, hoping to put him at ease. The alien… halffa?… stared at him for about a good minute before finally nodding and turning to get some water. It was a sign of trust in its own way that he was willing to turn his back on Lance.

“Most don’t seem to care whether I’m half or full.” The halffa responded as they turned back around to give Lance the water pack.

“Then they’re stupid.” Lance shrugged. “It doesn’t matter where you come from. What matters is
what you do,” Lance advised. His hand brushed against the trader’s as he accepted the water. Of course, there wasn’t any skin to skin contact, as they were both wearing gloves, but it didn’t matter.

It’d been so long since he’s touched someone other than his teammates. Great. Now he wanted a hug, but probably not from this guy. As pretty as he is – and this guy is really pretty – Lance didn’t know him enough for a hug.

Speaking of how pretty this guy was… why were Galra halffas always so pretty when the Galra themselves weren’t? It just didn’t make sense. It wasn’t fair. Perhaps halffa just always took more after the other species in the looks department? And why was purple a necessary thing? Keith’s eyes, this guy’s skin and iris color. Questions for later, but at least this guy was nicer than Keith.

“It sounds as if you speak from experience?”

“Not personally.” Lance was not going to get into his own experiences from Earth. Brightside about space: he didn’t have to hear ‘you don’t look Cuban’ or ‘McClain isn’t a Cuban sounding last name’ anymore. “But one of my teammates is part Galra.” Lance half shrugged as if to say ‘what can I say’. “I refuse to judge anyone on that alone.”

“That must be difficult for him. He’s lucky to have a friend like you.”

Keith. Lucky to have Lance? Oh man, the idea is almost laughable. Keith didn’t care about Lance, except to make sure that Lance knew that Keith was better than him in every way.

And Keith was better than Lance. He was the better pilot. The better fighter. He was Shiro’s favorite and possibly even more. Not that Lance was jealous or anything. It made sense for Shiro to favor Keith in all ways, after all Lance was…

Blue chirped, nudging him. She didn’t think Keith was better than Lance. She could have chosen Keith before in the cave, but she didn’t. She didn’t because Lance was her Paladin. Lance was better than Keith. At least in her eyes.

It was reassuring, Lance guessed, that at least Blue had his back. Even if it felt like the same kind of feel of ‘at least mom has my back’.

“So, you said you’d be interested in tools?” The trader’s hand is suddenly touching his shoulder, a steady weight which brought Lance out of his mind and back to the present. If he’s being honest, he was relieved at the change in conversation. The touching thing he wasn’t sure about, but, he wasn’t about to turn the guy helping him away. “By the way, I believe I never introduced myself. I’m Tyrac.”

Tyrac, huh? Well, Lance has a name for him now. Tyrac pulled himself away from Lance, heading deeper into the ship. “What kind of tools did you need?” Tyrac called out.

Lance floundered. He didn’t know what he needed, only that he needed something to help fix Blue’s communications array. “Uh, multipurpose?”

“What will you be working on? I’d suggest communications, if you don’t already have that up?” Tyrac’s voice floated back out to Lance.

“Yeah.” A few minutes passed before Tyrac returned, tools in hand.

Alright. Here you go. I’ve only got one of this,” He held up a tool, “So I hope you don’t mind if I stick around until you’re done with it.”
Stick around? Uh, no. Lance wasn’t sure how he felt about that. Letting a stranger – or not so stranger since Lance knew his name and half his race now – watch him work on Blue.

“I won’t mess with your ship or get close.”

There was something about Tyrac that was oddly reassuring. Lance wasn’t sure what it was, but it was there. The guy’s smile was absolutely gorgeous, and the way he spoke was so… charming. Lance could see how this guy was a trader, after all, Nyma had the same alluring call to her.

If it wasn’t for the fact that Lance had been to a swap moon or space mall or whatever it was called and seen some of the traders in there, he’d almost assume that being pretty/handsome and charismatic would be a requirement. Maybe if the whole Paladin of Voltron thing didn’t pan out or once they were done, then he could become a shop keeper.

He could totally go back to the space mall and take over that Earth stuff store. And he was getting way off topic.

“If you’re going to be hanging around for a while, then I suppose I could introduce myself.”

“It would be nice to think of you as someone other than ‘the guy with the strange ship.’” Tyrac shrugged. “But it’s honestly your choice.”

“The name’s Lance, and I suppose your presence while I fix up B… my ship wouldn’t be too unwanted.”

“Just a little then,” Tyrac jokingly asked.

“Just a little.” Lance returned. “You’re kinda distracting, in all the best ways, I assure you. I bet that helps with sales.” Tyrac laughed, and Lance decided that it was one of his new favorite noises, even if he never heard it again after this encounter. No one’s laughter should sound so attractive. No one’s.

“I’ll try to keep distracting you to a minimum then.” No one’s smile should look like that either.

Ugh. Get it together, Lance. He spent time, daily, with a team of insanely attractive people. Between Shiro and Allura’s combined and separated gorgeousness and then Keith and Pidge’s cuteness and Hunk’s general well… his nickname wasn’t false. And it wasn’t fair that they all looked that way naturally, unlike his bottled beauty due to strict beauty regimes.

“I’m not sure how well you’ll succeed.”

“We’ll just have to find out, won’t we?” Tyrac returned.

Blue huffed, tugging at Lance to get his attention. He could flirt with the pretty alien later, after she was fixed.

Lance flushed dark enough that it might actually have been noticeable if he hadn’t chosen that moment to turn away and put his helmet back on in preparation to head back outside. Inside his mind, he screamed at Blue incoherently. He wasn’t flirting, and Tyrac wasn’t flirting back, and there was no flirting. None. NONE.

Skeptical Blue was skeptical.

Lance practically threw the word ‘no’ at her. If he was flirting, it would have been obvious. It would have been finger guns and winking and that one smile that made everyone laugh. His flirting
was obvious, unless he was flirting with Keith, in which case he could make it as obvious as he wanted and it’d still probably fly over Keith’s head. Not that it mattered since Keith a) wasn’t interested in him, and b) probably most likely kinda sorta possibly already in a relationship. It was hard to tell with point B.

In any case, he wasn’t flirting. He wasn’t. Skeptical Blue was still skeptical, but more willing to let the subject change.

“I guess we will.” Lance replied, stepping past Tyrac and heading back outside. He glared at Blue as he approached, and finally came to stop a few steps away from here. He sighed, his glare softening as he looked her over. This was going to be anything but fun.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: A trader named Tyrac stopped by to see if Lance needed any help. Lance did. So begrudgingly, he accepted the help. However, Tyrac only had one of the multipurpose tool that Lance needed, so he planned to stay and watch Lance since Lance refused to let Tyrac near Blue.

Chapter Notes

For any American readers, Happy 4th of July!

The small meet and greet had helped some to ease Lance’s paranoia, but it hadn’t been enough to erase all of it. Out in space, Lance had learned that it paid to be suspicious. Just letting Tyrac be present while Lance worked on Blue made the hairs on the back of his neck stand.

Lance knew Tyrac was just sticking around to make sure he got his tools back, or just in case Lance needed help. Which he didn’t. Well, not more than he already received from this guy. He wouldn’t mind taking some help from Hunk, or Pidge, or Coran.

Any of them would have Blue back up and running in no time. But Lance wasn’t them, and he was stuck with a magical blue lion feeding him info, like an instruction booklet to a desk or something.

In any case, Lance could understand Tyrac sticking around. He only had one of the tool, and Tyrac didn’t know Lance. In a twisted universe ruled by an oppressive overload, chances weren’t something to be given freely, even if it was just lending someone some tools.

The chances Lance had of someone coming to help were about equal to Pidge’s calculated chances of them hitting a planet if they were to be flung out into space. Which actually, upon review, meant the exact opposite of how Lance meant it considering Pidge’s calculations were either a) wrong, or b) the Voltron team was just lucky enough to always hit a planet when they were flung apart.

All this being said, it was super lucky for Lance that Tyrac decided to be a ‘Good Samaritan.’ It’s not like Lance prepared for anything like this, despite how often this seemed to happen lately. The only thing he was sorta sure he possibly could have was a first aid kit, but there was so much doubt in that possibly that it was more likely that he didn't.

Note to self: put supplies in Blue. Maybe even suggest that the others do the same to avoid this fate. Blue rumbled in agreement in the back of his mind, and then nudged him to move a crystal into alignment.

Another reason to appreciate this stranger: Lance’s lack of funds. It’s not like he had any form of currency and even if he had brought his wallet, Earth money was not going to do him any favors. And to top things off, it wasn’t like there was a fountain full of coins and currency that he could just take money from again.
On the other hand... Tyrac could have been sticking around for money. Being a paladin of Voltron, Lance doubted that there wasn’t a bounty on both the Paladins and the Lions. Both of which, there was one of right here. Sitting ducks. Perfect pickings for someone.

No, no. Maybe Lance wasn’t the end-all-be-all of good judgment of character, but he liked to think the best of anyone. Allura has said that Blue didn’t usually judge before knowing someone, that they were a more trusting out of the other Paladins, but… he’d already messed up so many times by now. But, Tyrac didn’t seem dangerous. Neither had Nyma. Or the Mermaids.

Then again... Lance had Tyrac’s tools and… Blue growled, clearly tired of all the wishy-washy nonsense. Message received loud and clear, Blue.

He’d just talk to the guy, set his nerves at ease. Sure thing. He'd get right on that.

What a wonderful idea, in any case. Have him talk to Tyrac when he was supposed to be working on Blue. The only reason he knew what he was doing was because Blue was feeding him info. He wasn’t like Pidge, who downloaded schematics and things into the suit or computer. He couldn’t even enter Blue and check the screens periodically, like how everyone not Pidge did maintenance.

As far as he knew, the others didn't just sync with their lions and just know things. To some degree they did, like when Hunk knew to use his Bayard to form the Shoulder Cannon; but it wasn’t like how Lance and Blue were. He knew because when he brought it up, the others had looked at him like the ‘Sure, Jan,’ meme or, alternatively, like he was crazy.

What made that situation worse is that Coran overheard him and it was the whole ‘talking with your lion’ conversation all over again. Ugh. No. No Thank you.

Speaking of repairs and monitors, Lance really needed to check his; just to be sure he was doing this right. However, that would mean that Tyrac would know how to get in Blue and the last thing he needed was someone trying to mess with his lion.

Aw. There Blue went, reassuring him again that he was on track with a purr and a gentle nudge. That took some of the pressure off, sort of.

Well, now that he was sure he didn't need to debate going into the cockpit, he could revisit the 'talking with this random helpful stranger plan.' Which may have been Blue’s intent all along. He glanced up at her suspiciously, but she gave no indications either way.

Lance turned his head slightly to glance back at the other, just to confirm Tyrac was still looking at him. Which he was. He didn’t care if these were this guy’s tools; it was kinda creepy.

But what to say? What conversation to bring up? Conversation didn’t used to be this hard.

Maybe it was the pressure. He was a Paladin of Voltron. He was a defender of the Universe. A Diplomat of the people. He may not have made the best first impression, but that didn’t mean he could go ahead and slack off now. He was representing his peeps now.

"I can't imagine this is very interesting," Shiro would totally be giving him his proud space-dad smile right now. Not that Lance knew how that felt since Shiro only have it to him like… once. And then promptly scolded Lance about giving information away to the enemy; even if the enemy was a yupper.

"That would depend on your definition of interesting," Tyrac responded quickly, which told him how 'friendly' the guy was, like he was anticipating him, "I find it rather fascinating."
Lance furrowed his eyebrows and actually turned to look at Tyrac this time, despite the fact that neither of them could actually see each other's faces.

"That so?" His tone was partially suspicious and annoyed; and yet Lance was kind of eager, in some small way, to just talk in general. He was sorta curious as to what was so interesting about any of this.

"I've never encountered your species before."

Well, okay, fair enough. Lance could give the guy that. That even cleared some things up, like the avid staring. After all, people back home would be doing the same thing - after having about three heart attacks. Most back home didn't even believe in the possibility of aliens. Yet here he was, living that stupid space adventure he wished for when he was eight. What was next? The magic adventure he asked for when he was eleven?

Blue prodded at Lance. Slave driver. Did she want him to feel at ease or work? ...Work. Got it. Working now. Not that he could blame her, the faster he got things done, the faster her communication array was up and working, the faster Lance could give back the tools, say goodbye to Tyrac, and then hail the castle.

Still... it would be rude to just be silent after starting up a conversation. He gave a noncommittal acknowledging hum, which Tyrac took as an opening to continue.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lace could see the other take a few steps closer, but didn’t come much closer than half the distance between Lance and his ship. The alien sat down, settling himself, probably figuring this was going to take a while.

He wasn’t sure how he felt about Tyrac’s closer position. His metaphorical hackles rose, but similar to how a frightened cat could be reassured by its owner, Blue soothed him with a brush and a prod to continue working. He shot a look in Tyrac’s direction and Blue assured him that she had it covered.

As much as he trusted Blue – and he did trust Blue – Lance was still loath to turn his back on Tyrac. Blue said she got it, which meant, she got it.

"Are all of them as expressive as you?" Tyrac asked, crossing his arms.

Lance never really considered himself expressive, but as he thought about it, compared to the rest of his team, he totally was.

Shiro was always so cool, calm, and collected. Unless Slav was around, but honestly, who could blame Shiro for getting annoyed? Even facing down a Galra fleet Shiro remained confident, staring them down without so much as a flinch.

Allura was similar, but so much more defined in her posture and expression. She looked, and behaved, every bit the princess that she was.

Stone-faced Pidge as she worked at her station, glaring equipment into submission in her mission to find her family and help-out team Voltron.

And then there was Keith. And then there was Keith. Keith, who was probably the most active out of them all, baring himself, if only because Keith only had two modes: brooding, and training. Both of which he did with as little human interaction as possible unless it came to Shiro. Probably because Keith was so much better than everyone else, except for Shiro. Or maybe it was due to Shiro and Keith’s relationship.
Maybe out of all of them, Hunk and Coran were the closest to being as expressive as him, and really, Coran was the closest. And he didn’t even count because he wasn’t human!

Not that he wanted to think about his similarities to Coran, or Allura, for that matter. No. He’s not going there. Nope. Nada. Not at all. Eagerly Blue nudged and he pushed her away. That topic was off limits.

Instead, he debated on whether he preferred silence or Tyrac talking to him.... No, the silence would kill him. He was used to the hustle and bustle of a busy tourist destination and his huge, obnoxious family, even the Galaxy Garrison was so full of people and noise. Unfortunately, most of the people he was typically around now weren’t so social. Which meant, yes, talking would be preferred.

"I guess," Lance shrugged. "Humans can be expressive sometimes," his voice wavered, not that he could really help it with all the things that had been going on, all the thoughts he refused to think about... "But yeah, I guess my family was usually pretty expressive."

"It sounds like it has been quite some time since you’ve seen them." Tyrac wasn’t so quick to respond this time.

Lance’s motions slowed as he stared blankly at the panel in front of him. In his head, the buzz of Blue’s instructions even fell silent. Before Lance could even realize his own reaction, Tyrac was backpedaling.

"I apologize, that was-"

"No, no. It’s fine... It’s just... yeah, it’s has been awhile," Lance managed to put a smile on his face - not that Tyrac could see it - and returned to work on Blue. Blue’s curious trill echoed in his head, concern ringing out with every note of the sound. He was fine. Really. He wasn’t sure either of them believed it, but she let the matter rest.

Speaking of a while, he needed to fully sync with Blue again, which would take his attention. While he ‘enjoyed’ the experience, it would leave him wide open for Tyrac to try something. If Tyrac would try anything. So far he hadn’t done anything to promote further paranoia.

He pursed his lips before looking back at Tyrac again. Well, the only way he’d know would be to try.

"One moment." Lance needed to know he was on the right track and if there were some repairs on panels he needed to access somewhere else.

Although he generally liked the experience – when he wasn’t being dragged down – he wished syncing with Blue felt more like tropical warm shallows instead of the cold ocean depths and icy glaciers.

Uh oh.

She didn’t like him thinking that. She could be so moody, but he did just call her frigid. He mentally reassured her that she was perfect the way she was, which helped lessen the bristle he was feeling from her. Did she also know he appreciated her looking out for him all the time? He could almost hear the responding purr.

Lance closed his eyes and let their connection wash over him, his body almost feeling numb from the sensation. He checked the schematics and compared them to what he had done so far, checking for other things he might have to do. Theoretically, he should be good unless he needed to go to
some of the other panels. Hopefully that wouldn't be necessary. Together they pressed forward to try to firmly establish that connection and... nothing.

Blue consoled him, letting him know that he'll get it. He forced himself out of the link, wavering slightly at the dizziness that always came from returning to himself, the sudden disconnect disorienting him for a moment.

Every disconnect from Blue was different. The only real constant was that it was disorienting. Although, it tended to be less so if he lets himself drift out of the connection or if he’s in the cockpit. One thing he knew for certain, standing while syncing and disconnecting was a bitch to deal with.

"What's a... moment?"

Tyrac's voice helped pull him together. He didn't bother looking back at the other to answer, "90 seconds," He was pretty sure that would not answer Tyrac's question. Thing was, he didn't really care right now.

"Ah."

Ah, the simple joys in life. Who couldn’t not grin at that response?

That wasn't the 'ah' of understanding. No. It was the sort of 'ah' that meant something along the lines of 'I have no clue what you just said, but I'm going to pretend I do and hope you think I do.' Oh, how he wished he could have seen Tyrac's face just now. It was bound to be priceless.

He debated on continuing to tease Tyrac, but, there was no sense in being mean to the guy who was nice and lending him some tools.

"A second is shorter than a tick... but... I guess it would be like 90 ticks," more like 70 to 89 ticks since they were slightly longer than seconds, but why squabble over a few milliseconds?

"Ah," It was hard to keep his snigger quiet at Tyrac's response. At least that 'ah' was definitely the understanding 'ah' this time. "So, essentially, it's a tock."

Lance mouthed the new term, committing it to memory as he closed the current panel and moved to check another one, humming as he inspected it. At least this one would be a shorter repair. Blue agreed, which made him feel a bit better. He did not want to figure out how to get to the other side of Blue right now.

Tyrac allowed the silence for a bit, although it was Lance who broke it. Time to put the new vocab to work. “One tock.” He let Blue wash over him, and saved himself some time by testing the connection immediately.

Failure. Again. Ugh. Why did this have to be so stupidly complex? Blue huffed at him, and he sighed, giving a tired apology. No, he wasn’t calling Blue stupid. He was calling her stupidly complex. There was a difference, okay?

Blue didn’t care. She dumped him from the sync; and Lance sighed again – physically this time – and rested his helmets head against Blue.

“That’s… not how tock is used.” It could have been Lance’s imagination, but he was pretty sure there was amusement in Tyrac’s voice. Tiredly, Lance lifted his head to look at the trader.

“What’cha mean?” All he’d said was ‘one tock’, which, yeah, sounded kinda weird. Felt weird to
Tyrac flinched at Lance’s words, which was kind of interesting. Was it something Lance said? Speaking of, since they were working on Vocab here… how was Tyrac and Lance able to talk since Lance was pretty sure he didn’t have some communication device that worked that way. Were Translators a thing?

Oooooo! He hoped translators were a thing. No wait, they totally had to be a thing.

Translators made perfect sense! No Aliens ever seemed to have a problem communicating with Shiro, Allura, or Coran. He’d have to ask Pidge about those later.

“While Tock is a timeslice; it’s fallen out use. Most just use ‘in a few ticks’ or some close variant.” Tyrac explained.

Oh. Ah, well, that’s sort of what he gets for using a word and not properly knowing how it was used. Didn’t stop the embarrassment from turning his face red. Thankfully, he a) never showed blushes well and b) had a helmet to hide his face. Time to play it cool.

“Ah, well then… I’m just gonna keep using ‘moment’ then. You know what it means, I know what it means, so,” He dragged out the word as he said it. “I’m just gonna keep using it.”

It was rather amusing how Tyrac flinched each time Lance used a bit of slang. Although, it had grown less pronounced. Interesting. He’d have to ask... IDEA!

Lance grinned, ignoring Blue’s considerably less than gentle prod to get back to work. “Say, outta curiosity, have you ever heard of Twenty Questions?”
Leaving

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance and Tyrac talked some to pass the time while Lance used the borrowed tool to try to repair Blue. Lance asked Tyrac if he'd ever heard of Twenty Questions.

Lance had to give Tyrac props. He almost fooled Lance. Key word there: almost.

Tyrac’s first guess at what 20 Questions was almost convincing enough for Lance to believe that 20 Questions was a universal game. Almost.

It wasn’t like Lance had expected Tyrac to know the game. As universal as some things seemed to be, he highly doubted that game was one of them. Besides, the rules were easily enough explained, and Tyrac caught the hang of it pretty quickly. It was a good way to the pass time, and exchange harmless information.

Obviously, somethings were off limits. For example, names of their home worlds weren’t shared, but the names of towns, cities, and places were acceptable. To some degree, family was off limits as well, although, some basic information was okay. Like, for instance, compared to Lance’s giant ever growing family, Tyrac was a single child with only a father left to call family.

Lance both pitied and envied the guy for that.

Additionally, Lance learned that being a trader wasn’t Tyrac’s family’s profession, although, if something were to happen to Tyrac’s father, then Tyrac was expected to pick up the family business. What said family business was Lance didn’t ask and Tyrac didn’t offer. Likewise, Tyrac didn’t pry into Lance’s ‘profession’, if being a Paladin of Voltron could be called that.

The questions ranged from the semi-personal to cultural, from both home and the places they’d visited. Lance didn’t even know what question number they were on anymore, but their current topic was languages.

“You mean to tell me that your home planet has over three thousand languages?” Tyrac asked as he leaned forward in interest. Lance hummed in response. Technically, he was pretty sure there were more, but he couldn’t recall the exact numbers from his high school classes. “That’s incredible!”

“You don’t have as many languages where you’re from?” Lance asked.

“If there are, I wouldn’t be able to tell. When we’re young we have a universal translator implanted which automatically dissolves most language barriers. Although it works best if both parties have one. I suppose your culture doesn’t offer such accommodations?”

A bark of laughter escaped Lance. As if! ‘Accommodations’, pft. That was funny. But, hey, he was right! There were translators involved.

Allura and Coran probably had some – although they were 10 thousand years old – because Alteans were diplomats and have to travel and meet many different species and races. Shiro, Matt, and Pidge’s dad probably had some implanted as well given their time with the Galra.
The castle and the suits probably helped filter some of it, but... oh man. If he could get Pidge to work on getting them translators, or get some from the Galra....

“Nope.” Lance popped the ‘p’. Tyrac flinched, although it was considerably subtler than the past couple times Lance had done something similar like that. “So, the translators, are they like, self-learning or something? Cuz, that’d be really cool if they were.”

Tyrac was silent following Lance’s question. Although he knew the other hadn’t moved – Blue was still keeping an eye on him and telling Lance every move the other made – he still checked over his shoulder to look at him.

“I’ll be honest. I didn’t quite catch what you said. Your speech varies dramatically and the translator is still trying to learn it.”

Lance shrugged, and turned his attention back to Blue. “Guess that answered my question.”

So, they were self-learning, but they did have hiccups. He supposed it’s hiccups was basically ‘slang’ – not that Lance considered the words as much – like ‘cuz’ or ‘gotcha’ or ‘gonna’. The words Tyrac usually flinched on.

“Basically, I was asking if it learned more as I spoke.” Lance further clarified.

“Ah.”

Maybe Pidge could fix that little hiccup. Or Hunk. But his money was on Pidge.

Hiccup or not, having translators would be super useful for the team. He wondered if they worked on written word or not. His Altean wasn’t too bad when it came to conversational written, but, if he could actually read the full warnings and things around the castle instead of only every third or so word, that’d be amazing.

He finished up with what he was doing. “Give me a few ticks?” Lance asked, although he didn’t bother waiting for a response to sync with Blue.

Like before Lance checked the schematics first. Blue’s response was a far cry from her earlier optimism. There was a current of glee at seeing her Paladin be sociable, but it was drowned out by her coastal shelf deep skepticism. What? So, he’d been somewhat distracted with Tyrac... he was still paying attention to what he was doing! Blue hummed, the type that mothers did when they didn’t believe their kids.

The array wasn’t wrong, but... the test still failed. Lance sighed, coming back to himself and resting his head against the side of Blue. Blue purred reassuringly.

“Where do you go?” Lance jumped, not expecting that question, and spun around to look at the other.

“I’m sorry?”

“I don’t believe that’s in the rules of the game.” He teased. “But, where do you go? You ask for a few ticks, but you don’t go anywhere, or do anything so...” Tyrac shrugged.

“Oh. Uh....” Lance trailed off. He glanced off to his side where Blue sat, and she rumbled in response, filling him with the cool certainty of her faith and trust in however he responded. “My ship has an AI program. I was jus’ talking with it.”
He flinched as Blue’s cool reassurance, faith, and trust turned icy for calling her an ‘it’. Mentally he soothed her over, trying to explain how he didn’t want Tyrac to know too much about her lest he get greedy like Nyma.

“Ah. It’s part of the helmet?”

“Look who’s breaking the rules now.” Lance teased, and waved his hand, as if to push the question away. He moved over to the last panel on this side to try to fix this. If this failed… he’d have to figure out how to get underneath Blue to access the panels there.

He might be able to access them from inside Blue but… Lance sighed. He’d cross that bridge when, no IF, he came to it.

“My sincerest apologies.”

“Oh, I’m sure. But it’s cool. I’ll answer anyways. It’s pretty much part of the helmet.” Lance’s response wasn’t exactly a lie, but it wasn’t exactly the truth either. The suits were tied, in some way, to either the lions or the castle. Although, given the lions connections to the castle, perhaps that was one in the same.

“I see.”

Well, Brightside: this panel had significantly less to fix. The not so Brightside? While this panel could access what he needed to get to, it wasn’t exactly designed for that purpose; and what he was trying to fix was just stupid in general. Stupid Alteans, and their stupid small panels, and their stupid crystal arrays and…

Lance took a deep breath, muttering ‘wusa’ under his breath. He pulled away from the panel, letting his eyes close as he took a couple breaths. There was absolutely no reason to get upset or annoyed. He just needed to take a moment before he retired his hand at the infuriating crystals.

Unlike Allura, he didn’t have friendly physic space mice to help keep small crystals in their proper arrays. He tapped out his usual song, trying to use it to calm himself back down before he reattempted to fix the crystal array.

“That song you keep tapping… where did you hear it?”

“Another question? You’re on a rule breaking streak.” Lance replied. “But, since I am so kind and benevolent, I’ll be generous and answer: no idea. I’ve been humming and tapping it for as long as I can remember.”

As a matter of fact, Lance had spent at least a year in music classes as they tried to see if he had some talent for creating music – spoiler: he didn’t. Then he’d spent several many hours scouring the web listening to songs to try to locate this particular one. Another spoiler: he never found it.

Lance’s fingers slowed, and he paused, turning to look back at Tyrac. Why was Tyrac curious about the song anyways? Perhaps Tyrac had heard it before? But no. That didn’t make sense. How would Lance, of all people, have heard a song from space?

Tyrac asking about it probably didn’t mean anything. After all, plenty of people on Earth had asked about the song. Where had he heard it? He had no clue. Where there any words? Yes, but he couldn’t remember them. And every time, Lance would ask them in return if they recognized it. ‘No, but’s it’s pretty’, was the response he usually received.

Blue nudged him, offering a suggestion. Maybe the trader heard it before. Maybe he hadn’t. Lance
would never know unless he asked. And if the Trader did know it then maybe Coran and Allura….

Of course, that was why she was interested. Fine, he’d ask then just to prove her wrong.

“Why? Do… have you… I don’t know… heard it before?”

Perhaps the translator didn’t like what Lance had said, or perhaps Tyrac was just thinking about the answer to Lance’s question. Whatever the case was, for every tick of silence, Lance’s heart beat louder and louder in his ears.

Coran and Allura hadn’t recognized the song, but they also had been in cyropods for ten thousand years. Lance couldn’t think of anything from Human culture that had lasted from ten thousand years ago.

“It sounds familiar.” Tyrac responded after countless ticks. In his head, Blue roared victoriously as a ‘I told you so’. Similar, Lance reminded her. Similar did not mean the same. “But I can’t place it, or name it. My father was never fond of lullabies.”

A lullaby, huh. Well, that made sense. Lance would hum it to his younger family members when he was babysitting to help them get to sleep. Blue preened. But no. It was just coincidence. Like how Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and the English Alphabet were sung to the same tune. Those were different songs, but the same tune. The same thing could be happening here.

So. Anyways. He turned back to the panel and dove back in to fix the crystal arrays. He’d rather get frustrated with that then think about the implications of Tyrac recognizing a song that, so far, no one on Earth that Lance had met recognized.

He wasn’t sure if it was his new found single focus on the crystal array or what but somehow it seemed easier to take care of now. The crystal slid back into its proper place, and he barely wasted a second to sync with Blue and test the connection.

The connection was a success.

Lance almost didn’t believe it. As a matter of fact, he didn’t believe. Blue ran the test again and… success. He did it.

“Thank fuck!” He cried coming back to himself. He closed the panel. He was done with repairs. He could hail his friends and get picked up off this moon! As a matter of fact, Blue was already sending out a signal, trying to reach the Castle.

“I’m sorry?” Despite the distortion from the helmet, Tyrac’s confusion was obvious.

“Uhh… it’s nothing. Just.. yeah… Ignore it.” Lance spun back around and rubbed the back of his helmet.

“Okay?”

“Yeah, but seriously, thank you.” Lance walked towards Tyrac. “If you hadn’t come by and offered your help, who knows how long I woulda been stuck out here.” Lance reached the other and offered a hand to help him to his feet. “It’s good to know there’s some charitable people out here.”

“This wasn’t charity. You’ve paid for borrowing the tools already.”

Lance froze, and he could feel Blue likewise pause at the trader’s words. Neither of them thought
that Tyrac would turn them in, even for their bounty, but... as if sensing the sudden tension, Tyrac continued.

“You’re company was payment enough. Not to mention your little game. It was very enlightening and entertaining.”

There was a collective sigh of relief from Blue and Lance. Tyrac also relaxed, evidently deciding that Lance’s return to his relaxed posture was nothing but an omen of good signs.

“Well, if you’re good, then I suppose I should go getting myself.” Tyrac added on as an afterthought.

Well, that was both a relief and kind of saddening, considering Lance had enjoyed the conversations between them. He was going to miss Tyrac.

Sure, Lance’s team was great and all, but he’d been stuck with the same six other people for a really long time now. Yeah, they met people while exploring and answering distress calls, like Shay on the Balmara or Reyner of the Olkari, but it wasn’t the same.

“Yeah, I... guess you should.” Lance faked a smile. Fake it till he made it, right? He handed over the multipurpose tool. Truth be told, Lance was kind of impressed that Tyrac was still respecting Lance’s desire for him to not be close to Blue.

Tyrac’s hand brushed over Lance’s as he took the tools back. Like before, it didn’t matter much since they were both wearing gloves, but... Helmets or not, Lance could see the smile curling up at the corner of Tyrac’s lips. Unless one considered ‘accidentally on purpose’ to actually be accidental... then the contact was definitely not accidental.

“Before I go, I’d feel better giving you some food and water in case it takes a bit for your friends to come.”

Lance resisted the urge to bite his lip. Blue nudged him, encouraging him to accept Tyrac’s offering. Neither of them knew when the others would get here, and it was better to be safe than sorry. Besides, the saying was ‘don’t look a gift horse in the mouth’.

“Are you sure? I don’t have any GAC to pay you back.”

Tyrac shrugged. “I figured as much when you didn’t ask to buy anything. Besides, I believe we already covered that your company was more than enough payment.”

This close, Lance could see more than just the smile – which hadn’t dropped – through the visor. He could also see the other’s eyes, and as such, he saw the exact moment when Tyrac gave him a very obvious look over.

Blue’s amusement flooded his veins as soon as he realized that Tyrac was flirting with him again. She couldn’t believe that Lance was only just now noticing, since as far as she could tell Tyrac had been interested in Lance from the beginning. As a matter of fact, she’d even pointed it out!

For all that Lance preened about how pretty he was, he’d never really ever gotten hit on. He was always hitting on other people – admittedly to make them smile more than any actual attempt to hook up.

TLDR: Lance a) hadn’t realized he was being hit on; and b) he wasn’t used to people hitting on him. Especially if those ‘people’ were unfairly handsome half-Galra men. Lions knew Keith was obvious as hell when it came to this.
Blue essentially sniggered at him, and nudged him in Tyrac’s direction. She wanted him to go enjoy his time with the trader before he left.

Lance’s face felt so heated, he was sure it was red. Thankfully, he had his visor to hide behind. A small mercy, but he’d take it. If it wasn’t for Tyrac’s presence, he’d be scolding Blue, but… Tyrac was still there, soo…

Instead of responding to his lion, he followed Tyrac into the ship. Tyrac went straight to work, putting the tool away and then coming back with a pack, presumably with the food and water as promised.

As he handed the pack over, his hands once again brushed against Lance. The heat in Lance’s face, which was only just faded, returned; mostly because he knew that the contact was definitely on purpose. It didn’t help that Tyrac didn’t immediately move back, but instead stayed closer that what was probably socially acceptable.

In the dim lighting of the ship Tyrac’s eyes seemed to glitter. Seriously, it wasn’t fair.

Keith had such pretty eyes which were like some weird mixture of lilac purple and storm gray depending on the lighting. Now here was Tyrac who’s eyes were remarkably similar to Keith’s just with yellow where the whites should be. Not only were half Galra guys pretty body and face structure wise, but they also had such pretty eyes, and it seriously wasn’t fair. All Lance had was boring blue.

Of course, his lamenting the fairness of this was a distraction, because really, his mind seemed to have stopped working the moment Tyrac smiled. The trader had removed his helmet when he entered the ship, so now Lance had a completely unfiltered view of Tyrac’s pretty smile and prettier eyes.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I included a communicator in with the supplies.”

Lance’s reply may have been a ‘uh’, or an ‘um’. Blue informed him, with no little amount of glee, that it was a squeak. Tyrac’s laugh, when it wasn’t being distorted by the helmet, was warm and if Lance were a goopy fanfiction writer, he’d describe it as sunshine and honey. Or velvet.

“In the event your friends don’t come, I can come back and give you a hand.” Tyrac explained.

Right. Right. Of course, that made sense. It wasn’t like Tyrac was giving him a communicator for any other purpose. Lance was just looking too far into this.

“Or, so you can talk to me anytime you want. Space is vast, and in my experience, when you find someone you enjoy talking to, you usually want to hold onto them.” Or Lance wasn’t looking too much into this, and he was pretty sure his brain short circuited.

This did not happen to him. Like, this just didn’t happen to him. He flirted to make people laugh and smile. People did not flirt with him. People were not interested in him. He never actually expected someone to flirt with him!

One of Tyrac’s hands let go of the pack to slide up to Lance’s upper arm. He held the touch for a moment before dropping it, and finally, finally, stepped back away from Lance.

“Give me a call sometime. I’d like it if we could keep in touch, especially given the dangers of your profession.”

There was a moment of ice panic which settled in his veins. Lance had purposely avoided any talk
of his ‘profession’, although, anyone who knew anything about Voltron knew about the Lions and Paladins. It was stupid of him to assume that Tyrac hadn’t known. Lance was pretty sure he was still ‘safe’ though, given Tyrac’s reactions and the fact that Lance hadn’t been turned into the Empire.

“It’d help ease my worries.” Tyrac’s smile was small, gentle; and was reflected in his violet eyes. “Stay safe, alright?”

Contrary to belief, Lance recognized a dismissal when he saw one, or in this case, when he heard one. Except, Tyrac’s mouth and words are dismissing Lance, but his eyes were begging him to stay.

In the back of his mind, Blue trilled, still finding amusement in how Lance seemed to have broken, or in the fact Tyrac is flirting with Lance. Lance mentally screamed at her a bunch of gibberish nonsense, although, outwardly, he took a step back away and forced his face to smile again.

“Thank you for everything. I’ll be sure to keep in contact.” Allura’s diplomatic training kicked in, although, he hadn’t needed it. Lance made a friend. He made an alien friend all on his own. More than that, this friend knew he was part of Voltron and hadn’t turned him in. This friend could very well become an ally in time.

Lance’s smile broadened, and little bubbles of happiness in his stomach and chest exploded. He felt as if he could fly, and he knew Blue felt the same – despite the fact they were both firmly grounded until someone from the castle found them.

Swallowing down the giddy happiness was like drinking the bubbly champagne from his oldest sibling’s wedding. He took a breath to steady himself. Faintly, he registered that Tyrac smelled of… flowers. Space flowers. Ha. Cute.

Now if only Keith could smell nice, instead of smelling like sweat all the time from all the unneeded training he put himself through.

“I’ll stay safe.” Lance promised. It’s not as diplomatic, but he didn’t need diplomacy here. Not with Tyrac. Things didn’t need to be political between them when they were easily sharing smiles and touches like this.

Blue tugged at him, a gentle reminder that they were saying goodbyes. Lance needed to return to Blue, and Tyrac needed to get to where ever he was going before he decided to be a good Samaritan. He took another deep breath, and with another smile, left Tyrac.

“That just happened, right?” Lance asked Blue as he watched Tyrac leave. “Because I’m still not convinced that that actually happened.” Blue trilled her amusement. She’s amused and… sort of proud.

Lance shook his head, and rolled his eyes.

“Come on, girl. We’ve got a message to send out.”
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance finished up fixing Blue while playing 20 questions with Tyrac. Tyrac left, but not before leaving a lasting impression, a communicator, and some food and water. Lance attempted to hail his friends.

A day after the encounter, and Lance still couldn’t believe what had happened with Tyrac; just like he couldn’t believe that he’d been unable to contact the castle. Although, with the whole Tyrac thing, Blue was more than willing to help him believe it.

Blue had absolutely no qualms about reminding Lance exactly of what all had happened with Tyrac. She used everything in her arsenal, from replaying snippets of memories to forcing a sync and telling Lance exactly what she’d thought of the whole encounter.

There were times Lance didn’t mind syncing with Blue. He hadn’t minded during the repairs because it’d been necessary. During battle, it made things easier. It was times like this, however, that Lance did mind, mostly because he wanted some form of privacy, especially in his head.

Not to mention how disorienting the syncs could be. Each one felt like waves washing over him, sending him tumbling through water like Sora in that one Kingdom Hearts opening when he was trying to get to Riku in the water. Lance would try to break for the surface only for another wave to wash over him as Blue dragged him back down, drowning him with herself.

She was proud of her Paladin, and her preening was almost worse than Lance’s on a good day. Her Paladin was always the best looking, according to her, and she didn’t care how much Lance protested about Allura, Shiro, Keith, or any of the others being so much more attractive.

Allura was Allura. She was a princess. Duh. Shiro cheated. Hadn’t Lance ever noticed his eyeliner wings? Make up was cheating! And Keith… Blue trilled in laughter at the thought of Red’s Paladin being considered attractive. He should have been discounted instantly from his hair alone – an opinion Lance shared only when in public and out loud. Inwardly, however, well, Blue wasn’t as horrible as to out her paladin’s evident kink for people with longer hair.

Each time she did this, Lance had to drag himself back out, bit by bit. It felt like he was trying to drag himself back up on the shore by grasping at the beach. His hands grasped the sand only for it to just drain out between his fingers.

By the time he escaped, he was shaking, trembling and just the tiniest bit traumatized.

Lance has lost count of how many times she’s dragged him under, and she’d been ignoring his cries for consent before she does this. She was too… too much over everything. She was excited that someone gave her Paladin some interest. She was irritated that he didn’t think he was worth it. She was… she was just like a mom, or an older sister, or a best friend.
It had gotten to a point that it was just easier to let it happen; to just lean back into the sync and drift through the water, letting the currents of their thoughts guide him. So, when Blue released him from the sync, it took him a moment to re-orient himself.

The disorientation took about a minute to clear, and when it did, Lance realized why Blue had released him from the sync.

“Lance? Lance are you there?” Allura’s voice was like hearing the bell to leave school after a really shitty day. It was relief. It was happiness. The only reason he wasn’t jumping up and down and cheering was because of the lasting effects of the sync.

His vision swam, the console spinning from the disorientation of basically being thrown back into his body. But, he didn’t need to do anything, just respond verbally.

“Allura? Yeah, I’m here!”

The words Allura responded with were decidedly not English. Probably something that wouldn’t translate over properly. Like Quiznak.

“Are you alone?” Allura sounded frazzled. Lance wondered if it was result of the shaky-at-best communications they had going on, or if there was something else.

“Yeah.” He said.

Static returned his ‘yeah’, and he resisted the urge to sigh. Or scream. Or just go crazy. He finally got a response, and now he got static.

Blue purred, a quiet comforting rumble which echoed in his chest. It was soothing, calming. Lance took another deep breath.

“If you are sure….” Allura trailed off. “It’ll be a tick or two before we can come get you.”

We. We? Who was we? Like, ‘we’ the team? Or ‘we’ as in herself, Coran, and Slav. He didn’t know.

“Is everyone else alright?” Lance asked.

Silence and static returned his question. It was only Blue’s comforting rumble that kept him from complaining.

The Lions could communicate amongst themselves. However, they’d been designed for close quarters. It was their whole purpose, since they formed Voltron. As such, their long range capabilities with communicating with the other lions was limited at best, non-existent at worst. They were better equipped to connect with the Castle, or evidently their Paladins, long range than they were each other.

That being said, Blue was just as much in the dark as Lance was on the status of their teammates. A fact both Lance and Blue shared hatred for. Unfortunately, the only one with answer was Allura, and she wasn’t sharing.

“Just a few more ticks, Lance.” Allura finally responded.

“It’s fine. I’ve got all the time in the universe.” Except, he kind of didn’t. He was limited on food and water. He had Tyrac’s supplies and assistance, but, that wasn’t going to last forever.
Lance wasn’t given a reply, not that he expected one. The connection turned back to static snow, and Lance gave up resisting the urge to sigh. He flopped back against the seat, and with a lazy flick of his hand, ‘tossed’ the communication screen – which Blue had rerouted to a new screen since the usual one was still broken – away.

“This sucks.”

Like before, Blue agreed. But… this gave them time to bond… and talk. Lance sat up, silently threatening to leave if she dragged him into another sync.

She trilled and then nudged the dark corner of his mind again. The corner where he kept his secrets and things he didn’t want to talk about. She pushed past the memories of Keith, and Lance’s messed up feelings for him, and instead dragged out a memory of Allura and Coran cornering him and… Nope.

Lance hit that memory so hard it spun, slamming it back into the darkest part of the corner. Blue snorted, and pawed at a memory of Keith. He could just imagine her raising her eyebrows, if Blue was human, and asking ‘so what about this topic then?’ Like she hadn’t just been terrorizing him about Tyrac.

“Can you not?” Lance muttered. He slid down in the seat, slumping as he held his hand to his face, massaging his temples.

It was bad enough already that he had a crush on a taken guy. He didn’t need her rubbing that in his face. He needed to get over Keith, which was why it was shoved over there, away from Lance’s thoughts.

Blue snorted, and once again pawed, although she pawed a different memory of Keith this time. Lance was allowed a moment of realized horror once the memory started playing, Keith’s words echoing in his head.

“We had a bonding moment! I cradled you in my arms!”

Lance sat up, slamming his hands into the armrests. “Why are you like this?” He demanded. Blue shuddered, holding back the lion equivalent of laughter. “Seriously!? Not. Cool.”

She nudged him, poking the memory again. “Oh no. You put that back.” He demanded. There was the mental equivalent of her rolling her eyes, and then she slipped back, letting the memory slide back into its spot in the dark corner.

“Shoulda been warned how much of a nosy busybody you are.” Lance muttered, settling back into the seat.

“Lance, have you ever considered that you may….” Lance practically threw himself out of his chair with the speed in which he sat up once Allura’s imagined voice echoed in his head. He grabbed his helmet as he stood, putting it on.

“That’s it. I’m out of here.” Lance ignored Blue’s shudder of laughter, or how she tried to pick at him to come back as he slipped out the exit hatch. “Don’t care.” He replied to Blue’s concern about Allura trying to contact them again. “I just can’t with you right now, Blue. I just can’t.”

Missing a message from Allura was better than Blue shifting though sore memories. He didn’t want to talk about that stuff, and honestly, he didn’t care how much Blue did. He knew who he was. He knew where he was from. There was no need for any uncertainty from that. No. Need.
“Lance?” Lance froze, half way through the hatch. Blue sniggered. “Lance, can you hear me?”

“UGH!” He practically snarled as he pulled himself back up, pulling back up the communications. “Yeah?”

“Good. I thought we’d lost you for a moment.” Lance raised an eyebrow at her tone. She sounded like she was legitimately worried about that, which… okay? Paladins didn’t just… vanish. People didn’t do that.

“Yeah, I’m here.” On a moon, with a currently insufferable Lion. “Still.”

“Alright. We’ve finally managed to lock onto your signal. We’ll be there in a tick.” Her voice still sounded frazzled, but… there was definitely some of her old confident lit coming back through.

Awesome.

Space away from Blue was exactly what he needed – and he was so totally ignoring her irritation and pain at that thought. She’d still be able to connect to him in the castle, but it’d be easier for Lance to brush off her influence.

True to word, it was only a few seconds before Yellow greeted him and Blue. He knew because Blue withdrew from him to communicate with Yellow, and if he focused, he could feel Yellow too. Although, trying to feel Yellow through Blue felt… difficult. It was like the connection was blurry or something.

In any case, it wasn’t like Lance wanted to connect with any of the other lions. Blue was more than enough for him.

They all played a game of Telephone in which they were basically told that Yellow was going to be taking them back up to the castle. Which was honestly what Lance and Blue were expecting since the only lions larger than Blue was Yellow and Black. What was weird was the lack of communication and assistance from Black.

Neither Lance or Blue could understand why Black wasn’t either assisting or communicating with them, but it was possible that Black was more damaged than Blue and unable to do either.

Regardless, Yellow could handle Blue and within no time – although it would have been faster with Black’s assistance – Blue was in the castle. Lance climbed out of Blue once she was safely in her hanger, although, still laying on her side. He could feel her connect to the castle, and pull energy, or what Allura called Quintessence, help the self-repair systems kick in.

“Lance!” Hunk’s arms were suddenly around him, pulling him up and… okay, his feet were officially off the floor now. Congrats to Hunk. “I’m so glad you’re okay!”

Okay? Why wouldn’t he be okay? It wasn’t like they just battled the Emperor of the Known Universe, and won, and then were flung out among the stars in a hostile universe or anything. Except, oh wait, yeah that did happen.

It was reassuring, at least, that Hunk was so excited to see Lance. He laughed, patting his friend on the back. “Easy, buddy!”

“That’s one missing Paladin down.” Lance swiveled around, trying to locate Allura like looking at her would help her words make any more sense. He counted heads as he attempted to squirm out of Hunk’s hold. Let’s see, there was Allura and Pidge. Hunk was holding him.
“Miss-sing?” He asked, the second half of the word coming out in a mixture of a squeak and gasp as Hunk squeezed.

“Shiro’s gone.” Lance turned– to the best of his ability – to look for Keith at the sound of his voice. Well, that was everyone except for Coran and Shiro. And one of them was not a Paladin who could be missing. Which meant…

Quiznak.

“We were scattered by the explosion. You just ended up the farthest, congrats.” Pidge pipped up, looking up from her computer at Lance for a moment before returning to typing. “The Black Lion was the closest to the battle… except for maybe Keith here.”

“It wasn’t my fault I ended up in Zarkon’s ship!”

Ha! Keith ended up in Zarkon’s ship. That’s a riot. Although, he was lucky that the ship didn’t take off with Keith in it. That would have sucked for everyone.

Pidge didn’t even pause in her typing, although there was a decrease in the tip-tapping of the keys as she took a moment to flick off Keith.

“Hey!” Keith started.

“But.” Hunk interrupted before anything could come from that small exchange. “When we got Black into the castle, Shiro wasn’t there.”

Shiro wasn’t there. But then… where else could he be? People didn’t just vanish. Except, they did. After all, what were the people he left on Earth thinking about him? “People don’t just vanish.” Lance muttered as Hunk let him drop back to the floor.

“You don’t think we know that?” Pidge snapped at him.

“She’s trying to hack the systems in our suits to try to find him.” Hunk explained before dropping to a half whisper to continue with, “She’s not succeeding.”

“I can hear you.” Pidge’s tone was as flat as the look they shot in Hunk’s direction.

Okay, Lance could understand Pidge’s irritability. After all, Shiro meant a lot to Pidge. Shiro was a link to her missing brother and father. Losing Shiro, again, was probably losing another brother. Especially since as far as Lance could tell, Shiro had been a close friend of the Holts in general. This couldn’t be easy for Pidge.

As a matter of fact, while Pidge and Keith were probably being hit the hardest by Shiro’s disappearance, it had to be hitting everyone else fairly hard too. To all of them Shiro was their leader. For most of them, he was more. For Pidge, Shiro was a brother. For Keith…

For Keith… well, Keith had a few extra sets of Shiro’s clothes in his shack in the middle of the desert.

People didn’t just carry extra clothes for a presumed dead pilot in their hovel shack in the middle of nowhere. They just didn’t. Not to mention how close Shiro and Keith always seemed. Plus, all their shared likes and stuff, like training.

Lance really couldn’t imagine how Keith was feeling right now. How he was handling losing his boyfriend – because what else could they be? – twice now.
As for the others, Shiro was a friend, or more. Yeah, Shiro was Lance’s friend too, but it was different for him. Shiro was friendlier with the others. He talked to them more, despite Lance being the more social and outgoing one. Outside of the role of leader Lance didn’t know Shiro beyond the hero-worship Lance had done before this all started.

Out of everyone here, Lance was probably closest to Hunk and Coran. He never spent any time with Shiro, unless the other was reprimanding him or they were training/fighting. Pidge never cared about him, not even when they were at the Garrison. Allura didn’t really spend any time with him, which may have been his own fault with the flirting. Keith was… complicated.

“We had a bonding moment! I cradled you in my arms!”

Lance eyed Blue, but she had nothing to do with it this time. He was the one thinking of those words. It didn’t matter. Keith was off the market, and Lance hated him anyways. No, he didn’t. They were rivals. Keith and Lance, neck and neck!

Blue mentally nuzzled him, offering her support with a low quiet mental trill. She couldn’t tell if he was sad because Shiro was missing, or because he didn’t care as much as the others, or because he cared more about how it was affecting the others rather than himself, or was it because… Was it because Lance would never get to have one of Shiro’s shining proud space-dad smiles directed at him for a second time?

He didn’t have an answer for her. She didn’t have an answer for him.

The whole hanger is silent, except for Pidge’s tip-tapping on the keyboard.

“I… best get back to the bridge.” Allura was the first to break it, and Lance spun back around to look at her. “The… I… the ship needs me since it’s still undergoing repairs.” She nodded to herself, and then spun around and marched out of the hanger.

The effect was ruined by the fact she was wearing her space uniform instead of the dress. But then again, it didn’t matter. What did matter was that she was the first to leave.

It seemed her words set off a domino effect with the others.

“The princess is right. Repairs need to be done, and with Slav’s hep, the work will go by twice as fast. The Castle won’t fix herself!” Coran was the first to leave after Allura, spinning around in typical Coran fashion and exiting out the same way as Allura.

Lance eyed Hunk, Pidge and Keith. Who was next? What reasoning would they be giving?

Pidge, as it turned out, was next. She grumbled unintelligibly under her breath as she shut her laptop, and climbed to her feet.

“I don’t understand!” She cried. “There should be something in the armor to track him.” She shook her head and tucked her laptop under her arm, heading for the door.

Hunk looked between Pidge and Lance, before giving Lance a pat on the shoulder and chasing after her.

“Maybe there’s something in his arm we can track? I mean,” Hunk’s voice was cut off as the door slid shut behind him.

And then there were two.
Except there wasn’t. Lance hadn’t noticed when it happened, but sometime after the ‘fight’ with Pidge, Keith had left the hangar. Who knew what for.

One moment Keith had been there, and then the next, gone. Just like Shiro.

Blue’s presence was a quiet rumble, a steady press against his mind. He would never be alone, so long as he had her.

Which is fine and dandy and all that, but… it isn’t the same.

In this situation, there’s not much he can do. Blue’s repairing herself. Hunk and Pidge are being Science Siblings together. Allura was on the bridge doing Altean stuff, while Coran and Slav try to fix the castle elsewhere.

And Shiro was… gone.

Even if Shiro wasn’t gone, what would that do for Lance? He’d be in the same predicament. Still stuck with nothing to do and no one to spend time with.

Seventh Wheel. He was the seventh wheel just like he told the Yupper.

Everyone had a purpose, except him. He couldn't pilot the Castle like Allura, or repair it like Coran and Slav. In terms of technological prowess, he was nowhere near the technological capabilities of Pidge, or even Hunk. He wasn't an awesome cook like Hunk. Allura and Shiro were leaders, not him. Lance was useless at combat compared to the others too, Keith especially.

Keith has far more reason and purpose than Lance. Keith who was part alien and had connections to one of the resistance groups against Zarkon. If Shiro was captured by the Galra, one of the Blades of Marmora would hear and either get Shiro out or tell Keith.

Lance could do nothing. He had nothing. He might as well as been nothing.
What had started out as a low rumble grew louder and more insistent, as if Blue could sense Lance’s thoughts and was trying her best to tell him the opposite.

Honestly, Lance wasn’t sure if it was helping, or making things worse. After all, for all her purrs and rumbles, Blue is cold.

So much around Lance was cold. Space was cold. The mostly empty castle was cold. It was cold standing basically alone in a hanger. It was cold, realizing how useless he was.

Blue was no help. She was nothing but deep oceans and frozen glaciers. If there were three words to describe her, Lance would use: cool, chill, and cold. They all mean different things, yet are all the same at once.

“Same, but different.” He muttered.

Blue was confused. It flooded the bond as she attempted to reach out to him and figure out what he was thinking now.

“Focus on yourself, girl.” He told her. They’re already down one paladin, there was no need to make it two because Blue was still out of commission.
I know, I know. We don't know how far into the future this is set. So why is there a KH reference? Because a) Lance likes Retro stuff. Look at his clothes compared to the others. b) KH3 probably came out like 50 years ago or something, and now they're on KH3.4 and Square just kept putting out remixes of their previous games. Which is how Lance knew KH.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance was picked up by his team, and was reunited at last. However, Shiro is still missing, a fact which put a damper on the overall mood of the team.

Chapter Notes

Please see the end notes if you feel that a character in this chapter has acted OOC, or is falling into the typical 'be mean to Lance for no reason other than to cause Langst' trope.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As it turned out, Lance did have a purpose.

It wasn’t the best of purposes, but it was a purpose. Like his history teacher used to tell the class: ‘someone needs to be the janitor.’ It was just that Lance never thought it’d be him.

Fortunately, Lance had *plenty* of experience with wrangling siblings, cousins, nieces, and nephews. Compared to them, his crazy teammates should be a piece of cake.

It wasn’t like he wanted to essentially babysit his fully-grown teammates. No one on this ship should have needed to be babysat. No one. Yet here Lance was, doing exactly that. But hey, if he didn’t then who would? If he didn’t do this, then who’d find Shiro? Not them, that was for sure, since they’d all be dead.

Lance brought them all food goo. Lance was the one making sure they all got at least some sleep. He was the one basically ensuring that all these perfectly functioning adults knew how to take care of themselves.

Okay, let him amend that previous statement. Lance knew for sure that at least Shiro, Keith, Hunk, and himself were legally adults. They had to be to a) get into the Garrison, and b) become pilots for the Garrison. Pidge was… questionable. She definitely wasn’t younger than 16, and honestly, Lance was willing to estimate her at 18 at the oldest.

Honestly, Lance had no clue about Coran and Allura. Coran had mentioned that his grandfather had helped build the Castle of Lions, but he also said that the castle of lions was built 10,600 years ago, and that he went on trips with his grandfather to places. Soo… who knew how Alteans aged.

Regardless. Point was the same: everyone was an adult and no one had an excuse – except for maybe Pidge. Except, even Pidge was old enough to know better. No excuses. None.

But, then again, they were all stressed, working themselves to the death to try to either a) get the
ship in tip top shape, or b) find Shiro. But partaking in those activities didn’t excuse the team from not caring about themselves.

Lance helped, the best way he could. Beyond the babysitting, he had also taken over a good majority of Coran’s usual tasks/chores. Which, hey, okay, Lance was being helpful. And being helpful was better than being useless.

Lance had a purpose now, and it even came with the added benefit of allowing Coran to focus on fixing the ship along with Slav.

It didn’t mean Lance wasn’t tired. It was a bone deep tiredness, which persisted since that battle with Zarkon. He was tired, and he felt like he was running on empty air. Which made him feel worse, because it’s not like he was doing anything. Not anything important.

The lack of social interaction wasn’t helping his mood either. As a matter of fact, when he saw people, it was usually to take care of them. Speaking of….

The ticker in back pocket let out a few quiet chimes, letting him know that two vargas had passed. He’d last checked in on Allura and Coran, so now it was Keith’s turn. Pidge and Hunk were always last given how difficult Pidge could be.

Lance finished up the section of the castle he was moping before putting the supplies up and heading off to the training deck.

Nine out of ten times that was where Keith could be found, over-training himself to death. If he wasn’t there, then he was in the showers – which Lance had accidentally walked in on once – or down in the lions’ hangars; usually Red’s, but sometimes Black’s. Lance wasn’t sure what was going on there, and honestly, he didn't care to.

Lance stopped at the door, and stared at it for a moment. Keith was probably training, and security protocols or not… he didn’t want to chance walking through that door and getting the gladiator’s attention. So instead, he turned and headed towards the observation deck. He leaned against the glass overlooking the training area, peering down at Keith.

It wasn’t a mystery to Lance why Keith spent so much time in the training room. Hell, if he was in Keith’s shoes, he might have done the same. After all, training had to be better than sleeping in an empty bed or whatever Shiro and Keith did in their free time. Or perhaps that was it. Training reminded him of Shiro, and he was over training to feel closer to his missing boyfriend.

Perhaps Lance wouldn’t be doing the same as Keith then. He wouldn’t be able to stand being constantly reminded of what he lost. It was bad enough he had feelings for Keith despite knowing the guy was taken. Those feelings were always fun to try to hide from the Voltron bond.

Man, his luck in feelings sucked. Allura was off limits just on the principal that she was a princess and not interested in him. Keith and Shiro were together and probably not interested in him. Hunk was attractive, but he just didn’t do anything for Lance. Nyma was… a mistake.

He watched Keith as he parried and attacked, moving as quickly as one would expect from the Paladin piloting the Red Lion.

There was something awe-inspiring about Keith’s fighting. It wasn’t traditionally graceful or beautiful, but, in its own way, it was. It was a special dance only Keith – and probably Shiro, who spared with him the most – knew.

Keith finished the gladiator, panting as he took a brief breather.
“Halt training sequence.” Lance called out before Keith could start another, or the AI could give Keith another gladiator to combat.

Keith looked up at the observation deck. Lance couldn’t see his eyes, but he could definitely see the frown.

Not to sound like a basic white fuck boy, but, man, Keith did look so much better with a smile. Then again, everyone did. Which was why he often strived to try to make the most amount of people smile whenever he could.

“Start—”

“Nope.” Lance used the intercom to interrupt.

“Training sequence 5,” Keith continued. The circle where the gladiator dropped out of lighting up, and…

“Halt training sequence.” Lance commanded again. The light died down, and nothing dropped down from the ceiling.

Keith’s frown probably deepened. Lance couldn’t see.

“Lance.”

“Keith.”

“We are not doing this.” Keith turned back up to the observation deck and crossed his arms, letting the bayard fall as he did so.

“Nope, we’re not.” Lance replied, watching the particles of the dropped bayard as they returned to the armor. He’d never understood the mechanics of them, but then again, he never figured he needed to. He could summon it when he needed it, and that was all he felt he needed to know.

Keith sighed, unfolding his arms to run a hand through his hair. It was a testament to how long it’d been since his last shower, seeing as his hair remained sticking up where his hand passed through it. Lance wrinkled his nose, shaking his head. Honestly, hadn’t Keith heard of hygiene? Then again… he’d been training a lot. Which did produce a lot of sweat. And sweaty hair did act like that, sometimes.

“Don’t you have someone else to bother?” Keith resumed his folded arm stance as he spoke. Lance was proud he didn’t flinch, although, his lack of a physical reaction didn’t make it hurt less.

“Nope. I’m all yours.” Lance purred. For at least a bit, anyways. And not in the way Lance would have preferred.

“Do you come with a receipt?” Keith replied. "I want to return you."

Ouch. Okay, that hurt a bit more. Although, hey, that was a pretty good comeback. Lance had to give him that. Win for Keith. Again

“Rude.” Lance instantly replied. Keith didn’t physically reply, but Lance was getting the feeling he was being glared at. Keith's glare had a particular feel to it, and Lance had been on the receiving end enough times to recognize it.

“You’ve been training since… since I last saw you, about…mmm, maybe ten hours ago.”
Technically, ten vargas ago when Lance did his ‘morning’ checks; but it’s whatever. “You need a shower, a break, and some food. Not necessarily in that order.”

“Seriously?”

Lance shrugged. He didn’t make the rules. Except, oh wait, he kind of did now.

“When’s the last time you trained anyways?” Keith called up. Technically, the last time he trained was whenever the whole team last trained. Not that he was given much of a chance to respond before Keith continued. “Probably not since the last team training.”

“Doesn’t change the fact you’re training yourself into an early grave.” Just because Keith was right didn’t make Lance’s point any less valid. Keith was going to train himself into an early grave, and then Shiro would come back to a dead red paladin, and Lance would be blamed.

“Fine. If you can beat me in a sparring match, then I’ll take a break.” Keith challenged.

Okay, now that was insulting. Like, that was honestly insulting. “What the quiznak, Keith?”

“What? Too scared I’ll still beat you, even when I so clearly need a break?” Okay, that was it. Lance huffed, marching to the door and down the ramp that led to the training area. “I’ll even go easy on you and not use my sword.”

Go easy on… Oh hell no.

Keith raised an eyebrow when Lance finally reached the training floor, giving him an unimpressed look over.

“You ready to eat your words, mullet?”

“Like you’ve got any chance against me.” Keith returned, body shifting into an aggressive position.

As it turned out. Lance did not, in fact, have a chance against Keith.

Lance found this out the painful way when not even a few minutes into the ‘spar’ found him pinned on his stomach against the cold metal floor.

“You’re horrible at combat.” Keith spat out. Lance tried to buck him off, but it was kind of hard to do when Keith was basically on top of him, twisting his arm, and pressing his face into the floor. Like his poor skin needed contact with that!

“Not all of us spend all day every day at the training deck overworking ourselves!” Lance spat back.

Keith finally let go of Lance. Lance climbed up to his hands and knees, already anticipating Keith’s next remark. It’d probably be something about why Keith still won – and that stung in and of itself – if he was ‘overworking’ himself.

“Maybe if you did, Shiro would still be here!”

…. 

Lance was not expecting that.

“What?”
“I said, maybe if you did, Shiro would still be here! Maybe if you did train harder, then we would have beaten Zarkon easier, and then Shiro would still be here!”

So, he wasn’t hearing things. Keith was honestly blaming him for Shiro’s disappearance. What the quiznak? Lance laughed, the sound high pitched and kind of hysterical even to his own ears.

“Are you seriously blaming me for Shiro’s disappearing act?” Lance asked. The words sounded even more ridiculous when said out loud.

“Maybe he wouldn’t have over exerted himself if you knew what you were doing out there! The least you could do is practice flying, cargo pilot. Pidge is a better pilot and she didn’t even train for it!”

Lance… wasn’t sure how to even respond to that.

It was like all the words escaped from his mind. Everything just… crumpled. Without even knowing, Keith managed to hit most of Lance’s own doubts and insecurities. His rank as a cargo pilot – and the fact he only moved up due to Keith washing out. His ability to pilot…

It hurt, more than Lance liked to admit. Worse, he was still reeling from the pure shock of this happening that he couldn’t even begin to think about defending himself. Not that he could.

Pidge was the better pilot. Both, Shiro and Keith were amazing. Even Hunk was better than him. And he was… he was just a lowly cargo pilot who somehow ended up lucky enough to end up as a fighter pilot. He was the class idiot who couldn’t even pass a simulation.

“If we hadn’t wasted so much time trying to find you, then we might’ve been able to put that time to searching the battlefield for him!” Keith continued, like he didn’t see that he’d already won, in more ways than one.

Lance’s head dropped at the onslaught of words, until he realized the implication. His head shot up, as he stood up and turned on Keith.

“That isn’t fair!” The words spilled out before Lance had even fully thought them. Because it wasn’t. It wasn’t his fault that his Lion had crashed the furthest away from the battle. It wasn’t his fault that the others had hoped that somehow Shiro was with him. “That’s not my fault.”

Not to mention the implication that it was a waste of time trying to find Lance. Not trying to find Blue, but trying to find Lance. Way to make Lance feel needed on the team. Go Keith.

“Oh yeah? If you could have piloted Blue better, then maybe you wouldn’t have ended up so far away!”

“You are the worst pilot, ever.” Keith's words from the very beginning echoed in Lance's head. He wouldn't admit it out loud, but those words had hurt then, and they certainly hurt now. After all they'd been through, he couldn’t believe that Keith still believed that.

Especially since it wasn’t fair. It wasn’t. They were all flung away from the battle, except for Black, and Keith, who shouldn’t count because he was stopped because he was flung into Zarkon’s ship.

Lance was so angry that his hands were shaking. His whole body was shaking. He could feel sweat dripping down his back, sliding along his spine. His hair felt damp, and he knew he was a mess. He’d never dealt with anger well.
“That’s not fair!” He repeated, because that seemed to be all that he could say. All other words were getting stuck in his throat. They were getting tumbled around and mixed up. Forming a knot so thick he could barely breath.

“This is war, Lance. Not much is.” Keith’s eyes narrowed he replied. “Now, if you don’t mind, I have some training to get back to.”

Lance pursed his lips, but he didn’t respond. Not verbally at least. Words were still getting stuck in his throat, and there was no point in arguing with Keith. Lance never won against Keith.

Even in fights that Shiro had to break up, Lance never won. Shiro always sided with Keith. Always. There was no point in even trying. Before, Shiro would break up the fights, although, Shiro always sided with Keith. Especially with Keith acting like this.

He spun on his heel, refusing to look back at Keith, and walked to the door.

“Start training sequence five.” Keith called to the AI in the room. Lance didn’t even bother to stop him.

Chapter End Notes

It has come to my attention that a lot of 'Langst' fics feature team members being mean to Lance for no good reason. Particularly, the fics feature Keith being mean to Lance, and acting uncharacteristically out of spite or seemingly just plain meanness towards Lance.

This is NOT the case in this story. The story focuses more on Lance, and what Lance sees. There are things that are happening that Lance is not privy too. While this does not excuse Keith's behavior, it does explain it. Keith incorrectly lashed out Lance, and said things in anger that were not meant. This is a natural human reaction.

If you feel that this is incorrect, please Message me on Tumblr, and we can talk further. :)

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance found his purpose. Unfortunately, it was taking care of the adult children that the team has become. Unfortunately, someone graduated into their terrible twos, and had a temper tantrum when Lance attempted to get them to stop over training themselves to death. Lance decided it wasn't worth his time to stay where he wasn't wanted, and left them to continue over training if they wanted.

The Castle of Lions was huge. Like huge couldn’t even begin to properly describe the Castle. It was plenty large enough to house all five Lions of Voltron, which was ridiculous because each of the lions alone were at least a couple stories high. Keeping in mind that the Lion’s hangars only took up a small fraction of the bottom half of the castle, there really wasn’t any other way to say that the castle was huge.

That said, despite the size of the castle, there were surprisingly few places that Lance could turn to.

There were the basic places. The places that were ‘designated’ for Lance. His ‘room’, if one could call it that, was one such place. Except, it wasn’t his room.

His room was painted cream with a baby light blue accent wall. His room had blue glow-in-the-dark stars plastered up on the ceiling in real constellation formations. His room had posters all along the walls, and shelves with knickknacks and souvenirs. Lance’s room was always colorfully lit with a string of old Christmas lights, and almost always playing some sort of music out of his old beat up stereo.

This room in the castle wasn’t Lance’s room, except in the sense that it was the room Lance stayed in. Nothing more than a small rectangular space, barely the size of a king-size mattress, with a twin size inset into the wall. It was cold, impersonal, and exactly the same as everyone else’s – except perhaps for Coran or Allura.

The room was cold, which wasn’t helped by Blue’s natural chill. Said chill seemed to perpetually seep through the bond into and around Lance; and tended to linger in the room.

Lance shivered as he tried, and failed, to curl up into a smaller ball than he already was. His arms were wrapped around his legs, holding them up to his chest.

Blue’s concern was overwhelming, barreling into him like storm waves batting a tiny toy ship on the ocean around. She was more than just concerned. She was upset, irritated, and angry; although, not at Lance. She wanted to know who had caused her Paladin this much pain. She wanted to console him.

The ticker that Lance been using earlier laid in broken shards of holographic glass at the base of the wall across the room, where they’d fallen after Lance had thrown the device earlier. Later, when he cleaned it up, he would probably regret that. Especially since he’d need to either go to Pidge or Coran about getting a new one.

Despite being weakened by distance, Blue was still able to poke and prod at him through the bond,
imploring him to tell her what was the matter, and what Paladin she needed to utterly destroy.

It was because of that last part that Lance remained silent.

He just needed, he didn’t know. A distraction, maybe. Something else to think about instead of what had happened.

Blue’s insistent coddling fell quiet, and then almost like a small whisper, she reminded Lance of his desire to stock her with essentials in case they were to crash again. Lance scoffed, rolling his eyes. Oh yes, sure, go inside Blue, where she could force a sync and find out exactly what had happened. That was a perfect idea.

He didn’t need a bond with Blue to sense her offense at that.

No. No, there was no need to take his frustrations out on Blue. The only good thing about this place when she had done nothing wrong.

He stood, using the wall for support. While he didn’t know how long he’d sat curled up there, the ants dancing up and down his legs told him it’d been for far too long. He made his way down to the hangars, and looked up at Blue.

“Sorry, beautiful.” He offered her a half smile. “Didn’t mean anything by it.”

Blue seemed to survey him for a moment before letting out the equivalent of a ‘hmph’ through the bond, and then lowering her head to allow Lance access.

Inside of Blue, it was harder to ignore her persistent chill. He crossed his arms, and pulled his jacket tighter; but he was thankful for even smallest amount of relief against the cold. None of the others, to his knowledge, had this problem.

He wasn’t quite sure what to make of that.

Inside Blue, there was a bit more than just the cockpit, but it was there that Lance headed. His fingers trailed against the walls of Blue, and she let out a low rumble of appreciation at his attention. Just inside the cockpit, he paused, noting a pack stashed away to the side.

What was…?

Blue flashed him an image of Tyrac, and he silently cursed her for choosing a memory where he smiled.

But she was right. The pack was from him. Lance remembered now. He knelt, and pulled it out, systematically going through it.

The pack was full of some food which Lance was sure that Hunk would appreciate, if Hunk could get free of Pidge long enough to cook, that was. The poor guy hadn’t been able to cook since Pidge ‘dragged’ him off. Water, which was unnecessary at this point, but useful to keep in Blue – provided she didn’t freeze it over. And…

He paused, pulling out a small device. The communication device.

Blue purred, nudging at Lance. If he would not talk to her, then perhaps he could talk to another?

“I’m not using Tyrac as a therapist.”

Tyrac was a friend, of sorts. He wasn’t some confident for Lance to talk to whenever he had
problems. Tragic backstory had not been unlocked yet. Their friend level wasn’t high enough.

But… no one else knew about him. In the wake of finding out about Shiro, and then the way everyone else was acting, it just hadn’t occurred to Lance to even mention Tyrac. As a matter of fact, as ashamed as Lance was to admit it, Tyrac had slipped Lance’s mind completely.

Regardless, no one else knew about Tyrac. And it wasn’t like Tyrac could tell anyone what Lance said about them.

The corners of Lance’s lips slowly twitched upwards as she shifted his position so that he was sitting criss-cross, and looking down at the device. His fingers brushed over it as he examined it from every angle.

There were no secrets between Paladins, or so Coran had always said. But, Zarkon had been a paladin, and had somehow kept his ambitions a secret.

…

Okay, not the best example. But he was sure there were other examples. The others could keep secrets. Would it be so bad for Lance to have a secret friend? Someone who he could confide in about the others?

Blue rumbled, caught on the fence between wanting to encourage her Paladin and to change opinions and side with Coran in the whole ‘no secrets between Paladins’ aspect.

This wasn’t quite what she’d meant to have happen when she asked Lance to come to her, when she’d suggest that Lance spoke to Tyrac though the device.

Lance paused, his fingers drumming along the device to his song. He pursed his lips as he debated with himself before he muttered a quiet “fuck it” and stood.

“Sorry, Blue.” He called out to her, as he headed towards the exit.

If he spoke to Tyrac now, then Blue would hear the story and then… Blue flailed, as much as could mentally. She didn’t understand why it was so important that she didn’t know. She’d find out eventually, through the other lions. Besides, Lance may have decided to keep secrets from the others, but that didn’t mean he could start keeping secrets between them!

“Like you don’t keep secrets from me.” He muttered.

Blue’s presence recoiled as if struck by the comment Lance had made. She didn’t argue against it though.

She remained sequestered away from Lance even as he exited, and then headed back to his room. It seemed that she was accepting his decision to keep things to himself.

With the everyone in the castle so busy – except for Lance, of course – he ran into no one on the way to his room. And once there, he stared down at the device.

Was he making the right choice? Blue had just meant for him to talk to someone. She hadn’t meant for him to keep secrets from his teammates. But, he needed someone to talk to. Someone who wasn’t busy trying to find Shiro, or work on the ship, or… anything.

Lance nodded to himself. He made a choice, he needed to commit to it. He sat down at the end of his bed, playing with the device in his hands.
Besides, Tyra was probably worried since he hadn’t heard from Lance in a while. A while being what… a couple space days? Enough time for everyone to drive themselves insane looking for Shiro/fixing the ship.

Lance sighed, before looking at the wall and trying to think of what to say. He started to tap out his song on the device, not that it gave him any comfort. Since that conversation with Tyra, the song just hadn’t been as comforting as it once seemed.

But it gave his hands something to do while he thought. And he was thinking. After all, what to say? How to say it? It’d been so long since he spoke with Tyra. Would it be weird to just randomly contact him?

“Ugh…” Lance groaned, dropping his head and closing his eyes. “I can’t just start a conversation with ‘My Life Sucks. I feel like I’m running a space kindergarten, and I just got the equivalent of a toddler kicking me in the shins today.’”

“That sounds like a wonderful and interesting way to start any conversation, really.” Lance jumped, his eyes opening so he could stare down at the communication device in mute horror. The communication device which now had lights flashing, and was very clearly on.

Quiznak.

He must have done it while he was playing with it. Or when he was tapping his song out on it. Man, what had he been thinking?!

Tyrac laughed, his voice rich even through the device. “I take you didn’t mean to call me just quite yet?” He teased. “But I’d be interested in hearing about this ‘space kindergarten’ anyways.”

Lance blinked down at the device. “… You would?”

“Of course. It’ll be an interesting distraction to the drama I seem to have found myself in.”

“How about a trade then. You tell me your drama, and I tell you mine?” Lance suggested. Tyrac chuckled, the sound warm and inviting. Definitely warmer and more welcoming than anyone in the castle right now.

“Sounds fair, but I expect to hear of this ‘space kindergarten’ afterwards.” Lance smiled at Tyrac’s words, the action feeling foreign after all the frowning he’d been doing since hearing of Shiro’s disappearance.

“Naturally. So, what’s happened to you?”

“I received news that my father’s been injured, and I needed to return home after only just leaving it.”

Lance gasped at Tyrac’s words. Immediately following the trader’s words with: “Oh no! What happened?”

“He was attacked by armed assailants. Five against one, how fair is that?” Tyrac finished the question with a bark of laughter, considerably less warm and welcoming than his last laugh. No, this was cold, and dry… almost sardonic.

“Five against one?” Lance repeated. “That’s… quiznak… that’s not fair at all.”

Tyrac was quiet for a moment. “It isn’t, is it? But, I’m sure they’ll get what’s coming to them.”
“On my planet, we call that ‘karma’.” Lance shook his head, despite the fact that Tyrac wouldn’t be able to see him. “Is your father going to be alright?”

“My father’s oldest and closest friend is a doctor of sorts. If anyone can restore him back to health, it is her.”

“That’s good.”

Tyrac hummed an agreement. “So, karma, huh? Well, perhaps this ‘toddler’ who ‘kicked you in the shins’ will be visited by karma as well.”

Lance laughed. “Oh, if only. I wish. He’s not that much younger than me, but, I swear, he’s so immature.” Lance dragged out the syllables in ‘so’ as he spoke, and rolled his eyes.

“Is this one of your ‘teammates’ you mentioned before… or did someone else end up picking you up?”

“Oh… oh yeah! No. I was picked up by my team.” Lance placed the device on the retractable table by the bed and allowed himself to fall back onto the bed. “And yeah, it is one of my teammates.”

“Well, what happened?”

“So… my team is all down in the dumps because we’re missing the guy who’s basically our space dad, right? Although, he’s not really our dad. He’s too young to be a dad and he’s not related to any of us, and I think he might be with, like with, someone on the team; but he’s the guy who makes sure that we don’t all kill each other, and tells us what to do.”

Even without an actual audience, Lance moved his hands around as he spoke. He couldn’t help being this expressive when he spoke, especially when he was worked up.

“Anyways!” Lance continued. “So, he’s missing so there’s no one else here to kind of take care of us. Not that I need taking care of. I mean, I’m the one stepping up to take care of them!”

Tyrac hummed, making the ‘go on’ noise.

“So, Ke… my teammate is all about training. I swear, he’s going to over train himself into an early grave. And I tried to get him to stop and take a break because like I just said, he’s going to train himself into an early grave.”

“Well, that’s stupid of him.” Tyrac interrupted. “It’s important to take breaks, everyone knows this.”

“I know, right? So, I tried to get him to stop, and he was all like ‘I’ll stop if you can beat me’, except, like, I can never beat him. He beats me at literally everything! So, he beats me at this, because I suck at hand to hand, and then, you know what he does?”

“What did he do?” Tyrac’s near instantaneous response informed Lance of just how well Tyrac was listening to him. By this point, he was pretty sure that most people – his team included – would have zoned him out.

“He blames me for our space dad being missing!” Lance exclaimed, throwing his arms up in the air as if to nonverbally say ‘what the quiznak?!’.

Tyrac gasped. “He didn’t!”
Lance nodded, not caring that Tyrac couldn’t actually see him. “He did!”

“How dare he!” It warmed Lance’s heart to hear of how offended Tyrac was getting on his behalf. It felt like Tyrac actually cared. “You couldn’t have had anything to do with that!”

“I know, right?”

“Some teammate! Do they all treat you like this?”

“I mean, kind of?” Lance paused, furrowing his eyebrows as he thought Tyrac’s question over. “I mean, not really, sort of, yeah no?”

“That tells me nothing.” Tyrac sighed. “Except that they probably are. I mean, you did say you were running a ‘space kindergarten’ which sounds like it implies there’s more than one youngling on your team.”

“Well, I mean there’s Pi…… P. There’s P. They’re kind of like a toddler, or a youngling as you said.”

“So Ke and P are the younglings who aren’t actually younglings?” Tyrac clarified.

“I mean, yes. Everyone’s so focused on getting Space Dad back that they aren’t even bothering to take care of themselves.” Lance shook his head. “I even have to bring them their food, ugh.”

“Atrocious! What does P do?”

“P’s constantly on their computer. And I swear, the last time I tried to get them to sleep, they nearly bit me.”

“They didn’t.” Once again, Tyrac gasped.

“They did.” Lance confirmed.

“…I believe you may have it worse than me. All I have is my injured father. It sounds like you’re stuck with incompetence.”

Incompetence was one way to put it. Honestly. Lance wasn’t sure why his team just couldn’t pull themselves together. Like, he understood, he really did. They lost Shiro. And the Black Lion was unresponsive. And no one could find Shiro.

And yes, it sucked. Lance knew. He understood. He agreed, it was super important to get him back, but if things kept going at the rate they were, then they’d only hinder themselves. Shiro would never be found. Zarkon would win. Boom, universe ends.

Plus, Lance was pretty sure Shiro wouldn’t be too happy when he came back to see that they’d all run themselves into the dirt.

“Tell me about it. Ugh.” Lance sighed.

“Well, you have a ‘Space Dad’, what about a ‘Space Mom’ who could take over?” Tyrac asked.

Lance hummed as he thought. As ashamed as he was to admit it, at the words ‘Space Mom’ the first person to come to his head was Allura. And that had mostly been because Shiro was totally
Space Dad, and while he knew Shiro and Keith were a thing, it was hard not to think of Allura and Shiro as some sort of leadership power couple.

But the more he thought about it, It seemed, he didn’t know… demeaning to just say she was ‘space mom’ just because of that. Especially since Allura didn’t really feel like a mom. As a matter of fact, Hunk was the ‘mom-friend’ of the group.

“I mean, we’ve got another leader, but she’s busy too.” Lance shrugged. “But I don’t blame her. She’s got a lot to do, ya know? And I mean, if I can help by taking care of everyone, then well, at least I’m helping.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“Nope.” Lance popped the ‘p’ as he said the word.

Lance rolled over and twisted around in the bed so he was looking at the communicator. This kind of felt familiar, like when he’d spend hours on the phone talking to his friends. It was a relief, having someone he could complain about the team to, and to know that the team wouldn’t find out.

“So, tell me about ‘I’m too busy, Space Mom’ and why she can’t take care of things.”

“Well… I wouldn’t really call her ‘space mom’. She’s more than that, ya know?” Lance started. “I mean, mom’s are awesome, don’t get me wrong, but… I don’t know. It just seems wrong to just throw that title on her. If anyone’s the mom here, it’s H. He’s what we call a ‘mom friend’.”

“Mom-friend?” Tyrac repeated. Lance laughed, smiling as he launched into an explanation. Blue was right, he needed this.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance needed a distraction to keep his mind off harsh words spoken to him, and in his distraction relocated the communication device that Tyrac had left for Lance previously. Lance accidentally started a conversation with the trader, which made him feel better.

Lance let his head fall back, closing his eyes as he took a deep breath. In his back pocket, the ticker let out another set of chimes.

“This is for the team.” He reminded himself. In the back of his mind, Blue rumbled in agreement. And then slyly nudged his nearly nightly conversations with Tyrac at him. “Those are for me.” Lance clarified. “And quit digging around. I’m still not telling you what happened.”

Blue gave him the equivalent of a ‘we’ll see about that’.

Honestly, he knew that she already had a pretty good idea of what had happened, but she was waiting for Lance to come to her about it.

The ticker went off again, and Lance pulled the device out, swiping across the screen to shush it.

He put up his cleaning supplies, not bothering to rush before making his way to the kitchen. It wasn’t like anyone would be waiting for him. After a week or so of Shiro being missing, one would think that the others would have learned to take care of themselves by now. But no. Of course not.

It didn’t help that Lance was an enabler.

Honestly, he wouldn’t have cared so much if it was just Coran and Slav needing this. After all, they were often in the middle of important repairs and updates. He didn’t blame them for being unable to come to dinner.

Alas, it wasn’t just Coran and Slav who needed their food delivered. Although, if Mr. Overtraining-Mullet wanted to starve, Lance was more than happy to let him.

Okay.

So that was harsh. And not entirely true. Lance did care if Keith starved, even despite what the other had said.

What Keith said was inexcusable. Like, seriously. If this was how Keith had acted the first time Shiro went missing, then no wonder the Garrison kicked him out. BUT… Lance had said worse things to his family when under stress.

It didn’t change the fact that Keith was out of bounds, an opinion that Tyrac shared. Although,
Tyrac had been sure to add on that Lance didn’t deserve such treatment. Tyrac was also convinced that karma would come around and bite Keith in the ass.

Lance wasn’t so sure.

Regardless, that was three of the six people – excluding lance – in the castle. Surely the other three didn’t need to have their food brought to them? Wrong.

Trying to drag Pidge and Hunk away from the computers and the various… things… around their workspace? Lance would rather take Zarkon on, one to one. Lance had expected this from Pidge. Shiro was like their big brother, besides their actual brother. However, any ally Lance thought he’d have in Hunk didn’t exist. Most of the time, Hunk was with Pidge, although, occasionally he helped Lance manage them.

Hunk and Pidge made five. Five plates of food that he had to deliver. That left the best for last: the princess. Surely Allura wouldn’t over work herself and would come to the ‘team’ meal times. After all, she was their other leader. She was the most invested in the team. So, of course she’d come to get food.

Or, maybe she wouldn’t, since five members of the team already didn’t show up, and she never cared to spend much time with Lance alone. Oh wait, did Lance say five members wouldn’t show up? His bad, he meant six. Six members of the team wouldn’t show up. That was all of them.

So, Lance needed to not only make, but also deliver six plates of food to various people across the castle. And the castle was huge.

Tyrac had suggested not delivering any food at all to see if after some time they’d get hungry and come to eat. Lance lasted two days before he was tired of waiting for them to show up in the kitchen. If they found food, it wasn’t from the kitchen.

Quiznak. Toddlers knew how to take better care of themselves than this!

Needless to say, Tyrac and Lance were both flabbergasted.

So, between cleaning the castle, getting stuff for Coran, Slav, Pidge and Hunk, Lance was also making and delivering them meals.

And don’t even get Lance started on trying to get any one of them to take a break either. None of them would listen to reason. Not that Lance tried with Keith anymore. Quiznak Keith. It was mostly Pidge who was his biggest adversary lately.

After hitting up the kitchen, Lance stopped by Allura first. She always received the first plate, which he usually placed on the console near her. Never Shiro's empty workstation, however. That’d just be rude.

Thankfully, unlike some people, she didn’t require babysitting to eat. Sometimes, though, if he was lucky, she’d tear her eyes away from the star charts long enough to give him a watery smile that never quite reached her eyes and ask how the team was. Never how he’d been. Always about the team.

Which, he supposed, he was part of the team. He was included in that, right?

Not that it mattered. He always grinned, and informed her that the team was going just great. There was no need to add more stress to her shoulders.
“Thank you, Lance.” She muttered distantly as he placed the food down. She reached forward, ignoring the plate, and instead touching something Lance couldn’t see, and shifted the star charts around.

Today was not one of those days, evidently. Oh well.

“No problem.” He replied, shaking his head as he exited the bridge.

Next on his ‘food trip’ was his favorite ‘Space Uncle’ and pet lemur-caterpillar-scientist thing. Lately, Coran had been too busy with the updates and repairs to spend time with Lance, and that was okay. Really. Lance understood, he did.

Lance’s favorite real uncle was almost always too busy for Lance before he left Earth, so it wasn’t like Lance wasn’t used to be ignored by his favorites. It was like a requirement, actually. HE was ignored by his favorite real uncle, space uncle, and even his hero.

Tyrac thought it was a travesty that no one paid enough attention to Lance here or there, but once again, Lance was used to it.

Now then, about Coran’s current companion: Slav. Lance wasn’t quite sure what to make of the guy.

Ever since Shiro went missing, the little guy had been acting weird. Like, super weird. His big bug eyes were already creepy enough without him staring up at Lance all the quizznaking time. Although, out of everyone on the ship – excluding the Lance and the Lions – Slav seemed to the sanest.

Which… Hello!? Did no one see a problem with that?

Slav seemed to the sanest. Which screamed problematic because Lance was about 99% certain that Slav was missing a couple screws. Shiro could barely stand Slav, and Shiro used to be the sanest person on the ship! What did it mean that Slav had taken Shiro’s role as the living embodiment of sanity on this ship? Not including Lance, of course.

Slav was waiting for the food, or perhaps just waiting for Lance. The alien’s big eyes stared up at Lance as he accepted the offered plates of goo.

Maybe if he wasn’t always staring at Lance, the guy might have actually been kinda cute. In the pet sorta way. Kinda like how a Lemur or a Caterpillar was cute, both of which Slav looked like the lovechild of.

“You know… if you ever need to talk to someone, I am here for you.”

Lance was lucky that Slav already had a hold on the plates, as he almost dropped them in shock. The alien’s accent reminded Lance of stereotypical Indians that are on racist white people shows, usually working IT, but… even then, the accent wasn’t so strong Lance couldn’t understand it. Then again, it wasn’t the accent that shocked Lance.

Slav was offering… counseling? This nutjob? Like, no offense, but Slav was more likely to drive Lance further into the City of Insanity, not out of it!

“Uhh… Thanks? I think.” Lance blinked down at the guy.

Well, he could bring this up to Tyrac later, and they could laugh at it together. They both needed the laugh. Last Lance heard, Tyrac’s father’s condition hadn’t changed, although, he was stable.
Which, Lance supposed was something. At least he wasn’t getting worse, knock on wood.

When Lance had asked about him, Tyrac had laughed, and said that Lance’s concern was touching. A sort of strange remark, but hey, maybe Tyrac didn’t have the best relationship with his dad.

Slav blinked up at Lance for a moment. Lance wasn’t a lemur-caterpillar-scientist expert, but he thought Slav’s expression may have fallen at Lance’s rejection of the offer.

“Oh.” Slav muttered. “Oh... this is one of those realities.”

Lance rolled his eyes. And Slav was back to being crazy. Great. Now Lance was alone on the sanity boat, while everyone else swam in the sea of insanity. Perfect. Just what Lance always wanted. He gave Slav a tight smile. No need to let the poor dude know how Looney Tuney Lance thought he was.

“Alright, then.”

“Thank you.” Slav’s thanks was unexpected, but appreciated. That was twice that Lance had been thanked so far on this food run. Not bad, not bad. Lance gave him a wave of appreciation as he left.

“Crazy little guy.” Lance muttered once he was well out Slav’s sight, and, hopefully, hearing.

Unfortunately, due to reasons, Keith was next.

Fortunately, Lance didn’t bother with him anymore. He dropped the plate off on the floor in front of the training room, not even bothering to check to see if it was in use. He’d noticed that the security lights had been off more often, which usually meant Keith wasn’t there, but Lance didn’t really care.

It didn’t help that Blue had informed Lance that Keith had come to see her, and had been looking for Lance. Lance wasn’t ready to face Keith yet, or deal with whatever he had to say.

If the food wasn’t gone by the time Lance came around to pick up plates, then Keith could starve. Or find his own way to the goo dispenser. He knew where it was.

Lance’s last stop was also his most difficult: Pidge and Hunk. Aka, the ones that Lance needed to babysit when it came to food.

Before all of this started, Pidge already didn’t eat much. She was much too interested in other things, namely finding her family, and upgrading things. Shiro was usually the one to drag her away from whatever project she’d started.

That wasn’t to say that Pidge didn’t eat at all. She just… didn’t eat much. Even less so now that Shiro was missing.

And with Hunk out of the kitchen so much lately, it wasn’t like their meals were as nutritious as they were before. Plus, if Hunk couldn’t stress bake/cook, then he tended to stress eat. It wasn’t that he meant to, it was just something that happened.

Lance had to watch over them when they ate. Pidge wouldn’t eat otherwise, and Hunk would distractedly accidentally eat the food she never touched.

“Pidge, break time.” Lance called out as the doors opened.

Pidge didn’t even bother looking away from the screen. Some part of him wondered if she heard
him, or if she was just ignoring him.

Hunk definitely heard Lance, as evidenced by him looking up and taking his plate from Lance with a smile.

“Thanks, man.”

“No prob.” Lance shrugged, and turned back to the tiny gremlin who he was 90% sure was ignoring him. “Pidge?” Lance called out to her again. He held in the sigh, because he knew Hunk would notice it, and then Hunk would try to help him, and then Pidge would get upset and…

“Just leave it on the table. I’ll get to it later.” Yeah, that’s about what Lance expected. Except, it wouldn’t be Pidge getting to it later. He rolled his eyes.

“Yeah no. Nice try. It’s break time.” He walked up to her desk, and put the food down. If only so he could put his hands on the desk and look her down.

He was already mentally preparing himself for the usual fight. It was the same fight that he’s had with her countless times by now. She’ll say:

“Fuck off, Lance.”

And he’d reply: “You need to eat, Pidge.”

Once upon a time, aka: the beginning of the week, he told her to mind her language. So, naturally, she offered more profane language in return; and told Lance that he was in no way, shape, or form her brother, mother, father or Shiro. She didn’t need to listen to him. So, he quit caring. Now, she’d usually counter:

“I think I know what I do and don’t need, Lance.”

Of course, Pidge didn’t know what they needed or not, because if she wasn’t feeding herself, then she wasn’t going to bed, and she certainly wasn’t taking care of herself.

Thankfully, Hunk took care of dragging her sleepy ass to bed when she started snoring on the keyboard. Unless Hunk fell asleep too, and then the only thing Lance could do was give Hunk a pillow and a blanket, and carry Pidge off to her room.

That’s how he knew that everyone’s room was the same. Honestly, he could put Pidge in his room, and he didn’t think she’d even notice.

“Sure, you do.” Lance replied, dragging out the ‘sure’. “And I’m supplying it. You can’t think if you don’t eat.”

If there was anything Lance had learned about Pidge, it was that he had to phrase things just right. He needed to make her want to eat.

Despite how the team is acting, Lance knew they weren’t actual toddlers. Although actual toddlers may have been easier to take care of. In any case, Lance drew the line at spoon feeding these guys.

Once again, he understood the need to get Shiro back. But that didn’t mean the team needed to self-destruct to get him back. Ugh, and just thinking about the team without Lance right now was enough to make Lance shudder. Like, Lance was useless except for playing babysitter and janitor, but evidently, those roles were more unimportant than he’d originally assumed.
“I think I’m just fine.” Pidge finally looked at him, and ouch: if looks could kill.

It was a shame that Lance was evidently a mirror, because her glare was killing herself instead of him. She looked like death with those heavy black bags under her eyes. She might want to get those checked out. He didn’t think she could fly with bags that heavy: most airlines had a restriction of 50 pounds per bag.

“Pidge, eat the food. The faster you do it, the faster I go away.” If all else failed, bargaining usually worked.

“Look. Just because you don’t care about where Shiro is doesn’t mean the rest of us don’t care.” Lance’s jaw dropped open. Where the quiznak had that come from? Was she talking with Keith?! But… Blue had said that Keith wanted to talk, whatever that meant. Not he wasn’t going to think about that, not with Pidge chewing him out. “Stop distracting me. I’m trying to work. Go be useless elsewhere.”

Go be useless elsewhere.

…

There was a part of Lance that recognized that she didn’t mean to say those words. The bags under her eyes tell a story of supreme lack of sleep, which he could only imagine when added to the stress she was under to find Shiro made for a dangerously deadly cocktail of emotions.

But… Like with Keith, that was an explanation, not an excuse. There was no excuse for this anymore than there was for Keith. Especially since Pidge knew.

She’d been there, on that mission, and he knew she heard what he said to the Yupper because Shiro talked to him about it… so she knew that was a sore spot for him. And tired and stressed or not, there was just no justifiable excuse.

The sound of Hunk’s spork hitting his plate echoed in the silence following Pidge’s statement.

Lance wasn’t sure how to feel. He supposed he felt numb. He was angry. That was a thing. But, for the most part, he just felt numb. After what happened with Keith, this just felt like a slap in his face. It felt like the universe was laughing at him.

Part of him couldn’t believe what he’d heard, but Hunk’s reaction was proof that he’d heard correctly.

“Pidge.” Hunk’s voice broke the silence, his voice low and quiet. “We spoke about this.”

Lance’s gaze darted over to Hunk, taking in his guilty stance: the way he was hunching his shoulders, and the wide-eyed look he was giving to both Pidge and Lance.

Ah.

This didn’t just come out of the blue then. This was something that clearly they’d both discussed.

Honesty, Lance wasn’t sure what was worse: the fact that Pidge and Hunk had discussed his uselessness, the fact that they feel he’s distracting, or the fact that they too consider him useless.

Even with Shiro gone, Lance was still the Seventh Wheel.

“Lance.” Lance hadn’t realized he’d taken a step back until Hunk said his name. He was slowly
shaking his head. He just couldn’t believe this. Out of everyone on this ship, Hunk was literally the
last person he thought would betray him like this.

“Don’t bother, Hunk.” Pidge cut in. “For as much as he wants to play Leader, he can’t replace
Shiro.” She shook her head. “It’s embarrassing that he tried. All he’s done is distract us from
finding him!”

Lance didn’t even wait for her to finish before he was back pedaling away. He wanted to be away.
This wasn’t… they weren’t Keith. He couldn’t fight them. He still couldn’t believe what he was
hearing.

The roar in his ears might have been the rush of blood, the noise one heard when freaking out. Or it
could have been Blue, who surged through their bond and was howling for the other paladin’s
blood, or at least apologies.

“Lance!” Hunk stepped forward, putting the plate down on a table as he passed it. “It’s not… she’s
doesn’t…”

Lance didn’t give him a chance to finish before he was spinning around, and heading out the door.
He’d heard enough.

It wouldn’t matter if Hunk tried to chase after Lance. The only people faster than him were well,
everyone but Hunk. Besides, after so much time on his own, the only person – not including the
Alteans – who could rival his knowledge of the castle was Pidge. Who based off her words would
not be chasing after him.

If this was an ordinary day, then Lance would have returned to the kitchen to eat his meal alone.
Then he would have gone around and picked up the dishes in the same order he dropped them off.
He would have taken said dishes to the kitchen and cleaned them before moving on to complete
more of Coran’s chores.

Compared to what everyone else on the ship was doing, his routine seemed so insignificant.

He considered fleeing to his room, but, if Hunk bothered to chase after him, then that’d be one of
the places Hunk would check first. Blue tugged on him, a sharp steady pull asking him to come to
her. She wouldn’t allow anyone to cross her barrier without Lance’s approval. With her, Lance
could find sanctuary.

It wasn’t a bad idea. At least Blue could talk to him. But…

But, Blue wasn’t a reason person. She was a machine, no matter how smart her AI may be. She
wouldn’t understand, not completely. And besides, Lance didn’t think her chill would help the
numbness he could feel spreading out through body. Lance was tired of the cold anyways.

He missed the typical beaches of Cuba. The hot sun on his skin and the warm breeze through his
hair. He missed his family, who loved him despite how useless he was. He missed that how stupid
and naïve he used to be, especially towards space. He used to love space.

Lance hated space. He hated this castle. He hated this team.

In his head, Blue let out a noise of dismay, but did nothing further. She didn’t – couldn’t – blame
him.

His vision blurred until he couldn’t see anything anymore. His chest and eyes hurt from pressure
building up. There were noises escaping from him, and already snot started to run from his nose.
He sniffled it up as best he can, but then he was just constantly sniffling. And that was annoying
and only managed to work him up more. He came to a stop, going to a wall and sliding down it.
His hands were shaking, or was it his whole body? He couldn’t tell.

He didn’t even care that he was breaking down in the middle of the castle because it wasn’t like
anyone would see him. He was alone.

Who knew where Keith was, although Lance’s non-existent money was on the training room or
the Lion hangars. Pidge was in a lab area which she had set up. Hunk might have been with her, or
he could have been searching the halls, or at Lance’s room. Who knew? Allura was on the bridge.
Coran and Slav were in the teludav.

Blue was… Blue was washing over him. Comforting, sweet, and so fucking cold. She apologized,
and tried to soothe him despite the harsh words and feelings he’d thrown at her. She tried to push
through all that, to inform him and apologize.

Her Paladins were always emotional, and she heightened it, and… Lance didn’t want to hear this.
He didn’t want to be cold. He didn’t want to be in space. He didn’t want to be in the castle, and he
most certainly didn’t want to be in this castle with people who hate him.

Like the last time, Blue reared back at the last thought. Shock and anger leaked through the bond,
and Lance didn’t just feel and hear her roar mentally, but physically too.

Her roar wasn’t loud enough to drown out the echo of Pidge’s voice in his head.

Those words echoed in his mind, bouncing around his skull. It wouldn’t be all that bad, really… if
it wasn’t for Keith’s similar words at the beginning of the week. Once was an incident, an event.
Twice was… twice was pattern. What were the chances, after all, that two of his teammates would
come to similar conclusions without talking to each other?

And he was pretty sure that they weren’t talking to each other, given that Keith was evidently
asking Blue about talking to Lance, and there were only so many things that Keith would want to
talk to Lance about. Especially since Keith had already made his feelings quite clear.

Blue hadn’t left Lance, and through their bond, he could feel irritation seeping in. Not at him, no,
but at his teammates, at how they’ve been treating Lance. She understood why Lance hadn’t
brought this up to her, but, understanding doesn’t make it any more acceptable.

Lance closed his eyes, and hoped that Blue would keep this to herself. The other Lions didn’t need
to know about this, no matter how much Blue thought that they did.

Besides, it wouldn’t change much. The others could talk to their lions, but not like he could. He
was alone in this regard. Just like he was alone in being useless. Just like he was alone in so many
other things, and none of them good.

He felt sick. And, the more he cried, the sicker he felt. Part of him wondered if he’d feel better if
he just threw up already. No. No, it wouldn’t. It’d just make it worse since then he’d have another
mess to clean up. And if one of the others did come through, prompted by Blue’s roars, then they’d
smell it and know. It’d just add onto the list of how fucking useless Lance was.

Even now, he wondered if they’d notice. Would they notice if he didn’t come around and pick up
the plates? Would they notice when Lance didn’t bring them any other food? They hadn’t noticed
before when Lance stopped feeding them for two whole days. What would change now?

Pidge would probably be happy. No more distractions.
Out of the six other people on this ship… Slav had noticed. That was why Slav had asked if Lance wanted to talk.

Slav was the one who smiled at him when Lance started delivering food again, and told him it was good to see Lance again. He’d tried to ignore what Slav had meant when he said that there’d been a two percent chance of Lance returning to deliver food. He’d tried to spin it in a positive light. Maybe in 98 percent of other universes, the others come and grab their food and get their shit together. Or maybe Slav knew this breakdown was always going to eventually happen.

It explained the bug-stare looks Slav had always given Lance, and his general silence and reluctance to speak to Lance. Slav knew this was coming, and didn’t want any part of it.

Lance wasn’t sure if that made things better or worse. Worst part was, at this point, he didn’t care.

It could have been a few minutes, or a couple hours until Lance had fully calmed down. His body ached from being curled up, his face felt sticky from dried tears, his throat hurt, his nose was all runny, and his head was killing him. Despite this all, he blinked his eyes opened, sniffled, and pulled himself into an even tighter ball.

He should move out of the hallway. Perhaps into the ‘comfort’ of his room. The bed would be better than the floor for of the castle. Besides, the communicator Tyrac gave him was in there, although Lance wasn’t sure that he wanted to chat with Tyrac tonight, especially with how much of a mess Lance was sure he sounded.

Blue nudged him, reinforcing his idea to return to his room. She agreed that the floor couldn’t have been more comfortable than the bed.

Lance didn’t bother to hold his broken laughter in. No one was around to hear him anyways. Out of the people on the ship, how was it that a sentient blue robotic lion was the only thing on this castle that seemed to care about him?

Oh wow.

If he could go back in time, and meet his younger self… the things he’d say. For starters, he’d warn himself not to go to the Galaxy Garrison.

“I don’t care how hard the stars pull at you, don’t go.” Talking to oneself was a sign that someone was going crazy, right? If so, then Lance didn’t care. He went crazy the moment he found a giant sentient robotic lion ship out in the desert.

And besides, who was going to hear him? Who was going to care? Besides Blue, that was.

“Stay home with mama, and the family. Go into politics like Daniel, or… something.” He informed his imaginary younger self. “Trust me. Going to space is a Bad idea, with a capital ‘b’.”

Okay, so Blue was getting a little concerned. It leaked out through tiny cracks between each rumble of her mental purrs.

Fine. He’d leave the talking to himself in his head. Not that that was any better. Besides, he didn’t really see the difference between talking out loud to her, and talking out loud to himself. Either way, people would peg him as crazy if they heard it.

Lance pulled himself to his feet, groaning at the effort. He debated continuing his routine like he hadn’t been offset by an undetermined amount of time, but… he wasn’t really feeling all that into it. Blue encouraged him to. She thought it’d help. Ha. What did she know?
He’d rather head to his room and wallow in his own self misery.

He’d go to the Holodeck if it wasn’t for Allura sometimes going there to check stuff. If everyone else could self-destruct themselves, then why couldn’t Lance? If they wanted to starve to death, or work themselves to death, or die of sleep deprivation, then who was Lance to try to deny them?

“If you can’t beat them, join them.” He muttered.

The moment he entered his room, he flopped down onto the bed. In the semi-darkness of the room, he noted the flashing glow of the communication. Great. He’d missed a call.

He sighed, and face-planted into the bed. He’d worry about that later.

Chapter End Notes

Like with the chapter with Keith... this is all part of human nature. In the show, Pidge herself has stated that she's not good with human interaction, and it has also been shown in the show that she can (and will) get irrationally mad at the team.

Pidge is frustrated about not making progress with her family, and also because now Shiro is missing and there is nothing she can do about it.

Speaking of Shiro, and his missing status and stuff... I understand Voltron will have a panel at SDCC during which they will be airing the first episode of the 3rd season. I will NOT be modifying my story to make it canon compliant to Season 3. I may add information as it is revealed. I will posting another reminder of that when Season 3 becomes available on Netflix, as this story will continue Past the airing of Season 3.

As always, Thank you for taking the time to read my story, and this note! If you ever want to talk, please don't hesitate to drop by my Tumblr and say hello!

Also, look at this fantastic art by my roommate!!! I highly suggest that you guys check her stuff out! :D
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance finally recovered from Keith's temper tantrum and continued on his routine. Everything was fine until Pidge went off script and broke the routine. Sprouting similar ideas to what Keith had before, Pidge unleashed her own form of a temper tantrum upon Lance.

Lance didn't fare well having two of his teammates ‘turn’ on him as they had, and took a mental health day.

To Lance’s surprise, no one investigated the reason for Blue roaring. Or, if they did, then Lance didn’t know about it. Then again, perhaps her roar had been in his mind. Regardless, it’d been a few days since the second ‘incident’.

He allowed himself exactly one day of moping before he forced himself out of his room and back to his routine. If he allowed himself too much moping, then he’d just get stuck in a never-ending loop of self-pity, depression, and self-deprivation.

Why sit around and torture himself when he could have his teammates do it for him?

Tyrac couldn’t understand why Lance was putting himself through all this. Surely his teammates weren’t worth this pain. He’d offered to take Lance away from the team, to take him to someplace Lance would be appreciated; but Lance declined the offer.

No matter how they acted, the team was all Lance had, and unless something truly horrible happened, he wasn’t going to give them up. They might not have wanted him, but… Lance wanted them.

However, because of certain events, there were a few changes that Lance made to the routine. The wounds caused by certain people – not that he’d name names – were too deep and painful for him to ignore. Their actions were still too recent for him to even think of entering their presence.

Out of the six people on this ship, he was now set to avoid three of them. Not that it was difficult with a castle this large and the people he needed to avoid seldom moved from their ‘domains’. Except perhaps Keith, who’d become increasingly more active around the ship – to Lance’s disdain.

Giving up what little interaction he had with Hunk hurt, but, Hunk’s betrayal had hurt a whole lot more. To some degree, he had expected what happened with Keith. But what happened with Hunk and Pidge? There was no way he could have been prepared for that.

Besides, when his interactions with Hunk were already so small, was he really giving anything up?

The answer, as Lance came to find out, was no. Especially since Lance found that while he lost Hunk, he gained interaction with another: Coran.
“Correlation is not causation,” Tyrac reminded him when Lance halfheartedly complained during their ‘nightly’ talks. It wasn’t that Lance was complaining, except he totally was. But it was human nature to complain about change; no matter what the change was.

Then again, while Coran was floating around the ship more, he wasn’t always mentally present. A lot of the time Coran was absorbed in some little device, muttering to himself, so Lance tended to try to stay out his way.

That didn’t mean Lance didn’t get any interaction out of Coran. Oh no, the moment Coran noticed Lance, the poor guy was subjected to Coran’s nonstop rambles about everything. It wasn’t bad and Lance was used to people rambling at him… but it was kind of a shock to his system, especially after all the solitude he’d been subjected to lately.

Perhaps Slav put Coran up to it.

Keith was also floating around the castle more, although whether he was still looking for Lance or not was anybody’s guess. Lance never allowed the opportunity to find out.

Lance knew he couldn’t avoid people forever. However, that didn’t mean he was prepared to enter the ‘common’ area and find it, for once, full of people; including all the ones he was trying his hardest to avoid.

“Lance! I—” Keith stood up from where he was sitting the moment his eyes fell on Lance. He would have said more if Coran hadn’t turned around and interrupted.

“Ah, Lance! Glad you came, saves me the trouble of calling you!” At least Lance could count on Coran to save him from a conversation he didn’t want to have, unless of course, the conversation was with Coran. “Sit, sit.” He gestured to the couch. “Team meeting!”

What team meeting? There hadn’t been a team since Shiro disappeared. He glanced at the couch, suppressing a grimace before choosing a spot as far from the other three as he could possibly manage, and then turned his attention towards Coran and Allura.

He couldn’t see Keith, but he heard him sigh and retake his seat. If Lance wasn’t mistaken, he swore he could feel Keith looking at him, but that may have been his imagination.

If Coran and Allura noticed the tension between the Paladins, neither Altean spoke of it.

“Alright then!” Coran cheered. “Now that we’re all here, there’s something very important we need to talk about!”

Perhaps it was Coran’s tone, but both Keith and Pidge seemed to jump up at the same time to ask the same question: “Is it about Shiro?”

Not everything revolved around Shiro. Except, evidently, things did. Since the whole team literally fell apart without him.

“Afraid not, Paladins.” Coran shook his head, and then snapped to attention. “This is a bit more worrying.”

Uh-oh. Coran had said something was more important than Shiro. That couldn’t be good… WAIT! Maybe Allura and Coran had finally noticed how un-team-like they were all being lately! Maybe, they were going to fix it?!

At that thought, Lance sat up a bit straighter.
“Excuse me?” Pidge spoke up, indignation clear in her tone.

“You’re excused Number Five,” Coran replied. “So, I’ll turn over to the Princess to explain why we’ve called you all here today.”

“Thank you, Coran.” Allura stepped forward as Coran took a step back. “Paladins.” She looked over them. “I know the loss of Shiro has hit us all, but we can’t forget that we are still the Paladin’s of Voltron, and as such we have a duty to the Universe.”

Okay, okay. So far so good. Lance was liking how this was going. There might actually be a chance that this team meeting was about how everyone was acting! Awesome!

“Since our scrimmage with Zarkon, we’ve noticed that something has been transmitting data out of the ship. It was due to our efforts to locate Shiro that we have noticed this.” Allura continued, not even noticing that she’d dashed Lance’s hopes and dreams.

This wasn’t about how they were acting, but instead about something transmitting data. Who cared? Idly, Lance tapped his song against the side of the couch, keeping to himself as the conversation continued.

“Do you think it could be related to Shiro’s disappearance?” Pidge asked.

“It’s possible.” Coran answered with a shrug.

“Regardless, the device, or stow away, must be found. We can’t risk sensitive data falling into enemy hands. If we fall, so does the Universe’s last defense against the Galra Empire.” Allura elaborated.

“But, we beat Zarkon.” Hunk shook his head. “I thought if we beat Zarkon, then we’d be done.”

“Far from it, Number Two! The universe has been under Zarkon’s control for 10,000 years. There’s still a lot to do!” Coran replied. “In any case, we can’t do much until that device is found. I’ve been looking for it myself, but I haven’t had much luck yet. I was hoping you Paladins could keep an eye out, and tell me if you spot anything suspicious.”

Like the others would notice anything suspicious. They never left their areas. Well, Keith might. Speaking of…

“Is it possible that it was left by the Marmorites?” Lance asked. “Like Keith. Didn’t he think Zarkon was tracking him or something?”

Lance couldn’t see Keith, but he could see Allura turn to frown at Lance.

“That wasn’t a pleasant thing to say about your fellow Paladin, Lance.” She pursed her lips for a moment and then continued. “I wasn’t aware that you had a problem with Keith’s lineage.”

Lance couldn’t believe that. She was accusing him of racism?! Him?! He’d been the most supportive of Keith – minus Shiro – when it’d been revealed. If anything, she’d been the racist one when she wouldn’t even acknowledge Keith’s presence.

Lance opened his mouth to protest, but Allura cut him off before he could even speak.

“This is a time where we need unity, Paladins. If it isn’t an apology that you’re about to say, Lance, then perhaps it is something best not heard.”
What. The. Quiznak?!

Then again, Lance should have expected that. After all, he spoke badly of perfect Keith. Keith who was the perfect student at the Garrison – before he was kicked out, at least. Keith, who was the perfect pilot. Keith, who was the perfect Paladin. Perfect Keith, who beat Lance in everything.

Perfect Keith, who’d never look at Lance the way Lance looked at him.

Lance bowed his head. There was no point in trying to fight this. Just like there hadn’t been any point with Keith, or with Pidge and Hunk.

“I don’t think Lance meant it like that.” Keith spoke up.

What? Did Lance hear that correctly?

Lance’s head snapped up and he swiveled around to look at the three that he’d been avoiding. Keith met his gaze, and offered a small smile, although Lance did not return it. Keith’s eyes which had brightened when he smiled dimmed slightly, the smile falling at Lance’s lack of response.

“I think he was just meaning like… maybe the… Marmorites left behind something for communication purposes.” Hunk added. Like Keith, he too was smiling at Lance. Lance didn’t return his smile any more than he had Keith’s.

“Yeah.” Keith agreed, his voice quiet. He was still staring at Lance.

“Could a communication device be the cause?” Pidge questioned. She wasn’t looking at Lance, but at Allura.

Lance wasn’t sure how to feel. All this time they’d been complete crap to him, and now they were finally reacting. Now, they were showing him some support? Some part of him was overjoyed. This was them, acting like a team, supporting each other, again.

But a darker part of his mind cried that it wouldn’t last. Good things seldom did around here.

It seemed that was correct as just a moment later Lance froze, repeating Pidge’s words in his mind.

Communication device?

Oh no.

Quiznak. Quiznak. Quiznak.

Okay, so, it was cool that the three rude AF people were actually standing up for and helping Lance out. But, that question just opened a whole new can of worms, which Lance wasn’t sure he was ready for yet. Quiznak. Could it be a communication device? Why hadn’t he thought of that?!

Allura pursed her lips, and exhaled sharply through her nose.

“We won’t know until we find whatever it is that’s transmitting the data; that is why it is imperative that we locate it.”

“Then I guess we should stop yaking, and get to working, right?” Lance asked, his voice pitched a bit higher than normal. He jumped over the couch, and headed for the door. “Good talk!” He called out, and then was gone.

Blue was concerned, as she was so often lately. However, Lance wasn’t giving her any attention.
His mind was a whirlpool of activity: thinking about what Coran and Allura had said, and then what Pidge had suggested, and then also about Tyrac.

Tyrac was his secret. Tyrac was his escape, both figurately and literally should Lance decide to accept his offers. Tyrac was his friend, and given how everyone was acting lately, well, Lance wouldn’t be surprised if they tried to take him away. Lance wasn’t ready for that. Not yet, anyways.

One moment of support did not make up for all that they’d put him through lately. On ‘Atta boy’ did not erase a thousand ‘awh shits’.

Of course, it was possible that whatever was transmitting data could have been something left over from the Blades of Marmora. Or, a much less likely idea: it could have been from a Druid. Or, it could have been related to Shiro’s disappearing act.

Blue interjected with a healthy dose of skeptically. She nudged Lance to talk to Coran, but.. he didn’t want to let Tyrac go. He just didn’t. If he gave up Tyrac, then what else would he have?

Of course, he’d have Blue. She reassured him that he’d always have her.

Despite that, it wasn’t enough. He was used to crowds of people: family, friends, strangers… it didn’t matter. Being isolated like this with only one magically sentient lion to turn to? He couldn’t do it. He was barely managing having one magically sentient robot lion and a communicator.

He wasn’t a loner like Keith. He couldn’t spend hours alone in front of a computer like Pidge. Hunk was his best bet, besides Coran or Allura, for attention, but he was with Pidge most of the time and Lance still wasn’t over his betrayal. Even if they had helped defend Lance from Allura earlier.

Allura and Coran were out simply on principle. Besides being too busy for him, Lance had an idea of what they’d want to talk about; and given the topic of discussion, he’d prefer them to stay busy. That wasn’t something Lance was interested in discussing anytime soon. Especially since that topic was something that Lance knew Blue really wanted to explore.

She’d bring it up at random times, giving a questioning trill about whether it’d really be that bad if Allura and Coran were right. Of course, it’d be that bad. It’d mean that everything he’d known in his life was a lie. That he was a lie. That he was living a lie.

Yes, the idea Allura and Coran had offered would explain a lot of things, like his bond with Blue, or how quickly he was picking up on reading the Altean language and a few of their spoken language quirks. It also provided more questions than it did explanations. Questions Lance didn’t want to think about, ever. He was happy with how things were.

Well, more accurately, he was happy with how things were before Shiro went missing. Before he found Blue. Before any of this happened.

So, of his seven possible conversation options: one – Hunk – was taken by Pidge and crossed off the list by betrayal; two were off because Lance hated them right now – even if one of them wanted to talk; and the other two wanted to talk about things Lance would rather avoid.

That left Tyrac and Slav. And of those two, well… If he was honest, Slav was one of the reasons he wasn’t keen on giving up that communication device. Actually, he just thought about it a bit more and… Nope. It wasn’t gonna happen.

It was not going to happen without damn good reason.
Lance retreated to his room, and ‘locked’ the door. Coran or Allura could override it. If Pidge wanted, she could probably override it too. But, it made Lance feel more secure.

He went over to where he had the device hidden under his mattress, and picked it up, looking it over.

There was just no way that this small device was causing issues. There just wasn’t any way. Tyrac was trustworthy. He was Lance’s friend. Lance liked him.

He sighed, and put the device down on the bed. If he turned it into Coran, then he’d lose Tyrac. And what if it wasn’t sending out the data? He supposed Coran may give it back. But what if he didn’t?

Lance didn’t know. He just didn’t.

Maybe he could, he didn’t know, try to experiment some. He’d try not communicating with Tyrac for a while and see if that stopped whatever Coran had picked up. If it did, then he’d know that his nightly talks with Tyrac was the cause. And if that was the case, then he’d let Coran know.

And if nothing changed despite Lance not talking to Tyrac, then obviously, there wasn’t a problem with Tyrac, and Lance could continue as things were.

He took a deep breath and nodded to himself. That sounded good. That sounded reasonable.

Everything was going to be alright.

Chapter End Notes

**I'm pretty sure Hunk is Number 2, and Shiro is Number 1, right? OR do I have that backwards?**

I know for sure that Pidge is Number 5. And Keith is shorter than Lance, so he's got to be Number 4. Which makes Lance Number 3.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance recovered from Pidge's temper tantrum only to walk into a team meeting where things did not go to plan. Keith attempted to talk to Lance before the meeting, but Coran interrupted him, and then Lance left before the meeting finished.

The meeting was about a signal and some data that was being transmitted out of the castle. Pidge suggested a communication device, which prompted Lance to panic as he had a communication device from Tyrac which no one else knew about.

Only a day after the meeting, and everything was going wrong. First, the food goo machines had been acting up, then he couldn’t find Coran to give him his meal, and then Lance had spilled the mop water all over himself. The cherry on top, so far, was when Lance returned to his room to change and found Coran.

It was hard to describe how Lance felt when the door slid open to reveal Coran, sitting on Lance’s bed, looking like he belonged there. Except he didn’t.

The room and the objects may have been Lance’s in name alone, but they were still *his*.

Coran’s eyebrows were furrowed from how heavily he was frowning down at the small communication device in his hands. Or at least, he had been looking at the communication device, now he was looking over at Lance. Coran patted the space beside him on Lance’s bed.

Lance tried not to bristle, after all, it was just Coran trying to be polite and offer him a seat.

That didn’t change the fact that Coran had gone into Lance’s room, through his stuff, and was now acting like… like…

…Like a disappointed father. Like how when Lance was ten and his father found Benji’s broken toy in Lance’s room and wanted to quietly confront Lance about it. There were other similarities to that time to now as well, like the twist of guilt and shame.

Unlike then, however, there was a twist of anger and irritation.

First off, hadn’t he been through enough lately, what with what happened with Keith, Pidge, Hunk, and Allura? And also with how everyone ignored him despite him working his ass off to keep everyone alive? And now Coran had the audacity to come into Lance’s temporary room, go through his stuff, and act like his father?!

He had no right.

If there was one thing that Lance prided himself on, it was his acting skills. He was hurt, annoyed, irritated, and now, a bit offended; but he could put that all aside. Provided this conversation went
well, everything would be fine. Lance was the king of ‘fake it till you make it’, and if that meant plastering on a smile and sauntering into the room like he owned it, then that was what he’d do. After all, after so many times of telling a lie to oneself, they begin to believe it, right?

“What’s up, Coran?”

He didn’t take a seat where Coran offered, although he tried his best to keep his body language open and friendly. He tucked his hands in his pockets, and kept his shoulders slouched. Reacting how he felt right now would only cause issues.

“Where did you get this?” Coran held up the communication device for clarification, and Lance’s gaze slid to it for a moment before it returned back to Coran.

It still didn’t sit well with Lance that Coran would just go through his stuff. That was Oppressive Parent bullshit right there, and Lance didn’t ‘do’ that shit. His parents never did that shit, beyond what they had to. Siblings didn’t really do it much anymore either.

Lance understood and ‘got’ a lot of things lately, and this was just one more thing to add to the growing list.

This was Allura’s castle ship, and that kind of made it partially Coran’s too; since he was the one who repaired it and stuff. It’s not like the room actually belonged to Lance or anything. But still, hadn’t the Alteans ever heard of ‘boundaries’? It just wasn’t cool to go through someone’s stuff.

“Does it matter?” Lance asked.

As he spoke, he could hear some of the irritation bleed into his tone. He should dial it back. He knew that. Especially since he respected Coran, for the most part – although Coran just lost his stockpile of brownie points with this stunt. Coran was usually a pretty cool guy, and he hadn’t contributed to everything that’d been happening lately.

But, it was precisely because of everything that had been happening lately that Lance was at one of his limits. He could take a lot; he had to have tough skin growing up with as many people as he did. But with everyone taking their frustrations out on him, it was just too much.

He felt bad, because Coran didn’t deserve this attitude, but, then again, Coran kind of asked for it by going through Lance’s stuff and interrogating him about it.

Lance’s hands slid out of their pockets so he could cross his arms. Sometimes he did this and it didn’t mean much, but other times he did it, and it meant exactly what it was supposed to. It was a closed off position: guarded and meant for defense.

Defense in the sense of talking, anyways. This wouldn’t do anything against Keith. Or anyone else who decided to rush Lance. Not that anyone would here… except for training.

Coran didn’t seem to know how to respond to Lance’s responding question; although Lance wasn’t sure if it was due to the question itself, the tone it was asked in, or the change in Lance’s body language. Perhaps it was a combination of the three.

Lance counted the silence in his head. He’d already thought of how to respond to whatever Coran said.

The Altean dropped his gaze from Lance back down to the device. He tapped his finger against it, and Lance resisted the urge to tell him to leave it alone. But, it was thanks to this that Lance noticed the difference.
There no lights on it at all anymore.

Which meant not only had Coran gone through his stuff, but Coran has also messed with it too. Coming into his room without permission was one thing; going through his stuff was another… but messing with it too? That was a completely different ball park.

What if Coran broke it? What if Lance couldn’t talk to Tyrac anymore. What if he did something to it?

Given his younger relatives, Lance was used to, by some degree, people messing with his stuff. But Coran was not a younger family member. Coran should know better than to go through someone else’s stuff and mess with it.

“You won’t get in trouble, Lance.”


That sounded so much like a thing a parent would say before grounding their kids. That sounded like a trap; a ‘tell me and I won’t punish you, ha, just joking, you’re grounded’ sort of thing.

It didn’t matter if Coran was acting like his dad, or acting like Lance was a kid. Hell, if everyone else was allowed to act like a kid, why couldn’t Lance? Either way, it was seriously getting under Lance’s skin.

Blue was trying to soothe him. She didn’t understand why Lance was getting so worked up in the first place. And that was fair. How could Lance expect a giant sentient cat machine to understand? It was for that reason that he brushed her off. She didn’t understand.

“I just want to know where you got it.” Coran’s voice was irritatingly calm.

“And I want to know why it matters.” Lance felt like he had to move. He didn’t like Coran pressuring him like this, and he felt like he was being cornered, despite the door being right behind him. “It’s just something I picked up.”

Coran’s eyes seemed to lighten for a moment. Lance’s stomach twisted unpleasantly. It was easy to tell himself that he’d done nothing wrong, mostly because he didn’t think he had, besides the lie he just spoke.

Sure, he probably should have told Coran about the device but… Keith could have his Blade of Marmora contacts. Why couldn’t Lance have Tyrac? It just wasn’t fair.

Keith got everything. The contacts, the skills, the popularity, the good looks, the handsome men. What did Lance ever get? Keith’s crumbs. The leftovers that Keith left behind for him.

Tyrac was something that was Lance’s. And had only ever been Lance’s.

“Picked up or was given to you?” Coran’s question hit home, and it was hard for Lance to repress his wince. He didn’t think he succeeded because Coran’s eyes narrowed and then he was pressing further on the matter. “Lance. Was this given to you, or did you find it?”

He wasn’t sure if it was the tone or Coran pressing the issue. He wasn’t sure if it was just a build of stress. He wasn’t sure what it is, but it felt like something snapped inside of Lance.

“Does it matter?” He repeated his question from the beginning.
Did it matter? Really, Lance would like to know. All he was doing was talking with a friend, something he seemed to be lacking on this castle ship. He wasn’t giving away their location, or talking about their weakness, or giving away anything of particular value.

There were no secrets between Paladins, right? Yeah, no.

Yet Keith could keep quiet about his suspicions about his Galra heritage. Keith was allowed to keep Shiro’s desire for Keith to take over quiet. What about Shiro not sharing that he wants Keith to take over. What about Shiro leaving them?!

If everyone else could have their secrets, then why couldn’t Lance? Why couldn’t Lance have his secret friend? It wasn’t like he was in some sort of cult where he wasn’t allowed to talk to anyone outside of it.

“Does it matter?” Lance asked again, because Coran has yet to respond. He was curious to see how Coran liked being pressured into answering.

Blue’s presence increased in his mind, flowing full of concern with how things were going. Things didn’t have to be like this, and she didn’t understand why Lance was being so difficult.

There in which laid the root of the problem. Blue didn’t understand. Not like Tyrac did. Tyrac understood. He sympathized with Lance. He was different. And Coran was going to take him away.

Behind Lance, the door slid open, seemingly, of its own violation. Lance didn’t open it. Coran couldn’t have without going past Lance. Neither of them had moved. Doors didn’t open on their own. Which meant someone else had to open it.

Lance bristled at the new intrusion. He hadn’t turned around to look at them yet, but he was already running through the possibilities in his head.

Slav wouldn’t have a reason to come in, unless he too had discovered the item in Coran’s hands. No one else would have a reason to come in, so he was pulling up blanks.

Except… Coran’s gaze went to behind Lance; and Lance could see the thought of ‘uh-oh’ passing through the Altean’s eyes. It was with a sinking heart that Lance realized that whoever just entered the room wasn’t going to make anything any better.

Lance was proven correct just a moment later when Allura’s voice cut through the silence of the room.

“Lance!” Allura’s voice was almost shrill, and slowly Lance spun around to look at her without turning his back on Coran. “What is the meaning of this?”

The meaning of what? She never liked him, she hadn’t since the very beginning when he flirted with her and she insulted his ears. Now, she was more than happy to subject him to her ire and irritation, and jump to conclusions.

She probably wasn’t even going to wait for the full story before she started verbally attacking. No point in hoping that she would.

“The meaning of what, Princess?” He snapped back. Lance was so done with her blaming him when she should be looking at someone else. Like how at the meeting she’d not only accused Lance of being racist, but also at disrupting the team. Talking all that bullshit about unity.
Well, maybe she wasn’t wrong. The rest of the team was certainly unified in being Anti-Lance. And like she took side opposite Lance then, she was probably going to do the same with Coran.

Not that he’d blame her. Coran was her advisor and oldest friend. But still, it’d be nice if she took Lance’s side every so often.

“You should be asking Coran, he’s the one who came into my room and messed with my stuff!” As Lance spoke, he threw a hand out in Coran’s direction.

Allura pursed her lips, and looked at Coran. Lance watched her look him over, and then saw the exact moment that where she noticed the device. She locked up, gaze stuck on it for a moment before shooting back over to Lance.

“Where did you get that?” She demanded. Unlike Coran, she didn’t stay where she was. As she questioned him, she advanced on him, pushing him further into the room.

“Princess, I…” Coran started. Allura swiveled and turned immediately on him.

“You should have informed me of this at once, Coran.” There was war in her eyes. The same war that Lance saw when she talked about the Galra. The same war he saw when she looked at Keith after he confessed to his heritage. The war in her eyes now was not meant for Coran, but for the device and Lance.

Well, when opportunity came a knocking, one opened the door. So, naturally, Lance saw her brief distraction as just that: an opportunity. Lance ducked around her, and out the door. It was feeling way to small in that tiny room with the three of them. With both Allura and Coran demanding answers of Lance, it had felt even smaller in the room.

He didn’t get very far. The door didn’t even close before Allura was out it, following him. She grabbed his arm and pulled him back. He allowed the movement, using the momentum against her to spin and throw her grip off.

“You don’t get to leave this conversation, Lance.” She hissed, and held up the device. When had she grabbed it from Coran? “Where-”

“What conversation? This is an interrogation.” Lance interrupted.

He wanted to just swipe the device away from Allura, but Lance knew better. This was Allura, warrior magic space elf princess. Xena, Warrior Princess, had nothing on her. Plus, Coran would always side with Allura, like he had with the food goo fight so very long ago. Two against one in close quarters was not Lance’s forte.

Close quarters in general was not Lance’s forte.

“For a good reason!” She opened her mouth to say more, but Lance interrupted her again.

“Oh of course. Forgive me, Princess. I forgot that you never do anything without good reason.” She frowned at his snark.

Lance’s mind noted the echoed sound of the doors opening, but he was too preoccupied watching Coran exit Lance’s from behind Allura. The sorrow and pity in his eyes had no place here.

Normally, Lance would accept Coran’s sorrow and pity, but not today. Not now. Not when Coran was the cause of this mess.
Why the quiznak was Allura in Lance’s room anyways? The only thing Lance could think of was that Allura was looking for Coran. Who was in Lance’s room. If he hadn’t been where he wasn’t wanted, then none of this would be happening.

“Lance, that’s-”

“That’s what, Coran? Not how I should talk to the Princess?” Lance interrupted Coran this time.

“What’s going on?” Keith’s voice cut through them all like a blade, rising above their own shouting.

Lance fell silent, as did Allura and Coran. In his peripheral vision, Lance saw Pidge and Hunk come around the corner, and come to a stop.

Great. Everyone was here now.

“Lance was in possession-”

“A simple misunderstanding-”

“They invaded my room, went through my stuff-”

They all started talking at the same time. Although, Lance wasn’t even sure why he was even trying to defend himself. Keith wouldn’t accept it. Wouldn’t listen to him. After all, according to him, Lance was the reason Shiro was missing.

Perhaps it was just a desire to defend himself. Perhaps it was because he was hoping that this once Keith would take his side.

“Enough! One at a time!” Once again, silence fell at Keith’s outburst.

“You may be acting head of Voltron, but you do not speak to me in that manner.” Allura’s lip was literally curling as she turned on Keith. Keith took a half step back, but that’s all Allura needed to prove her dominance.

Unlike last time, Allura refused to give Lance the opportunity as she immediately turned back to him, holding up the device.

Lance took a few steps back. Now he could see Hunk and Pidge better, although they had approached the group. Pidge seemed focused on the device, and he watched in dismay as understanding seemed to wash over her.

Three against one now. Great.

Hunk opened his mouth to speak, but Pidge elbowed him and shook her head. Likewise, Coran stepped forward to speak, but he wasn’t able to before Allura continued.

“You were in possession of a rouge communications device, I demand to know where you got it.”

Silence followed her demand. Silence as each of them took in the implications of her words. Lance jutted his chin up. If he was going to own this, then he was going to do it with confidence, and, if it came to it, on his own terms.

“So. What?” He responded. “Why does it matter?”

“Because that’s what’s been giving out signals all this time.” Pidge responded before Allura could.
Pidge tore their gaze away from the device to look at Lance. “How could you?”

“How could I what?” Lance replied. He shrugged, half throwing up his hands and shaking them.

He knew what they were all implying. That he’d been giving away information. It didn’t matter what he said, they weren’t going to listen to him. None of them had been listening to him since this all started. He was just comic relief, or a punching bag for when someone needed to take frustrations out.

“You know what you’ve done.” Allura spat out. “We trusted you, and this is how you repay us?”

Oh yes. They trusted him. That totally explained their behavior as of late. Calling him useless, and blaming him for Shiro’s disappearance, and claiming he didn’t care about Shiro.

“You’ve been giving away information since Shiro disappeared according to the ship’s sensors.” Pidge accused. “I’ve even tried helping Coran locate that last night. Now I know why it was so hard to find… you were harboring it.”

“Guys, guys,” Hunk tried to intervene. “Maybe we should-” As per the habit lately, Allura interrupted.

“Pidge, we need to know where he got it. And what information he’s shared.” Allura handed Pidge the device. Lance didn’t know if it recorded his talks with Tyrac. It probably hadn’t, but at this point, Lance didn’t care. He could understand Allura’s point, but this was all the wrong way of going about it.

Those conversations were private. They were Lance’s rants. They were Lances moments of sunshine and happiness in this cold forsaken castle. They were his thoughts and feelings, especially of these past few days on the ship. His privacy was already invaded, and honestly, he didn’t want it violated further.

He was already acting before he could even finish his thought to do what he was going to do.

His actions only lasted a few seconds, but they felt like they occurred over the span of a year. It was almost like everyone was hit with sudden slow motion. Lance lunged forward, arm reached out, hand stretching. He felt the device his hand, and he mourned its existence even as he slapped it to the ground, and then stepped on it.

Abruptly, time seemed to return to normal as there were various shouts of dismay and alarm. In an attempt to stop him, Keith had lunged forward towards Lance, but had been too late. Now, Lance spun away from Keith, and danced back a couple of steps.

Well. Would he look at that? He managed to avoid Keith. Go him! Now, if only he could do this when they weren’t in this tense situation.

Hunk pulled Pidge away, the same way Coran did for Allura. Keith was between Lance and the others. Allura and Pidge were both staring at where the device used to be before their gaze slowly traveled down to the broken remains of it.

“I’ve had my privacy invaded enough, today, thank you.”

Silence reigned for maybe about five seconds. Everyone was stunned, but it was Pidge who broke the silence first.

“It wasn’t enough for you to just be useless in finding Shiro, was it? You had to make things
“Pidge!” Hunk and Coran chided her at the same time, but the words have already been spoken. Just like they came out before. Too little, too late, guys.

Useless. The word rattled around in Lance’s brain, knocking against his skull and echoing in his ears. Useless. He was so tired of that word.

“Fine.” Lance’s voice was hard as he spoke. He didn’t deserve this. If he was so useless, then they could manage without him. He didn’t need this crap.

He didn’t notice he was running until Keith grabbed his arm similar to how Allura did not too much earlier.

Lance dispatched Keith the same way he did with Allura. Leaving them both standing off in the hallway. Their chests were heaving. Lance opened his mouth to talk, but all he could do was pant. His chest hurt, but he didn’t want to stop and think of why.

“Don’t.” Keith was only able to get a word out before he swallowed thickly and tried again.

Something was swimming in Keith’s eyes. Any normal time, Lance would be trying to figure it out. But, this was not any normal time. Lance could care less. Not when Keith could be held accountable to some of this. Not when Keith had attributed to this. Not when he currently hated Keith.

Fuck the crush he once had on the other. He should have given it up at the Garrison when Keith first gave him the cold shoulder. He should have given it up when he realized Keith and Shiro were a thing. It shouldn’t have taken things getting this far before Lance decided Keith wasn’t worth this pain.

“Don’t what, wonderboy?” Lance sneered. The words still came out in pants, but that was okay. They had the reaction Lance hoped for. “Don’t you see I’m not wanted here?”

Keith reared back. It’s hard to say what just stunned Keith, but Lance wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth. Hello, Opportunity knocking. Lance bolted.

He didn’t realize he was at Blue’s hangar until he locked the doors behind him.

“Quiznak!” Keith’s voice was muffled, but the curse could still be clearly heard through the crashing noise of Keith hitting the door. But, that wasn’t important. What was important was that Blue’s bay doors were already open, and she was leaning down, ready for him. “Lance! Open the door!”

“Good girl, opening the door for me.” He murmured.

The bond was stronger here in the Hangar, but Lance knew the moment he stepped past the threshold into her, it’d be considerably stronger. He knew that she wasn’t sure about this. But, he could feel her trust, and, more than that, he could feel her agreement that the others were out of line.

He hesitated at the threshold. Once he stepped over, he wouldn’t be able to brush her off as easy as he had been. But perhaps that was for the better. He may not like the cold, but it was useful for numbing painful emotions, like the ones he was feeling.

There was a loud grating noise, and he turned to see Keith’s Marmora blade between the doors.
Keith was trying to pry them open. Good luck to him.

Good luck to himself. Lance had no gear, no armor, no bayard. He had nothing. Blue brushed against him, a gentle reminder that he had her. He couldn’t help to grin grimly at that. He looked back to the door, and then up at Blue and made his choice.

The moment he stepped in, he felt her attempt a sync. He fought it off, and launched instead. Blue washed over him. She supported him, but she didn’t think this was the right choice of action. Perhaps they should wait and talk this over with the rest of the team. Then again, she hit that catch-22. The rest of the team was being rather unreasonable right now.

“If you support me, then understand I can’t stay here right now.” Lance pleaded. Blue hesitated, and then she gave up, allowing him some peace.

It took a moment, but when she next tried to sync, he could feel through her the bonds of the other lions. It was a weaker bond than what they’d have if they were Voltron, and Lance couldn’t remember the last time it felt this weak. Regardless, it informed him that the others were in their lions.

Last to join was the Red Lion. Presumably because Keith had to go from Blue’s hangar to his own.

The communication window popped up and blinked. Normally the transition would just go through, but Blue was offering him the option to accept it. He felt how much she hoped he would.

He denied it.

She was no more happier about this whole situation than Lance was, but she wanted to work through it. She still thought they could be a team. She thought they still wanted Lance.

“Fat chance, beautiful.”

She had a mixed response at his words. Part of her was chiding him because she knew better, and she knew that he knew that he was still wanted. But, at the same time, she couldn’t help but to preen at being referred to as beautiful. Like him, she had a bit of vanity in her core, and loved compliments.

Another communication attempt came through. And another, and another, and another. After Lance denied the first few, she finally took over and started to auto deny them. She still disagreed, but she wasn’t arguing against him anymore. At least she was on his side.

She warned him as soon as she noticed, but even then, it was too late for Lance to avoid it.

It being the Red Lion slamming into Blue, sending them both spinning into an asteroid field. Blue hit against one, and static overtook the screens for a second before clearing. When they did, another communication attempt was waiting on the screen.

A private communication from Red, evidently.

Lance’s hand hovered over ‘accept’, and Blue pushed at him to push it, but at the last moment Lance shifted his hand to deny it.

He had to give it to Keith, though. He was persistent. Too persistent, if anyone asked Lance. Then again, maybe Keith just wanted to be the one to attack and take Lance down. Maybe Keith was after some sort of revenge for Shiro, for his delusions about Lance causing Shiro’s disappearance.
Or maybe he wasn’t. Lance wasn’t interested in finding out.

Lance was ready for the next slam from Red. The moment she moved, Lance rolled under her, turned on Keith, and – against Blue’s recommendation – fired an ice ray at Red. He knew he wouldn’t be able to outrun Red, but if he could slow her down, then maybe there’d be a chance for escape.

It wasn’t even that he wasn’t to escape forever. He just wanted… away. For just a bit. Just to think, and cool his head. To allow the others to cool their heads.

Surprisingly, Red took the hit.

For a brief moment, Lance felt bad; but then overwhelming shock and excitement flooded Lance. He couldn’t believe that he’d managed to hit Keith. The chances of it happening had been slim to none, especially given Lance’s luck as of late.

Yet, he managed to hit Keith. But, he couldn’t allow himself a moment to crow in victory. If he gave a moment, then that’d be all Red would need to take back control of the situation. He used Red as a launching pad, bouncing off of her. It had the effect of sending Lance away and the added bonus of pushing Keith further back.

As Voltron, they all felt the strange mind meld thing that allowed them to ‘become one’ to form Voltron. In their lions, the bonds were technically, still there. It just wasn’t as noticeable. Lance supposed that he was more susceptible to the ‘Voltron’ bond due to his bond with Blue; although things from the ‘Voltron’ bond while not in Voltron form seemed to filter through Blue first, leaving the sensations dull.

Lance was able to get some distance away from them all before there was a disturbance through that bond. Distress rippled through the bond, and Blue identified it as coming from Green.

Blue came to a halt by accord of both Blue and Lance’s desires. Behind them, Keith had already turned around and was headed back to where the Castle was. More communication attempts popped up before a wave of alarm washed through the bond.

Yellow this time.

As angry as he felt towards all of them, he couldn’t in good conscious just leave them. Especially since they were already down Shiro. They’d never trust him again if he just continued on his way. If he just took this opportunity to escape into the stars.

And then what? These people were all Lance had. Blue rumbled, adding in her sentiment. The other lions were her Pride, her family, her everything. She didn’t want to leave them anymore than Lance truly wanted to leave the other Paladins.

“He’d probably regret this choice later. Lance turned Blue around and headed back to the castle. He’d barely managed to leave the asteroid field when he discovered the cause. No doubt later the team would blame the Robeast on Lance, but Lance couldn’t just sit around and watch the remaining three Paladins try to fight this monster off.

It looked considerably smaller than the Robeasts they had been fighting. Which, Lance considered, may have been for the better considering their current team situation.
Regardless, without Shiro, it’d probably be for the best if they just distracted the monster long enough for Allura to make a wormhole with the castle, and then have the Lions follow behind. If that was the plan or not, Lance couldn’t tell. Mostly because he was still denying any and all communication attempts.

Against a Robeast, he probably should be talking to his teammates. But, if he talked to them, he was afraid that they’d just push him into wanting to leave them.

“Continue denying communication attempts, Blue.”

Blue wasn’t keen on the idea, but, she wasn’t going to force anything. Besides, they all could manage some form of connection to their Lions, no matter how they denied it. They could communicate through those bonds, no matter how weak they were.

Maybe if he proved himself in the fight, then Lance wouldn’t have to leave. Maybe they’d all cool off and get off his back. Wishful thinking, he knew.

Lance took a deep breath, and then pushed Blue forward into the fray.

Like all battles before, this one blurred in his mind. There was so much to keep track of, and without communications, it was difficult. Most warnings he received from the others came belated after being translated and filtered through Blue.

“Feels like the others don’t trust you either.” He muttered. Blue’s sorrowful whimper confirmed that, and rage once again burned in Lance. It wasn’t bad enough for them to treat him badly, now they had to discriminate against his lion too?

Keith seemed to be the only one who tried to try to keep sending Lance communication attempts. Private, general, open… if it was a communication attempt, then Keith had attempted it. Lance denied them all.

He was still denying those requests when he noticed the Robeast making a move for Red. Despite Red’s speed, there was no way that Lance could see her avoiding the hit. Ideally, Yellow would be best to take the hit for Red, but Hunk was too slow and too far away. Lance was the closest the Keith.

Lance didn’t have time to think about his choice before he already made it. Before he could even think about his actions, Lance synced up with Blue, sinking into her waters. For one moment, he could clearly see the bonds between them all like a multicolored twisted spiderweb.

Black was barely present, sleeping away in the hangar and not hearing the cries of the others. Yellow was panicked and rife with anxiety. Green was scared. And Red… Horror seeped from Red like blood from a cut.

As one unit, Blue and Lance moved.

All concern felt was immediately overtaken by the pain that ripped through them.

“Lance!” Lance could hear Keith calling his name, while at the same time, he could hear Red’s roar echo around him. His ears were ringing, and his eyes hurt against the bright red that Blue’s display had become.

Funny, Lance didn’t recall accepting any communication attempts.

There was a loud crashing noise as something slammed into Blue again, sending another wave of
pain through their bond. Blue’s flickering displays was the last thing Lance saw before there was yet another hit, and then, nothing as the darkness at the edges of his vision took over.

Chapter End Notes

#Sorry, not Sorry.

ALSO... I'm thinking about posting a chapter on Friday to honor Lance's Birthday. If you think that's a good idea, let me know on either Tumblr or in the comments. Also, if you guys want smut, I'll need to know. I've been on the fence about including it, so let me know. (I think I know the answer, but we'll see.)

ALSO! As a friendly reminder, while I may take information given in the Season 3 and Season 4 episodes (Like Lotor's lady Generals), the story-line of this will not be Canon Compliant.

ALSO (Last one, I promise), I'll be posting a Chapter on August 4th to celebrate the release of the Third Season.
Interlude: Clarity

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: Lance was having a bad day, and it only got worse when he entered his room to find Coran there, holding the Communication Device that Tyrac had given Lance. Coran attempted to find out more about it, but due to recent events and other characters, a fight broke out; causing Lance to flee the Castle.

Once Lance fled the Castle with Blue. A Robeast attacked. Lance/Blue turned back to assist, and ended up taking a powerful hit in place of Keith/Red.

Chapter Notes

So, I was convinced, lol. As promised, here's your Lance's Birthday Special Update. :)

Also, check out my Roommate's Comic for Lance's B-day: Art

As for the Smut Idea, I think I'll create a separate story and create a series so that people who don't want the smut don't have to read it, and those who do, I'll include a link and a comment. :)

“We still need to find the Blue Lion,” Allura announced.

Her gaze was on the star map before her. She showed no signs of fatigue or tiredness, which, Keith knew, she must have. After all, two Paladins and one Lion were missing now, and she’d been working tirelessly to try to locate them all.

It took all of Keith’s willpower not to sarcastically respond ‘no, you think?’ to her statement. If Lance were still here, he’d probably be the one to say it.

But Lance wasn't here, and therefore, the silence where Lance would have commented hung like a noose, reminding all of his absence.

Lance may have talked more than not, but Keith never realized just how much the team needed Lance for exactly that. He said the things that no one else could, or would, say.

It was because of Lance that Keith silently disagreed with Allura’s last statement. He could agree that they did need to find the Blue Lion, however, it wasn’t just the Lion that they needed to recover. They needed to find Lance too.

A Lion was of little use without a Paladin, as shown, quite plainly, by Black and Shiro.

In the space between his head and his body, he could feel the rumble of the Red Lion as she agreed with his thoughts. Her reactions, thoughts, and emotions weren’t quite mental, but they weren’t purely physical either.
Heat followed the phantom vibrations of her agreement, which he swore he could feel in his chest. He closed his eyes to brace himself as the heat filled his lungs, causing his breath to catch. A moment later he was able to breathe easily as he adjusted to Red’s heat.

Although, with Red like this, each breath of air felt like he was breathing in the dry arid desert air. His mouth felt dry, and every swallow of saliva threatened to make him cough.

It was all in head. He just needed to remember that. All in his head.

Faintly he could hear the other Paladins having a conversation. They were talking about the Robeast, and if it had anything to do with Lance or the communication device. Hunk asked something about why Coran was in Lance’s room, and Coran was saying something about him tracing the signal back to there.

But what did it matter when Lance was missing? Didn’t he deserve to be part of this conversation too? He had a right to defend himself!

Red rumbled, and Keith nearly swooned from the heat of her agreement.

“Keith? You sure you’re fine?” Pidge asked, but Keith didn’t hear her, too caught up in his thoughts.

Honestly, since the battle… since Lance sacrificed himself for Keith, Keith had been feeling sick. At first, he’d thought it was physical.

He felt hot. He felt clammy, but oddly dry. His balance seemed to be off, and he was about 90% sure it was because his head felt like it was in a fishbowl. The cause of that, he was pretty sure was the heat that seared against his skin, inside his skin.

Thankfully, he knew how to use the Cryopods and the Medical bay well enough to look himself over. Except, he had no fever, no sickness, nothing.

But now he knew it wasn’t that he was physically ill. He was sick of how they were treating Lance currently, especially since Lance wasn’t here to defend himself. He was sick from Red’s influence, which burned into him.

Although, he was pretty sure Red was more of a contributing factor than the injustices thrown in Lance’s direction.

Contrary to what some people (Lance) believed, Keith wasn’t an idiot.

They’d all been told that they were going to ‘bond’ with their lions. What they’d been told was nothing like what it actually ended up being. A proper heads up would have been nice. But then again, there wasn’t any real proper way to explain it, and since neither Coran or Allura had been Paladins, Keith supposed that they really might not have known.

Although, that explanation didn’t make anything better, to be honest.

He’d expected the bond with Red to be similar to the mind meld between Paladins during that one horrendous training day. The one training exercise that they’d all agreed to never return to. He’d expected the bond to be a sharing of thoughts, experiences, and ideas.

Which, in a way, he supposed it was. Keith just hadn’t expected the phantom sensations and the practically constant heat.
Good grief that heat. He could live without it. Really.

Keith had lived, for the better part of a year, in a hovel shack, in the middle of a quiznaking desert with no air conditioning, while wearing a jacket. Keith could handle heat.

He didn’t think he could handle this.

Seriously. A warning would have been nice! Then again, he’d been given a warning, in a way, through Lance. Lance, who’d described ‘talking’ with Blue. Right from the get go, he’d said that he wasn’t really talking with Blue, it was like she was feeding ideas into him, or something like that.

That felt like a more accurate description then whatever the heck Allura and Coran had said.

And Keith knew that Lance had a better idea of the whole ‘bond’ with the Lions thing because he’d felt it when he brushed – for lack of better word – against Lance in the battle. In that battle with the Robeast, the monster had tried to hit Keith, and then… and then everything changed.

Like a record, the memory seemed to start playing in his mind without his permission. It started at the moment he realized he was going to be hit; the moment he realized that he couldn’t do anything about it.

And then there was Lance.

He’d physically reached out for Lance, despite knowing that he couldn’t actually touch him. Despite knowing that he couldn’t catch him as he fell.

Yet, he could recall, in crystal clarity the icy cold water trickling between his fingers, the streams growing larger until his arm was numb from the chill and the force of the current. The force of the Robeast’s hit slammed Blue into Red; and they slammed into Keith and Red like a tsunami, washing over them with their feelings, doubts, and insecurities.

It was like they were wearing those stupid Mind Meld devices, but it was more than that. It was stronger than that. It was like they were forming Voltron; but different, because it was just the two of them.

What was worse, was that now that Keith was aware of it, he couldn’t not be anymore. He could feel the jagged edges of where he’d meet with the others, where there’d be more with them too. Even worse than that was the hollow emptiness where Blue should have been.

He’d felt Blue there, and now, it was gone.

He could deal with the emptiness caused by the others, since he’d never properly felt them, but… he’d felt Blue. He’d felt Lance.

He’d felt them both, and suddenly stuff was starting to make sense. Like why Lance was always wearing his jacket, and why sometimes he’d shiver and pull his jacket closer when he thought no one else was looking. Which was ridiculous, because it was Lance, and who wouldn’t be looking at him?

Just the brush from Lance during the battle still had Keith shivering from just the memory. If just brushing against Lance had felt like that… then what would it feel when everyone was bonded? When they were all connected?

Between Pidge and Hunk, considering their ‘elements’, Keith was willing to bet that one of them
would be suffocating, and Keith was so not looking forward to experiencing that.

Yet, for all of his fear of connecting with Lance like that again, Keith was excited. That connection had been everything and nothing at once. Keith needed to experience it again. They all needed to experience it. Besides, perhaps Keith could provide Lance some warmth and in exchange, Lance could offer some icy coldness to help combat the heat.

Perhaps that what the bonds of Voltron were all about. The give and take of each other, merging together, being one. It was a shame they all hadn’t experienced it.

“Keith?” A hand touched his shoulder and he jumped, looking up to see Hunk gazing down at him, concern evident in his dark brown eyes.

“I’m fine.” Keith replied, already figuring what the question was.

But the truth was, Keith wasn’t fine. He hadn’t been fine in a long time. Shiro was gone. He couldn’t do as Shiro asked and be the leader the team needed. He couldn’t get Black to wake up. He couldn’t find Shiro. And now Lance was gone, and the team was fractured.

“I just need some time to think.” Keith continued. He smiled up at Hunk, and then headed for the doors. Some part of him wanted to go the training room, but he knew he couldn’t. Memories of what he said and did to Lance haunted him there.

He hadn’t meant to take his frustrations out on Lance, and it wasn’t until later that he realized that he shouldn’t have said what he said. Keith had tried to apologize to Lance, but it was a bit difficult to talk to him when he was actively avoiding Keith. If he’d known this was going to happen, he would have tried a whole lot harder.

Keith was never quite sure what to think of Lance. On some days, Lance was annoying. He never took anything seriously, like everything was a joke. He laughed too much and his voice was too loud. He was nothing but bad jokes, puns, and pick up lines.

Even Allura couldn’t stand Lance most days, and Shiro only seemed to tolerate him. The only ones who seemed to spend large amounts of time with Lance were Coran, Hunk, and occasionally, Pidge.

Honestly, Keith had never thought much of Lance. Keith had thought of Lance as… shallow. He was a pretty face, but there wasn’t much more to him.

Except there was.

Sometimes, Lance was more. He was everything that was needed. Those moments were rare, but Keith would never forget walking into the common room to see Lance comforting Pidge whenever she got upset and disheartened about being unable to find her family so far. Or how he’d distract Hunk whenever Hunk’s anxiety seemed to spike up. Or the effort he went through at the Mall to get Pidge that video game that she’d wanted.

…

Or all the movie references and modern jokes that Lance would take the time to explain for Keith.

Lance was a silent companion to listen to one’s woes. He was a shoulder to cry on, or a body to hug. He was a non-judging comfort. More than that, he was so self-sacrificing. He sacrificed himself for Coran in the beginning, and for Keith now.
Not to mention his smile, when it was genuine, was beautiful. Lance smiled not only with his mouth, but with his whole body. His smile showed his in eyes, in his hands, in his stance. It was refreshing to see someone who wore their emotions so very openly, especially in a group of people who didn’t.

But it was a problem too, because Lance didn’t just show his happiness, but all his other emotions too. Lance’s reaction to Shiro being missing was about the same as Lance’s reaction to Keith being part Galra: indifference. For all that Lance had appeared to care, it seemed like he just didn’t care about Shiro. Or at least, if he did, he didn’t let it show.

For being so… shallow, it turned out there were hidden depths to Lance.

Keith knew this now, but then… then he hadn’t. Then he’d been confused, and frustrated at various other things, and then he’d gotten angry at Lance, and… well… Keith regretted what he said.

It didn’t stop Red from tormenting him by replaying the memory over and over in his mind. He could practically hear her say ‘this isn’t how you treat your teammates.’

He’d never be able to apologize to Lance if Lance wasn’t found. And for all they knew, perhaps Lance didn’t want to be found. After all, he’d been trying to leave before they’d been attacked by the Robeast.

As if thinking the word summoned the memory of the battle, it played out in his head again. Red’s response in the memory mirrored her response in the present. Heat flickered up through Keith’s body, burning him from the inside, choking his lungs with dry air and smoke. Clouding his eyes with tears as her overwhelming anguish and mourning burned through him.

Keith had to stop and use the cool wall of the castle as a support as he waited out Red’s firestorm of emotions.

That was another thing he could have been warned about. He’d been told that the Red Lion was temperamental. No one said anything about her being emotional too.

Slowly, the fires of her emotion died back down to low embers of heat, and Keith was able to continue once more. Although, he wasn’t surprised that in his wanderings, he’d found himself at Red’s hangar.

He looked up at Red, and contemplated their new ‘bond’. He’d always been able to feel her, to locate her, to call her in his time of need. But now he could feel everything: her grief, her sorrow, her worry and concerns. There was anger too. Anger at him, at Black, at Blue, at Lance, at the world in general.

Like he said, temperamental and emotional.

She was furious at Keith, in particular. He could feel her anger simmering under the surface. He took a deep breath, and let himself fall into Red.

Red welcomed him with fire. She embraced him, surrounded him. She burned through him until there wasn’t anything to burn anymore and he wasn’t Keith, and she wasn’t Red, and neither existed in the singular sense anymore. Keith and Red were no longer Keith and Red; they were just them.

They were upset. They were scared. They were angry. They were angry at themselves.
They’d waited so long to reach this point of communication, and now, now, finally, they reached it, but at what cost? For what reason? Their combined interest in Blue? Blue, the only thing to soothe the flames of their existence, to quench the thirst of their heat.

It didn’t matter, Blue was missing. All of Blue was missing, and all that remained of Black was the container. Perhaps Black remained, but he was unresponsive to the cries and needs of the pride.

The pride was broken, and they helped break it.

No, not them. The Red Paladin helped break it. And not just Red, but Green, Yellow, and yes, even the Black and Blue Paladins. If the Blue Paladin had let them apologize! If the Black Paladin hadn’t vanished!

Anger surged, although the only one who felt it was Keith, who came back to himself and fell to his knees, unable to stand under the duress of the sync.

“I get it!” Keith told her, looking up at her. “I get it. I messed up, and I’m sorry!”

For all intents and purposes, she sniffled and turned her nose up at him. In reality, she was still and dark.

“What do you want me to do?” He asked. “Do you want to go out and try to find them?” A pointless endeavor considering Allura would be best to do that. Besides, then they’d be breaking the pride up even more.

“What do you feel you should do?” Keith whirled around at the voice and glared at the one who’d spoken.

“What are you doing here?” Keith hissed out. “What do you want?”

“A happy ending, if it’s possible.” Slav shrugged. “One where I live would be most preferable.”

Keith scoffed and shook his head. Why was he even asking Slav anything? Everyone knew that he was a total nut job, supposedly a genius or not.

“She’s about instincts, right? Follow those.” Easy enough advice for Slav to give.

However, following that advice was more difficult than it sounded. His instincts were at war. He was conflicted over so much. What he felt. How Lance felt. What he’d heard, and what he remembered.

It wasn’t so easy to just ‘follow his instincts’.

He wanted to believe Lance, he really did, but at the same time… Lance had felt guilty. Keith had felt it. More than that, Keith had felt… more anger than he thought Lance possessed. There’d been more, but in the few seconds that they’d been… connected, Keith hadn’t been able to process it all.

He wondered if Lance had ‘felt’ Keith too? Had Blue and Lance both felt what Keith and Red were feeling at the time? Or had the connection been a one-way street? Too many questions, not enough answers.

Lance and Blue hadn’t lasted long after the initial hit. He’d felt them both… dull, for lack of better word. He supposed that ‘dull’ was probably the best term for it. They’d dulled. Their vibrant blue faded to grey, and then they’d been batted aside, tossed away like trash.
Anger flared up at the thought, and with it, fire. He burned with Red, meeting her anger for the situation with his own until she settled down, her fire dimming to a low simmer in his heart.

“Paladins,” Allura’s voice comes over the castle’s speakers, “Please report back to the Bridge. I’ve located the Blue Lion.”

Keith expected elation at the declaration, but Red responded with trepidation and worry. Red didn’t trust easily. She was temperamental, judgmental, emotional, and kind of rude. Blue on the other hand… Keith remembered Blue.

She was cold, there was no mistaking that, but… Allura had said that Blue was the most accepting of new Paladins, and Keith could understand that now. Although she was cold, she was trusting. Although, that was only because that trust, once lost, was hard to gain back. Similarly to how once gained, Red’s trust was nearly unshakable.

Perhaps that was another trait that manifested in the Paladins. After all, Keith had tried so hard to talk to Lance, even before the battle. And then, after the fight, Keith had chased after Lance to get his story. He’d even bombarded him with communication attempts.

And perhaps, Lance would have talked… had Keith not needlessly blamed Lance that day in the training room.

“Don’t worry, Red, we’ll figure this out.”

Red’s heat simmered inside him, flickering almost peacefully with the rumbles of a sudden reassuring purr. Keith’s hand rose to his heart, unconsciously trying to grab and hold onto that warmth.

“If anyone can give me the happy ending I’m looking for, it’s you.” Keith turned back to Slav, furrowing his eyebrows as he looked over the alien. “You should head up to the bridge. Your chances at finding the Blue Paladin dwindle with each second you spend here.”

Slav didn’t even need to finish the sentence before Keith was racing back to the Bridge. After all, he needed to find Lance. Hopefully, it wouldn’t be much longer until they could resolve this all.

Hopefully.
Crashed

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith is dealing with guilt after having lost Lance after Lance took a hit that was meant for him and Red. The only 'good thing' to come from everything is that he was able to connect with Red, similar to how Lance could connect with Blue.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometimes Lance didn’t dream so much as remember.

He didn’t get to choose what he remembered. His mind took moments and replayed them out on repeat, allowing him to go back through and change things at his leisure. He remembered watching ‘Groundhog Day’ and being terrified that he’d get stuck in a never-ending loop, but now… now he was happy for this.

It hurt sometimes. It hurt to go to sleep at night and relive his happier days with his family, or the exciting first days at the Garrison.

Sometimes he’d remember his first meeting with Keith, and how things could have gone so much better. That memory hurt too, mostly because no matter what he said or did, the dream always ended with Lance’s heart hurting, and feeling abandoned and lost.

Recently, it seemed like if Keith was in a dream, then Lance would mess up somehow in some way. It wasn’t just Keith where things were evidently set in stone. Lance would always: mess up things with Keith; disappoint Shiro; and annoy Allura.

Facts of life, he supposed.

It was tiring and annoying; and days where he had those dreams were the days he felt like he didn’t sleep at all.

But then there were days where he was reliving a day trip to the beach with his siblings, baking and cooking with his mother in the kitchen, or helping his dad out at the small store he owned. Those were the best dreams, the ones where Lance didn’t touch anything at all because everything was perfect as it was.

This felt like one of those. Although, he couldn’t quite place when or where it’d happened.

He was sitting on the beach, watching the sun set into the ocean. The sky was painted in brilliant warm red, golds, oranges, and yellows. The colors smeared and blurred like paint on a palette. The clouds looked like waterdrops on watercolor, with bright white golden halos thinly circling around them. The sun was half dipped in the ocean, and each little wave of the ocean shined in the light, like someone dropped glitter over the surface of the water.

It was a postcard picture. The perfect view.
And despite the distant sound of traffic and cars behind him, it was peaceful and calm.

His feet were half submerged in the waves that washed up, burying his feet under cool sand before the tide took it all way when the wave washed back out to sea. His hands were under still sun warmed sand. A gentle breeze ruffled his hair.

Lance closed his eyes, and let himself sink into the serenity of the moment. He knew when the sun fully set by the cool darkness when washed over him. The water was rising, going from his ankles to his calves, to his knees, and then to his thighs.

If he didn’t move soon, it was very possible that the waves would just wash over him. There was a pull he felt to the sea, to the sky, and to the stars. He’d always felt it, for as long as he could remember, but now that he knew what it was, he was content to ignore it.

If only it was content enough to let him.

A wave washed over him, and he without warning the ground dropped out from under him. He was left suspended in a moment of time, submerged in water. He was lost in that moment, not knowing which way was up or down and not actually caring either way.

He felt Blue before anything else.

She hit him like a current of icy water, and dragged him down deeper into the depths of the ocean. Or was she dragging him back up to the surface? Blue’s roar echoed in his ears, as loud as the crash of the tide.

Her worry ran through him, along with her comfort that everything would be okay. It sounded like she was trying to comfort herself just as much as him.

He broke the surface, and the stars were spread out in a dazzling spread above him. The water glinted off the moon’s light and reflected the stars. For all intents and purposes, he was swimming in a sea of stars.

Amidst the roar of the surf, a fog horn from a lighthouse bellowed in the distance, echoed by the quieter returning cries of a ship. Except, no, that wasn’t a fog horn. It was… It was just an alarm. His ears were ringing as the noise became louder and louder. Blue was pulling at him, asking him to wake up and…

Lance opened his eyes to flashing red lights. He blinked, the vision before him blurring, the brilliant red color burning his eyes. Lance closed his eyes again, but he could still see the red flashing light from behind his eyelids.

Relief, potent and thick, settled deep into his chest and made his heart heavy. It took him a moment to realize that it was not his own that he was feeling, but Blue’s.

All at once the noise stopped, the cockpit went dark. Blue fell silent, becoming a small quiet presence in the back of his mind. He could hear water splash against her body, and she gently rocked at the motion.

Well, that told him a couple of different things, some of which were good, and some… not so much.

Lance was surrounded by water. The sound and motions probably helped cause that weird dream. Also, Blue didn’t float. So, where ever he was, he was on a beach or a sandbar. The waves were strong enough to rock Blue, so hello, strong waves that Lance wasn’t even going to attempt to mess
with. The fact he felt Blue rocking told him that her inertial dampeners were probably out. Which meant no space travel for him, at least while inside of Blue.

Failed inertial dampeners never meant anything good. Depending on whether the inertial dampeners failed during or after the crash, then Lance may have some pretty extensive bruising.

Awh, who was he kidding? He was gonna have some pretty bad bruising regardless of when they failed. Although, if they’d failed during the crash, he’s pretty sure he would have been thrown out of the pilot’s chair.

Which, ouch, just thinking about it sucks. Especially since he would have been thrown into the display. Oh well, he had other things to worry about. Like… Blue.

Trying to stand was difficult. It felt like his whole body was numb and weighed down. There was that strange tingling feeling of limbs coming back to life, and he was almost afraid to move and risk hurting himself. He half collapsed against the center console – which didn’t flair up to life—when his leg buckled out from under him.

“This sucks.”

Why did he ever want to be a pilot again? Crashes really sucked.

Blue let out a quiet wounded purr of agreement. Communication was down again, but she’d been damaged enough to activate her emergency beacon. Allura would, hopefully, find that and pick them up.

“Ha.” Lance laughed dryly.

As if Allura wanted to pick him up. He’d bet his non-existent money that Allura wouldn’t allow him back on the castle. He tried to stand again as feeling returned to his legs.

“Allura doesn’t want me on the Castle.” He muttered.

He got the vague impression that Blue disagreed, but was staying silent just to avoid an argument. The console flickered briefly, but never stayed on long enough for Lance to do anything. Her presence was growing smaller. She was tired, and injured, and well, Lance couldn’t fault her for wanting rest. Almost as if waiting for those exact thoughts, the console quit flickering, and then just like that, she was gone.

If he needed her, he was sure that he’d be able to wake her back up. But for now, he could let her rest.

“It shouldn’t take Allura that long to pick us back up.” He muttered himself. Yet he couldn’t help but remember the anger in her eyes, and the sharpness of her tone as she yelled at him. But he had to stay hopeful for Blue’s sake.

Last time he was stranded, and the time before that, it’d taken Allura about a day to find him. They shouldn’t have to wait long, and if they did… well, Lance had left some of the food from Tyrac in here, along with all the water.

The ticks passed by slowly. Especially with Blue out of commission.

When she did wake, her presence was always fleeting, and pain always leaked through to Lance. It was so much worse than last time, and she knew that Lance wouldn’t be able to help her. The waves were too strong, and the damage was too bad.
To keep himself from going crazy, he ransacked Blue’s inner compartments. When that failed, he listened to the waves, counting them out to the beat of his song. He was timing them, in case Allura didn’t come and the rations he had ran out.

It was hard to do here, since the tides were weird. But based on how they hit, he’s more confident in his assessment that Blue was at least half submerged on a sandbar or beach.

A day passed.

Lance slept in the small bunk provided in the back of Blue. It’s meant exactly for this. Well, this, diplomatic overnight stays, or multiple day missions where he’d need to camp out in his lion. He’d thought he’d find sleep easier with the sound of the waves hitting up against Blue. He thought wrong.

He spent most of the night doing exactly what he’d been doing before: timing the waves and learning the tides.

By the third day, Lance accepted that Allura isn’t going to come for them. This was the longest it’d ever taken her to come, and the only reason Lance could think of was because he was there. Like he told Blue, Allura doesn’t want him. He wasn’t fit to be a Paladin. Not since he was evidently a ‘spy’.

Speaking of that, Lance would have killed for the communication device. Silence and solitude was something Lance wasn’t equipped to handle. He needed people, communication, noise. He needed life.

He would have cried to hear someone’s voice other than his own.

If he thought that the castle was cold and lonely, then he knew nothing. This was so much worse. Here, he truly was alone, in a small, cold, dark place.

Tyrac was probably worried about him. This was the longest Lance had gone without speaking to him, not that he could with the device left broken at the castle.

His family was probably worried too. Quiznak, Lance would sell his soul to see his family again, even for a moment.

The team, on the other hand… they probably weren’t worried about him. If they were truly worried, then they would have found him by now. They wouldn’t have left him out here.

But he was stuck out here because he took a hit for Keith. That was what Keith wanted anyways, wasn’t it? That was what the whole thing with Shiro was about. Sorta.

Except, Lance had done exactly what he’d done last time: blacked out and ended up who-knew-where.

Maybe he wasn’t cut out for being a Paladin. Like he told Coran: he just wanted to go home. Except, he couldn’t. He didn’t have any way to get home, and even if he did, Earth was so far away.

Going back home was a pipe dream. It was never going to happen, and it as much as it hurt, it was the truth. He was going to die out in space, having never really said a proper goodbye to his family and friends. He was going to die alone, cold and miserable in the vastness of space.

Lance only had one thing left: Blue. And Allura and the others were going to take her away from
him. If he didn’t leave, then Blue was never going to be picked up, and then she’d never get repaired. And even if he stayed with Blue and Allura and the others showed up, the chances that they’d take him back were so slim, he was sure he’d end up being left here without Blue.

The only option he saw to best protect himself was to let go of Blue himself. It’d hurt less. And who knew, maybe by his leaving, Allura would come and find Blue.

It took Lance five days to make up his mind, and on the morning of the sixth, Lance left Blue.

It was oddly relieving to know that he’d been right about something. Blue was half buried in glittering blue sand, and being pelted by the churning purple waves which crashed against her with enough force to almost throw Lance off Blue.

The fact he hadn’t realized the waves were that strong was promising that the inertial dampeners weren’t too terribly damaged. Not that it mattered to Lance anymore.

Blue was stuck in a sandbar of sorts, although, thankfully, this one wasn’t too far from the beach proper. There was a couple of feet of shallow water between Blue and the beach, which Lance was sure wouldn’t take long for him to transverse.

That was, if he was correct about it being shallow.

Based on how high the water came up on Blue, plus the fact he knew she was at least partially buried, he could roughly estimate that it was shallow water. But, the blue sand blended in with the purple waves a bit too well, and honestly, visually, Lance wasn’t convinced that he wasn’t going to just jump into some water of indeterminable depths.

It was just his luck that Blue was awake on the day he chose to leave, too.

Already, she was chiding him, reminding him that if he’d been wearing his armor – which he hadn’t thought or wanted to grab on his flight from the castle – then this wouldn’t be a problem. Besides which, she didn’t want him to leave. She didn’t want to be alone, not again, not after all those years waiting for Lance to show up.

Lance pursed his lips, and inhaled sharply through his nose. The salt in the air was familiar to home and stung his lungs. It was a bittersweet pain.

“Calm down, beautiful.”

Another wave hit against Blue and he hid his stumble by sliding down so he was sitting on top of her, his legs dangling down on the side facing the beach. Patronizingly, he patted her a few times.

“I’ll be back before you know it.” The words tasted sour and salty in his mouth, although it may have just been the sea air that he was tasting. “It’s just a supply run.”

She whined, audibly; the noise a call out on his bullshit and an attempt to tug on his heart strings. They both knew she wasn’t dumb. In a way, she was a part of him. Even if she hadn’t been privy to his thoughts of leaving, she could still feel the echoes through their bond.

Didn’t mean Lance was going to admit it.

“I left my jacket in you. You know I’d never leave that behind.” He tried to reassure her. He’d left it in her for that reason, and also because it wouldn’t survive well if he had to go in water. And, also because he was sort of hoping that maybe one of the others would keep it to remember him by.
The breeze ruffled his hair, bringing with it the spray of the ocean as another wave hit against Blue. He tilted his head back, closed eyes looking up into the sky and letting the warmth of the sun beat down upon his face. He was lucky this was a world that didn’t require his helmet.

Man, he missed the sun. This was a pale comparison, but, it was something.

Blue was not reassured, which was fair. She was a mind reading sentient war machine, and Lance could respect that. She bristled. If he respected that, then he wouldn’t be lying to her.

“Fair enough,” He muttered, and ran a hand through his hair.

Some part of him debated giving Allura some more time. He felt better now that he wasn’t cooped up in Blue. But there was still an itch that he couldn’t scratch, a thought floating in the back of his mind: Allura wouldn’t come for Blue; not while he was there.

Lance looked back down at the churning purple water. It sparkled in the sunlight, or maybe he was seeing the glitter of the sand… or the reflection of the light blue sky? Ugh. Lance would complain about all the cool colors, but he didn’t want to offend Blue more than he already had.

This was supposed to be a goodbye after all. He ignored Blue’s rumble at the admission.

Lance hated goodbyes, but Blue already called him out on his lie, and really, Blue deserved better. She deserved so much more. She deserved a better paladin, pilot, and friend. She deserved someone who was as skilled at being a pilot as Keith, calm and diplomatic as Shiro, smart as Pidge, or as useful as Hunk. She deserved someone smarter, more likable… someone useful and better and not Lance.

“Look, Blue. I don’t want to leave you,” He started, pausing for a sigh. “But this is something I gotta do.” He took a deep breath and pushed himself off Blue, sliding down her and landing in the water with a splash.

The shock of hitting the cold water helped hide Blue’s reaction to his words. She was adamantly protesting against this.

The water was deeper than originally estimated, coming up to Lance’s chest. It was cold too, but nowhere near as cold as Blue. Lance was pretty sure that there wasn’t much as cold as Blue. And, after so much time with her, he was used to the cold, and how it sunk through his flesh and into his bones. He could handle this.

This was cakewalk compared to Blue.

Lance turned back around to give Blue another pat, wincing as he heard her whine again.

“Allura won’t come if I’m here.” He pursued his lips again, and watched her shudder, this time not with the force of a wave but from the strain of trying to move. “Y… you’re hurt.” He cleared his voice halfway through the sentence, and had to look away as he saw her shudder again. “You’re hurt and… and… if I leave, Allura will come get you.”

“I can’t help you, Blue. This... this is the… this is for the best of everyone.”

Blue was reaching out for him now, desperate and scared. He felt her emotions echoed in himself, in the pain in his chest and the sudden difficulty in breathing. His hand was shaking when he pulled back away from Blue, and he took a few steps backwards, stumbling under sand that gave away too easily under his shoes.
Blue shuddered again. Her eyes lit up yellow as she attempted a roar. A wave crashed into her, and she fell silent, the light from her eyes fading.

Lance turned his back to her, wiping away at the water on his face, and told himself it was just the sea water that’d been splashed upon his face.

The waves, while broken from Blue, still crashed into him, sending him spinning forward a couple times, but it was always in the direction he needed. He wasn’t sure how much time he spent wading through the strange purple water until he hit the beach, but it couldn’t have been too long.

The tiny blue crystals that make up the sand stuck to his shoes and clothes, kicked up by his dragging feet, and sticking due to the dampness of his clothes. He was pretty sure there was sand in his hair too, from the few times he took a tumble in the water.

Physically, Blue remained silent. In the back of his mind, however, he felt her. She was a constant presence trying to coerce him into turning around and returning. She’d already more Paladins leave then she wanted to, she didn’t want to see another.

Lance wasn’t giving her much of a choice in that regard.

The others didn’t want him. They didn’t trust him, and they didn’t want him on the castle. And that was fair. He didn’t want to be there anymore than they wanted him.

He didn’t look back at Blue as he walked up the beach. He didn’t look back at her when the sand turned to bluish green stone and dirt. He didn’t turn back when his clothes dried, and some of the sand fell off of him with every step, catching the light of the sun like jewels as they fell. He didn’t turn back as the sky darkened and he approached a settlement with what looked like outgoing traffic going up to a… space mall moon.

How convenient for him. Finally, something seemed to be looking out for him.

The locals were strange creatures, with large bug eyes and no mouths that he could see. Their heads were mostly taken up by horns; and they remind Lance of larger, taller versions of the Arusians. Thankfully, they had translators, and Lance was able to convey to them that he wanted to go to the swap moon.

The further he was from Blue, as much as it hurt, the better.

Thankfully, money didn’t seem to matter for these guys. They took one look at Lance before they swarmed him, and when he expressed that he wanted to go to the Swap moon/Space mall place, they’d been more than happy to help him get there.

Maybe they really liked him enough to want to help him. Or perhaps, they just want Lance off their planet. He was the stranger here, after all.

The trip up was uncomfortable, and Lance revised his thoughts of them trying to get rid of him.

Those on the shuttle seemed to be taken with him. They all wanted to touch him: his hair, his arms, his legs, his clothes… but mostly his hair. Thankfully, once at the trader moon, they all dispersed to the destinations, leaving Lance standing alone in the lobby. For once, Lance wasn’t going to complain about being alone.

Lance sat down on a bench, letting out a sigh and tipping his head back to look up at the fractal glass ceiling.
He wasn’t sure where he was going, or even if he was making the right choice. Part of him heavily debated turning back around and going to Blue. But, no. He’d left her; hopefully so Allura could find her and take care of her. Maybe even find her a new Paladin.

So where did that leave Lance? He could try to find a way back to Earth? And possibly lead the Galra back there? Ha. Nope. Lance didn’t think so.

Living in a Space Mall wouldn’t be the worst thing ever. He’d contemplated living in a mall when he was younger. Dreaming up zombie invasions and what he’d do and where he’d go. He was past those days. Time to dream bigger, and what was bigger than a mall that was literally an entire moon?

That still left him with the question of ‘what now’.

Did he stay here and become a space mall hobo? Should he live out the rest of his days as a Space Pirate? With what ship and what crew? Settle down and become an obedient member of the Galra Empire society? Ha! He’d rather die.

That was probably the fate awaiting him, anyways.

He was a strange creature, on a strange planet – well, moon now – far, far away from his home. … Maybe he’d get lucky and get a cushy life in a zoo or something. He could see it now. He’d make a fabulous exhibit. He could even do tricks for decent food that wasn’t space goo.

Thanks to his past experiences with aliens, like the ones who helped him get up here. Maybe alien creatures found him as pretty as he found long haired half Galras or Alteans, or… fuck it, he could find beauty in quite a few alien races. So maybe they could find beauty in him?

Wait.

Tyrac! Tyrac was a trader! It was possible that no one had heard of him here, but, this was a Trade Moon… sooooo… It was a long shot, but maybe he wasn’t as alone as he thought. All he needed to do was find a store keeper or a shopper or someone who knew Tyrac, and ask if they could get a message out to him.

Easy peasy, lemon squeezy!

Even better, Tyrac knew all about Lance’s troubles with his previous team, and so far, had been judgement free for Lance. Why was Lance only just now thinking about this?! He should have asked Tyrac for assistance ages ago, back when he was still on the Castle of Lions and miserable.

In the meantime, though, Lance needed to figure out some short-term stuff. Like, what he was going to do until he found Tyrac or someone who knew him. Lance could always go get some GAC from a fountain, like he and Pidge did when they visited the other space mall… or he could do what Hunk did and find some work.

Honestly, he’d rather do what he did with Pidge, but, like so many things, the memory hurt to think of. Besides, he didn’t want security attacking him again. As funny as it was then, he didn’t have the option to escape easily this time.

Besides, if he did some work, then he’d see and meet more people, which meant more opportunities to ask about Tyrac. And, if he could get some GAC to his name, that’d just be a bonus.

Alright, he had a plan now… now it was just a matter of making it happen.
Here's a preview to something Ghost, my roommate, may or may not be working on related to Chapter 13. It’s nothing big from the chapter. Just a small little something that Ghost helped me with.

In celebration of Season 3, I will be posting on Friday, August 4, 2017. :) That day will be a special day, with a Bonus Chapter posting. (Please note, Bonus Chapters are significantly smaller chapters.)
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance crashed on an alien planet. After nearly a week of no sign of a rescue, Lance decided that the reason no one was coming for them was because of his presence. Lance didn’t want Blue to suffer further, so he said his goodbyes, and ended up traveling to a Swap Moon, aka: Space Mall.

Getting a job at the Space Mall was surprisingly easier than Lance had first suspected. Or perhaps it wasn’t too surprising, considering that Hunk managed it in the other Space Mall in less than a varga; although for him it’d been a very short lived indentured servant/slave kind of deal.

Which Lance made sure not to end up in, thank you very much.

Lance’s new job was a whole lot less stress inducing than being a Defender of the Universe, although, that wasn’t to say it didn’t come with its own different stresses. Retail was retail, no matter where in the universe it was, evidently.

Customers weren’t too bad, although they had a horrible habit of gawking at Lance like they’d never seen a human before. Which Lance knew wasn’t true since a good majority of the Exotic Goods shop that he worked at sold human items.

In Alien terms, ‘exotic goods’ meant items from pre-warp planets, and Earth was evidently produced the most popular ‘exotic’ items.

Ugh. Lance hated being called exotic.

BUT, it was because Lance was ‘exotic’ that Lita gave him a job at her shop. It wasn’t like Lance had to do anything really difficult. He just needed to look pretty, sell some stuff, sometimes explain what something was, and try not to murder the customers because the translators didn’t want to work properly with him.

In exchange for those services, Lita gave him a place to stay via her couch, food, and occasionally some lunch money he could spend at some of his favorite food places.

Sure, it sucked being surrounded by things that reminded him of home all the time, but there were plenty of distractions available. Lita often encouraged, and enforced, breaks, and during those times, Lance was free to wander the mall as he saw fit. And the mall was nothing if not full of distractions.

Lance had met more aliens through this mall than he’d ever met during all his travels as a Paladin of Voltron. So far, he’d met Unilu, Galra, Olkari, and so many others.

The Galra mostly worked security – and were heavily avoided – but some were shop owners, traders, or customers. The Unilu owned most of the shops. He’d ran into some Olkari, some sloth-people, bird-people, and some blob like androgynous people. Honestly, he’s seen too many
different species to list them all off, just like he’d seen so many different wares: from Human video games to Olkari goods, or even Balmerian Crystal Jewelry.

Allura and Coran may have known a lot about different species and cultures, but their information was 10,000 years out of date. All of Lance’s new-found information was 90% up to date, and recent.

For example, for as much as Coran was all like ‘Unilu = bad’, the Unilu here were pretty chill. Most of the ones he interacted with were around his age, like Lita, Rueben, or Anita. And they weren’t much different from how humans acted around this age.

It was a bit disheartening that despite everyone he’d met, not a single one of them knew of Tyrac. It wasn’t like he’d expected instant success, but he’d hoped to have some sort of progress to the future. He couldn’t be a space mall hobo forever after all.

Ignoring his failure in finding out about Tyrac, Lance felt he was learning a lot. He was learning about different species, learning about different cultures, and also, unfortunately, learning about politics.

The last part couldn’t be helped seeing as Reuben’s Snack and Sandwich bar wasn’t far from one of the lobby areas; the most prominent features of which were the large televisions which proudly displayed mall information, commercials, and current Galra propaganda.

And oh, was the propaganda strong in this mall, especially compared to the last one he’d been in.

Perhaps it had something to do with this Prince Lotor guy taking over as Emperor while his father recovered from some injuries, the cause of which had not been officially covered. Then again, considering the content of the propaganda, perhaps it was just normal for this mall.

Although, a good deal of the propaganda seemed to be targeted towards children. Which, in a sick twisted way, made sense. After all, children were the voice of the future.

There was some cartoon, Battle for the Stars, that told the story of Zarkon’s win against the Alteans ten thousand years ago. There were a couple of places which aired the episodes, most of them children play areas or food areas.

The playgrounds were designed to look like the giant battle cruisers in Zarkon’s fleet. Kid’s meals came with toy versions of the blasters that the sentries used. Lance’s favorite cookie shop sold Empire Emblem shaped cookies, which were fan-quiznaking-tastic if Lance did say so himself.

Nothing was better than taking a huge bite of the Galra emblem and getting purple sprinkles everywhere.

Toy stores for kids were full of action figures of Zarkon, his well-known generals, and some of the more popular gladiator champions – Shiro included. There were even little Druid dolls too.

There was even a Trading Card Game which focused on the Gladiators matches, and reminded Lance a bit of Magic: The Gathering. Evidently, getting the Foil Shiro Card was basically the equivalent of getting the Blue Eyes White Dragon in the Yugi-oh Anime. He’d already seen one legitimate fight break out over that card.

Propaganda wasn’t just for kids. There were also some very adult stores which featured very interesting adult toys. Lance was no stranger to that side of adult fun, but #sorrynotsorry, he just wasn’t interested in a ‘replica’ squirting Zarkon toy.
No thanks.

There were posters of Zarkon for all ages, some of which even enforced the idea of joining Zarkon’s military force. Enlistment centers were at every third or so intersection.

So far, Lance had yet to see any merchandise for this Prince guy, but Lance figured it was only a matter of time. Evidently, the Prince preferred being out of the limelight of the people, and was said to prefer severing the people of the empire out of public view. Or so the grapevine said.

Lance honestly didn’t really know because he tended to avoid the TVs like a plague. Already they had influenced his dreams to include echoes of ‘Vrepit Sa!’ and the stupid jingle for the Slice Capades shop commercial.

Speaking of the Slice Capades shop commercial… a week into staying at the Swap Moon and that commercial had already become Lance’s most hated thing from the TVs. Lance was convinced that if he had to hear that stupid jingle one more time then he was going to scream. Earth commercials had nothing on this.

Besides, people were the real sources of information. Not the TVs. People around here tended to talk like they didn’t think anyone was listening.

Just listening onto a couple conversations informed him about the ongoing Civil War on Pollux, which was started over a scandal with the Royal Family. Demos recently joined the Galra Empire peacefully, although there was some scandal about their princess trying to force a relationship between herself and the prince.

Speaking of the Prince, besides not wanting to be in the lime light… he also evidently was a half-breed with questionable maternal heritage. Lance personally hoped that the Prince got his looks from his mother. He wouldn’t wish the curse of Zarkon’s ugliness on anyone.

Although, based off some things Lance wished he had mind bleach for… some people did.

In any case, the populous were understandably worried about this prince guy, but there were also quite a few people with high hopes for him. There was a good chunk of people who thought that a change in leadership was needed after so long under Zarkon’s rule. But, people didn’t like change generally on principal, so there were still quite a few who were apprehensive about this all.

Not all whispers among the people were about the Empire. There were some, although not many, about Voltron.

Voltron was a tricky subject for the people.

It was featured in *Battle for the Stars* as a weapon that Zarkon used, and then was used to seal away the Alteans after defeating the horrible evil King Alfor of Altea. After ten thousand years of peace, however, Voltron was discovered, and that broke the seal, releasing the horrible witch princess Allura.

Longtime fans thought this new villain was rather lack luster, and it was a current fan theory that King Alfor would return to guide his daughter. After all, if she could be around after ten thousand years, perhaps the king was still around too.

Anyways, so, in the season premiere, Allura bewitched the people who found Voltron into becoming her loyal minions and piloting the lions. She cast a spell upon the Champion to make him think that he loved her – Blegh – and she was manipulating him into piloting the Black Lion for Evil.
So yeah, the kid’s show was pretty quiznaked up, but hey, it killed about two hours of Lance’s time every day. They were doing a marathon to celebrate the premiere of the newest season.

Anyways, with that to go off of, the population was pretty… weird about Voltron.

In some ways, the cartoon was good. It provided a decent cover for people who wanted to talk about Voltron… the real Voltron. Lance already had heard theories that it was Voltron that had injured Zarkon. There were whispers of Voltron’s exploits, and stories that Lance knew were true because he’d lived them.

The Unilu were willing to pay a decent price for any information. Especially in regard to the Blue or Black Lions, since evidently, they were missing.

Lance was hot news. Cool. Too bad he’d never rat out his former teammates. Even if he really wanted the GAC that the Unilu were offering for that info.

It wasn’t like Lance was trying to listen and find out about his team. Really, he wasn’t. He was content watching the stupid – so very stupid – cartoon, and ignoring everything wrong with it.

Not meaning to listen about it though didn’t change the fact that he still heard information.

Lance was thankful he was already sitting. His hands shook as he continued to listen to some kids talking about Voltron, and playing voice recordings of his team’s voices. Evidently, some of their communications had been over General communication lines, and people had tapped into that to record them.

That wasn’t what was important to Lance though. No, what was important was that Blue had a new pilot. She must have, because Lance was her pilot and he was here. And if Lance was here, and she was elsewhere, then there had to be a new Paladin.

Right?

His heart sunk as it was confirmed by the kids. They were complaining about the quality of voice in the General Communications recordings, but even through the garbled static, he could recognize Coran’s voice.

Looked like Coran finally got his wish of piloting a lion. Blue was always most accepting of new Paladins.

“Shame, I really liked the previous Blue Paladin’s voice.” Rueben commented.

The look he gave Lance was almost knowing. Almost. But there was no way Reuben could have known. Even if he’d heard all the recordings, they were usually too garbled to properly hear someone’s voice. And there were no visuals on what the Paladins looked like. Unless one counted the cartoon.

And no. Just, no. The only ones who looked how they should was Shiro and Zarkon.

Anyways, Lance had, against his better judgement, heard all the recordings, even those with his voice on them. There was no way Reuben could have matched Lance’s voice to the recordings. Then again, Lance successfully matched Coran to the recording, and that recording was one of the worst quality ones he’d heard yet. But, he knew Coran.
“The new one sounds like they just took their mechanic and strapped him into the lion.” Anita, Reuben’s cousin, chimed in. “Although, they really shouldn’t be playing that in public.” She huffed and shook her head.

“They probably did.” Lance finally responded. He still hadn’t pulled his gaze up from the table, but he saw the arm Rueben was resting on the table jolt, like he hadn’t expected Lance to speak.

“What?”

“About the mechanic, stupid.” Anita replied to Reuben. “Makes me wonder how short staffed they are.”

“Makes me wonder what’s needed to be a ‘paladin’.” Reuben countered. He leaned over grabbed one of Anita’s finished sandwiches – ignoring her noise of protest – and placed it in front of Lance. “I thought more was needed than just being a convenient body.”

“Guess not.” Lance shrugged and picked up the sandwich to look through its layers. He knew Reuben wouldn’t feed him anything bad, but… it gave him something else to do than focus on the fact that he’d been replaced.

Quiznak. He still wasn’t ready for that. Like, he’d expected it. He’d even go as far as to say that he’d wanted it. But… it didn’t change the fact that it hurt.

Rueben tapped his fingers against the bar. “It’s not going to kill you.”

Lance rolled his eyes, finally raising his gaze to look up at Rueben. Rueben rolled his eyes back at him, and made a face when Lance smirked and took a big bite out of the sandwich. Beside Rueben, Anita huffed and crossed all of her arms.

“Quit your flirting,” She snapped at Lance, narrowing her eyes when he stuck his tongue out at her. “And you,” She turned on Ruben, uncrossing her arms to jab at him with her finger, “get back to work, and stop giving the stray free food. We’ll never get rid of him at this rate.”

“Awh! Anita, baby, I thought you loved me!” Lance pouted. “You wound me with your cruel words.”

Anita rolled her eyes, although when Rueben turned away, she gave him a wink and a snack. Lance pocketed it for later, and waggled his eyebrows at her. She arched an eyebrow back, and returned to her own work with a fond smile.

Of course, now that his distractions were distracted, it was hard for his thoughts to not stray back to his replacement.

He knew they’d replace him. He’d knew they’d replace him instead of Shiro. After all, he was the seventh wheel. He wasn’t important like Shiro, or the others. Lance was replaceable, and Blue was always the most accepting of new Paladins.

This confirmed what Lance already knew. Allura had been putting off getting Blue back because of him. They picked up Blue not long after Lance left, probably.

There wasn’t much that could make Lance’s day worse, so he finished up his sandwich and decided to head back to Lita’s shop. After all, he had two jobs to do: help Lita, and find Tyrac.

“Heading out?” Reuben asked.
“Yeah, gotta make my keep someway, ya know?” Lance shrugged.

“I hear ya. Well, don’t be a stranger!”

“Rue! Don’t invite him back! That’s how we get strays!” Anita smacked Rueben, and Lance laughed, turning away and heading out with a wave of his hand. Behind him, he could hear their bickering continued until the noise of the mall swallowed it up.

The fastest way back to Lita’s shop involved him passing through that Lobby area. Hopefully, if he was lucky, he’d manage without hearing the stupid Slice Capades jingle.

The largest TV gave out a loud news jingle, prompting Lance to mentally groan and drag his feet. While it wasn’t anywhere near as annoying as the Slice Capades shop commercial, Lance wasn’t in the mood to hear political nonsense. Usually he timed his departure from Rueben’s to avoid both, but it appeared his timing was off today.

Normally, he couldn’t hear the TV inside of Rueben’s bar. He’d gotten ‘lucky’ – if one could say that – and every time he’d passed by the TVs before, they’d been playing various commercials and the Slice Capades jingle. Why couldn’t they play the cartoon’s theme song? That was at least catchy.

Today was not Lance’s day, he thought. Clearly the Universe wanted to enact Murphey’s law upon him as just when he thought his day couldn’t get any worse, it did.

As he approached the lobby, he heard, for the first time, Prince Lotor’s first public Announcement to the Empire.

Now, this announcement had been playing on the news for like a week now, but Lance hadn’t given it any mind. Most of what he’d heard about Prince Lotor was from the grapevine or verbatim from the news.

A couple people had quoted the speech. Something about Lotor’s father building the Empire on the Bones of his Enemies, or something. Lance really hadn’t been listening then, but he was listening now.

He raised his gaze to the screen, hoping that he was hearing wrong – praying that he was hearing wrong. He hadn’t.

He thought his day couldn’t get any worse, but that was before he watched Tyrac smile reassuringly to the Galra Empire and finish his speech off with the words of the empire: “Vrepid Sa!”

Chapter End Notes

Ghost heavily helped me with this chapter, as well as inspiring me for some of the 'Children' propaganda that Lance discovered, like the Gladiator Trading Cards, and the ultra rare Shiro card. As such, I commissioned her to draw said card.

Also, friendly reminder: Friday I will be posting a chapter in honor of the Premier of Season 3. ADDITIONALLY, I will be posting a (much) smaller Bonus Chapter.

@pettygaygirl, Yes. You were correct back in Chapter 7. I had mistyped both because
of the Comic AND also because Tyrac was Lotor.
Bonus: Vacant

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: Lance was enjoying his time as best he could while at the Swap Moon. He was learning about races, culture, political movements, and... a certain trader's real identity.

Chapter Notes

While there will be light-hearted moments up ahead, we will be taking a break from our regularly scheduled Langst for some Dubcon tones, torture, Brainwashing, and other 'fun' things. This is your warning chapter before things start getting real.

This is a BONUS chapter, so it will be shorter than a usual update. I will be updating the SECOND chapter today at a later time.

Also, as a friendly reminder, while I will pull information from seasons past the season 2 finale, Lilac Sweet will not become canon compliant.

Words could not explain how Keith felt upon seeing the Blue Lion. Relief might have been prominent, were he not looking at a half buried, half submerged Lion that he was 90% sure was empty. Any attempts at communication with the Lion failed, and her eyes were dull.

Somber was probably the more accurate word to describe how Keith felt.

Guilty was another word. If he’d been faster, if he’d been better… if he’d been everything that he’d blamed Lance for not being, then perhaps none of this would have happened.

He knew that Pidge and Hunk both still believed Lance to be inside the Blue Lion. But, Keith knew better. Lance had probably left like he’d been trying to do in the first place. Or perhaps he’d left to go try to find assistance.

It didn’t matter. All that Keith knew was that the moment that he and Red had looked at Blue they knew.

Perhaps Red and Blue were able to communicate, or perhaps it was just the instincts that came with being the Red Paladin, but… somehow, they both knew that the Blue Paladin would not be found with his Lion.

Yellow spent nearly a day trying to dig enough of Blue out of the sand so that she could be lifted. Keith had watched from the shoreline waiting for Hunk to give them the go head to help get Blue back up to the Castle.

Pidge had gone off to explore around this place, in case Lance was nearby, not that Keith thought that he was. She’d returned shortly before Yellow had finished, informing them all that the locals
were of no help as they couldn’t even seem to remember her after she’d just spoken to them.

However, her worst complaint was with how obsessed over her hair they’d been. Given how well Lance took care of his hair, Keith was sure they would have remembered him if he’d stopped by. Perhaps who ever Lance had been talking to had picked him up.

Because, surely if Lance was in Blue then he would have come out. He would have reached out to them, sent a message or anything. There would have been something other than the radio silence they were getting.

Keith couldn’t even get a response through the bonds that they shared with their lions. He tried to connect like he’d someone managed to do during the battle. There was nothing, which did little to quell his fears or his guilt.

Once they did manage to get the Blue Lion up to the Castle, Allura had been quiet, staring at the Lion’s slumped form. Pidge and Coran were trying to get the Lion to open up, while Hunk stood quietly off to the side, fidgeting nervously.

Allura might have been trying to communicate with Blue, the way she tried with Black sometimes. It was by this point that Keith knew that they’d all figured it out. They’d all finally admitted, to some degree, what he’d already realized. None were brave enough to confront it however, so it fell to Keith to do it for them.

In the end, it was Keith who brushed past Pidge and Coran, and wormed his way past Blue’s teeth and into her inner chambers.

The moment he took his first step in Blue, he realized he didn’t belong there. First, he stood out like a sour thumb with his red armor in a blue interior. Second, there was this pressure which pressed at him from all sides.

It was similar to the feeling one tended to get when they walked through a haunted house or a graveyard at night. He was an intruder. He was unwelcome. There was a definite sense of ‘wrongness’ here.

The feeling persisted as he explored Blue. Lance’s bunk was clearly slept in, and there was a small stack of food and water, some used and some not.

Guilt once again burned through Keith’s body. Lance hadn’t left immediately. He’d stayed, presumably waiting for them. If they’d been faster to find Blue, to find Lance… Keith shook his head. Nothing made sense. As broken as Blue was right now, her emergency signal should have gone off.

Why hadn’t they found Blue sooner? Why hadn’t the castled picked up on the signal?

Keith stared at the mess Lance had left behind, and imagined him huddled here in the dark, trying to reassure himself that someone would be coming for him. His hands tightened into fists, and he looked away, entering into the cockpit with hopes that Lance would be there, or that there’d be a note or something.

The sense of wrongness that had been plaguing him increased ten-fold.

He’d been in Black since Shiro had vanished, and not once had he felt like this. He felt like he was intruding. Like at any moment Lance, or his ghost, was going to pop up out of nowhere. Which honestly didn’t make any sense because there was no blood, no body, no sign of any struggle
besides the usual struggle of life.

Beyond the mess, Lance might as well as just have vanished like Shiro had. Except, this was worse than Shiro’s disappearance in the aspect that Lance’s was all Keith’s fault.

If he’d been a better leader… Been the leader that Shiro wanted him to be, then maybe he could have prevented all this. Perhaps then Blue wouldn’t have broken screens and be missing a Paladin.

Keith rounded the chair, and paused, looking down at it. It was impossible to miss the last sign that Lance had been there. Just as it was impossible to not recognize the object’s meaning.

Folding up on the seat was Lance’s jacket.

Lance never went anywhere without his jacket. It was his last remaining true link to his home, to his family. There was no way that he would have left it willingly like this unless it was a message. A piece of him that he’d left behind for memories.

A goodbye.

Keith reached down, his fingertips barely grazing the stiff material.

The floor beneath him shook, a rumble echoing in his ears. Keith stumbled, his hand flying to the back of the chair to steady himself. The lights in the cockpit flickered on, flaring a red bright enough for Keith to shield his eyes.

Outside, he could hear his teammates’ shocked and worried cries.

The floor beneath Keith’s feet seemed to drop, along with his stomach. It didn’t even take Keith a second to realize what was happening. He didn’t think as he grabbed Lance’s jacket, and then was essentially spit out, tumbling down out of Blue’s mouth into the hangar.

Keith scrambled back up to his feet, ignoring the mental roar of Red’s indignation. She didn’t appreciate her Paladin being treated like that. She must have said something to Blue, because he could feel her roar in his bones.

Part of him wanted to cover his ears from the sheer volume of the roar, but something in his gut screamed at him that to do so would be death. Instead, he spun around with wide eyes, ignoring the ringing in his ears. He watched with quiet mute horror as the Blue Lion attempted to stand, and failed, falling back down and then roaring, again, in Keith’s face.

He couldn’t understand her, but he thought the message might have been for him to give the jacket back. The hand holding it clutched it tighter. Alternatively, she could have been screaming in response to Red, who’d fallen quiet.

From somewhere behind him, Keith heard Allura gasp. That was his only warning as Blue’s paw swiped out at him. Someone’s hand grabbed his collar, and he was yanked back before Blue’s attack could hit.

The ringing in Keith’s ears finally quieted to hear his savior.

“Quiznak.” Coran muttered, and then patted Keith’s back, smoothing out where he’d grabbed. “That was a close one, eh?” He was talking to Keith, but his eyes were on Blue.

Blue shuddered, and then came to stop. Her eyes dulled some, but they weren’t the dead eyes that Keith had seen on the beach.
Where Red’s anger had once burned had been replaced with pity. She felt sorry for her fellow Lion. She felt guilt. Keith’s stomach turned. He felt like he was going to be sick. This was Shiro all over again.

“Keith?” Hunk touched his shoulder. “Is that…?”

Keith looked down at the jacket, opening it up to look it over. Everyone fell silent, looking at the jacket. The fact Keith had the jacket, and the missing presence of the one who usually wore it was proof enough for them.

The silence didn’t last long. Keith turned on Coran, the jacket falling to his side, his hand still tightly grasping it.

He knew before he spoke that his words would be misspoken in anger. He knew that he should keep his silence. Lashing out at the undeserving had been what had started this whole mess with Lance. Yet the fire of his anger burned in his chest, and he needed to release it.

“Why didn’t we find them earlier?!” Keith demanded. His questions from earlier needed to be answered. It was too late for Lance, but what about the others? Keith would not allow this to happen again. “Her inside lights were red, and she’s clearly trashed, Coran. Why didn’t the Emergency Signals work?”

Coran was supposed to fix the castle, not go about snooping in people’s rooms, and forcing Lance into a corner the way he had. If Coran had been fixing the castle, like he was supposed to, then maybe they would have found Blue sooner. Maybe they’d have Lance with them now.

Maybe then Keith could apologize.

But, no. He couldn’t. He couldn’t do anything, except hold Lance’s jacket, the physical proof of Keith’s failure to him.

“I don’t know.” Coran replied, looking down in sorrow.

Keith didn’t realize he was moving forward until Pidge shouted, and Hunk’s hands appeared on his shoulders, holding him back.

“It’s okay, buddy.” Keith didn’t know how Hunk had the capacity to even attempt to smooth the situation over right now. Hunk’s best friend was missing. Gone. Vanished. And if the castle or the lions were working properly, then he wouldn’t be!

“Keith!” Pidge shouted. “This wasn’t Coran’s fault!”

Hunk’s hold on Keith loosened. “Are you saying it’s Lance’s?” Hunk asked, incredulously.

“No, of course not!” Pidge replied. “But it’s not Coran’s!”

Chaos descended upon them all, although, miraculously no physical attacks were dealt. Hunk and Pidge were fighting over whose fault it was, and Keith was silent, glaring at Coran. Coran, for his part, had nothing to say; no answers to give.

“Paladins!” Allura shouted. Everything stopped. Allura looked at each person sternly. “This is not the time, nor the place. We shall see if we can recover Lance. If not, then I’m afraid we will need to find a new Blue Paladin.”

The room exploded into further chaos.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith and the team found the Blue Lion, but it was too late. Lance was nowhere to be found. Keith investigated the Blue Lion, and found Lance's jacket, which had been left behind. Blue reacted negatively as Keith took the jacket from her. Allura accidentally kicked a proverbial hornets nest when she suggested that they find a new pilot for Blue.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 14 saw the end of the first 'arc' I had for this story. This next arc will focus more on Lancelot and will have considerably more Dubcon tones than langst. IF this is not for you, then please message me on [tumblr](https://tumblr.com), and I can inform you of when (roughly), we will return to our normally programmed Langst.

This next arc has the potential to make people uncomfortable (Or so says my Roomie), as there will be Dubcon, Dubcon tones, Brainwashing, Referenced/Implication of torture, Referenced/Implication of Drugs, Referenced/Implication of Alcohol, Referenced/Implication of Harems, Referenced/Implication of Sex, and yes, some OOC-ness caused by the before warnings.

As previously mentioned, any outright sex scenes will be written and posted separately in their own story with links provided. Please note, you probably won't be getting any smut like that for a while.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Lance could handle this. He could totally handle this. He was so chill, he could have been Blue. Ha ha. Yeah right. But no, seriously, he could handle this. He just needed… time. He just needed to adapt.

It was totally common for one’s friend to turn out to be the prince of the enemy empire, right? Right?

So Tyrac was Prince Lotor. Tyrac, the friendly good Samaritan who helped Lance out. Tyrac who’d been Lance’s confidant. Tyrac, Lance’s Friend. That Tyrac. His Tyrac. The Tyrac he’d literally fought his friends over.

…

…

Quiznak.

Lance needed to sit down, or find the nearest bathroom. He was caught, torn in the middle between
his stomach’s sudden upheaval and his legs sudden inability to hold him up.

He sunk down onto a nearby bench, nearly collapsing onto it. He couldn’t do this right now. He just couldn’t.

Quiznak. What he would have given for Blue right now. Someone who understood what he was going through. Someone who knew everything, who knew the whole story.

Man, he never thought that he’d want Blue's numbing chill, but he did.

This was almost as bad as the time he was told that he was adopted. He’d overheard his parents talking about it one night, and it’d shattered him. Now felt a lot like that, except 100 times worse because… oh Quiznak… because… his friends had been right.

He had been betraying them. He’d been betraying them all along, without even knowing it! The Galra probably knew where to send that Robeast because he’d been talking with the Quiznaking Prince!

If there was anything that Lance had learned from his time with the Unilu, it was that information pays.

Information pays, and he’d given Ty-no, Lotor, a proverbial goldmine of information about the paladins, Voltron, and the castle. He’d complained about Coran always having to work on the teludav. He’d talked about Keith and his heritage. He’d even brought up how Shiro was missing, and the effect it was having on the team! All of his complaints were inadvertently giving Lotor all the information he needed.

“What have I done?” He muttered to himself, shaking his head as he dropped it into his hands.

Mentally, he was reviewing every conversation he had with Ty-Lotor. He’d talked about Pidge’s inventions, and Hunk’s recipes. He’d brought up how Hunk was stressed, and hadn’t been able to do any stress baking recently.

He’d brought up Allura and her mice, and how they could communicate. He’d talked about how much he hated Cyropods, and the healing pods. He’d mentioned Slav, and how much of a genius he was, and what he could do.

And that was all just what Lance could remember. What about what he couldn’t? What about… what about Earth?! Earth, which he spoke so fondly of. He’d told Lotor that all the Paladins were from the same planet! Surely he’d would know it was Earth!

His friends were right not to trust Lance. They were right. So very, very right.

Quiznak. This was… this was horrible.

He was worse than useless now. He was… he’d been… he didn’t… He couldn’t even think the words, no matter how true they were.

Coran had noticed the device transmitting data, although, Lance had no idea if it’d been constant or not. Had it only been transmitting while Lance was talking to Lotor? Or had it always been transmitting? What other information had Lotor managed to get? In what other ways had Lance helped spy for the Galra.

And worse yet, here Lance was, in a Space Mall, looking around for Lotor for help. How much worse could Lance get?
Man, he really had fucked up this time, hadn’t he?

Shiro was right to yell at him for trusting as easily as he did. Shiro was right, and the team was right, and Lance was so very wrong.

This wasn’t the place to have a breakdown. The middle of the mall was the worst place for him to do this. He could be seen by the Mall security – and that’s an experience he never wanted to experience again.

He ran a hand through his hair and took a couple deep breaths. He counted to ten and back. After a few moments of that, he felt like he had a more stable hold on his emotions. He stood up, and headed back to the store, although, he wasn’t sure what he was going to be doing now.

He couldn’t continue to ask for Tyrac. That was asking for trouble. That much was for certain. If that was an alias that Prince Lotor tended to operate on, then it was only a matter of time before the wrong sort of people heard about him, and when they did… well, that was trouble. Trouble that Lance definitely didn’t want right now. He didn’t have weapons, or any form of defense, or anything. No Blue, nothing.

“Lance?” Lita called out as he entered the store. Thankfully, for once, the store wasn’t crowded with customers. There was a guy in the back, looking through the human art pieces.

“Yeah.” Lance replied, heading to the counter where Lita was.

“You back from your break already?” She asked. She leaned against the counter, and then paused, tilting her head as she looked Lance over. “…Everything alright? You don’t look too well.”

“I don’t feel too well.” Lance replied.

“Might have been something you ate.” Lita mused, resting her lower hands on her hips. “I heard that before he was lost in transfer, the Champion needed special dietary needs. Humans are picky.” She shrugged. “Take the rest of the day off, feel better.”

“Thanks, Lita. I owe you one.” Lance smiled softly at her and then headed towards the backroom which would lead to the ‘inner’ part of the mall and Lita’s apartment. Lita’s laughter followed him out.

Lance was almost to her apartment when someone grabbed his arm and pulled him off to a ‘side alley’.

“Hey!” Lance cried out as he was thrown against a wall, his cheek pressed against it as something clicked around his wrists. “What’s the meaning of-”

Lance was spun around, and cut himself off at the muzzle of the blaster pointed at his face. His gaze trailed up the blaster, to the Sentry holding said blaster.

“Silence.” The Sentry holding the blaster spoke.

“This the guy?” Another sentry was standing further back in the alley, barely out of Lance’s sight.

“Yeah, that’s him.” The response was so quiet, Lance could barely make out of the words. Whoever it was speaking, Lance didn’t think that he knew them.

“You gonna go quietly? Or are you gonna kick up a fuss?” The sentry asked Lance.
Well, that was nice of it. Probably meant that it didn’t know who Lance was, not really. He didn’t
know what had caused this to happen, or what that person had said about Lance, but it didn’t
matter. He was caught.

Besides, if he fought, he’d only cause trouble for himself, and whatever poor innocents would get
involved. Lance nodded.

“Good.” He wasn’t even given a warning as the sentry swung his blaster at Lance’s head. “Best
not to take chances though.” Lance heard as his vision faded to black.

Waking was not easy. He came and went as he woke, sometimes when he was being dragged,
other times when he was being presumably handcuffed to something.

When he woke, it in a small little prison cell. Gone were the clothes that he’d bartered for while at
the Swap Moon, instead, they’d been replaced by the black suit and gray rags worn by prisoners of
the Empire.

“You’re awake.” The alien next to him smiled grimly. Lance turned his head to view the alien. It
was one of the long lanky thin ones with the large bug eyes. One of them had been one of the
prisoners on Sendak’s ship.

“Wh-where are we?” Lance’s voice caught, his throat was too dry, and he ended up coughing out
his words. The alien offered him a hand to sit up, and then a small bowl.

Lance glanced down at the liquid in the bowl, but it was so dark in the cells it was hard to see
anything. There might have been a faint glow, but he couldn’t quite tell. He wrinkled his nose, and
put the bowl down.

He had no desire to try that just yet.

“You’re awake.” The alien replied grimly. As if to accent the alien’s words, there were
sounds of distant screams.

Great.

“Where none wish to be.” The alien replied grimly. As if to accent the alien’s words, there were
the sounds of distant screams.

Great.

“That’s… encouraging.” Lance muttered.

“The only encouraging thing here is death.” The alien sighed. He leaned over and picked up the
bowl and handed it to Lance again. “You should drink up. It hurts less later if you do.”

Well… well, that was even more encouraging. Thanks man, it was exactly what Lance really
wanted to hear.

Lance accepted the bowl again, wrinkling his nose as he did so. He sighed, looking once more at
the liquid. It hadn’t even been…

“How long have I been here?” Lance asked.

“Not long.”

… That was helpful.

Well, anyways, it hadn’t even been that long since he was at the space mall, but already he missed
Lita’s home cooking, or Rueben’s subs, or the Empire Emblem cookies. Lance put the bowl back
aside, and instead opted to curl up into a ball, resting his head on his knees.
He could feel the judging eyes of the Alien on him, but he didn’t care.

Everything about this situation sucked. First, he found out that Tyrac was the Prince of the empire. Then he was attacked by some sentries, and now he was stuck in a prisoner cell. Man, he couldn’t imagine what poor Lita was thinking. Probably that Lance just bailed on her. Great.

The screams in the distance died down, not that that was any more reassuring. Oh Quiznak. He was probably going to get tortured here, wasn’t he? At least he’d be able to relate to Shiro now, if he ever saw Shiro again.

He probably wouldn’t.

He’d probably never see the other Paladins ever again. He’d never see the castle. He’d never see Blue. He’d never see Earth. He’d never see his home.

This was his life now. He just had to accept that.

“So, what?” Lance asked. “We’re going to the Gladiator matches?” Well, Brightside, if he did well enough, he’d get an awesome action figure. Maybe he’d even be able to get up to Shiro’s level and get a cool trading card.

“If only we were so lucky.” Or not.

“Aren’t you a ray of sunshine.” Lance muttered.

If the Alien responded, Lance didn’t hear it. Not that it really mattered. The alien didn’t seem keen to actually answer any of Lance’s questions in a way that helped him. Or perhaps the alien didn’t know anymore than Lance.

After some time of Lance not drinking the bowl, the alien sighed and took back the bowl, drinking it all in one go. “You will regret not drinking that later.”

Oh yeah, Lance was sure. But, pardon him for not wanting to drink weird unknown things.

He passed the time by listening to the rhythmic sound of the sentries’ footsteps, although it wasn’t long until they stopped in front of Lance’s cell.

Lance looked up, and immediately regretted it.

He’d heard stories about the Druids of the Galra empire. He’d heard tales from prisoners that they’d saved, heard rumors from the dark corners of the mall about their experimentations. Keith had talked about Druids, and how they could move faster than one could think, and shoot out purple pink lightning with a thought.

Shiro, Lance knew, had some interactions with them. His arm was Druid-made after all. Although, if Shiro had talked about them, Lance hadn’t been privy to those conversations.

The creature standing before Lance’s cell was terrifying. The creature’s form was covered and hidden by a shapeless hood and cloak. The only real identifying feature was the blank white mask, with the yellow glowing eye slits. At least, Lance thought it was a mask.

Regardless, there was little to no doubt in Lance’s mind that this creature was a Druid, and that yes, the alien was correct: this was a place none wished to be.

The Druid nodded, and the sentries flanking him moved forward, the door sliding open at their
approach. Lance sprung to his feet, and moved forward. There was a flash of bright pinkish purple, and then pain as Lance was thrown against the wall.

He fell to the floor, blinking away hot violet specks in his vision. The sentries paid him no mind, stepping past him to his alien cellmate.

Said cellmate curled himself into the corner of the cell, but did not resist physically when the sentries dragged him out.

“No, please!” Verbally, however, was a different story. “I’ll do anything, please!” Lance’s cellmate cried out.

Lance couldn’t just let this happen. He shook away the spots in his vision, and once more, Lance surged forward. Again, purplish pink filled his vision as he was hit by the same burning energy as before. His head cracked as he hit against the wall again. Darkness took his vision as he watched the sentries drag his cellmate away.

Lance woke only a few moments later, although it was already too late for his cell mate. He curled up in a ball in the corner of the cell. If that was the fate that awaited him, then yeah, that alien was right about another thing: the only encouraging thing here was death.

Perhaps it was what he deserved. After all, he’d betrayed his friends, and then abandoned them to go live on a space mall while he searched for the person that he’d betrayed his friends to.

Okay, so that was a bit melodramatic. No one deserved to be a Druid experiment. No one deserved to be an experiment in general. Maybe they were all just over thinking this all. Maybe it wouldn’t be as bad as they were all thinking.

The screams didn’t really help sell that idea, but, it was worth a shot. His cellmate would probably be returning perfectly fine any moment now.

Lance’s cell mate never returned. Although, some sentries stopped by to push a bowl of the same strange liquid as before under the door. Lance eyed it warily, not sure if it was a good idea to take it or not.

It was possible that it was drugged. As a matter of fact, that was more than likely considering it ‘made it hurt less later’ according to his cellmate. Getting drugged was not on Lance’s priority to-do list. But, Lance wasn’t too keen experience the pain later, and if this helped dull the pain, then perhaps he should take it.

But why would the Druids even offer this? It helped the prisoners by dulling the pain. Why would they do that, unless it was for some other sinister purpose.

Lance poured the bowl out, deciding not to take whatever crap it was. He liked not being drugged, thank you very much.

It took some time before the sentries came for Lance. When they did, he didn’t bother to fight. There was no way he’d be able to overpower the Druid. He’d already learned that.

Besides, even if he did fight, what would it accomplish beyond his pain and possible death? He was one man against unknown amounts of Druids and Galra. One man against an army without even a weapon. At least Shiro had inside help when he escaped.

He walked willingly between the sentries, the Druid following behind to ensure his cooperation. They took him to a room, where another Druid waited and shackled him with energy shackles to
what was essentially a standing gurney.

“Answer our questions, human, and all will be fine.” The Druid who’d walked him to the room spoke. For some odd inexplicable reason, Lance doubted what it was saying; but it didn’t seem like a good idea to express as such to his captors.

“Sure thing.” Lance smiled and shrugged. He wasn’t planning on telling them anything. He was done betraying his friends. But, maybe if the Druids thought he was going to be helpful then they’d be nicer to him? Unlikely, but worth trying. “What’cha wanna hear?”

The Druids looked at each other, and Lance got the definite impression that they were smiling at each other. His mind attempted to conjure faces beneath the masks, and Lance cringed at the sharp teeth and long tongues that his mind created. Ugh. No thank you.

Lance blinked, and suddenly his vision was completely obscured by a Druid. It leaned towards him until their faces were literally face to face.

Or well, Mask to Face.

The Druid’s hand reached up to touch Lance’s face. Its sharp nails skimmed against his cheek as the creature stroked the side of his face, cupping his cheek in a way that for anyone else might have been comforting.

“You will tell us everything.” The Druid promised.

Chapter End Notes

On a less serious note, for anyone who's finished Season 3... who else is annoyed that Dreamworks basically Disney'd Allura's mom and made her a physical carbon copy of Allura, except in pink?

ALSO, who else noticed/is annoyed by the fact that they keep changing spellings of things in the subtitles.

Seriously. First they changed up Dobash and made it Dobosh. Then Decafeebs vs. Deca-phoebs. Finally, one of the general's names is seen spelled Auxia and then Acxa. The inconsistency is killing me. KILLING ME.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance dealt with the realization that his friend Tyrac was in fact Prince Lotor, Emperor Pro Tem of the Galra Empire. Upon returning back to where he’s been staying, Lance was pulled into an alleyway, and agreed to go with some Galra Sentries. They didn’t trust him, so he was knocked out. Lance awoke in a Druid Facility, and after witnessing his cell mate be dragged off, was dragged off himself.

Chapter Notes

As a Friendly Reminder, for this next 'arc' there will be Dubcon, Dubcon tones, Brainwashing, Referenced/Implication of torture, Referenced/Implication of Drugs, Referenced/Implication of Alcohol, Referenced/Implication of Harems, Referenced/Implication of Sex, and yes, some OOC-ness caused by the before warnings.

As previously mentioned, any outright sex scenes will be written and posted separately in their own story with links provided. Please note, you probably won't be getting any smut like that for a while. (And also, you won't get much. There's only like 3/4 that I can think of off the top of my head.)

There was something to be said about torture: it sucked.

No… no, saying it sucked was like saying vampires suck; that was such a no brainer. Honestly, Lance didn’t really have anything to describe torture to, which all in all meant that he’d probably lived a good life.

Like most ignorant people in the world, Lance had stupidly joked about torture before. It was a luxury of the privileged: to complain that XYZ was torture, even if XYZ was something as simple as doing some homework or as complicated as giving a cat a bath – Lance made that mistake ONCE, and he would never attempt that again, thank you very much.

But this. This. This right now, what he was experiencing. This was torture. Clear cut, plain and simple.

The first thing he learned was that time did not exist here. He’d thought that Shiro was exaggerating when he’d said that he had no clue how long he’d been missing. But now, Lance could relate; although, he wished he couldn’t.

Lance couldn’t tell how long it’d been since he was taken from his cell and strapped to this table. His hands, waist, and ankles were already numb with the buzzing dark energy of the restraints. ‘Days, months, years;’ indeed, Shiro. Lance understood it now, he really did.
He had to give Shiro some props for surviving as long as he did, if Lance ever saw Shiro again; after all, Lance now knew that the Druids didn’t mess around.

He didn’t know how long the Druids had been in the room. They came and left at their leisure. He tried timing them once. However, they realized he was focusing on that, and well, they gave him something a bit more concerning to focus on.

Major Payne style.

It hurt, and when he said ‘it hurt’, Lance meant everything hurt. It felt like he’d been hit with that Druid weapon from before – the Kumar – except this was so much worse because it wasn’t targeting five Paladins and their protective lions, but just him.

Except, unlike the Kumar, this wasn’t draining him of energy. This was more like he was being packed with too much. So an opposite Kumar, whatever that would be.

It felt like there was a pressure building inside of him, making him spasm as energy surged through his body. He felt like he was going to explode, or melt, or spontaneously combust. Actually, any of those options would be significantly less painful than what he was experiencing now.

Man. He wished he’d taken the offered drugs earlier. Sinister plots be damned, he’d kill for some painkillers right now. Stupid past Lance being paranoid, didn’t he know that current Lance needed it?!

A hand clasped his cheek, claws biting into his soft flesh there as the Druid lifted his head.

“There’s no point in keeping your silence anymore.” The Druid cooed. “We know who you are.”

Lance attempted to spit at the Druid, but the way that the Druid was holding his face made it difficult. His attempt dribbled down his chin.

“Poor, poor Paladin.” The Druid ‘soothed’. “Except you’re not anymore, are you? Abandoned by your team, replaced, and forgotten.” The other Druid, the one in the back of the room, laughed, while the one that had spoken tsked.

Great. Even his enemies were laughing at him now.

“Tell us all about it.” The Druid in front of him purred.

Lance shook his head.

“So much knowledge, locked up in your head.” The Druid from the back of the room sighed. “If only we had the key.” The Druid in front of Lance nodded at the other, and then stepped back. Lance closed his eyes, already anticipating what was going to happen. “Oh wait, we do.”

The Druid hit something, and electricity arced through Lance, causing spots to dance in the place between his eye and his eyelid. His body spasmed, although it was held down by the restraints, which added their own electric burn to the sensations.

The energy within him spiked, rising up to a crescendo. The dots of white splatter across his vision grew in size until it was all he could see.

He felt close, he didn’t know what he was close to, but he knew he was close. It was like he was at an edge of a cliff, and he didn’t know what was below it; but anything had to be better than this. He’d willingly step off if he could, if it’d stop this pain.
Except, he was yanked back. His air choked off for a moment, despite his lungs burning for oxygen. He was drowning without any water, and the Druids graciously allowed him a moment to relearn how to breathe. His throat was sore from his screaming. He could feel sweat and tears running down the side of his face.

“Hmm, a little longer, I think.” The Druid mused.

Lance didn’t care how much longer, he wasn’t planning on cracking. He’d die before he told them anything more about the Paladins, Voltron, or the castle. Besides, even if he wanted to tell the Druids something, he couldn’t.

He didn’t know anything new, anything important. He was as useless to the Galra now as he was to the team. Man, for once, Lance loved that he was useless.

“Fuck off.” Spit literally flew from his mouth as he snarled the words. He’d tried flirting and joking earlier, whenever that had been. That hadn’t gotten him any favors. None at all.

Laughter and jokes had been stripped from him, leaving him more defenseless than he’d felt in a long time. Humor had been such a personal shield for such a long time, paired with his obnoxious skill with annoying people. Now, he had neither, and he was left bare boned, showing off the most basic of human defenses: brute vulgarity.

He wanted to curl up in a ball. He wanted to wipe the tears, sweat, and snot off his face. He wanted his family. He wanted to be home.

It didn’t matter what he wanted. What mattered was what he had, and he had two Druids who were more than willing to torture him a bit more.

The electric energy coursed back through his body. He didn’t know if he was screaming. He didn’t know if he was breathing.

He barely felt his body as it convulsed; bruised wrists thrashing against the energy restraints as he tried to arch away from the pain, away from the energy. He didn’t feel it when his head crashed against the board for the umpteenth time in the misguided belief that maybe, just maybe, he could knock himself out.

All he could feel was the energy twisting inside of him, squeezing him and pushing against limits and blocks he hadn’t known existed before. The pressure kept building. More and more and more. He could feel it rising, faster than before, bolstered by previous progress. It pushed against those newly discovered boundaries, like a shaken soda pressing against the cap of a bottle.

There was a morbid bit of curiosity lingering in his mind. The type that wondered what would happen to him when he died. Would anybody miss him? Would anybody care? Would he just be another missing person, another unsolved case? What about his family?

He was pretty sure that Voltron team wouldn’t care. After all, they’d replaced him. They didn’t care. But his family? He was sure they cared still.

The curiosity was also the type that questioned what would happen when those boundaries inside him finally gave. Would he find new limits and blocks… would there be anything left of him to find new limits and blocks? Would he be left as just as empty useless shell? What was at the bottom of the cliff that Lance was so desperate to take a free fall off of?

He could almost imagine the cliff.
He could see it’s outline in the growing white spots in his vision. When white was all he could see, color started to fill in. It looked like the cliffs where they all found Blue, where their adventure started. It was fitting he should see the beginning in his own end.

He heard the roar of the wind in the crackle of energy that surged through and around him. He heard the Druid say something, but their words were lost on him, and the energy did not cease. If anything, it grew.

Good. At this point, he didn’t want it to cease. He wanted this, whatever it is. It sung to him, in the static wind. A familiar song. His song. It called out to him, familiar and safe.

He felt the wind and heat of the sun in the trembles of his body. He was so close. He felt like if he could just take one more step, then he’d be flying. Just one more step, just one more push. He felt calmer than he thought he should, given the situation. Yet, he felt bolstered by his own smooth confidence.

Lance plastered a smile to his face, and with a swagger in his step, moved forward.

When someone walked up the stairs in the dark, it didn’t matter how familiar that person was with the stairs, they almost always expect there to be one more step than there was. Lance’s foot met no resistance. There was no extra step at the top of the stairs, and he fell.

There was a moment. A freeze frame moment of his life, looking out at the cliffs where he found Blue.

The sun was high in the sky, and there wasn’t a single cloud visible, showcasing the brilliant blue sky. The wind whistled in his ears, singing to the tune of the song in his heart. It was a beautiful day. The moment ended.

The wind whistling in his ears grew louder and louder until he thought his ears were going to pop. The noise was rising higher and higher like a rising Shepard Tone. Never stopping, always going.

He saw the ground, but it wasn’t the ground anymore. Instead, it was an ocean; choppy waves breaking the water’s surface tension for him and hitting up against the cliff. He hit the water and dissolved into static.

Time didn’t exist here either.

He wasn’t even sure he existed here. He was the static around him just as much as the static was him.

Was this death? This endless expanse of self and static. This plane in reality where nothing existed, but in that nothingness, everything existed. Was this all there was?

The Druids had pushed him past his limits, and this was it. He’d broken his limits the moment he’d stepped off that cliff. Were those limits the limits of his life? Was he really that close to death all that time, or was this something else? Something more?

Was his body still alive? Like the lights were on, but no one was home. Could the Druids use that to their advantage, or would he be tossed away like space trash?

He wasn’t sure he liked the answers to those questions, and yet, he wasn’t sure he cared. It was hard to care about anything in static. Static was unforgiving, unmoving, and yet, forever changing. It was rather apathetic, but soothing. Irritating, yet able to calm the nerves it set on fire.
Memories had no meaning here. So, he could say that the static was white noise, but he couldn’t know for sure. But, he’d like to say that he knew the sound of white noise, and the static was not it. The frequency was all wrong. Static was static, except when it wasn’t.

He didn’t know how long he drifted, but sensation came back in small ripples.

First came touch. He could feel the warm buzzing energy of the restraints against him. He could feel the heat of his skin where he’d rubbed against the restraints, pulled against them. He could feel his body, complete with the tiny ice pinpricks where the electricity had fried his nerves.

There were hands against his skin, cool and hot, clammy and moist. They were touching him, his chest, his ears, his face.

Worse than that, Lance’s whole body ached. It wasn’t painful, parse, but more like the ache following a series of stretches, or after yoga with his sisters, or a thrilling dance session. It was the burn of muscles, and how they jumped after a long workout or run. Yet, it went deeper than that. Deeper than bones. Further than physically possible, into his being.

His whole existence hurt like he’d over stretched, like he’d worked out whatever he was made of – his entire state of being.

Audio came next. In broken shattered fragments, he heard the rush of voices, not that he could comprehend what they were saying. Noise faded in and out like bad phone reception. There were snippets of words, half started and half finished.

“…-ean… Tha-… -sib-…. -ear…is. …-gar.”

The two Druids who Lance had spent such a lovely time with had two completely different voices. Yet now they seemed to blend and blur until they were the same.

Some of the hands on him disappeared. Nothing made sense anymore, and Lance wasn’t sure he wanted it to. Things making sense meant he was alive, and honestly, given how things were... he wasn’t sure he wanted that.

No.

No. No. Of course, he wanted to be alive.

He wanted to see his mom again. Not just his mom, but his grandmother, father, and all of his siblings. He wanted to see everyone, and he wanted to see them smiling, free from the Galra. If he died now, he’d never get that. Never.

He didn’t get a change to further regain himself. The hands on his face touched something which set off sparks inside of him.

He didn’t like it. He didn’t want it, whatever it is. He recoiled the only way he could, and with barely a thought, he was lost to static again.

Once again, he lost track how much time passed. How could he keep track when time didn’t exist there at all? Regardless, he felt like he came back quicker than before. Or maybe it only felt like that and he’d actually been out for much longer.

Like before, sensation was the first thing he regained.

Someone was holding his chin, and he felt their breath on his face. Something sharp pressed
against his cheek bones, and he felt his body spasm. That foreign feeling from before crepted through him until it was draped over his senses for a moment. When the sharpness was removed, so was that strange foreign creeping feeling.

Curiosity, his mind supplied. He wasn’t sure what that had to do with anything.

Sensation was followed by sound. There was a new voice, a feminine one. It grated against his ears, and made him shudder. His brain was too scrambled to make out words, but he didn’t like the tone in which the voice spoke.

He knew she was asking him questions, and he felt his mouth move, heard his voice talking… but he couldn’t make out what he said. Hopefully it was just babbles, and nothing important.

He got the feeling it was, since the lady’s tone became nastier and nastier, like she was upset at him. Good. Let her be angry at him. He didn’t care anymore.

He blinked his eyes, and his vision returned slowly.

Perhaps in her earlier years, the lady before him might have been considered attractive, although now she just seemed like an elderly cranky woman. Her purplish-blue skin screamed ‘Galra’, but the lack of fur, scales or anything else screamed differently.

Then again, not all Galra were furry and scaly. Kolivan wasn’t either, was he? Or Tyra… no, Lotor.

Lance was wrong in his earlier assumption. Although the lady was facing and touching him, she wasn’t actually talking to Lance. In his earlier delirious state, Lance hadn’t noticed. She was snarling something to someone out of Lance’s field of vision. And then she turned her attention to Lance, and oh quznak, he wasn’t prepared for that.

“It looks like you’re crying blood.” Lance winced at the sound of his voice. It was scratchy and slurred, like he was both drunk and had been screaming a lot. His voice cracked halfway through the thought – which he hadn’t meant to say out loud, but evidently his brain to mouth filter was shot.

Although, his accidently spoken thought was true.

Paired with the yellow glare of her eyes and the purple lighting of the room, it looked like the red marks on this lady’s face were trails of blood which dripped down from her eyes and past her mouth.

“Enough of that nonsense,” She hissed. Pinpricks of pain against his cheek appeared again as she squeezed.

Understanding her did not make her voice sound any better. At all.

She sounded like she was fighting off some horrible lung infection, or like she’d smoked one too many cigarettes in her lifetime. The dull blondish gray hair did nothing to help establish her as a young lady, more of an older lady… probably a cat person.

Ha! Crazy old cat lady, who’s crying blood! Maybe he was still delirious. Maybe it was a return of his humor. He wasn’t sure, but he smiled as best he could with her squeezing his cheeks.

“Who needs cats when they have Galra?” After all, the Galra were pretty cat like. Didn’t one of them have a tail? “Fuzzy fluffy ears, and long tails. Giant purple space Cats.” He laughed again.
hurt to laugh, but he couldn’t stop himself.

Some part of him was screaming at him to not antagonize her. He didn’t know who she was, or where the scary masked Druids of before disappeared off to. He didn’t know a lot of things, but somehow, instinctually, he knew this was a lady he didn’t want to piss off.

Her nose scrunched up as she snarled, violently twisting his head as she let go of his cheeks.

“Be that way. We’ll see how long you can keep your laughter.”

At her words, a spark of alarm formed in the pit of his stomach. It felt like he’d swallowed a rock, or a few dozen, and it was suddenly very hard to breath.

He wasn’t given a chance to respond or even fully process the words before that damn energy from before was sparking through him. The pain lasted only a moment before he returned back to the static. The witch’s screeching voice echoed along with his own screams as he faded away.

The next time he woke it was to nothing. He hadn’t been moved, as far as he could tell. He was still vertically strapped.

But, there was something new when audio finally filtered back in. The lady from before was arguing with a new voice, which sounded almost familiar. It tickled the edge of Lance’s mind. Although Lance couldn’t make out the words, he hoped the ‘new’ voice won the argument.

The new voice sounded soothing, and… kind of dreamy. It was heavy and thick, like syrup, molasses, honey, or something along those lines. It was warm, like velvet. Lance wanted to make the voice into a blanket and wrap himself up in it. It was comforting, and familiar, and it made his chest feel strange.

It wasn’t not pain, but it wasn’t something he could recognize in his current state. Regardless, he wanted to feel it more.

The woman broke off the argument before Lance could make out words, and by the time he could see, the new voice was gone, or at least, out of his range of vision. When this occurred again, he still was unable to see this person, even though he knew they remained in the room.

They hid in the back. Out of sight, out of mind, right?

His time awake blurred into one big mess, mixing with his time in the static. Sometime he woke and wasn’t restrained, although he always slid back into the static before he could do anything.

Time still didn’t exist. Lance didn’t exist, except in stolen snatched moments away from the static and the waking world. Sometimes, he thought he could hear a familiar roar in his ears, and the sound of rushing water and bubbles.

He knew that the Lady would sometimes ask him about Blue. That she wanted him to do something… to connect with Blue most likely. But he couldn’t. There was a warm curtain of static which kept him contained.

He woke once to warm broad hands touching his face. Fingers which gently stroked his face, smoothly gliding down to cup his cheeks. He heard the lady’s voice, and then he felt the other pull away, and when he could see again, it was just the lady.

Sometimes when he came back to himself, the lady asked him questions. Sometimes she asked about things Lance doesn’t mind talking about, like the static.
Other times, she brought up taboo topics like his birthparents – he doesn’t know them, he was adopted – or about his time on Earth. Occasionally, she brought up the Voltron team, and asked if he could tell her anything about them. Ha. As if he would. As if he could.

Most commonly, however, the lady talked to him. She whispered things to him which were lost to the static he inevitably fell into. She crooned to him. He knew she promised him things. Power. Freedom. Attention. But, he didn’t even remember what she wanted in return.

Occasionally, Lance was able to hear pieces of the conversations the lady had with the familiar voice. They argued a lot, but it was their conversations that were the most interesting. The lady talked about ‘refined quintessence’ whatever that was, and about someone’s progress.

Once she talked about Lance hurting himself, although he had no memory of the occasion that she spoke of. She’d been touching his face when she’d been speaking, and her words faded in and out of the static. She’d said that he’d tried to claw something off but he didn’t know what it was.

In the end, he didn’t think it mattered. He only heard the conversation once before it was never spoken of again.

Another time she was talking about how his mother must have forced him to hold a shift, whatever that meant.

To be honest, Lance didn’t care. His life felt as nonexistent as his place on Team Voltron. Which wasn’t helped by the fact that his life right now only existed in stolen snapshot moments when he was leaving the static.

Unfortunately, nothing he heard from those snapshot moments ever helped Lance place that familiar voice.

Sometimes, although it was rare, Lance was left alone with the voice. It was never for long, but Lance had come to treasure every moment with the voice instead of the lady.

“So lovely.” The voice whispered, a hand caressing his cheek.

The voice liked to touch him. Although, unlike the lady, each one of this person’s touches were gentle, like Lance was thin fine glass that would break if even just slightly mishandled.

“How could anyone discard you?” The voice continued. “So valuable. So precious.” Long strands of hair brushed against Lance’s face, tickling his nose, as the owner of the voice embraced him. He pulled away, and Lance whined. The voice leaving him meant that the lady would be returning. A chuckle echoed through the room.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got you now. All you have to do is just… let us help you.” A hand brushed against his face. “Will you do that for me?” The voice asked.

Lance nodded. Frantic for the nice voice to stay. Although, things had been changing for the better already.

The electric treatments seemed to have stopped, or, maybe they were continuing at a lesser degree. It may have been his imagination, but he swore could still feel currents of energy running freely through him, unhindered by blocks or limits.

The energy seemed different too. It was less destructive, and felt more like a gentle steady hum of electricity. Sure, it was still enough to make him numb, but it was nowhere near as jarring or painful as it once was.
Nothing changed the fact that everything was still disorienting. Especially since Lance still couldn’t tell the proper passage of time. He didn’t see or hear from the other Druids, and he wasn’t exactly sure if that was a good or a bad thing. He only ever saw the lady.

The lady was irritating.

She’d update him with news about Voltron. News he didn’t want to believe were true, and couldn’t believe were true. She’d talk about how they were able to form Voltron, and how they didn’t need him.

“If your team truly cared for you, then why haven’t they come for you yet?” She asked once, and Lance had to admit that he had no definitive answer. “They aren’t concerned with finding you.”

“Such a shame. They don’t know the jewel they lost.” The voice Lance preferred purred from somewhere out of Lance’s range of sight. “You could help us. Help the universe. All we want is peace, Lance. Doesn’t that sound nice?” The voice continued.

Lance dropped his head. He couldn’t do this anymore. Everything hurt. His head hurt.

He was with the Galra, right? So what were they talking about? Why would… they want peace? He didn’t want to listen anymore. Nothing made sense.

The voice continued to talk as Lance returned to the static. The words slid through his mind and head like a hot knife through butter; and like liquid butter, the words slipped through the cracks in his fractured mind. If he was asked, he didn’t even think he could repeat the words even directly after hearing them.

It didn’t take long for their voices to invade the safety of his static.

Their voices echoed in the static, repeating words he couldn’t remember, offering promises he didn’t know the price of. At the edge of the static, he could hear the sounds of waves and a worried whine.

He wanted to go and comfort the whiner, but he could never reach them. What had once been a curtain had changed. The static turned to tar whenever he tried, and was too thick and sticky for him to get through. It took too much energy to even try, so eventually, he just gave up.

The next time he woke, it was to warmth curling around him. There was numbness in the warmth and the pleasant tingle of energy which sparked across his skin.

He sighed into the sensation, slumping down into it. He wasn’t restrained as he once was, and part of him considered trying to make a break for it… but a stronger part of him whispered about how warm and content he was.

Besides, where would he go? Voltron had replaced him. His time at the Swap Moon led him here. This is where he was now, and to be honest… it wasn’t as bad now as it once had. The static was safe, and the pain had ceased. He was just so very done.

Lance opened his eyes, and his gaze was immediately drawn to the swirls of purplish pink which floated in the air. A hand touched his face, and he looked to see the lady.

She smiled at him. It was not a kind smile, but it was not unkind either. She stroked his cheek, almost like how a mother would their child, and when sound filtered in, she was humming a song. His song.
“I was told you liked this song.” She murmured to him. “Your mother used to hum it as she worked.”

He wasn’t sure what she was talking about. It was his song. The song he knew, and no one else did. He’s certain his mother never hummed it. Or maybe the lady was talking about…

“You’re doing so well.” She stroked his cheek again, and he shuddered at the sudden strange sensations that washed over him for a moment before fading away. “You’re almost ready.”

Part of him wanted to know what he was almost ready for, but honestly, his capacity to care had disappeared. It wasn't worth it, and he'd ran out of fucks to give. So instead of fighting her or asking her questions, Lance closed his eyes and remained limp and plaint.

The lady lowered him back into the warmth, and he let himself sink.

Chapter End Notes

It occurred to me that I forgot to mention... I may be double Posting on Wednesday as I MAY have a bonus Chapter... If I can get it to cooperate. :D Keep in mind, Bonus Chapters are SHORTER and usually post EARLIER in the day.

Also, for people wondering what SPOILER (Not really if you look in the tags) looks like... If I can convince my roomie... I'll have a picture for you guys on the Wednesday Post.
Bonus: Enough

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance’s time with the Druid was disorienting and vague. He felt lost in a ‘static’ which invaded his mind. He can faintly recall various things from the Static, such as a Lady or a familiar warm voice. They tell him things. Sometimes it was things he didn't want to hear, and sometimes, it was things he didn't mind hearing. The lady informed him that he was ‘almost done’, and Lance honestly didn't care anymore.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings: Mention of Possible Self Harm, Mention of 'Human' Experimentation

**If I missed any, please LET ME KNOW, so that I may add it here.

This is a BONUS Chapter, which means a) it's (usually) posted Earlier in the day, b) it's shorter than usual chapters, c) it CAN BE and in this case IS from another Character's POV, d) Bonus Chapters are chapters that I couldn't really fit into the main story line, but I felt needed to be included/ was somewhat requested by readers/commentators/Ghost (My Roomie).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lotor's life had been a non-stop turn of events that no one could have expected. In fact, it'd come to the point that Lotor expected the unexpected. As a young child, Lotor had been exiled for not being... well *enough*.

He wasn’t Galra enough. He didn’t look Galra enough. He didn’t take after his mother enough. He didn’t look or act like his father enough. He wasn’t fearsome enough. He just wasn’t *enough*.

He’d tried over the years to be better, to prove his worth to his father, to his father's people, to everyone. He'd taken down countless rebellions, captured thousands of planets, and destroyed hundreds of systems.

It was never enough for his father. For his father’s Empire. For anything really. The public, as easy as it was to manipulate, never cared for Lotor.

But that was fine. Over the years, he’d grown to not care about what they said, or how they felt. He wasn’t Galra enough, but he could use that to infiltrate resistances, or bypass Anti-Galra sentiments. He didn’t look or act like his father enough… well, who would want to? He wasn’t fearsome enough, but who needed fear when he could inspire loyalty?

Loyalty, Lotor had learned early on, was far more powerful than Fear ever could be. Loyalty
quelled uprisings, rebellions, and resistances. All he needed was one person to become loyal to him, and he could bring a resistance, a planet, a culture down to its knees.

He was not his father. He never would be, and that was fine.

That was fine because he had his four Generals, who’s loyalty had been given, tempered, and tested. He had the loyalty of the planets that he’d conquered in the name of Galra, who owed him for allowing them to keep their cultures and people.

He may not have been enough for his father’s empire, or for his father, but he was more than enough for what he’d built for himself.

However, for as much as Lotor had come to expect the unexpected, nothing could have prepared him for Lance.

He’d been on a nearby planet, where he’d been undercover tying to flush out yet another resistance when he’d seen the Blue Lion crash.

As a child, he’d grown up hearing his father talk of Voltron. Now, he’d heard the rumors and whispers. He’d heard of his father’s difficulties with beating them. As a matter of fact, Lotor had looked into them himself for a short while before deciding to let them battle it out with his father.

If they defeated his father, then he became Emperor Pro Tem, and he won. If his father defeated them, then nothing would change. To put it simply, they didn’t mean enough for Lotor to care.

Yet, his curiosity wouldn’t settle for his logical thinking. He’d looked up recordings and records. He’d studied the paladins from reports. He knew that if he truly wanted to know the Paladins capabilities, then he’d need to test them himself. However, that hadn’t stopped him from pouring over the information anyways.

Ironically, Lotor had determined that out of all the Paladins that he could use as a way into Voltron, the last Paladin Lotor had expected was the Blue one.

The Blue Paladin was the heart of the team. He kept things from getting too serious, but was more than capable of being serious when it was needed. He was able to motivate the others when they needed it, and was the star of redirecting them to their best uses.

The Red and Black paladins both had tied back to the Galra empire that Lotor could exploit. According to Acxa, his lead General, the Red Paladin was at least part Galra. Which interested him because there was only a few things he liked more than those who were part Galra.

Although, in his examination of the Paladins, Lotor had come to the clear conclusion that while he could use the Black or Red Paladins, either the Yellow or the Green Paladins were his actual ticket in the door.

Yellow was a pacifist at heart, and based on his performance thus far, Lotor didn’t think he even wanted to be in the war. It wouldn’t be hard for Lotor to ‘save’ a Balmera, earn some trust, and then turn it to loyalty. And once that was done, then he could offer a way out of the war ‘peacefully’.

As for the Green Paladin… she’d been hacking into ships and terminals. It’d taken a while to find what she was looking for, but evidently the Galra empire once held her family. She was looking for them, how sweet. And Lotor knew exactly where her father was. Their ‘freedom’ for her cooperation would be a fair trade.

Despite his theories and assumptions, he hadn’t been able to keep his curiosity contained when
he’d seen the Blue Lion crash. That lapse in self-control would end up being one of the most unexpected things to ever happen to him.

The Blue Paladin’s name was Lance, and he was more delightful than Lotor could have ever imagined.

When he first arrived to see the downed Lion and the Paladin, his first thought had been to take advantage of their vulnerability. But he didn’t know Lance’s capabilities. The risk was too great, as was the potential.

He’d given his fake name because he hadn’t known if Lance knew who he was or not, and so he started to try to earn the Paladin’s trust.

He was not ashamed to say that he’d been wrong. He’d been so very wrong. Because the best way into Voltron was through Lance.

Lance who was more expressive and alive than anything Lotor had ever seen before, besides maybe Ezor. Lance was certainly livelier than the other Paladins. It didn’t hurt that Lance was beautiful as well. Lance was so expressive, so alive, so much everything.

It had taken only that one day on the moon with Lance for Lotor to realize that he could use Lance.

It had taken only a few days after talking with Lance through the communicator to realize that he wanted Lance. He had Lance’s trust now, but what he wanted was more.

After all, Lance would understand. Lance was never *enough*. Not for the Voltron Team. Not for his family on the primitive world the Champion was from. Lance wasn’t even enough for himself. And Lotor could relate to all that. After all, he’d never been *enough*, either.

Until he was. Until he’d found his place with his four generals, and listening to Lance, Lotor realized that with him, Lance could be enough.

Besides which, Lotor had grown fond of Lance as they’d talked, and somewhere along the lines, Lotor’s plans shifted. It wasn’t enough to have Lance’s trust… he wanted his loyalty.

Of course, he didn’t realize that until Lance had stopped contacting him all together. Furthermore, the nearly endless stream of data that he’d been receiving from the device had ceased.

Prince Lotor did not worry, but he did feel something at his loss of Lance. What a wasted opportunity. What wasted potential. It was a shame. Just a bit longer, and he might have been able to finally get Lance to agree to leave with him. He hoped that Lance would not be treated too badly since he’d been found out.

That was all he could assume had happened anyways.

It truly was a shame. He had actually been looking forward to seeing Lance on his side. Now, that would never happen.

He’d given up on the ideas and plans he’d had for Lance by the time Ezor had practically bounced up to him with some ‘interesting news’. Evidently, a suspect believed to be the Blue Paladin had turned into an Altean during an interrogation. Haggar, herself, had been called from his father’s bedside to investigate.

It was only proper for Lotor to investigate and see what could have possibly distracted her from his father, right?
Words could not have begun to explain how pleased he was that he had.

If he had thought Lance to be beautiful before, then surely he knew nothing of beauty.

There was no beauty in the Druid interrogation chambers. There was no beauty in how they strung the prisoner up. There was no beauty in how they were treating him, in the glowing purple wounds scattered across his body, and the static of quintessence energy which arced off him occasionally.

But he could see where Lance’s beauty could be. Being Altean had not ruined Lance’s beauty, but had compounded upon it, for Lance’s beauty had been more than just appearance. It’d been in his energy, in his life, in him.

But now, Lotor could just imagine how beautiful Lance’s eyes would look once they were no longer glassy and dead. The soft swoops of the scales under Lance’s eyes were more delicate than any other Lotor had seen. And while Lance’s ears had been cute before, Lotor could only imagine the jewels he’d put there.

Neither the Druids nor Haggar were present, but even if they were, Lotor wouldn’t have acted any differently. He walked right up to Lance and touched his face, stroking the space where the delicate scales had appeared.

Despite being half Altean himself, Lotor had been born without scales, which, he supposed considering what they could do, was probably for the better. They were better used for decoration now than their actual purpose.

“What are you doing here?” Haggar demanded as she entered the room. Lotor smiled, patting Lance’s cheek in a silent promise to return to him. He turned to Haggar.

“I was just curious as to what could have possibly been more important than tending to my father.” Lotor drawled, he paused and gestured to Lance. “I trust you were going to inform me of this?”

Haggar’s silence was telling, informing him of what he’d already known. She hadn’t planned to tell him.

Good thing then for that transmission. He’d have to thank both Acxa and Ezor for their combined skills, after all, if Ezor hadn’t prompted Acxa into trying to find hidden transmissions, then Lotor would have never known.

Lotor would have lost this opportunity to Haggar forever. Based off his own childhood, he could only imagine the horrors she would have inflicted onto his fragile Blue Paladin. His fragile, broken Lance.

It was as if fate itself had intervened to bring him back to Lance.

“What do you plan to do with him?” Lotor asked.

“What do you want?” Haggar replied. Lotor’s responding grin was all teeth.

“I want him.” Lotor replied. “I want him to side with the Galra.” Lotor circled slowly around Lance, although his gaze remained on his father’s witch. Already so many thoughts and possibilities were floating around in his head.

Lotor could use Lance’s newfound heritage.

“I can’t imagine it’ll be hard to do. Just look at how his team has treated him. He’s been in our care
for some time now and they’ve yet to rescue him.”

“We’ll talk about this later.” Haggar growled. “He’ll wake soon.” Lotor hummed, and stopped in front of Lance.

He turned his attention back to him, and smiled softly. “I’ll be back for you.” Lotor promised quietly. He was not going to let an opportunity like this go.

Being the current leader of Galra meant he didn’t have much time, but he spared what he could to visit Lance. He knew his generals were curious, but so far, they’d been mostly content to leave him be. Zethrid, in particular, was annoyed with his constant returning from the battlefield, and Ezor was just curious as to what had captured his attention.

He had no doubt that Ezor would eventually begin to snoop. She never lasted long before resulting to that.

He’d fought with Haggar a few times over Lance. She wanted the secrets of Voltron from him. She wanted to try to continue her work on projects she’d started with the Champion on him. She wanted him. It was just too bad for her that he was acting emperor, and therefore, she had little choice but to agree to his wishes.

And what he wished for was Lance.

The ideas he’d had when he discovered Lance’s Altean heritage had grown. Lotor might not have been able to use quintessence magic, but the chances were high that Lance would be able to. After all, according to Haggar’s research, both of Lance’s birth parents had been Druids of the Empire.

Not as reassuring, however, was the fact that they’d both become traitors to the Empire. But what Lance didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

If Lance could use magic, and if he could become a Druid… then Lance could eventually take over as the lead Druid for the Empire. Lance would be what Haggar was to his father for Lotor.

No. Lotor was not his father. He’d be better than his father, just as Lance would be better than Haggar.

And, on the off chance that Lance couldn’t use quintessence magic, then Lotor was more than willing to accept someone as lovely as Lance into his harem. His newest piece, Princess Corral from Planet Demos, might have a problem with the new addition, but she could deal.

She didn’t interest Lotor like she once had. Dreams where she’d once starred had been replaced. Where he’d once seen her lovely amber eyes, he was seeing twin sapphires. Accents of gold were swapped out for swaths of sparking ocean blue.

Lance was the new star of Lotor’s dreams, and had been since before he’d discovered his Altean heritage.

Although, Lotor was sure that Lance wouldn’t have to be just a lowly harem member. Call it intuition, but Lotor just knew that Lance would be more, and it was for that reason that Lotor needed Lance to be loyal to him.

No. He needed more than loyalty from Lance. He needed Lance to need him. He needed Lance to want him. He needed Lance to be tied to him in every way possible until Lance belonged to no body but Lotor.
He wanted Lance, and he knew that Lance would want him in return.

The feelings were already there, or so said Haggar. Or at least, the very potent potential for the feelings. Although, she said that they were clouded over by doubt and guilt.

She’d grumbled at his demand to ‘fix that’. “Blue quintessence doesn’t work that way.”

“Then make it.” Lotor replied.

Her suggestions had been most pleasing. In his current state, Lance was susceptible. She recommended touching him, talking to him, promising him the things he’d get once he was done with Haggar’s conditioning.

All those things were completely acceptable things that Lotor wanted to do, and so he did.

While she had agreed to his demands, Haggar was still trying for her own plans. Lotor would watch in mute amusement as she’d try to get him to connect to the Blue Lion. So far, Lance seemed to be unable, leading both of them to believe that the connection had truly been severed.

Poor thing. Lotor really ought to thank the Voltron team for delivering him Lance like this. After all, he could very easily take something broken, and build it back up. As a matter of fact, he preferred it that way. There was no better way to inspire loyalty.

He’d thank the Voltron Team after he tore them apart piece by piece. Preferably with Lance by his side.

He’d already decided that he’d give Lance the Red Paladin. By the time they were done with Lance, he’d appreciate that treat.

Haggar’s attempts to instill loyalty to the Galra empire were useless. Lance would be loyal to Lotor. So long as Lance loved Lotor – and make his words, Lance would love Lotor – then there would be no problem.

When he’d expressed those thoughts, Haggar’s expression had soured. “Your obsessions will be the end of you both.” She muttered.

There was no doubt of who else she was talking about.

“I am not my father.” Lotor growled in response.

He was not his father. He would not allow folly obsessions to bring about his downfall. He was stronger than that, better than that… Smarter than that. He would not allow his obsessions to control him, like his father had allowed his to.

Lotor knew when to step back. He knew when to retreat from a fight. He knew his limits and his boundaries. He was not the fool his father was.

Besides, Lance would not be Lotor’s downfall. Lance would be one of his greatest assets, paralleling Lotor’s generals.

Although, Lotor didn’t mind when Haggar antagonized Lance. It pleased Lotor to know that Lance was quickly soothed by his presence. He could calm him back down, and lull him back into pliancy with the sound of his voice alone. Haggar always said he behaved better when Lotor was near.
Sweet thing didn’t seem to want to be a hassle for Lotor. He appreciated it.

Neither he, nor Haggar, thought it was a good idea for Lance to see him. She was worried it’d cause him to panic and undo their progress. And that was unacceptable.

Lance was his beautiful jewel. His shining star. His lovely Lance.

He couldn’t wait for the quintant that Haggar would announce that Lance could be taken home. That he’d finished this part of his conditioning.

There were setbacks, such as the time Lance tried to claw his beautiful scales off – which should have been illegal. Why would Lance want to ruin such beauty?! But, for the most part, everything had been smooth sailing.

Soon, all that would be left would be to further cement the bonds between them and help Lance grow as a Druid. It was a slow plan, but Lotor was used to those. He preferred to think in the long-term.

He’d started to imagine team Voltron’s reactions when he showed them what they’d helped him to create out of their former teammate. Lance would grow with Lotor. Lance would become powerful. Lance would finally be enough.

Needless to say, when Haggar finally announced that Lance was done, Lotor couldn’t have been happier.

Haggar would be returning back to his father’s ship, so that’d be one less thing in his hair. Not that it really mattered as he was sure that the Druids on his ship still reported his actions to Haggar. She never was able to keep her hands off of Lotor’s affairs.

But that was okay. He’d have Lance soon, and Lance would fix all of this in time. Eventually, Haggar would be a thing of the past, alongside his father. Relics of an old era.

He’d be happy to be rid of them both, and her annoying cronies that she’d send after him to babysit him. He wished she’d leave him in peace. The only time he was given peace was on his personal cruiser, and even then peace was debatable considering his Generals.

But how could he stay annoyed when he finally had Lance? The solution to a question that had plagued Lotor for years: who to succeed Haggar? Who to serve as Haggar for him?

Lotor insisted on carrying Lance himself. He would have taken Lance aboard the cruiser, but, there were no Druids there to train Lance, or to ‘fix’ him should he lapse. So, he’d taken him to the next best place: his personal chambers.

He was unable to resist the urge to put Lance on his bed. He needed to see how lovely Lance would look there, against his sheets. He needed to see if it was as perfect as his dreams would suggest.

No, his dreams were wrong.

They paled in comparison to the reality of Lance being in his bed. His dreams had been a mockery of perfection, but this…. This was true perfection. Lotor always admired pretty things, especially if he was the one to put them back together again.

Now, he just needed Lance to wake. It was time for the next phase of Lotor’s plan to begin.
Remember, today is a DOUBLE POST day, cuz I feel like it. Bonus Chapter First, then Regular Chapter. :) 

@ThatCatOnTheEdge: I hope this answered your question from Monday! Sorry I couldn't answer it then, as they was already in the works, and I couldn't spoil this. :D
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lotor didn't expect much from Lance. He only planned to use him to infiltrate and tear the Voltron team apart from within. However, as time progressed, he grew to enjoy and look forward to talking with Lance. When the calls cut off, he was disappointed, but didn't think much of it.

Until the Druids found Lance and had revealed his Altean heritage. Lotor knew an opportunity when he saw one, and decided to take this chance while he could. He had plans for Lance, which were only *slightly* influenced by his feelings.

**Chapter Notes**

*Trigger Warnings:* Mention of Possible Self Harm, Mention of 'Human' Experimentation, Mention of Non-Consensual Body Modification (Shiro's arm, Shiro's facial scar, etc), Mention of Torture.

Also, sorry for updating so late. I usually update while I was at work, and my usual beta, Ghost, was working on an art piece, so she didn't read through this chapter until late. And then Word crashed and my boss was being super needy and annoying. (And I can say that because he's a married man and asks me out on dates, and doesn't seem to understand the word 'no'.)

The next time Lance woke, it was in the same order as every time before.

Unlike those times, however, there were different sensations. For starters, he wasn’t being held up. Instead, he was laying on something soft; something so soft, in fact, that his body was half sunken into it.

He would almost describe it as a cloud if he didn’t know better. Then again, perhaps he’d finally died and it was a cloud. But somehow, he didn’t think that was the case, considering the other sensations he was feeling, like the hands that were touching him.

He recognized them from the way they gently ran their fingers against his skin. They caressed him, tracing along the side of his face with one hand while the other carded through Lance’s hair.

It sorta of reminded him of the hazy days when he’d get sick.

It wasn’t often that Lance was sick, but when he was, he got really sick. His mother would watch over him, run her hands through his hair, and wipe the sweat away with a cool damp cloth. Thinking of her only reminded Lance of how much he missed her and his family, and the fact that he would probably never see them again.
He almost didn’t notice when his hearing returned. Where ever the Druids kept him, he was used to the almost constant static, the crackle of the electric bands holding him, and the noises of the Druids. Here, it was quiet. The only familiar thing was the low steady hum which he’d come to associate with crystal energy and being on a ship.

For a moment, he thought he was still on the castle ship and that the past unknown amount of time was just a fever nightmare.

The fight never happened, he never left Blue, and he never lived on a Swap Moon. It was a stupid hope, especially since he knew that all of that did happen. No amount of hoping, wishing, or dreaming was going to change that.

The beds on the castle were never this comfortable. He could tell without opening his eyes that it was darker where ever he was than the castle usually was. Although, the most telling thing was the absence in his mind where Blue should have been. A sticky wall of static that Lance couldn’t quite pass separated him from where he should have felt her.

Just thinking about static sent icepick pains through his head. It was more than enough incentive to leave those thoughts alone.

He laid in the bed, his eyes closed. He was too scared to open them. If he opened them, then he’d know where he was. He’d know if he was safe or not. If he was still with the Galra, or with the Voltron crew, or some third party.

One look was all he needed. After all, Alteans favored whites and blues over the Galra’s favorites of darker shades, reds and purples. All he needed to do was open his eyes.

But, what if he was wrong? What if this was all a dream? A static dream, and he was still in the ‘gentle’ care of the Druids? What if that was why he couldn’t feel Blue? And if he wasn’t with the Druids… then where was he? He didn’t know.

Faintly, he could smell something floral. That was new. Normally, he fell back into the static before he could come to his sense of smell.

The scent somewhat reminded him of… lilacs and sunflowers. Lilacs, which usually made him think of Keith, and Keith’s eyes. But no one he knew smelled like that combination. Even further proof that he wasn’t among his team.

But perhaps that was a good thing. Yeah, it meant he was still with the Galra, or with a third unknown party… but, his team had left him. They abandoned him, even after he risked his and Blue’s lives to protect the Golden Boy, Keith.

They mistreated him, abandoned him, and worse yet, they replaced him with Coran.

A familiar chuckle broke the silence, and the hand that was stroking his face glided over, grazing the space below his eyes. Static crackled in his mind, but it wasn’t enough for Lance to sink into, to grab, to do anything with. It was just floating there, in the sudden wave of warmth and something foreign which flushed through him.

He only knew that he whimpered because he heard it. The hand on his face jolted, and then slid down away from his face until it was gone. The strange flood of feelings and the crackle of static faded as the hand left him.

What was going on? What had the Druids done to him?! He’d seen what they had done to Shiro’s pretty face – although the scar was pretty badass. Hell, he’d seen what they’d done to Shiro in
general. Lance didn’t want a prosthetic, no offense to Shiro or anyone who had one!

Not to mention whatever it was, it was on his face. They’d taken literally the last thing Lance had, his beauty. He didn’t have a home, his family, Blue, allies… nothing. But he had himself, and his looks.

“My apologies. I forget, sometimes, how sensitive those could be.” The familiar voice was a quiet rumble, but it wasn’t enough to distract Lance from what he’d said. How sensitive what could be?! What had happened to him?! “Did you sleep well?”

Once again, Lance was reminded of sticky sweet honey when the voice spoke. Honey and velvet. It was… still oddly soothing. Which helped, some, to keep the panic at a minimum. Although it wasn’t entirely effective.

Now that he was more awake, he could pinpoint other things that felt different. His entire body felt foreign. He both did and didn’t feel like himself. In some ways, it felt like he was… more, somehow.

He didn’t have the mental capacity to deal with this right now. He was Crona, or Krona, or however it was spelled from Soul Eater. He didn’t think he could handle this right now. But he didn’t have a choice. The static in his mind still danced out of his grasp, and when he could grab it, it was never enough for him to sink into.

He had no choice but to face whatever waited for him – the familiar honey-velvet voice with now familiar hands.

Lance opened his eyes, half expecting to see the cold dark walls of the interrogation room and find out that everything was a dream after all. He half expected to see the Lady’s glowing yellow eyes in his face, or the haunting masks of the Druids.

He was given nothing like that. Instead, he saw what looked a lot like the ceiling in someone important’s room. Like the ceiling in Allura’s bedroom, except, the colors were – as he feared – reds and purples.

Well, he saw that, and the identity of the familiar voice.

Some part of him, he suspected, had always known who the voice was. Although, he’d wanted to deny it so much that he’d forced himself not to recognize it. But, he always had. It was why the voice was so familiar. It was why he liked it so much.

After all, one couldn’t spend hours of time talking with someone and not to some degree recognize their voice. Quiznak, he should have known.

He should have recognized Lotor.

“Lotor,” Lance’s voice was hoarse, probably from a horrible combination of screaming, nonstop talking, and not speaking at all.

Lotor’s lips quirked up at the corners, and Lance watched as the grin grew until the alien was showing off his pearly whites. The skin at the corners of his eyes wrinkled with little crow’s feet. Conflicting feelings collided in Lance’s chest, making him feel like his heart was being squeezed, trapped in a cage of his rib bones.

There was the sharp sting of betrayal. Because when he looked at Lotor, he still saw Tyrac – his friend. But Tyrac didn’t exist, not really.
He didn’t see, nor did he want to see, Lotor – the Prince of the Galra Empire… and Lance’s enemy. He felt used, since Lotor had befriended Lance and used him to get information. But, he also felt… happy? Relieved?

Lotor may have used him, but… if he was here now, then that meant that he’d stopped the Druids. He’d saved Lance, right? Lance had only been saved because of the fact that he knew Lotor.

He didn’t know how Lotor had found out about Lance being in the Druid’s tender loving care. Perhaps he’d known from the beginning. Perhaps he hadn’t. But what mattered now was that Lance wasn’t in their care anymore.

And Lotor was probably the reason that Lance had been spared from further time with the Druids. Which explained the relief and Lance’s happiness. But it didn’t explain why Lotor was happy.

After all, he’d used Lance. But at least Lance had been useful to him, unlike the Voltron Team. Lance wasn’t useful to Lotor anymore. He wasn’t with the Voltron team. He didn’t have any secrets, any knowledge that Lotor didn’t already know.

So why was Lotor happy?

Surely it couldn’t have been because of Lance. No one was ever happy to see Lance.

Everyone was always ‘be serious, Lance’, or groaning whenever he entered a room, or insulting him by calling him ‘dumb’ or an ‘idiot’. No one that knew him liked him for long. Not unless they were Family, and therefore obligated to love him.

Perhaps it was because Lance recognized Lotor, and called him by name?

It couldn’t have been due to Lance himself. It just couldn’t. Then again, he could very faintly recall Lotor arguing with the Lady, hadn’t he? He’d talked to Lance too, right?

If he focused, then Lance could weakly recall the purr of Lotor’s voice. The gentle caresses. But, the more Lance tried to recall, the harder it became to remember. Lance’s memories of his time in the static were slipping away like water through open hands.

Ugh. This was just so confusing. Nothing was making sense. Nothing felt right. And he still didn’t know what the Druids had done to him. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know.

Ignorance was bliss, right?

“I should have expected you to learn my proper name.” Huh, so Lance had been right. Lotor was happy that Lance called him by his name.

As irrational as it was, Lance was actually kind of irritated that Lotor’s voice was still as soothing as it was. After turning Lance’s world inside out, what right did Lotor have to sound like that? But… at the same time, Lance wanted to cling to the warmth offered. It was cold in space. Cold and alone, just like the Castle and Blue. Was it wrong of Lance to miss warmth?

Yes, it was wrong.

Space was cold, that was a fact he’d come to accept. Everything up here was cold, so why was Lotor warm? Why would Lotor be giving him this warmth? Lance was… once… a Paladin of Voltron, Lotor’s enemy. Why would he be treated this way? Why was he in this lavish room, alone with Lotor? Why had Lotor… saved him from the Druids?
That was where Lance had been, right? With the Druids. He’d been in the space mall, and then he’d… somehow gotten to the warm static. It’d been due to the Druids. Lance was sure of it.

The icepicks in his head stabbed again, and Lance winced, his eyes watering at the short sharp pain. It hurt to think about that. He didn’t want to think about that. He just… wanted this all to be over.

“I don’t unders-” Lotor’s hand slid back against his skin until a finger was pressed against Lance’s lips, cutting him off.

“Don’t tax yourself, Lance.”

He’d heard Lotor say his name before, during their conversations, but there was something different about the way Lotor said his name now.

Lance’s name just seemed to roll of Lotor’s tongue, making it sound like Lance’s name was some sort of delicacy that Lotor couldn’t wait to eat. His tone was all sugar sweet, reminding Lance of Hansel and Gretel, and how the witch lured them in with sweets.

Lance wasn’t sure how he felt about any of this. The way Lotor said his name, the finger at his lips, the soft bed which he was sure belonged to Lotor.

His chest still felt tight. Too tight, and tightening. Tightening and tightening until it was almost so tight he couldn’t breathe. But he needed to breath. He needed to breath or else he’d be panicking – he already was – and that wouldn’t be doing him any good.

He went over the facts he knew. He’d been taken by the Galra… or had he given himself over? There was an itch at the back of his mind about innocents and not bothering to fight. Oh what did it matter? He was with the Galra, and then he spent time with the… Druids… and there was another sharp stab of pain.

Quiznak, this wasn’t helping.

He could remember the static, but he couldn’t. He knew there was important information in that static, but he couldn't find it. Thinking back on the static made things fuzzy, like a TV losing signal and going to white noise and static.

And even if he could remember what was so important in the static, that didn’t change the fact that he was pretty sure it wouldn’t explain things. There was no explanation for Lotor, or why Lance was no longer in the Druid’s care – or the care of the creepy Lady for that matter.

What had happened? What had Lance agreed to? He had to have agreed to something to be ‘free’. Or perhaps it’d been Lotor who ‘saved’ Lance. But then again, for what price?

There were so many questions bouncing around in his head. What happened? How did he get here? When was he moved? Who changed his clothes? How long had it been? Why was Lotor being so nice to him?

All the thoughts in his head were cycling, like a never-ending circle and stream of thoughts that all tumbled over each other. He felt disorganized, disoriented. He felt sick. His chest was still too tight. He needed… space. He needed air. He needed…

Lance moved away from Lotor’s hand. He needed to not be touched. He curled up in a sitting upright position near the top of the bed. With every move he made, Lance could feel the prince’s gaze on him, making chills run along Lance’s skin.
He didn’t like any part of this situation.

Not at all. Free from the Prince, momentarily, he opened his mouth to speak… and Lotor was already leaning forward to touch him again. Quiznak! What was with aliens and wanting to touch him!?

Lotor raised his hand to cup Lance’s cheek, and his fingertip brushed against something under his eye. A sweeping wave of vertigo and nausea rushed over Lance, along with those foreign feelings that he could maybe decipher as emotions if they could settle long enough. But as it was, Lance didn’t think he could manage to maintain contact for that long. Like before, the sensations faded when Lotor moved his hand away.

Okay. So, whatever the Druids did… it affected his face. That was basically confirmed. Like, he’d already suspected, but now it was like… BAM, hitting him in the face.

He’d… he’d deal with that whenever he was given access to a mirror. Hopefully, it wouldn’t be anything… bad. Like Shiro’s entire arm was missing but for all intents and purposes, Shiro didn’t even notice because the prosthetic was that awesome and…

He was recycling thoughts again. He was still running around in loops and cycles. Stuck on a track, crashing into the same thoughts over and over.

“It was a shame that such beauty was hidden away.” Lotor’s voice was quieter as he spoke, but, it was as warm and steady as usual. It didn’t stop Lance from flinching at his voice.

Once again, Lotor brushed against that spot below Lance’s eyes. Each jolt of that strange feeling only worsened the conflicted feelings in his chest, and only tightened the squeezing of his heart.

He wished Lotor would stop that.

He didn’t want to be reminded that the Druids had done something to him. He didn’t want to be here. He’d almost prefer to go back to the Druids, if this was how Lotor was planning on torturing him.

The next time Lotor touched him, Lance was able to place one of the possible emotions. It still felt foreign, but he thought he could place it as… affection.

It wasn’t making him feel affectionate; no, not by any means. If anything, it just made the nauseous feelings from before worse. Especially since Lotor couldn’t decide if he wanted to keep touching Lance or not. Perhaps if he had time to become accustomed to the feelings invading him, then he’d be fine.

Pft. As if. Like Lance would ever be fine with whatever had been done to him.

“Oh, Lance.” Lotor’s voice was still the quiet warm honey it was before, and Lance hated it. He hated it as much as he hated that he could feel warm sticky wetness on his cheek. He hated it as much as he could feel Lotor brush away the tears. “I’ve got you now. You’re safe with me.”

Lance didn’t feel safe.

He was still with the Galra. The Druids had done something to him. What, he didn’t know. Someone he had thought was a friend was really the Prince of the empire he’d once fought. How could he possibly ever feel safe, especially with Lotor?

“How can I see your beautiful eyes if they’re clouded with tears?” Lotor tsk’ed and shook his head. “I suppose it cannot be helped though. After all, I can’t imagine how you’re feeling right now after
being abandoned by those you once called friends,” Lotor sighed. “Simply dreadful.”

Lotor’s hand dropped. He looked Lance over before returning his gaze on Lance’s face, and once again shook his head.

“I don’t understand how they could let cast a jewel like you away. Even in your prior form you were lovely, although, I can’t imagine why you’d ever want to change such gorgeous features as your scales. But I suppose it wasn’t your choice, was it?”

At first, Lance thought he might have misheard, but he knew that was just hopeful wishing. He knew what he heard, and he knew he heard correctly.

*Scales.* Lotor said ‘scales’.

No, no, no. Humans didn’t have scales; and Lance was human.

He was raised with a human mom, dad, and siblings. He’d looked human all his life. He’d taken human medications, and gone to human doctors… and... he was pretty damn sure that if he wasn’t human then someone should have… would have found out by now.

*Scales.*

Like what the Alteans had? Because Lance didn’t care about Allura’s thoughts, or Coran’s theories. No. No. No. Was ‘no’ an emotion? Because Lance was really feeling it if it was.

It wasn’t that Lance didn’t believe Lotor but… he didn’t want to believe Lotor.

He didn’t even realize he was touching his face until his fingertips registered something smooth and cool under them, just below his eyes. They were smooth, kind of flimsy, and felt like some of those semi-thick jewel stickers. Like the sticker earrings his niece loved to stick on things.

They almost felt like Lance just needed to find the edge or seam, and then could just… pull them off. Except there was no edge that he could pull up on.

What had they done to him?! He had *scales*. *Scales*?!

Quiznak. What had the Druids done to him!?

Lance’s hands were shaking, not that he noticed until Lotor’s hands grasped Lance’s and held them. Lotor prevented Lance from continuing to scratch at the ‘seams’. No. No. No. Lance needed them off. He wanted them gone.

He didn’t want scales. He didn’t want this. Quiznak his wishes to be ‘different’ or ‘special’ or to have his ‘own thing’. If it meant this… if it meant having scales, then Lance didn’t want to be special.

He just wanted to be back home. He Just wanted to be back on Earth. He just wanted to be ‘that boy from Cuba’ again. He didn’t want to be here. He didn’t want to be in space, or be an alien, or some weird experiment from the Druids.

Lotor’s eyebrows knitted together, and he pressed his lips together, slowly shaking his head. “I thought we were past this, Lance.” The pity in Lotor’s eyes were neither wanted nor needed. “Haggar said you were doing so well.”

Haggar. Lance felt like he should recognize the name. Maybe he heard his other teamma- maybe
he heard one of the others saying her name.

He was about 75% sure that Haggar was the name of her freaky space witch who kept sending those Robeast monstrosities after him. He was about 70% sure that Haggar was the one who did a nasty number on Shiro a few times. And if both of those Haggars were the same and did all that, then he was pretty positive that she was the one who attacked them with the Kumar.

More terrifying, Lotor said that Haggar said something about him doing well. Which meant that same Haggar had done something to Lance, or at the very least, had been around Lance. The lady in the static flashed in his mind for a moment.

“You’re doing so well.” Her voice crooned to him in a memory.

Funny. He tried to think of the static, and the memories slipped away. But if memories were triggered, then he could recall them.

Lotor’s thumbs were rubbing circles into the back of Lance’s hands, and when Lance blinked and refocused on him, he could still see pity in the prince’s gaze. Lotor pulled Lance’s hands away from his face, until they were down in Lance’s lap.

“Terrible,” Lotor murmured, and Lance stiffened at the words. “I can’t imagine the torment you must have gone through, if even the thought of being so special and different makes you react like this.”

He released one of Lance’s hands, and lifted his own to cup one of Lance’s cheeks again. Lance didn’t know what Lotor’s obsession is with his… with his … -- he couldn’t think it. He didn’t want to accept it – face. Thankfully, Lotor was just stroking Lance’s cheek, and wasn’t touching there.

“Then again, I’m not surprised…. I heard how your own teammates treated you. It’s not farfetched to believe your home planet to be as equally unforgiving and barbaric.”

There was a brief moment of panic. There was a moment where Lance’s breath was stuck in his lungs, like the air was made of sticky glue. He couldn’t breathe before, but now it was worse. Everything was still catching up to him, and he wished Lotor would just leave him alone so he could freak out and panic to his heart’s desire.

He wanted to be sick. He wanted to scream. He wanted to throw things and kick things. He wanted to curl up in a ball. He wanted to cry. He wanted his mother’s hugs. He wanted to forget everything that had happened.

After he’d discovered what had been done to his face, he’d completely forgotten who he was talking to… or more accurately, what Lotor knew.

Lotor knew almost everything. He knew about Shiro being missing. He knew about the team dynamics. He knew how the team had been treating Lance. Lotor had heard it all. Lance had complained to him about it. There wasn’t much that Lotor didn’t know, especially about him. About how he felt.

Not to mention, some of the things Lotor had said earlier… and the brief memory of the witch… How much more did Lotor know now? What all had Lance said in the spaces of his memory that he couldn’t recall?

There was another moment of panic, although Lotor either had impeccable timing or had sensed Lance’s panic.
Lotor was taller and broader than Lance, and when Lotor hugged him, it felt like the prince was encompassing him. Like a Hunk-hug, but different. Whereas Hunk-hugs felt comforting, Lotor’s hug felt more like walls around Lance, trapping him in a nightmare.

Lance’s whole body shook like a leaf in a hurricane. Pressure had been building inside of him, and at Lotor’s hug, it was like a storm surge breaking past a seawall. He sobbed, curling into Lotor’s hug, not because he wanted to, but because it was the only comfort he was going to get here.

His tears wouldn’t stop, even as he buried his face into Lotor’s chest.

Everything was so fucked up. This whole situation was all sorts of fucked up. Like, this was the type of ‘fucked up’ that everyone always believed would happen to someone else. This was the type of ‘fucked up’ that had to be true because it was just too fucked up to be made up.

Lotor held him closely, occasionally running a hand through Lance’s hair or down his back in an attempt to soothe him. He was humming Lance’s song while he did so, intermediately pausing to quietly shush Lance.

Lance swore if Lotor said the words ‘it’ll be alright’, he was going to scream.

Clearly, this was all some hallucination. He’d gone crazy. The Druids pushed him past the brink of his sanity, and now he was just imagining that Lotor came, rescued him, and was comforting him and hugging him because honestly, nothing else made sense.

Lance was officially Looney Tuney.

Although, why his brain chose Lotor to come rescue him instead of his friends… yeah, that was a mystery. And why his brain decided to go ahead and make Lance… not-entirely human… was another mystery.

Or maybe those weren’t mysteries.

Who had he turned to in his times of need recently? Tyrac. Tyrac, who was really Lotor. He hadn’t turned to his team. He’d turned to the prince of the enemy empire. The enemy empire which had captured him. So, that mystery was solved.

As for the whole… not-entirely-human thing, well… it was his brain giving him a ‘thing’. Like how he used to imagine he was superhero or a merman when he was little. He wanted to be special, to have a use. Now he did… sort of.

Okay, now that he’d established that he was crazy, maybe he could handle this all a bit easier now? After all, this was all in his head, right?

Except, nothing felt like it was all in his head. Everything felt so… real. From the pressure and warmth of Lotor’s hands on his back –still rubbing slow circles – to the breath against his head, to the heart beat in Lotor’s chest.

Okay, so maybe this wasn’t all in his head. He didn’t know anymore. He didn’t know.

“I’ve got you now, Lance,” Lotor repeated his words from what felt like vargas ago. “Tell me, what can I do to make things better for you?”

“I want to go home.”

The words spilled out like water out of a bucket with holes in it. Lance didn’t mean to say the
words, but they were said none-the-less; and words, once spoken, could not usually be taken back. The hands on his back stilled for a second, and then resumed.

“If that is so, then I will make it happen.” There was this calm confident lit to Lotor’s voice, and for a moment, Lance actually believed him. His tears slowed at the promise, a small spark of hope lighting in his chest at the idea of going home.

After the moment passed, however, Lance was terrified. He didn’t want to introduce the Galra to Earth. He didn’t want the Galra there, but…

“You’re allowed to be selfish. If going home is what you desire, then I’ll destroy Galaxies for it to happen for you.” Lotor assured him, pulling away just enough for him to lean down and press his forehead against Lance’s.

Lance’s stomach flipped at the movement, and the close proximity to his face. This close, he could see flecks of darker purple in Lotor’s irises, which again reminded him of Keith’s eyes. The color, however, was the only thing they held in common, and it was only noticeable at close range.

The conflicted feelings inside of Lance swelled, bolstered by Lotor’s actions and words.

Lance didn’t think he could handle this right now. Any of this. Wasn’t Lotor supposed to be torturing him? Lance was a Paladin of Voltron – except he wasn’t anymore, was he? What was Lotor’s motive here?

“In the meantime, why don’t you enjoy all that the Empire has to offer you?” Lotor offered, pulling away from the hug to look at Lance.

The offer sounded an awful lot like a deal with the devil. Lotor was attractive enough to be one, and the words that slipped out of his mouth were practically dripping in silver. A deal with the devil was always too good to be true.

And, if something seemed too good to be true, then it probably was.

“I don’t think there’s much for it to offer me.” Lance sniffled and shook his head. Lotor made a noise of acknowledgement and leaned back, to raise an unimpressed eyebrow at Lance. “I’m a Paladin of Voltron.” Lance continued.

Except Lance wasn’t. Not anymore. It seemed they both knew that as Lotor responded with a short bark of incredulous laughter.

“Are you?” Lotor asked. “From where I stand, it appears that they’ve left you, haven’t they? After all, it was I who took you from the Druids, not them; and it is I who offered you to return home, to leave this war, to be with your family.”

He didn’t want to think it, but, Lotor was right. In all counts. Except it’d been Lance who had left. But he’d returned… and he’d taken a hit for Keith and still been abandoned.

“You’d be amazed at what the empire could offer you, Lance.” There was a gleam in Lotor’s eyes when he spoke, and the sharpness of his smile was more than just teeth.

As much as he hated to admit it, Lance could see the appeal in what Lotor was saying. Lotor was offering something to Lance, and as far as Lance could tell, Lotor wasn’t asking for anything in return. Not that Lance had anything to give. He was penniless, defenseless, and friendless. He was alone. He’d officially hit rock bottom.
Yet, here was Lotor; offering Lance everything.

“I don’t have much other choice, do I?” Lance’s voice sounded painfully small. He was used to his voice filling a room, usually with laughter and happiness. But now, he sounded small and trapped. Sad and lonely. He hated it.

“You always have a choice.” Lotor assured Lance.

Except Lance didn’t.

He didn’t know where he was, except that he was in enemy territory. He was alone, but surrounded by people. He had no armor or defense, except Lotor’s word as Prince of the Empire to protect him. He had no weapons to fight his way out.

Furthermore, he’d been experimented on by the Druids, and while he knew he had… scales now, he didn’t know what else they’d done. Besides which, he was super doubtful that Lotor would actually let him go free.

The only way he could see an escape would be if Lotor was true to his word and returned Lance to Earth; or if Lance bartered a way out… but the only thing he had to barter with was his body. He had respect for people who could and would do that, but Lance was not one of them.

As it stood, Lance was a song bird in a gilded cage, both literally and figuratively. He had no doubt that he was in Lotor’s personal room. Everything was too… too much... for it to be a simple bedroom, and Lance was not delusional enough to believe this to be a prisoner’s cell.

Although it was in a way. This was his cell, as far as he knew.

The price of knowing a Prince, he supposed.

His heart was fluttering in his chest, except it wasn’t the almost-could-be flutter of anxiety and nerves from when Keith smiled at him, or laughed at one of his jokes. It wasn’t the confident but nervous fluttering from when Shiro gave him his first real Space Dad Smile. It was more akin to the sad broken feeling he got when he thought of home, except, this didn’t hurt like that.

Lance sucked on his bottom lip in thought. The skin was chapped, and he could feel indents where he’d bitten his lip during his time with the Druids. He could still taste blood. He’d never been one to believe in omens before, but perhaps this was one. Perhaps not.

It wasn’t like he had the choice to take that into effect. He could, at the very least, listen to what the empire could ‘offer’ Lance. After all, it’d give Lance time to think, to decide, and maybe…

Maybe Lotor could make the Druids fix him. Maybe he could go back to being human. Lance sniffled, and pulled away his hand to wipe at his face. He must look like such a mess, but Lotor didn’t seem to care.

He didn’t seem to care that Lance had cried into his chest either. As a matter of fact, it seemed that Lotor did actually care for Lance. He’d rescued him from the Druids, and had comforted him, and had offered to take him home, and… maybe Lotor could help him.

Lance sniffled again, and took a deep breath, steeling himself for what he was about to say. Lotor would help him… Lance just needed to ask for it.

“What would the empire offer me?” The question tasted like betrayal, but, then again, it was the Voltron team who betrayed him first.
Alright, as promised, I managed to get Ghost to post a Druid!Lance pic. She actually redrew the one I had in mind (it was the only way), but [HERE](#) it is!!

ALSO, if you guys notice anything, due to the complications Word was giving us... there may have been some things that slip though the crack. I can re-read as many times as I like, but because I re-read it so often, I easily miss things.
Reflections

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance woke up in an unfamiliar place and realized that the familiar voice that he'd been hearing was in fact Prince Lotor. Lance freaked out upon realizing and finding out that not only had he been experimented on, but he'd changed as a result of it.

Lance realized with these changes, he could never hope to return home to Earth peacefully. This led to the realization that he was essentially stuck with nowhere else to go. Lotor encouraged Lance to stay with the Empire, and with some hesitation, Lance wondered what the Empire could offer him.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warnings:** Mention of Possible Self Harm, Mention of 'Human' Experimentation, Mention of non-consensual Body Modification (Lance's Altean form being revealed), Mention of Torture.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lotor’s personal bathroom was both everything and nothing like what Lance expected it to be. Given the bedroom just outside, he’d expected the bathroom to match the luxurious décor. He wasn’t wrong either. The bathroom honestly felt like a rich hotel’s bathroom. Like the type of hotel that charged more than a thousand a night.

He’d avoided looking into any of the vanities' mirrors when he first entered the bathroom, and had explored everything he could first. But now he had no choice but to face reality. He kept his gaze downcast as he walked to the vanity closest to the door.

The metal of the counter felt cold beneath Lance’s hands, but it helped steady him. He could manage cold. It was in his veins and soul, and was a comfort more than a discomfort now, even if it reminded him of Blue.

He took a deep breath and looked up. At first glance, Lance could maybe pretend that nothing had changed.

There were little things that he expected, like his hair being limp from lack of proper care, or the fact that his skin was paler than usual from lack of sunlight. He was the same height, although, perhaps he’d lost some weight since he last looked in a mirror. His hair was a bit longer, almost to mullet lengths.

Ugh. He’d have to fix that later.

But, despite how different he felt... how wrong he felt... There weren’t many actual changes to his appearance. He removed a hand from the counter, and he watched his reflection as it matched
his movements. It was him in the mirror, no matter how different, or not so different, he looked.

There were differences, however, that he couldn’t look over and ignore. The scales weren’t the only things that had changed.

His ears were longer and pointed at the top. When he ran his fingers over them, he felt nothing but smooth skin and flexible ear cartilage. His ear was soft and warm against his fingers, and when he pinched them, there was pain. They were his, and yet, they weren’t.

He lowered his hand back down to the counter, and then shifted his weight to his arms and hands as he pitched forward, leaning until his nose was nearly touching the smooth glossy surface of the mirror.

This close, he could really see the changes to his eyes. In a fantasy elf kind of way, his eyes were kind of pretty. The new orange color of his pupils contrasted – he was pretty sure that was the right term – rather nicely against the now brighter blue of his iris. They didn’t look bad, even though they weren’t as complimentary as Allura’s blue and pink, or Coran’s turquoise and purple.

Everything said and done, he still preferred his boring blue human eyes over these fantasy elf eyes.

He’d always mentally considered Allura and Coran as magic Space-Elves. He never thought he’d have to include himself in that classification. He sighed, and allowed himself to slide back down until he was resting with his feet flat against the ground again.

He’d been avoiding really looking at them, but there was no way he could not notice them. The brilliant blue crescent moon scales under his eyes.

Objectively, they were pretty. If they weren’t on him, he may have loved them. His fingers twitched with the need to touch them, to prove their existence. The only reason he resisted that need was because he knew that if he gave in, then he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from picking at them.

The idea of not having scales anymore was appealing. However, the thought of the pain he’d be in to remove them, and the mental image of blood streaming down his face was a good enough deterrent.

Plus, then he’d have scars. And honestly? Lance preferred the pretty scales over scars. Not to say that scars weren’t pretty, because Shiro rocked his but… Lance wasn’t Shiro.

Maybe, if the scales were less permanent then Lance would like them more. If they were something as simple as removable stickers, or shiny little stick on jewels or something. But they weren’t. They were permanent, as far as Lance knew. Unless, of course, Lance learned how to do that camouflage thing that Allura once did.

The camouflage thing that he’d evidently been doing his entire life. His head was still spinning with the story that Lotor had told him. How his birth parents were Druids who’d been on a ship when it was attacked by rebels. His mother must have landed on Earth, and had used quintessence manipulation to ‘force’ Lance to keep his human shift.

It seemed too… crazy to believe. He’d almost rather believe that he’d been experimented on. But, it explained the song that Lance knew… and he was adopted…. But adopted or not, he was still Lance. He was still raised by his human parents, and he still identified as human.

Although, it was hard to deny the proof that he was… Altean… When he was looking right at it.
He wasn’t sure how to take this information. It wasn’t like he ever read a brochure saying ‘So, You Found Out You’re A Member Of An Endangered Alien Species Of Magic Space Elves’ while at the Garrison. He couldn’t just go over to the local library and check out ‘Being a Magic Space Elf for Dummies’ book. The closest equivalent to that here would be accepting Lotor’s offer.

Quiznak, and wasn’t that a hoot?

He pressed his lips together, and adverted his gaze away from the mirror, looking at the door back out to the bedroom. Lotor was probably still waiting for him. Lance had been promised time to think about things, like whether he wanted to take the ‘benefits’ of the Empire or not.

Lance had choices, but they were defined by Lotor and the empire.

The freedom offered to Lance was limited. He could roam free through Lotor’s personal rooms at his leisure. That was the one basic freedom he was granted. He was half tempted to trash the rooms, but honestly, he was too scared of the retribution to actually do it. Keith was the impulsive one, not him.

If he wanted to leave these rooms… Well, that required making a deal with the devil. That was, if the devil was a half Galra Prince of the Empire.

Oh sure, Lotor made it all sound nice, and had put a nice spin on it to appeal to Lance’s request to go home. A request he now realized was completely stupid. He realized it before, but, it didn’t really hit him until he was given time to think.

No matter how much he missed home, he knew he couldn’t return. Not now. He refused to bring any part of this clusterfuck back to them. Everything he loved and held dear would be destroyed, his home would be conquered, and worse of all: he’d be the one responsible. Uh, hell no, not today, Satan.

Even if he entertained the idea of the Galra not conquering Earth – HA! Fat Chance – then he still couldn’t return. He couldn’t bear the thought of his family rejecting him, or worse, thinking he was an imposture. Of course, that was assuming that the government didn’t capture him and do whatever they were going to do to Shiro to him.

Logically, he knew he couldn’t return home.

Yet, the idea of being wrapped up in one of his mom’s hugs really appealed to him, especially now. He wanted to be under a kid dogpile; comprised of his younger siblings, nieces, and nephews. He wanted to be teased by Daniel about when he was finally going to bring a girl – or a boy, Lance wasn’t picky – home to the family. He missed all the noise and commotion, and how it was nearly impossible to actually sleep in because of it.

He was delusional to think Lotor would take him home and leave. If anything, Lotor wanted to know so he could use it against the others. Capture Earth and hold it hostage against the Paladins.

His options were simple.
1. He continued this delusion that Lotor would take him home.
2. He took back his request, and remained stuck here in Lotor’s rooms.
3. He took back his request, and he accepted what Lotor’s offered.

The first option was clearly out. He couldn’t take that. He couldn’t do that. He refused to be the cause of his family, and everyone else on Earth, suffering. He refused to help the Galra enslave and conquer the Earth. He just wouldn’t allow it.
That left him with two options, and he wasn’t sure which was worst.

The rooms were nice, from what he could see. He knew they continued on past what the second door in the bedroom, although he didn’t know what was past that point. The rooms were lavish and luxurious.

Hell, Lotor’s bathtub alone could fit his entire bathroom from home. The bed was soft and comfortable. It wouldn’t be so bad living here… except he knew himself, and he knew he’d go crazy within just a few days. He’d never been able to stand being cooped up for long.

Which left the last choice. But could he really do it?

Lotor had given him some clothes to change into if he agreed to the offer. When he’d entered the bathroom, Lance had tossed them aside, but now, he turned and picked them up.

The coarse outer material of the robe half spilled out of his hands, pooling on the ground. The robes felt heavy in his hands, the weight both physical and not. The choices he made here were everything, and he knew this. He took a deep breath, and then another.

Lance was still conflicted on whether he betrayed his friends, or they betrayed him. Yes, he left them, but he came back for them. He took a hit for them. They left him. So, they’d betrayed him, right? But then again, he’d been giving information to the enemy. So, he betrayed them.

If he put this robe on for survival, would it be considered another betrayal?

He rubbed the material of the robe between his fingers, worrying it as he thought. Lotor said he’d give him a few quintants to think about this, which if Lance recalled correctly, meant a few days. A few days to think about this, and boy, did he have a lot to think about.

After all, the very people now offering to help him were the same people who’d tortured him. At least, he was pretty sure they had.

Like Shiro’s memories were fuzzy, so were Lance’s. Probably a product of the mind trying to protect itself. Or a result of the Druids messing with him. He wasn’t sure.

Lotor offered his protection, and Lance at least trusted that no one would hurt him without incurring the Prince’s anger but… could he really trust the Druids? After everything they did, he wasn’t sure.

He let the material slide though his fingers and pool on the cool floor of the bathroom. It wasn’t long until he slid down to join it, burying his head into his hands as he curled up into a ball.

He just… didn’t know what to do anymore.

It wasn’t long before Lotor came to check up on him. Which made sense, since Lance didn’t know how long he’d been in the bathroom, let alone curled up in a ball on the floor. He was hit with a thought, one so familiar that he trembled at the implication of it.

Time did not exist here.

It was a familiar thought, tinged with pain. But, he didn’t want to remember that. For as much as he wanted to remember his time in the static, he didn’t want to remember the pain. He didn’t want to remember at all.

He curled up tighter as he heard the door slide open. There was silence as Lance imagined Lotor
looking at him. A sigh cut through the silence, followed by quiet footsteps. Lanced jumped when a hand touched him. The hand slid over the thin tight black suit he’d been given by the Druids – he assumed that anyways – until Lotor’s arm was wrapped around Lance. The prince pulled him close.

This was the second time in less than a quintant that he’d been hugged by Lotor. That he’d been comforted by the prince.

But it wasn’t the same as his family. If he was like this with them, then… this would be different. They’d be trying to cheer him up, telling jokes and laughing in hopes of making him feel better. But, he wasn’t with them. Instead, he was alone with Lotor.

But he’d take the comfort he could get, even if it was quiet soothing comfort from the Prince. Besides, he had to get used it. This was his life now, after all.

After about a varga, Lotor pulled away, and ran a hand through Lance’s hair. He smiled down at Lance, and then wiped away the tear tracks on Lance’s face.

“How about we get your hair cut?” Lotor suggested quietly. “I’ve heard that after a traumatic experience, having the option to do something yourself can help.” He paused, as if he was gauging for a reaction. “And I know how you feel about your appearance.”

Oh yes, because that made Lance feel any better. Bringing back up how much Lotor knew Lance, and how little Lance knew of him. He had no way of knowing if the things Tyrac had told him were true or not.

But… he was right. Lance had been just thinking about his hair not too long ago, and it would probably make him feel better.

“You said you used to… ‘braid’ your younger relatives’ hair when you were stressed, right?” It was actually kind of… comforting how uncomfortable Lotor sounded trying to comfort Lance. Even if every reminder of how well Lotor knew him was like an arrow to the knee.

“I… don’t usually allow this, but if you’d like to do this… ‘braiding’ of my hair, then I would not be opposed.”

“You’d make yourself uncomfortable to comfort me?” Lance needed clarification, just to make sure he was hearing that correctly. He sniffled and wiped at his eyes, before looking back at Lotor.

His hair was super long, and braiding was something Lance had always enjoyed, that was true.

“If it’ll make you smile again.” Lotor replied. “You’re beautiful when you smile.”

Lance sniffled again. “But what if I give you a crazy hair style?”

Lotor seemed to chew his response over. After a long moment, he sighed quietly. “It’s just hair. It’ll grow back.”

Lance half smiled and weakly laughed at that. “I’m braiding your hair, not cutting it.”

“There’s that smile.” Lotor grinned. “Now, let’s get you cleaned up, and fed.” He stood, and offered his hand to Lance to help pull him up. “And then you can braid my hair.”

Lance accepted the help. “Sorry. You haven’t really seen me at my best lately.”
Lotor shrugged. “I didn’t expect to. You’ve been through something traumatic. First you were abandoned by your friends, and then everything else.” He sighed and shook his head. “It’s only natural for you to be upset. After all, you have a lot of changes to adjust to. Just know that I’m here for you.”

Lotor rested his hand on Lance’s shoulder. His gaze was soft and kind, and Lance appreciated that.

“Thanks.” Lance replied, ducking his head.

“It’s no problem. Take as much time as you need, Lance, and when you’re ready… just let me know.”

Lotor’s words were vague, but they were probably meant to be. Lotor probably meant it as telling Lance that he could take as much time as he needed for just about anything; whether that was time to grieve over the friends he never had to begin with, or to adjust to the changes, or to decide on his options.

It was nice, however, that Lotor wasn’t forcing anything on him. He was allowing Lance time. He was comforting him. He wasn’t bothered by Lance’s messy appearance, or his red watery eyes, or the sniffling.

Lotor seemed to care about Lance, and right now, that was all Lance could have asked for.

Chapter End Notes

Alright couple things.

1) Wednesday is another double update day. I hope you guys haven't gotten too used to them, as this will be the last double update for awhile.

2) I was given some very gorgeous fanart!
   - Altean!Lance by Yuzurudropa
   - Druid!Lance by sangakumanami

3) I’ve had a couple people Comment/Message me asking about the Altean Eyes thing. Here is a post explaining about that in regards to CANON. I realize that I may have gotten Coran's incorrect in the story as I'm unable to find the screenshot where I saw he had turquoise pupils again. I've taken creative liscense on giving Lance orange pupils, and he looks fantastic.

   THANK YOU SO MUCH!! :3 <3
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance spent some time in Lotor’s bathroom, trying to come to terms with who and what he was, and what his options moving forward were.

In the end, he was comforted by Lotor. Lance decided that maybe Lotor wasn't all that bad after all.

In the world of being Lotor’s ‘song bird’ there were a few small mercies: being allowed alone in the room except for one guard unless Lotor was with him, sleeping on a soft comfortable couch, taking varga long bubble baths in an awesome tub, and exploring Lotor’s library.

“You ate *what*?”

Watching Lotor’s facial expressions when he learned about Space Goo, however, was just a pleasant bonus.

Lance raised a hand to his mouth, biting down on his finger to help prevent himself from bursting into laughter. Lotor looked so distressed. Like, Lance didn't think it was possible for the Prince to look this flustered. His nose was scrunched up, eyebrows furrowing. There was honest disgust in his eyes. Even his perfect hair was messed up and that just made this all just so quiznaking perfect.

“I fail to understand how you didn’t bring *that* up.” Lotor continued, like he didn’t notice Lance dying from trying not to laugh. Which Lance knew wasn’t true because Lotor was like always super attentive towards him.

“That is disgusting.” Lotor shook his head.

“I’m the one who actually ate it.” Lance was amazed he managed to hold back his laughter long enough to speak.

Lance lost his cool as he watched Lotor process Lance’s words. One tick passed, and then another and then it happened. Realization dawnded and oh man. The look Lance was given was one of pure horror, and Lance couldn’t hold it in anymore. Laughter spilled out of him in waves, leaving him gasping for air.

“This… This isn’t funny, Lance! Who knows how long that… goo… has been sitting around in that castle! I can’t believe…” Lotor trailed off as he shook his head, still not believing what Lance said about the Space Goo.
Lance’s laughter bubbled back up at Lotor’s protests. He flopped down onto the couch, his hands resting on his stomach. He was making a valiant effort to stop laughing, if only because he knew that if he didn’t then he’d get sick. Laughing this much after eating should be illegal. It really should.

“Relax. I’ve had worse.” It’s a shame Lance wasn’t able to watch Lotor anymore because he was sure that that comment was going to get a reaction. Lance counted the ticks that passed. One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

“You’ve what?!” There was a faint hysterical tone to Lotor’s voice.

Lance wasn’t sure if his next bout of laughter was triggered by the face that he was imagining that Lotor was making, or the very audible response.

“Tell me you’re joking.”

Lance shook his head, mostly because he was still laughing too hard to respond and he knew Lotor would see the movement.

It’d been too long since Lance laughed like this, and it felt good. Honestly, he couldn’t remember the last time he laughed this hard. It was sort of relieving to know that even now, in the presence of the enemy and feeling completely wrong and foreign in his own body, Lance could still laugh.

Lotor entered his field of vision, frowning down at Lance so hard his eyebrows were knitting together.

“You’re… pulling my leg.”

Poor Lotor, who tried oh so very hard to copy human customs and speech for Lance. Lance could appreciate that the Prince was trying. It was pretty touching. But, Lotor’s words sent Lance into another fit, and it took a few more ticks before Lance was able to respond.

“Nope.” Lance popped the ‘p’ as he sung the word out. “My sister made me some soup once, and nuh-uh. Never again. Not gonna happen. Tasted like she threw together hotdog water with some sand and salt water with rubbery bits of chicken in it.”

Lotor let out an honest to goodness whimper; and Lance was gone, lost to his laughter.

Chapter End Notes

Ya’ll needed a break from the Langst. Here ya go!

This chapter was originally written to be part of a larger chapter, but I was never able to get it to flow correctly, so it just became a Bonus Chapter (and something to giggle over).

Hope you enjoyed this short little Bonus Chapter! And remember, a 'real' chapter will be coming out later today! :)
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance is slowly becoming accustomed to being a 'prisoner' of Prince Lotor. He could enjoy the pleasures offered such as the baths, library (not as cool as the baths and the bathroom), and most importantly, real food. Another pleasure was seeing Lotor's responses to some of what Lance went through at the hands of the Voltron Team.

AKA: Last Chapter was fluff.

Now back to our regularly scheduled Plot. ;)

It wasn’t often that Lance was left alone.

Technically, considering there was a guard in the room anytime Lotor wasn’t, Lance was never alone. But the guard never did anything besides just stand there, unmoving and unchanging. At this point, Lance was used to ignoring the Galra. It wasn’t like he could do anything to them anyways.

Hand-to-hand was always Keith and Shiro’s thing. Lance was never magical with electronics, not like Pidge was, so, he couldn’t use electronics to distract the guard. Hunk could probably take them down no problem. But he was just Lance. He couldn’t do any of that stuff. He was weaponless and defenseless.

Even if he entertained the idea that he could escape, where would he go? What would he do?

Returning to Earth wasn’t an option. The chance that the Galra would follow him was too high. Besides, he doesn’t know how to get there. Not to mention his ‘new’ appearance. It might fly okay out here, but down on Earth...? Yeah, no thanks, Lance didn’t want to take any chances with the Earth Government.

It’s not like he knew where his old team was either. Not that he wanted to go back to them. He already tried being a Space Mall Hobo, and look where that got him.

He could – probably – escape the Galra, but he couldn’t escape his life. And Life, evidently, had it out for him.

It wasn’t bad enough that he was useless, lost in space, and captured by his enemies. Oh no, Life had to add a bit more and so he also ended up being part of the endangered magic space elves.

Considering how Life was going for Lance lately, it was only natural that when the alarms started sounding and the dim lights in the room changed to brilliant flashing red, Lance figured this was
just Life, smacking him in the face again.

To quote Castlevania the Anime: God shat in his dinner again.

If he’d been actively thinking of escape, he might have thought that this was the perfect chance. But, Lance wasn’t.

Instead, he was too busy trying to decide if the Galra Guard would use this as a chance to kill him, which totally wasn’t a fear born from his own bored paranoia and the fact he knew Lotor was off the ship attending some princely duty elsewhere.

…

Anyways! If it was a sign that he should try to escape, then he was pretty sure that him staying put would be better. Screw life and it’s lemons. He didn’t want any lemonade today, or ever.

So, instead of trying to escape, he sat up from where he’d been flopped over on the couch and stared at the guard. The guard stared back.

Lance thought his options over, like he hadn’t already thought of them when he was bored out of his mind the last time Lotor wasn’t here. He had an advantage with the couch. If the Guard moved to shoot him, he could use it as cover.

“I’m not going to shoot you.”

If asked, even years from now, if he shrieked like a banshee and nearly died from a heart attack, Lance would deny it. However, it should be known that this is exactly what Lance did, complete with flailing his hands and arms around. He didn’t expect the guard to speak to him. They hadn’t before now!

“Was that really needed?” The Guard huffed.

“Well, you haven’t spoken to me before. I wasn’t expecting it.”

“You have never spoken to me either.” The guard countered.

Lance quirked an eyebrow, and leaned forward, letting himself fall against the back of the couch and propping himself up on it. The guard had a point, but Lance wasn’t ready to concede that yet.

“Yet here we are. In this room. With screaming sirens, and blinking red lights. Talking. Fancy that.”

The guard said something that could be interrupted as ‘I don’t know what the Prince sees in you’, but Lance couldn’t be sure. There were screaming sirens in his ears after all. There was a moment of silence, or at least as much of silence as they could manage with the sirens.

The guard seemed to be waiting for something, and Lance didn’t want to know what it was. He really didn’t. He had enough on his plate, as it stood, and he didn’t want anymore. He didn’t want this nonsense, Life. Couldn’t he just take a page out of Cave Johnson’s book and just… tell Life to take the damn lemons back? Once again, he didn’t want to make lemonade.

The door to the room slid open and a masked figure entered.

Ugh. Masks. Lance was so done with masks.

Well, whoever this person was, they weren’t a Druid. Yay. But, they also weren’t a Blade of
Marmora member. And honestly, that was about as far as his knowledge of masked aliens went. If he was asked, Lance would say that the outfit looked like something out of Dragon Ball Z mixed with super hero capes, and ninja shoes and gloves.

“’Sup. Welcome to Hell, current population of now three.” Lance was proud that his voice made him sound more relaxed than he actually felt.

The new masked figure froze, staring at Lance like he was crazy. Which, okay, Lance was used to this.

Aliens didn’t seem to understand most Human or Earth things. After maybe three days with Lotor, he was used to the weird looks from the Prince, who didn’t hesitate to complain that Lance having a translator didn’t make things better.

Evidently the Druids had been nice enough to give him a translator during his time with them. How nice of them.

Lance was already preparing to explain what he said when the most wondrous and surprising thing happened.

“… the ceiling.” The voice was distorted from the mask but there was no mistaking what was said. Even if the words sounded like they were dragged out and drenched in disbelief. Lance didn’t blame them, not when he was working through his own explosions in his head.

There was another staring match, this time between Lance and the new masked person. Part of Lance was tempted to just ask ‘what’ and get clarification. Like, did this person seriously just respond ‘the ceiling’ to his ‘sup’?! Was that for real? What was this sorcery!? Normalness, in this place?! It’s not more common than he’d believe.

“Really?” The guard interrupted their staring contest, as both Lance and the masked figure turned to look at them. “We don’t have all quintant for this. Lives are on the line here.”

“Right, sorry…. Just…” The figure removed their mask, and Holy shit. Holy Shit.

Lance hadn’t thought that his team would come for him. And some part of him still didn’t think that they would. After all… if that was really Pidge in front of him, then the voice would have been different. She wouldn’t have been wearing that weird outfit. And most telling, she wouldn’t be staring at him.

Of course, hindsight was 20/20. Lance noticed all that, but he didn’t register it. He was swept up in the hope and belief that it was his former teammate in front of him. He could ignore the transgressions they’d done against him. He was willing to let bygones be bygones if they came for him now.

“PIDGE!” He shouted, nearly throwing himself over the back of the couch, and flinging himself at Pidge. “You’ve gotten so tall since I last saw you, you little gremlin!”

“I told you he was crazy!” The guard growled out. “Anyone who spent as much time with Druids as he did would be!” The guard moved to intercept Lance, but he danced around them and threw himself at Pidge.

“Uh…” All the Not-Pidge needed to do was speak without the helmet for it to really hit that this wasn’t Pidge. “I am not the Pidge you are looking for.” Their words even confirmed what Lance had already sorta of known.
Lance could appreciate a good meme, he wasn’t sure how to manage this memeing, taller, not-Pidge; especially when all he really wanted was for this person to be his teammate.

Lance reared back like he’d been slapped. If this wasn’t Pidge, then… there was only one person that he knew who looked this much like Pidge: Pidge’s brother, Matt.

The realization that his team wasn’t there hit him like a train. It hurt. It really did. But, to be honest, he hadn’t expected them to come for him anyways. How would they know he was in Galra hands? Would they even care? Questions for later, or perhaps, questions for a day after never.

“Sounds like something the Pidge I am looking for would say.” Lance plastered a smile on his face and took a couple steps back away from… Matt.

“Matt, we don’t have time.” The Guard interrupted; and hello, yes, thank you Guard for confirming identities. Lance needed that.

Matt rolled his eyes. Now that Lance had accepted that this wasn’t Pidge, he could see the differences. They were subtle and small, but they were there none the less. There was the obvious difference, which was the change in height. Beyond that, it was minute differences in their facial structure, hair color and style.

It felt like he was looking at Pidge, but he wasn’t. Like how when he looked in the mirror – which he still avoided like the plague – he felt like he’s looking at himself but at the same time, like he wasn’t. It was a strange uncertain feeling, which Lance had grown uncomfortably accustomed to feeling.

“Chill, Sonali, I’ve got this. I was chosen because everyone thought I’d relate to him best.” Matt made a ‘chill’ gesture with his hands, and then turned to Lance, giving him a smile. “So, I’m Matt. That’s Sonali. We’re with the resistance, and we have a proposition for you.”

Matt offered his hand as a hand shake, and Lance looked down at it for a tick before counter-offering his fist for a bump. Matt’s smile turned into a grin, and returned the fist bump with vigor.

“Name’s Lance. What can I do you for?” For extra measure, Lance waggled his eyebrows. There were alarms going off in his head, echoing the alarms still blaring in the room.

He was talking with Pidge’s brother. He was talking with Pidge’s brother. He was talking to Pidge’s brother.

…

Yeah, no. Repeating it didn’t make it seem any more real. Quiznak.

He was talking to Pidge’s brother. The guy that Pidge had been going insane trying to find. The guy Shiro went through hell to protect. The myth, the legend, the man: Matthew Holt.

“I think you meant ‘what can I do for you’.” Matt laughed.

“That too.” Lance shrugged and winked.

“Matt!” Sonali growled, and Matt turned to them and made the ‘chill’ gesture again.

“This is all part of it, Sonali. Chill.” Matt repeated, although Lance can see that Sonali didn’t buy it. Matt turned back to Lance. “In all seriousness, do me a solid?”
“Depends on what it is.” Lance’s response was automatic, the result of too many siblings having asked him that exact question before.

“Matt.”

“Kay.” Matt didn’t even bother turning to Sonali this time, keeping his focus on Lance. “TLDR; we want you to become a Druid to help out the Resistance by telling us what the Druids are up to.”

The noise Sonali let out sounded like a high-pitched balloon slowly deflating through a small hole. The Guard was staring at Matt like they couldn’t believe the words that just came out of his mouth.

“You can’t… You just… no. Matt, no.” They finally managed to get out.

Lance ignored Sonali in favor of arching an eyebrow and resting his hand on his hip. Matt met his gaze head on, no hesitation. Lance could respect this.

Let’s see. This wasn’t something he could ask time to think about over – like Lotor’s offer… which oddly enough corresponded rather well with this request. Sure, he could just see if he could pass his response along through Sonali, but, he didn’t think that was an option. If he was the resistance, he wouldn’t allow that to be an option.

Part of Lotor’s offer had been taking classes with the Druids to help control his new Altean abilities. It wouldn’t be hard to tell Lotor that he wanted more. As a matter of fact, this might help him find a reason to not want to return to Earth anymore, since he didn’t think Lotor would accept any of his real reasons.

As an added bonus, Lance would be able to find Shiro if the Black Paladin had been caught by the Empire. Lance would know if any of his previous friends were caught by the empire. While it was up to debate if they deserved Lance’s assistance or not… if it’d sabotage the empire, then Lance wouldn’t be opposed to helping them.

Okay, Life. He’d bite. He’d drink the stupid lemonade. So long as he didn’t drink the Kool-Aid, right?

He’d take this bait, although he wasn’t sure where it’d take him. If he was caught, at least he’d die helping some form of resistance against the Galra. Besides, Lance wouldn’t lie and say that he wasn’t curious. He wanted to know more about the resistance, he wanted to know more about the Druids, and most importantly: he wanted out of these damn rooms.

At least this way he could get out these rooms and NOT have to switch sides to the Galra. He just needed to make them think he had, and Lance’s acting skills had always been good.

“I take it that Sonali, here, would be my contact to pass info off to?” Lance’s question was answered with a nod from Matt, but before he could respond, Sonali cut him off.

“You don’t have the excuse of being human.” Sonali deadpanned, shaking their head. “I don’t understand!”

“I was raised human.” Lance replied. “And I identify as human, thank you very much.”

“…AND, we don’t have time for this, Sonali.” Matt’s add on was perfect, but Lance knew how to make it even better.

“So, shut your quiznak.” Lance finished.
Matt couldn’t take it, and dissolved into laughter, repeating the line and shaking his head. Sonali was staring at the two of them like they didn’t believe what was happening.

“Take a picture, honey, it lasts longer.” Sonali didn’t seem to know how to take that statement either, but that was okay. Lance felt that the poor guard had been broken enough for now

“You, my friend, are beautiful.” Matt sighed, and shook his head. “I needed this. Okay, but serious now. You’ll help us out?”

“Yeah, I got this. I was looking for a way to get out of these rooms without like… actually helping the Galra, so this is perfect.”

Matt nodded, like he’d been in Lance’s situation before and understood; although Lance doubted this. What Lance didn’t doubt was that Matt was enjoying this as much as Lance was.

It’d been far too long since Lance had been able to sit back and relax like this. Sure, he’d been able to relax around the others, but that was before everything had become so stressful and tense. Before Shiro went missing. Not to mention the stress of the space mall and trying to find Tyrac, and then the time with the Druids – which he could still only barely recall. So yeah, Lance enjoyed being able to just talk and chill with Matt like this.

10 out of 10, would talk again. Even if there had to be blaring alarms and flashing red lights.

“Cool. Cool. So, you join the Druids, and give us any info you find out. If you get caught, we may not be able to help you. Additionally, those that have tried to be Druids, usually end up flipping on us. You still cool with this?”

As far Lance was concerned, he’d already committed. Besides, even if he did say that he wasn’t cool, he doubted Matt would let him ‘leave’ knowing Sonali’s true allegiance. As cool as they were now, this was war, and he was an acceptable loss.

Team Voltron taught him that.

“I’ve got one condition.” Matt stiffened, waiting for Lance to continue. “If I do end up flipping like that, and you guys can’t stop or save me, you’ll put me out of my misery.”

Matt pressed his lips together, his eyebrows furrowing as he considered Lance’s request. Realization dawned upon him, and Lance found comfort in the expression that washed over Matt’s face. It was partially sympathy, partially empathy, and completely understanding.

“I give you my word.” Matt stepped forward and clasped Lance’s shoulder. A beep sounded from Matt’s wrist, and he sighed. “That’s my que to go. The others should be almost done. We’ll keep in touch through Sonali.”

Matt backed up a few steps, then spun around, grabbing his mask and putting it back on with a flourish. He was gone in a blink, exiting before the door could finish sliding open.

It dawned on Lance after the fact that he probably should have told Matt about Pidge, but… oh well. Maybe the next time he ran into Matt he’d tell him. Maybe. Jury was still out on that. He wasn’t happy with Pidge. He wasn’t happy with any of the Voltron team, but that was a break down for later.

“So, are you always my guard, or do I have to guess when it’s you?” Lance turned back to Sonali, who’d been quiet since Lance and Matt broke them last, but this was something Lance kind of needed to know.
“I… have been your guard all this time, yes.”

“Cool, and what are we gonna do when I become a Druid?”

“I will remain your guard. Prince Lotor wants someone with you at all times, even in the event you were to join him.”

“Cool. Cool.” Lance was quiet for a moment, and so was Sonali. “What I said—”

“What you said—”

They both started speaking at the same time, and cut each other off. Lance looked away and motioned for Sonali to speak first.

“I… If your sentiment is true, I… I’ll… put you out of your… misery. If you would like.” Lance’s gaze jerked back to Sonali, and he blinked in surprise. He hadn’t been expecting that, but he could appreciate it.

“Thanks,” He felt his expression melting into a small smile, and he let out a quiet sigh and ran his hand through his hair. Ugh, he hadn’t cut it yet. Note to self: get that done. Perhaps he could ask Lotor for one, or perhaps he could change it with the Druid training. “I appreciate it.”

The alarms cut off, leaving them in sudden silence. The red lights continued to flash.

Part of Lance was curious about what all happened, but he’d already pressed his curiosity too much today. He didn’t want to push it anymore and have everything snap back on himself. If anything, Lance would just bother Lotor about it later. Actually, it’d be better if he did bother Lotor later. It’d be less suspicious that way.

For the rest of their time together, Lance and Sonali didn’t speak. Although, they did offer Lance a nod when they departed after Lotor arrived a couple vargas later, complaining about the incompetence of some of the technicians and them setting off alarms accidently.

Chapter End Notes

Sonali is an OC, but beyond helping the plot, they have little other meaning. Come Season 4, I may be able to substitute another character for Sonali, but until then, we’re stuck with them. They are solely meant to represent a person from the Rebels who freed and helped Matt out.

Oh! I almost forgot! I may have a SPECIAL Surprise for you guys, so stay tuned to my Tumblr! :D

CONGRATS!! I have a surprise for you guys as appreciation for all the support you all have given me, I will *drum roll* be posting on FRIDAY! Additionally, you lucky people will be getting not one, but two chapters on Friday thanks to a Bonus Chapter.

Hope you guys enjoy!!!
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance was alone with his guard when the alarms went off and a stranger entered the room. Low and behold, said stranger turned out to be no one other than Matt Holt: the myth, the man, the legend. After a conversation of memes and Earth sayings that left the Guard confused and frazzled, Lance decided to become a Druid to help Matt's Resistance get insider information on the Druids.

Chapter Notes

First, I want to thank everyone for reading this fic! I appreciate each and everyone one of you, and wanted to reward you guys! Hence why you guys are getting a Friday update!

This chapter is mostly just explaining a bit more about Sonali (without giving too much away), and why Lance only has one guard. Because like, lets be real here, when would Sonali sleep then? That being said, this is a very dialogue heavy chapter which doesn't really exist except to help fill in plot holes with Sonali's character.

We will return once more to our regularly scheduled PLOT sometime later today. :D
Lance raised an eyebrow, but didn’t comment on their tone. They were probably stressed. He would be too. Especially since they were his only guard… which… didn’t… make… sense? Like, how was this ONE person his only guard?

“You’re my only guard, right?” Lance questioned to make sure.

“Yes.” Sonali ground out again.

Lance furrowed his eyebrows and hummed. So, there was confirmation, but that didn’t make sense.


It wasn’t like he was asking some big secret or something. He just wanted to know why he only had one guard. Like, that had to suck. When did Sonali take breaks? When did they sleep? Were they only free when Lotor was there?

No, that didn’t make sense. Lotor didn’t always leave at the same time, and yet Sonali was always there the moment that Lotor left.

“Technically, during the nights someone else takes over, but you will only have me during the day.” Sonali explained.

Ah. Okay, so that made Lance feel a bit better. Now he wouldn’t have to go to Galra HR and complain on Sonali’s behalf for the lack of breaks or anything. Did the Galra have an HR? Or did they unionize? Lance didn’t think Empires unionized. Hmmm.

“Prince Lotor correctly believed that you’d eventually want to talk to your guard, and so it was decided that you’d only have one so that you could have your guard’s full attention.” Sonali continued to explain.

Lance hummed and nodded. That made quite a bit of sense actually. And it was touching that Lotor had been thinking of Lance when he’d done that. It sucked for Sonali, but Lance supposed in the end it worked out perfectly.

And, it also helped show the differences between Lotor and his father. There was no way Lance could see Zarkon being this nice.

“And you were chosen because?” Lance asked after a few moments. Sonali sighed again. They’d likely believed Lance’s questions to be over. Well, #sorrynorsorry to disappoint, but he still had a few. “It couldn’t be your stunning personality.”

“To quote you, ‘Rude’.” Sonali replied. “And I was chosen because I needed to be. I am the only resistance member on this ship, and we needed to get that proposition to you.”

“I’m hurt.” Lance replied, his hands going to his chest as if their words had actually stabbed him. He sat up and looked over the back of the couch, crossing his arms on it and resting his head on his arms. “So, what can you tell me about the resistance?”

Sonali didn’t respond, which, frankly, Lance hadn’t expected them to. “C’mon, can’t you tell me anything?”

“Not really. If you turn on us, the less you know the better.”

Okay, well, that made sense too, and Lance had expected that response. He wasn’t born yesterday,
“Ouch. Okay. I see how it is.” Lance rolled his eyes. “Okay, then… why me?”

If he couldn’t be told about the resistance, then maybe he could at least be told why they’d chosen him. Was it for his dashing good looks? His charismatic charm? His new-found connections to the prince?

“If anyone could withstand the Druid’s influence, it’d be a Paladin of Voltron.”

…

Well, to be honest, Lance had expected that as well. Of course, the only reason the resistance had reached out to him was because of Voltron. It wasn’t like it was from any merit of Lance’s own. Oh no. Stupid Voltron.

Well, best to nip that in the bud. He wasn’t with them anymore. They didn’t want him, and frankly, he didn’t want them either.

“Ex.” Lance corrected. “I’m an ex-Paladin of Voltron.” He paused. “How do you know I won’t betray the resistance?”

“I don’t. As a matter of fact, I don’t expect you to last long at all. But Matt seems to think you’ll succeed here.” Sonali paused. “I don’t see what he sees in you.”

Well, that was an excellent vote of confidence. It really made Lance feel better.

So much for the ‘love’ Sonali had shown him when they promised to put him out of his misery. It was a shame that Lance was all out of fucks to give when it came to trying to prove himself to someone. He’d been burned by the Galaxy Garrison and the Voltron team for trying to prove himself.

He was done with that.

Although, it was good to know that Matt believed in him. Probably because Matt was totally unlike his sister in the aspect of the fact that Matt was awesome. Pidge was not. Clear, cut, and simple.

“Good to know.” Lance replied. He sighed, and flopped back down onto the couch.

Man, Lance loved this couch. It was a life saver.

Lance’s options in the room were the couch or the bed to sleep, and Lotor was pretty clear on the fact that he would not be sleeping on the couch. So, Lance had to sleep on the couch unless he wanted to sleep with the prince, which he highkey didn’t want to do. Lowkey, Lance could have maybe once upon a time been persuaded into it if the Prince played his cards right.

“Okay, so you were chosen because why? Because Lotor thought that you’d be a great conversation partner for me?”

If that was the case, then damn, Lotor dropped the ball on this. But then again, Sonali probably did everything within their power to make sure that they got the job. After all, they said that they had to get it.

“Something like that.” Sonali replied. Yep. That basically confirmed that.

“You said you’re the only resistance member here?” Lance fished.
“Yes.” Sonali’s reply was tart.

Huh. Lance was willing to bet that was a lie. There was probably at least a handful more of resistance members, plus a Blade of Marmora member floating onboard somewhere. However, he could understand why Sonali wouldn’t tell him that.

“How come?” He could understand as much as he wanted, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t going to give Sonali a hard time. After all, they were his only guard for the purpose of communication.

Sonali inhaled deeply and sharply. Good to know Lance was capable of getting under their skin.

“Prince Lotor and his generals are extremely adept at flushing out traitors in their midst. Something you should probably be wary of.” Lance sat up again, spinning to look at Sonali.

“How come?” Lance repeated.

“You cannot be serious.” Sonali muttered under their breath. Lance stared at them expectantly. “Or you can be…. Fine.” Sonali crossed their arms, and if it wasn’t for the mask, he’d be sure they were frowning.

“Prince Lotor is known for flushing out resistances. It’s what he does. I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but he’s kind of charismatic, and he knows how to use that to his advantage. He makes someone trust him and then he tears the resistance apart from the inside.” Sonali finally explained.

Well… that sounded terrifyingly familiar. Had Lotor been planning that for Lance? He’d gotten Lance to trust him, and then Lance had brought that communication device on board… So, what had stopped him? Why didn’t Lotor tear team Voltron apart when he had the chance?

Or maybe, Lotor had just been too amused to hear and see how Team Voltron was tearing itself apart for him.

Sonali shook their head, and sighed. “It’s what makes him more dangerous than even his father.”

“I could see that.” Lance admitted quietly.

“Not to mention his Generals are a real piece of work. I’ve heard rumors.” Sonali continued. Presumably, they had realized that Lance wasn’t going to be leaving them alone anytime soon.

“His generals?” Lance asked, perking up. He’d heard a brief mention of them while at the Swap Moon, but he’d take any information he could get. “What rumors?”

“We’ll, they’re all Galra ‘half-breeds’, that’s a known fact. The rumor is that they have talents from their other races. Like, supposedly, Ezor can teleport and fly. Narti is blind, but can somehow see things normal people can’t.”

Lance blinked, and then blinked again. “Hold up, I’m sorry, could you repeat those names?”

“Ezor and Narti?” Sonali repeated.

The first name Lance recognized from earlier. The second name however… Lance snorted.

“Yeah, no, I’m still hearing ‘Naughty’.” Lance replied after a moment of trying to contain his laughter. “Okay. So Lotor has like four generals, right? Who’re the others?”

“Acxa is Lotor’s second in command. There’s also Zethrid… who you should probably avoid. She’s known to be a bit of a wildcard, and she doesn’t really care much about people other than
Lotor.” Sonali ticked off the names as she spoke them.

Lance nodded. Alien names were weird, not that he could talk when ‘Lance’ was just an acronym. “Good to know, good to know.” He muttered.

So. He had to watch out for Lotor’s charisma. Well, he failed that already. And some teleporting flying person and a blind person. He needed to find out more about Acxa chick, and definitely avoid the wildcard.

Wait.

“Are all of Lotor’s generals female?” Lance asked.

“Is that a problem?” Sonali replied hotly. “Do you have a problem with females?”

“Uh, no? That’s quiznak-ing awesome! Like, go Lotor. You drink some respecting women juice.” Lance cheered.

Seriously, his respect for Lotor just went way up. He had a blind general; and they were all ‘hybrids’, and they were all female. Like, seriously, that was some pretty ballsy choices considering Zarkon’s military was like… the exact opposite.

Come to think of it, Lance couldn’t think of ever seeing a female Galra solider. Huh, Zarkon must have been racist and sexist. Great Combo… not.

Sonali snorted, and shook their head. “Lotor believes in having the right people in the right job. Unlike his father, he doesn’t rely on brute force alone.”

“Good to know.” Lance muttered. “Well, thanks for the tips.”

“You’ll need them if you want to survive.” Sonali replied. “But Lotor is the one you’ll need to worry about the most. He won’t interduce you to this Generals unless he feels you’re up for it, which shouldn’t be for a while yet.”

Well, that was encouraging. Lance sighed, and flopped back onto the couch.

All he needed to worry about was Lotor. Lance could do that. He’d be fine. He’d survive this, no problem. He was pretty sure Lotor wouldn’t be a problem anyways… he’d allowed Lance to braid his hair. Lance practically had him eating out of his hand.

This would be cake walk.

Chapter End Notes

Once again, thank you for your continued support! I love all of you! <3 <3 <3
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance attempted to find out more about the resistance that he's now spying for, and Sonali gave him information and rumors about Lotor and his Gal-ra Generals as well. Now Lance just needs to figure out how to convince Lotor that he's suddenly interested in becoming a Druid.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lotor loved the alien equivalent of classical music, a fact that Lance was irritated that he knew.

He knew this because Lotor almost always played it whenever he was looking over reports or reading. By all accounts, Lance shouldn’t know this information, but he did. As a matter of fact, Lance shouldn’t even be in his current situation, but he was.

There were many things, actually, that Lance ‘should not’. His whole life since he left the Garrison to look at the ship Shiro returned with had been one giant clusterfuck of ‘should not’. From getting into the Blue Lion, antagonizing Keith and Pidge, to talking to Tyrac, leaving Blue, and trying to live as a space mall hobo.

He used to wonder when he life became such a spiral of ‘should not’, but his time in the gilded cage that was Lotor’s personal rooms had given him plenty of opportunities to think that over.

Now, he was left wondering when agreeing to be a Druid spy for Matt’s unnamed resistance would become another ‘should not’.

Since leaving Earth, his life had become a Black ‘*Cards against Humanity*’ Card, aptly titled ‘Lance Shouldn’t have ______’, and honestly, at this point, Lance was sick of it.

He heaved a heavy sigh, tilting his head back against the armrest of the couch as he draped his arm over his forehead.

“That was a rather dramatic sigh.” Lotor commented. “Was there something you wanted to speak about?”

Since he was on the topic of ‘should not’s and how they defined Lance’s life currently…. How attractive Lance still found Lotor’s voice to be was another ‘should not’. As a matter of fact, he shouldn’t find Lotor to be as attractive at all.

Curse hybrid Galras and looking so pretty. Ugh.

He was tempted not to respond, but he knew how annoyed Lotor could get if he perceived Lance to be ‘ignoring’ him. Ugh. He turned his head to side to look over at Lotor, who despite having spoken, still had yet to look up from his tablet. Lance frowned, and looked back away, huffing quietly to himself.

“Nuthin’.”
Actually, there was quite a bit that he needed to talk to Lotor about. He just wasn’t sure how to breach it. That and the fact that he still wasn’t entirely onboard with the whole ‘join the Druids’ thing. But, he’d already committed, and it was like the only option open to him.

At his response, Lance heard the tell-tale sounds of Lotor putting the tablet down, and the nearly silent hiss of the chair as it was moved. The corners of Lance’s mouth twitched upwards against his will, and he hated how warm he felt at the fact that Lotor was stopping what he was doing to pay more attention to Lance.

Everyone else would have just let him be at that response. Keith would have continued training, Hunk wouldn’t have stopped cooking, and Pidge couldn’t have been bothered to quit her tasks. Lotor was stopping for Lance.

… It sucked that his enemy paid more attention to Lance than his own team.

“If you are sighing so dramatically, then I doubt it is nothing.”

The annoying thing about Lotor was that it was hard to hate him. Unlike other people, Lotor never ignored Lance or gave a half-assed response. The amount of attention Lotor showered Lance with was foreign. Even when focusing on something else, the prince made sure to always devote a percentage of his attention to Lance.

Lance knew this because he’d tested it. He knew almost exactly how long it’d take to get Lotor’s full attention, and Lance was unfortunately pleased to say that the longest had been a dobosh.

As much as he hated to admit it, Lance loved the attention. Coming from a large family, Lance was used to sharing attention. He was used to being loud and obnoxious to gather attention. He was used to being ignored and forgotten. Even among the Voltron team, he was never given the type of attention that Lotor gave him now.

As a matter of fact, Lance knew that if he were to look over, he’d see Lotor watching him. He had Lotor’s full attention now, and he hated how pleased that made him feel.

He hated that he hated a lot of things lately.

“You are sighing so dramatically, then I doubt it is nothing.” Lance shrugged at the Prince’s comment. “Or, did you just want my attention?” Lotor continued, his tone taking a tease lit to it towards the end.

Lance snorted, rolling his eyes despite the fact he knew Lotor couldn’t see it.

“Share with me what has you so troubled. Perhaps I could ease the burdens of your mind?”

Lance didn’t catch when Lotor moved, but suddenly the prince was in his sight, the back of his hand stroking Lance’s cheek. It was actions like this that also made it hard for Lance to hate Lotor. He was always so tender and careful with Lance. It made his heart feel tight, and Lance wished that he could control the beating of his heart so he could slow it back down to normal speeds.

“Back home, we’d just offer ‘a penny for your thoughts’, ” Lance informed him quietly. Like every other time Lance mentioned something from Earth, Lotor’s brow furrowed as he tried to understand the saying. “A penny is a form of currency.”

“Ah.” Lotor’s smile was small, soft, gentle.

It took a moment for it to register, but Lance realized that Lotor was kneeling at the couch, offering this comfort to Lance. Quiznak. He really needed Lotor to stop doing things like this. His heart
couldn’t take it. Not now that he knew who Lotor was.

“A penny for your thoughts, then.”

Lance was almost tempted to ask for the penny. The only thing that stopped him was that he knew Lotor lacked a penny, and who knew what Lotor would offer instead. He was too scared to think of it; or more accurately, he was too scared of his own reactions.

Instead of teasing or replying, Lance looked away, pulling on his bottom lip with his teeth. Lotor chuckled, and the hand on his cheek changed positions to hold Lance’s cheek and gently make him look back at Lotor.

“You know you can talk to me about anything, Lance. Your troubles are mine.” Lotor had a particular way of saying Lance’s name which should have been illegal. He could have been saying the most unsexy thing ever, and Lance was convinced that his heart would still be going crazy.

Funny. While he’d had a crush on Tyrac before – not that he’d admit that out loud – it’d never felt quite this strong. Perhaps it was because he was physically spending more time with Lotor instead of just on a communicator? Or perhaps the Druids had done something?

Nah, that was stupid. Why would the Druids do something like that? Did they even have that power? He was just being paranoid, that was all.

“I know.” Lance started. He couldn’t physically move his head away, but he could still advert his gaze. Even if this didn’t feel like a performance, Lance had to sell one. Matt’s unnamed resistance depended on him. “I just don’t want to be a burden.”

It was only after speaking that Lance realized how close to home the words hit. But, he grew up hearing that every act, every lie, every falsehood, and moment of pretend was based on some grain of truth. If he wanted to sell that he was interested in joining the Galra Empire and becoming a Druid, then this was the grain of truth to use.

“Nothing that you could desire would be a burden to me.” Something about the way Lotor said that made a tingle go up Lance’s spine. His grandmother would have said that someone was walking over Lance’s grave.

Lance’s response was nothing more than a noncommittal hum of acknowledgement.

“If it’s within my power, anything you wish, I will provide.” Lance’s gaze jerked back to Lotor at the Prince’s proclamation. There was power in those words; a dangerous sort of power. The type of power that was too sticky and liable to drown Lance.

If it was within Lotor’s power, anything Lance wished, he would provide. Man, oh man. What did that mean? What was within Lotor’s power? Would asking him to put an end to the Empire fall within Lotor’s power?

… Probably.

More importantly, what did Lance have to give up to receive this power? He wasn’t stupid. Power, especially this type, had a cost.

He gave up his home, family, and life for the power of being a Paladin of Voltron. What would he have to give up now? Or perhaps, him leaving Voltron was the cost for this. Thoughts for later.

“How do you know I want something?” Lance asked.
It was unfair how nice Lotor’s smile looked. His teeth weren’t crooked, or dirty. His smile was bright enough to belong in a dentist or toothpaste commercial. Besides, it was nice that Lotor would smile with his teeth, despite uncomfortable it made the prince. The only reason he did so was because he knew it was a comfort to Lance.

Every time Lotor smiled, warmth blossomed inside of Lance. No one usually sacrificed their own comfort for Lance. No one usually sacrificed anything for Lance. While he didn’t always want someone to sacrifice themselves for him, it was nice that someone was willing to. Now, if only that someone wasn’t the prince of the enemy.

“I’d like to think that we know each other pretty well by now.”

There was a moment where Lance’s stomach dropped. It was hard to miss the implication behind Lotor’s words. Just like how it was hard to miss the brief darkening of his eyes, and the flicker of his gaze. They did know each other pretty well by now, Lance would agree. But…

But, Lotor wouldn’t be opposed to getting to know each other a bit more.

Just the idea of it made Lance feel physically ill. He was already having a hard-enough time deciphering what was real and what was pretend. There was no need to add that level of intimacy into the mix. Not to mention the difficulty Lance was having in wrangling in his emotions.

Did he like Lotor, did he not? He was torn on this, stuck on how he felt, as his emotions conflicted and collided with one another. He had a crush, but he couldn’t have. Shouldn’t have. Thoughts and emotions were clashing in his head and in his heart, and it hurt to try to analyze how he was feeling, and what he wanted.

Thankfully, Lotor was a gentleman. He didn’t press. He hadn’t asked Lance for anything yet, and until he did, Lance was determined to ignore everything.

“All right, yeah. You got me there.” Lance conceded defeat. “It’s just…” He paused for dramatic effect, pursing his lips together and exhaling sharply through his nose. “No, it’s stupid.”

“Nothing that bothers you is stupid.” Lotor was quick to respond.

“You don’t even know what it is.”

“All the more reason for you to tell me.”

Lance rolled his eyes and half laughed. “Oh yeah, sure.”

“I mean it, Lance.”

“Fine.” Lance dragged out the word. “I’m bored.” Lotor’s silence lasted a few ticks before Lance continued. “See, I told you it was stu-”

“And I told you that nothing that bothered you was stupid.” Lotor interrupted. Lotor shook his head and laughed quietly to himself. “You’re bored.”

Lance nodded, making a quiet ‘mmhmm’ noise.

“Well, I could think of a few things to ease that.”

Lotor’s voice was usually all honey and velvet. It was sweet, warm, and soothing. But the low purr that Lotor just used was nothing like usual, and Lance would be lying if he said it didn’t do things
for him. A shiver literally ran down Lance’s spine at the pure amount of suggestion in those words, and the gaze Lotor was giving him was definitely a bit more heated than usual.

Fuck. Uh… wrong choice of word there.

Well, thank the stars that he took after his dad with tanned skin that tended to hide most blushes. It wasn’t easy to make Lance blush, but props to Lotor for succeeding. More power to him. … wrong word choices again.

Okay! Okay, okay, okay. Lance had this. He could manage. He was good. Lance was so chill right now.

He opened his mouth to speak, and nothing but air and the mortifyingly embarrassing sound of ‘uh’ escaped. Lotor’s smile was sharp before, but it suddenly looked about 100 times sharper.

“My apologies.” Lotor didn’t sound very sorry. “That was a bit forward, but, I couldn’t help it. You are very pleasing on the eyes, although, I could think of a few other places where you would look even more pleasing.”

…

…

…

Was this how deer felt when headlights fell upon them? Lance never thought he could relate to a deer before, but here he was. What was his life? Besides a clusterfuck of ‘should not’? He hoped that he wasn’t blushing hard enough for it to be noticeable, especially in this light, but he had the sinking feeling that he was.

He couldn’t even think of the last time he’d been so… flattered. Like, damn. He knew Tyrac, and by extension, Lotor liked him. But, he hadn’t expected this.

He couldn’t say when it hit him, but Lance suddenly had a very strong urge to hide. He wanted to hide away from his feelings, away from Lotor, and most importantly, away from the world.

Thankfully, it seemed a response from Lance was not really needed. A lucky thing as it seemed that all Lance could do was make embarrassing little squeaks.

“Good to know I can render you speechless.” Lotor laughed.

Where had… when had everything been derailed so completely? This wasn’t what he planned. This wasn’t what he expected.

Lance tried to talk again, but failed. Even if he could find his voice, he didn’t know what he’d say. In all his years of flirting, almost no one had ever returned the favor, and never as strongly as Lotor was.

“Relax Lance. I won’t do anything to you that you won’t enjoy.”

Okay. That was… a bit creepy. Okay, a lot creepy, but it was probably just a translator problem or something. Maybe Lotor didn’t recognize how creepy that was. Either way, he was the only thing keeping Lance alive now; and Lance kinda needed Lotor’s assistance to become a Druid and spy for the resistance.
“But, as much as I think we’d both enjoy my idea, I get the feeling that wasn’t the solution you were thinking of.” Lotor stroked Lance’s cheek. “It’s alright; I’m nothing if not patient. I can wait for you.”

Lotor’s fingers brushed against the scale under Lance’s eye, and he felt a wave of foreign emotions wash over him from the brief contact. Warmth surged through him, although, it wasn’t right. Over the past few days – quintants – he’d noticed that the warmth that Lotor bestowed upon him whenever he touched the scales was slowly changing.

Perhaps Lance was just projecting his own thoughts and feelings, but the warmth almost felt… slimy. It reminded him of the static, but it was a different mental texture. Both were warm, but where one was sticky, the other was slimy.

Possibly projecting or not, he didn’t care for the sensation, and he was pleased anytime Lotor didn’t make prolong his contact with the scales. The less he had to feel it, the better.

“So, I have to ask, what was your solution then?”

Lanced sucked on his bottom lip again, trying his hardest to pretend that he didn’t notice the way Lotor’s gaze dropped down at the movement. Evidently, the prince had decided that subtlety wasn’t getting him what he wanted and that he needed to be more obvious. Lance wasn’t sure how he felt about that.

Things to think about later, he supposed.

Lance hated feeling so defenseless against Lotor, but, he supposed, in that defenseless-ness, there was power. After all Lance had already been told that Lotor would give him anything he wanted. Besides, he needed Lotor to think of him as defenseless.

He needed Lotor to trust him, to want him. The resistance needed Lotor to want Lance. So, despite his desire to move, Lance stayed where he was.

“Well, I was thinking…” Lance paused, and then restarted again. “I was wondering if….”

“If?” Lotor prompted. The Prince’s voice was level, but Lance saw how his eyes almost literally brightened with excitement.

“Well, I was wondering if,” Lance repeated, “…if that offer from before…was, well, you know, still… open?”

“I get the feeling you aren’t referring to the one I just made you.” Lotor jokingly teased. “But, to verify, which offer are you speaking of? I’ve made quite a few.”

Of the few that Lotor was referring to, the one Lance needed was the offer to join the Empire and become a Druid. But, if he accepted that offer too quickly, it’d be suspicious. So, he went with the very first offer Lotor had given.

“The one that lets me leave this room, and teaches me how to… fix… this,” Lance gestured to his face.

“I don’t see anything that needs to be fixed, Lance. You’re perfect as you are now.”

Perfect as he was now, huh. Wasn’t Lotor saying earlier that he knew of some places where Lance would look ‘more pleasing’?
“For here, yes, but not for my home world.” It was hard to talk about Earth when Lance had accepted that he’d probably never return. But, he needed to keep pressing the idea of returning until it wouldn’t be suspicious for him to suddenly want to stay and be a Druid.

All Lance needed to do was get his foot in the door. Once he started taking lessons with the Druids he could try to convince Lotor that he enjoyed it and wanted to stay.

“If your home world would not accept your perfection, then perhaps they do not deserve it.” Oh wow. Laying it on a little thick, wasn’t he? “But if you insist, then I suppose you would need those lessons.” Lotor sighed. “Although, it’s a shame. Your Altean features are too lovely to be hidden.”

Oh yeah, Lance was sure.

If Lance had to guess, he’d say that Lotor’s favorite ‘features’ were Lance’s new magic space elf eyes, and the scales under them.

None of which were as pretty as say, Allura’s, but Lance supposed they weren’t bad looking. Then again, Allura and Coran’s were pretty much the same, and were somewhat different than Lance’s. Perhaps it was because they were 10,000 year old Alteans, and Lance was a ‘modern’ one?

“So, you’ll be teaching me?” Lance asked.

“As flattered as I am that you’d trust me to teach you, no.” Lotor laughed. “My mother may have been Altean, but I did not inherit her shifting capabilities. You’d be in more capable hands with the Druids.”

“The Druids… right.” Lance scrunched his nose some.

He still couldn’t quite recall what had happened, only that they were involved in his torture. He wasn’t keen on seeing them again, but, he had to; especially since he was going to be joining them.

Ugh. But at least he’d be getting some cool skills out of all this.

“Trust me when I say that no harm will come to you from them. Anything you remember or know of them is all in the past, when you were on the wrong side of the fight.”

“I’m not in any fight, now.” Lance narrowed his eyes at Lotor. He was choosing to focus on that part of Lotor’s comment rather than the ‘no harm’ part. No harm his butt. Was that referring to physical, mental, emotional, or all the above? Lance wanted clarification, dammit.

Not that he could ask it without probably insulting Lotor. Ugh.

He was also opting to ignore the whole ‘wrong side of the fight’ nonsense. Then again, if Lotor was raised on the cartoons and propaganda that they shoved down the youth of the Empire, then perhaps Lotor truly believed that.

Lance’s complaints about the rest of the team had probably only reinforced those beliefs too. Damn.

“Of course.” Lotor’s tone was just ever so slightly patronizing. “That’s exactly why you’ll be safe. They tend not to antagonize neutral parties.”

Mmmmhmm. Sure. Lance totally believed that. They totally wouldn’t hurt Lance because he was a
‘neutral party’. It didn’t have anything to do with Lotor liking him, or that Lotor wanted Lance on his side, probably as a Druid. Which… hmm… Lance had had to think on that.

Goals that shouldn’t have been lining up were, and that was mildly concerning. The key question was why. Why did Lotor want Lance to be a Druid? There had to be more reason than just the fact that Lotor liked him.

Then again, Matt said that most of the people they attempted to have become spies had ended up flipping on the Resistance. Perhaps Lotor was counting on that happening for Lance. But to what end? For what reason?

It couldn’t have had anything to do with Voltron. Voltron had been formed without him! …Wait. Voltron had been formed without him, then had Shiro returned? Or had they replaced Shiro like they’d replaced him?

…. Questions for later.

“Alright. I trust you.” Surprisingly, Lance did trust Lotor. Although, perhaps not in the way Lotor wanted him to, but, hey, trust was trust. Lance could trust Lotor to be Lotor. He could trust Lotor to try to do what was ‘best’ for the Empire. What he didn’t trust, was for Lotor to do what was best for the universe.

Regardless of how Lance meant the statement, and his own feelings towards it, Lotor’s eyes, once again, literally lit up, and his smile curled up into a smug smirk.

“Allow me some time to convene with the Druids. I’ll set up your lessons as soon as possible.”

“Thank you!” Lance beamed, and returned the smile. He sat up to throw his arms around Lotor, nearly throwing himself at the prince. There was an ‘oomph’ of air escaping and Lance felt the prince sway from the force of the hug. Lotor’s laughter was a low dark chuckle as he returned the gesture.

“Of course. Anything for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Once again, thank you to everyone for your support! I appreciate all the support and love that I’ve been given! I hope that Lilac Sweet continues to meet and exceed expectations!
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: In order to fulfill his duties to the Resistance, Lance needed to become a Druid. To do so, Lance needed to naturally suggest that he was more open to the idea of training with said Druids.

To make it appear natural, Lance asked just for Lessons with the Druids to learn how to better control his new Altean abilities. From there, Lance figured that he could suggest that he enjoyed the lessons and wanted to continue them by becoming a full-fledged Druid.

**Trigger Warnings:** Minor Implied/Referenced Drug and Drug Use.

The next time Lance found himself staring at the mirror, he was wearing the Druid-esque clothes Lotor provided. Technically, Lotor had provided these clothes from the beginning, but, Lance hadn’t wanted to wear them then. He still didn’t want to wear them now. However, he had a job to do.

It may have been a blessing, but he still didn’t remember the Druids.

Not really, anyways. So, he could only speculate if what he’d been given was truly what the Druids wore. The robe was far from form fitting, and despite its coarse material, it rippled and pooled around him.

He felt like he had wrapped himself up in an oversized snuggy. He just wanted to curl up and hide away from the world. Given how the cloak dwarfed him and pooled around him, Lance had the feeling that it was done on purpose.

Leaning against the doorframe, Lotor watched him with mild interest. The light from the bathroom – which was brighter than the light in the room – contoured his face, and Lance hastily reminded himself not to be caught staring. Lotor hadn’t made anymore advances towards Lance, and while he was certain that more would come, Lance didn’t want to invite them.

Lotor’s affection was a two-sided sword. On one hand, he gave Lance all sorts of fancy treatment, and wasn’t throwing him to the gladiator rings like Shiro was. Even if Lance didn’t know what to do with all the attention, he still liked it.

On the other hand, eventually Lotor would be looking for something in return, and given certain things, Lance wasn’t sure he could return the sentiments.

Hopefully, the robe would help negate some advances. After all, the robe was the farthest thing
The black under armor? Maybe.

Furthermore, he felt like he was betraying people by simply putting them on. However, wearing them was a necessary evil. Regardless of his feelings on the robes, he had to get used to them. This was his attire for the next long while. Perhaps even his last attire.

Besides, if wearing these robes was needed to keep the Galra away from Earth, away from his friends and family, then Lance would gladly wear them. Like he said: necessary evil.

He spun around, the robe flaring out and twirling around him. Okay. So, bright-side, the robe didn’t restrict movement. Also, Lance totally understood why girls twirled around with their dresses now. That was actually pretty fun. Lance spun around again.

At the door, Lotor snorted.

“What?” Lance twisted to look over at him, narrowing his eyes and resting his hands on his hips.

“Nothing.” Lotor threw his hands up, palms facing Lance. “Nothing at all.” There was an amused lit to Lotor’s voice, which caused Lance to further narrow his eyes and stare down Lotor for a few ticks.

“Uh-huh. Sure.” Lance purposefully spun back around to the mirror. “Whatever.” Lotor bounced off the door frame, and Lance watched the prince’s movements in the mirror. Lotor came to stand behind Lance, and wrapped his arms around him, leaning down to rest his chin on Lance’s shoulder.

“I was just thinking that you seemed to be having fun.” Lotor’s breath tickled against his neck, and Lance shivered. Whether it was due to Lotor’s close proximity or what, he couldn’t tell.

He didn’t like Lotor that way. Except he did. But he shouldn’t. Besides, he hadn’t discovered why he felt that slimy warmth whenever Lotor touched his scales. Although, Lotor hadn’t touched his scales since Lance requested the lessons about a quintant ago.

“Dancing isn’t a valued skill in the Galra empire, but I do know a few from other cultures.” Lotor took a step back and spun Lance around. “I could teach you a few, if you’d like?”

Oh, Lance was sure he could. And on that list was probably the horizontal tango. No thanks.

“Mmm,” Lance hummed. “Let’s see if I survive my current lessons.”

“Like I said, no harm will come to you from them. You’re safe here, with me.”

“I know, but…”

“Relax.” Lotor’s hands moved to rest on Lance’s shoulders. “You’ll be fine, now, come on, we’ve kept Xana waiting long enough.”

Lance nodded his head, took another deep breath and released it. He got this. He was fine. It wasn’t like he remembered his time in their… care, and Lotor wouldn’t let anything happen to him, right? The guy liked him too much for that.

Lotor squeezed his shoulders and gave Lance a reassuring smile before nodding towards the exit. The ship outside of Lotor’s rooms looked exactly like every other Galra ship that Lance had been on. There weren’t many Galra around, surprisingly, although, Lotor might have assigned them on
skeleton shifts for Lance’s comfort.

Lotor stopped in front of a non-descript door. The most notable thing about it was that it required a hand scan before allowing them entry. The prince graciously allowed Lance to enter first.

Lance looked over the Druid in the room, waiting for… he didn’t know, Something. But nothing happened. There were no explosions in his head, no sudden recurrence of memories, nothing. He eyed the mask, at least he hoped it was a mask, but even it didn’t trigger anything.

If becoming a Druid meant his face turned into that, well, he was pretty sure that a) Lotor wouldn’t want him to become a Druid and b) he’d rather die than disfigure his face like that.

“You must be Lance.” The Druid standing in the room walked forward to approach them. He tilted his head, looking Lance over. “You have your father’s eyes.”

Lance’s eyes widened, the implications of the words stopping him dead. This Druid knew his father. For a moment, he thought he was referring to his human father on Earth, but no, there was no way that the Druid, this… Xana… would know that. He had to be referring to… Lance’s birth father.

If Xana, assuming this was the Xana Lotor had mentioned earlier, knew the man who’d sired Lance… what about his…

“Your mother used to hum it as she worked.” His mind dragged the words out of static memories, playing them to the tune of a familiar song.

“Lance, are you ready?” Lotor’s hand was firm against his back, pushing him further into the room. “I’ll return for you when you’re done.”

“You’re leaving me?” Lance spun around, his eyes wide. His hand already extended like he could just grab Lotor and hold on.

“It’s alright, Lance. Xana will take excellent care of you.” Lotor took Lance’s hand, raised it to his lips, and pressed a gentle kiss to Lance’s knuckles. “You’ll be fine, Lance.”

Were Lance’s eyes deceiving him, or was Lotor glad that Lance was asking him to stay? He probably was. After all, it further proved that Lance trusted him; which for some bizarre reason was oddly important to Lotor.

It probably had something to do with Lotor’s hidden agenda. Oh well. So long as they aligned – and they did currently share goals – then Lance didn’t care. Well, he did… but he’d worry about why they were sharing goals later.

“Your father was my Blood Brother. By my honor of him to you, I won’t let you come to harm while in my care.” Xana promised Lance.

Blood Brother? What the hell did that mean? And also, WTF his dad worked with this Druid? And possibly his mom too? Lotor had told him as much, but, it was still jarring to hear it confirmed by another source.

It brought up questions that Lance didn’t want to think of. Like, was this what Lance had always been destined to become? A Druid of the Empire?

Xana stepped forward and put his hand on Lance’s shoulder, ignoring how Lance jumped at the touch. Lance craned his head to look up at the Druid, just in time to see him nod and hear Lotor
exit.

“I’ll be back before you know it, Lance. Have fun.” Lance nearly gave himself whiplash with how quickly he turned to look at the closing doors.

“It’s alright, Lance.” Lance blinked and suddenly the Druid was directly in front of him, leaning down to be eye level with Lance. “I understand this must be stressful for you. Come, have a seat.”

The Druid turned Lance around by his shoulders, and gently applied pressure to his upper back to make him walk.

“I can’t imagine what you must be feeling right now. Your entire world has been flipped, tipped upside down and sideways.” The Druid continued, gesturing for Lance to sit on some cushions on the floor. “I was told that you’d been raised away from the Galra Empire, and you’re only just realizing your heritage.” Xana tsked, shaking his head slowly.

“But you’re going to teach me how to change my appearance, right?” Lance asked, his words coming out all in one breath.

“Of course. I’ll teach you anything you want to know. It’s the least I can do for Kivrah’s son.”

Lance didn’t want to show a reaction to the name. He had his parents, and they were down on Earth. They had never worked with the Galra. Besides, if his birth parents had worked with the Galra, as it’d been implied, then he didn’t want to know about them.

Yet, there was a part of him that did want to know. He was curious, more than he’d ever been in years, to know more about them. Why had they left him? What had happened? How had he ended up on Earth?

He wasn’t looking a gift horse in the mouth, because hey, he did not want to be raised here by the Galra, but…

“You want to know more about him, don’t you?” Lance jumped, his gaze—which had fallen to his lap—rising to meet the Druid’s.

“How-”

“It’s only natural. Those who don’t know where they come from can never hope to know where they are going, after all.” What type of Chinese Fortune Cookie nonsense was that? Did they even have fortune cookies up in space? Whatever. Xana took a seat across from him. “There is no one better to speak of Kivrah here than I.”

“What about my mother?” Lance didn’t mean to ask about her, but, he couldn’t help the words from spilling out.

“I cannot speak much of Gracia. To my knowledge, they never made their union official, and I only met her a few times.”

Lance rolled his lips as he lowered his gaze back down to his lap. There was a strong temptation to ask questions, specifically about his birth parents. At least he had names for them now, but he wanted to know more. But would he like the answers to those questions? He didn’t know. There was so much he didn’t know.

“We can speak more of them at a later time, if you’d like.” Xana offered. “We only have so much time for me to teach you some of your natural skills.”
“Like the camouflage thing.”

“If you mean the ability to shift, then yes, that.” Xana nodded. “As I said before, those who don’t know where they come from can never hope to know where they are going. Before you can change, you’ll need to know what to return to.”

“It is my understanding that this form is new to you, although it should have been your natural state. Would you say this is true?” Xana questioned.

“Oh, yeah. I guess. I mean, I always thought I was… human.” Lance shrugged. Xana let out a thoughtful hum. “So, am I going to have to mediate?” Lance asked, raising an eyebrow. “Cuz, I used to do Yoga and stuff with my sister, but I don’t think that’s the same.”

“I’ll be honest. I do not know of this ‘yoga’ that you speak of, but mediation is a way to learn yourself, yes.” Xana nodded his head.

Alright. So… Mediation.” Lance sucked his teeth, and let out a noise. Sitting still and trying to clear his mind just wasn’t something he normally did. He seldom ever slowed down like that; after all, that type of stuff lead to thoughts Lance almost never wanted to deal with. Especially since he’d left Earth and been struck with such a strong case of homesickness.

Then again, maybe if he’d dealt with the thoughts and theories that he’d ignored earlier then he wouldn’t be in the position he was in now.

“If that is something you’re uncomfortable doing, then there are ways in which you can be assisted.” Xana’s words had a strange lit to them that Lance couldn’t place, but he could understand where the Druid was coming from.

“Will it speed up the process?” Space Dad would so totally ground Lance if he found out Lance was even contemplating this. Actually, Shiro would ground Lance for a good majority of his adventure thus far. Oh well. He was too deep into the rabbit hole to try to climb out now.

“Undoubtedly.”

Huh. Well, that increased the odds of it being some sort of space drug. Now the question, did Lance really want to risk going on some sort of weird space drug? Was looking human again really worth that?

He’d turned down the space drugs before, even in the face of torture. But, when in Rome, do as the Romans do, right?

“It won’t cause you any harm, Lance.” Xana chuckled, and stood. Lance blinked and the Druid was gone, another blink and he was back, a large shallow bowl in his hands. He placed it down carefully in front of Lance.

The surface of the liquid in the bowl was smooth, unnaturally so since the Druid had just been carrying it. The glossy purple surface reflected Lance almost perfectly back at him.

“What is this?”

And what was he supposed to do with it? Drink it? Hell. No. Not today, Satan, not today and not ever. Liquids were supposed to slosh and splash around when moved, not stay unnaturally still and smooth.

“A supplement, should you choose to use it.” Xana might have smiled. It was hard to tell with the
creepy mask on, and Lance was just going off verbal ques. “It will greatly accelerate this process.”

“Uh, don’t take this the wrong way, but how?” Lance looked down at the bowl, and gestured at it. “How, man, how? Am I supposed to drink it? Because that isn’t happening.”

“Drinking it would be preferred, yes, but, if you’re sensitive to Quintessence, then just touching it should do the trick.” Xana paused and contemplated Lance. “Try that method if you feel better about it. Touch it, submerge your hands and feel it. Focus on how it feels beneath them.”

“I just touch it?” Lance raised his eyebrow up again. Skeptical Lance was skeptical.

“Yes.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Xana assured.

“Mmm… alright.” Lance reached forward, and held his hands above the surface. Ugh, if Shiro was here – he wouldn’t be in this mess – then he’d so be getting a talk about safe substances, and the importance of saying ‘no’ and getting grounded.

Quiznak, he missed Shiro. He missed all of the team.

But they weren’t there. They left Lance, abandoned him, and replaced him. They didn’t want Lance. They weren’t there. They weren’t there and Lance was.

His hands shook as he held them over the bowl. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and dropped his hands into the substance.

Hopefully, he wasn’t making a mistake he’d regret.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, Xana is another OC. As is Lance's Birth Parents, Kivrah and Gracia.

Like with the Resistance that Matt is apart of, the show doesn't give many characters for the Galra Empire that we (the fandom) can use. I spent forever researching about the Druids, and all I have for it is that there's the 'Druids of the Four Directions' which are all deceased now (thanks BoM and Allura), and Haggar. Oh, and that they use quintessence for their magic; and that Keith's magic Luxite blade either sucks the Druids inside of it or poofs them.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance got ready for his first meeting with the Druid who would be teaching Lance how to control his Altean abilities, Xana. At the meeting, Xana introduced Lance to a 'supplement' to help Lance find a 'meditative' state.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Minor Implied/Referenced Drug Use ('supplement' for meditation)

The substance in the bowl didn’t really feel like much of anything.

There was a jolt of *something* which ran up his arms when he touched it, but after that it felt like he was just holding his hands in some sort of warm hybrid between jelly and water. It was squishy underneath his hands, like he was playing with a liquid form of play-doh or something.

Lance opened his eyes and glared down at the substance. Some ‘help’ it was.

Appearance wise, it looked like water. But, when Lance moved his hands, the surface rippled out before falling unnaturally still. It hadn’t oozed over his hands, or squished up between his fingers like he would have expected, given how it felt. For all intents and purposes, it was just like water. Except warm and squishy. Maybe it was some sort of Gel.

He still didn’t see how this was supposed to help.

When he lifted his hand, the substance clung to him, but became almost like a cloud. Wisps faded and disappeared into the air when he waved his hand around and wiggled his fingers.

Okay, so this stuff wasn’t a liquid, or a solid, or a gas… but somehow all three at once? That wasn’t how physics worked. Things couldn’t be all three states at once. In any case, this stuff wasn’t helping him with *anything*.

Maybe this was some sort of hazing thing. Like, ‘ha-ha’ look at the idiot. Except, he hadn’t really gotten any feelings from Xana that would indicate that he’d do this.

Then again, Lance’s intuition wasn’t exactly the best when it came to people or situations.

Lance huffed, looking up, and… Xana was gone. He looked back down, and the bowl was gone. He was standing – hadn’t he just been sitting? – in the middle of the room. This… this wasn’t making any sense.

There was this vague sense of something being off; both with himself and the world around him. It was like he was seeing the world either through hyper realism or a veil of fog; there was no in
between. Every step he took gave him this sense of vertigo, and the world blurred around him with every movement.

Okay. Okay. This was fine. This was fine. This was not fine. He’d jumped down the rabbit hole, and there was where he ended up. In this weird limbo place. Liminal spaces? Was that what they were called?

Oh whatever. He didn’t have the time or patience for this.

“Last I checked, meditation was not some Alice in Wonderland nonsense.” Lance called out.

There was no echo to his voice, no feedback he could hear to say he’d spoken. It was like the emptiness of the room had swallowed his voice up the moment he’d spoken.

Actually, now that he was paying attention to it, he could hear the faint crackle of noise at the edge of his mind. The soft mind-numbing noise a Television made when it couldn’t find a signal and white snow danced across the screen.

Static.

He was hearing static, and not just any static. No. This was familiar static, something he’d encountered before. He knew this static, and he knew it well. Reaching for it wasn’t a physical action; it was more like trying to block things out to focus on it. He brushed up against it; metaphoric fingertips just barely grazing it and…

“Ignore the static, Lance.” Lance jumped at Xana’s voice, and twisted around to look for him. Xana’s voice had the echoey ethereal quality Lance was expecting his own voice to have while in this weird dream world. “I wasn’t expecting you to find this place as quickly as you did. I’m impressed.”

Okay, so Xana wasn’t in the room. Lance looked up at the oddly nonexistent void like ceiling, mostly because he needed somewhere to look to pretend Xana was at.

“Yeah, that’s great and all.” Sort of. Like yeah, Lance was ecstatic that someone was impressed by him, but he kinda wished it wasn’t a Druid, of all things. “But… I don’t know where the quiznak I am, let alone what I’m supposed to be doing.”

Xana’s reply was a dry chuckle. “The sentiment of many when they begin as you have.” Oh, that was helpful. Lance rolled his eyes.

“You may do whatever you want. This is where you’ll find yourself. Tell me Lance, where are you?” Lance didn’t know where he was, that was the problem. UGH. Stupid cryptic people and their fortune cookie nonsense.

Well, fine. If Xana wanted to know where Lance was, then he’d describe the room. Lance clicked his tongue in irritation, but lowered his gaze. “Psh,” Lance blew a raspberry and rolled his eyes. “That’s easy,” He replied sarcastically, “I’m...” He trailed off, blinking at the change.

What was once a hard floor beneath him had shifted into sun warmed white sand, peppered with broken and whole bits of shells, coral, and sand dollars. Before him was the wide vast expanse of blue, the ocean touching the sky in the far horizon. The waves washing up on the beach looked like some sort of rolling painting. He’d recognize this beach anywhere.

Home. He was home.
“You’re…?” Xana prompted.

Lance took a step forward, ignoring the motion blur of the world as he did so. The sand kicked up where he walked, and when he stepped closer to the water, he could feel the cool salt spray of the water.

He felt… strange. Like he shouldn’t be there. Or more perhaps like he shouldn’t ever leave. It was a conflicting confusing feeling; one Lance wasn’t sure what to do with.

“I’m at the beach.” Lance finally answered Xana after a moment.

He crouched down and carefully reached down, like he was about to touch a rapid dog instead of sand. The granules of sand slipped out of his hand and blew away into the wind although some of it remained on his hand. He grabbed another handful, and cupped it, looking at it curiously.

It felt so real. He could almost believe it was.

“And are you alone?” Xana questioned. Lance rolled his eyes, turning as he stood to survey the area behind him to confirm that yes, he was alone.

“Of cour-…”

“Lance!”

At the sound of his name, Lance spun back around, his eyes widening at the figures on the beach.

He felt like his breath was caught in his chest, his heart having stopped beating. This wasn’t possible. And yet, he was looking at his family at the beach. His sisters were laying out on towels, tanning themselves. The younger children were digging and building sand castles. The adults all stood or sat around umbrellas, drinking and talking.

And not far from them… was Keith. Keith, who was sitting on a towel under an umbrella all alone, his feet buried in the sand up to his calves, smiling at Lance. Lance’s heart stopped, again.

“Lance!” Keith called out again, one hand cupped around his mouth, the other raised up to wave him over. The smile on Keith’s face was the largest he’d ever seen, his eyes nearly sparkling from both the sunlight and the joy shining out from within.

This was Keith as Lance had never seen before. This was Keith as Lance would never see.

Lance bit his lip, glanced at his family and then at Keith and jogged over. Keith leaned back on the towel as Lance approached. “You got some sand.” Keith’s hand wiped at the space below his eyes. “Just here.”

Lance raised his hand to mirror the movements, pausing briefly before touching his face and brushing the sand off from under his eyes. Smooth skin met his fingertips, only marred by the grainy grit of the sand.

“That’s what you get for trying to show off.” Lance’s older sister laughed at him from her towel. Lance nodded, scrunching up his nose as Keith started to laugh at him.

He opened his mouth to retort, but he didn’t get the chance before the voice in the sky interrupted.

“Lance?” Xana prompted, reminding Lance that this wasn’t real. None of this was real. It was some weird meditation thing. The world seemed to freeze at that realization, Keith’s responding
laugher cutting off abruptly, his smiling face frozen mid laugh.

“I… no. I’m not alone.” Except, he was wasn’t he?

He was alone here. He was alone in space. He was alone against the Galra. He was alone in learning that he wasn’t even completely human – actually, he wasn’t human at all. At least Keith had Shiro with him when he learned he was Galra.

Lance opened his eyes – when had he closed them – and jerked back, his hands flying back to help rebalance himself. He blinked, and then blinked again. His eyes felt dry, like they’d been open for too long, and his body felt stiff but odd, like he’d stuck his fingers in an electric socket.

“W…what just happened?”

“You forced yourself out, but you got farther than most others on their first attempt.” Across from Lance, Xana leaned back out of Lance’s personal space bubble. “I suppose it was for the best. Extended time in the Astral Plane isn’t generally recommended for first timers, and our time was nearly up anyways. I suggest trying to meditate while on your own as well.”

Right. Lance was just going to ignore all of that and focus on what he could make of it.

“So… I got homework.” Well, it made sense. Go to school, get the lessons… so it was only natural that homework came next. Xana nodded, probably not commenting due to his own lack of understanding of human terms and culture.

“That sucks, but… if it’ll help me control this,” Lance gestured at his face, “then I’m game.”

Speaking of his face… he reached up and touched his face. The cool smooth scales met his touch, and he winced, remembering how… human he’d been in the meditative state or whatever. Xana had called it an ‘astral plane’, or something, hadn’t he?

“You’ll have to meet with me quinantly until you get the basics.” Xana spoke after a moment. “But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t practice out of here.”

“Okay, but like, what was all that?”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.” Xana questioned, tilting his head ever so slightly.

“Like, I get that was all some weird dream mental state thing. But like… what was up with it? Like, I was on the beach with my family, but it wasn’t a beach I recognized.”

Except it was. It was a beach he recognized. He recognized it because he’d gone there nearly every day of his life until he left for the Garrison. He recognized it because it was the beach he’d seen in his dream the last time he’d crashed Blue.

“Ah. I was wondering about that myself.” Oh yeah, Xana, that was reassuring. “I believe it has to do with your individual personal quintessence. Blue does seem to suit you.” Xana paused.

“Allura did say something about the quintessence we had mirroring that of our lion.” Lance muttered, looking down and furrowing his eyebrows.

In a way, it kinda made sense… Blue was more agile in the water, and had the sonar and ice powers. Red could withstand hotter temperatures, and had fire breath. Green had the plant power… and so what was Yellow? Rock? Yeah, that made sense. So, Black was air.
Ha. Shiro was the thing that was absolutely needed to live. No wonder the team fell apart from his absence.

Lance ignored the quiet voice in the back of his mind saying that water was just as vitally needed as air. The team seemed to be fine without him. They didn’t need him, and he didn’t care.

“Exactly. You saw the ocean because that is a valid representation of your personal quintessence. Blue is usually aquatic in nature.” Lance nodded to Xana’s words, although he was already mentally moving on to the next topic.

“Okay and my family?”

“It is possible that they were there because they were what caused you to form, keep, and hold your human form previously. After all, it is to my understanding that humans are not… friendly towards those different than them.” Xana studied Lance for a moment.

“You would have been very young and any in your situation would have kept and held a shift like you had.” He reached forward and rested his hand on Lance’s shoulders. “But you are home now, if you chose to stay.”

Home. He supposed that if this was truly where his birth parents were from then this would be technically the place that Lance was from. But… how had he gotten to Earth? What had happened to his parents?

He knew that Lotor had said that they were attacked by rebels… but… Lance had so many unanswered questions. And here was this Druid who claimed to know Lance’s father. Heck, he’d even gone as far as to claim being Lance’s birth father’s ‘blood brother’.

“I… I know you said that time was almost up, but…. could you answer some questions about my parents?” Lance asked after a moment.

Xana studied him for a moment before slowly inclining his head. “You may.”

“You said you were my… father’s ‘blood brother’. What does that mean?” Xana chuckled.

“It’s a term given to those who are as close as family as they can be without being family. I grew up with Kivrha, and for a while, I was on the same project as him. In the end, we had differing paths, and he ended up on a separate project with your mother.”

Xana sighed. “It was a shame I was never able to meet with your mother more than I had. I heard that Gracia was very talented. It was a shame when the ship your parents had been on was attacked by rebels.”

“How did I end up on… with the humans?” Lance asked after a moment. “Last I knew, the Galra hadn’t been near that planet…”

“Your parents worked on a special research project away from the main entity of the empire. It’s possible she tried to escape with the research and crashed on that planet. We were never able to find the crash or the remains.”

Then how did they know that rebels had been the cause of their deaths? Something wasn’t adding up here.

“But what matters now is that you’ve returned back to the empire, and with as quickly as you progressed through your astral plane, your parents would be proud.” Xana clasped his hand on
Lance’s shoulder again, and Lance got the distinct impression that the Druid was smiling at him.

Lance nodded and smiled uncertainly. Xana chuckled and then half turned, his attention going to something behind Lance. This motion was followed by the audible hiss of door sliding open behind them.

“It looks like Prince Lotor is here. I look forward to future meetings with you.”

Lance swiveled around, looking up at Lotor as he stepped into the room. It was a relief to see the familiar face, and it took away some of the pain he was feeling since seeing his family and Keith.

“I take it things went well?” The prince raised a single elegant eyebrow, and then over exaggerated giving Lance a look over. “You don’t appear to be have been murdered.”

“Me? Murdered? Nah, Xana was great. I don’t know what you were so worried about.” Lance stretched as he stood up, working the kinks out of his system from sitting for a while. “How long was this lesson, anyways?”

“You spent about a varga meditating.” Xana replied.

An hour? Woah. It really hadn’t seemed like all that long, but… then again, he was in his head. It made sense that time flowed weird there.

*Time didn’t exist here.* Lance mentally winced at the sudden strange stray thought before shaking it off.

“I’ll see you later, Lance. Have a good night, and don’t forget to meditate.” Xana stood, taking the bowl with him as he gracefully rose. Wait, Lance turned back, but Xana was already gone. Had the bowl been empty? He looked down at his hands, but nothing seemed different. They weren’t stained purple or anything. He should have checked out the bowl sooner, but he’d been distracted.

Hopefully, he wouldn’t regret that.

“Is something the matter, Lance?” Lotor’s hand brushed against his back and then down to rest on Lance’s waist, a steady presence as the Prince nudged him forward.

“Nah. Just thought I saw something. It doesn’t matter.” Lance waved his hand in the air. “Sooo… what did you do while I was at school?” He asked, teasingly. “Miss me?”

Lotor laughed, smiling down at Lance. “Of course, but I was thankfully kept busy by my Generals.” Lotor sighed and shook his head. “They’ve been a handful lately, so I sent them away on some missions. Hopefully that will ease their restlessness.”

“You send them away often?” Lance asked.

“As often as needed.” Lotor replied, shrugging away the question as he ushered Lance out the door. “Are you looking forward to tomorrow’s lesson?”

Lance shrugged and nodded. “I guess. It was an… experience, I guess.” He sucked on his teeth as he reviewed the ‘lesson’ and his ‘dream’.

There were many questions that the lesson had given Lance, and he supposed the only way he could answer them would be to meditate again. This time without the ‘assistance’, although, he supposed if he asked, Lotor could probably get it for him.
The faster he got this done, the faster he could pretend to love this and want to become a Druid, right?
Meditation Pt. 2

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance took a look at his Astral Plane through the use of meditation and some additional 'assistance'. He learned a bit more about his birth parents and a bit about Xana.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Manipulation, Self-Deprecating Thoughts, Implied/Referenced Harm or Attempt to Do Harm, Minor Implied/Referenced Drug Use

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I don’t understand!” Lance screamed up at Keith, shaking his head.

His feet scrambled for purchase where there was none to be found. His arms ached with the strain of holding up his body. He could feel his grip sliding, not assisted at all by the dampness of the air or the slick clamminess of his hands. Below him, the dark ocean crashed against the rocks at the base of the cliff. Each roar of the waves was the ringing of the death toll in Lance’s mind.

Keith shook his head, crossing his arms. He didn’t look away, his eerily blank eyes locked onto Lance’s own desperate ones. He knelt, uncrossing his hands, although he still didn’t offer one to Lance.

“I may be Galra, but at least I’m not a traitor.” Keith hissed, one hand pulling out his knife and lashing downwards at Lance. The blade sung as it slipped through the air.

It was hard to say which hurt more. The injuries on Lance’s hand, or the pain of being so heartlessly murdered by Keith. He was given a few ticks to debate before he hit the choppy cold ocean. Hitting water wasn’t like diving into a pool, but instead like hitting a solid force. It forced him to gasp for air, taking water in.

The sun wasn’t shining, and the underwater world around him was equally dark and foreboding, giving no clues to the direction the surface was in.

His lungs turned to ice with the cold salt water, his vision blackening at the edges as he was tossed about in the currents. His foot hit something solid, and with one last burst of strength, Lance used it as leverage to push himself up.

His face hit the air, and Lance jerked back to himself with a gasp.

The book in his hands clattered onto the tabletop. He knew he was fine, but it didn’t stop him from examining his shaking hands, looking them over for any sign of the bite of Keith’s blade. His heart was beating a thousand miles per tick, and he was glad he was already sitting.
He let out a whimper, slumping into the chair. His life was already chaos, Lance didn’t need this. When Xana had told him that his quintessence was aquatic in nature, Lance had accepted it easily and brushed it off for other questions. Now, he wasn’t so sure it was a good idea.

For someone who’s quintessence was ‘aquatic’ and ‘blue’ he was developing terrible phobia of drowning. Which wasn’t helped by the fact that he was doing that nearly every meditation session. Ugh. What did that even mean? That he was drowning in himself?

Or was there some sort of outside force helping with that?

Each meditation session, the world he found himself had been getting darker and darker. Using the ‘assistance’ that Xana offered only seemed to make things worse, but at this point, he felt like it’d raise red flags if he were to suddenly stop using it.

Although, if he really wanted to, he could stop using it.

After all, Lance didn’t need assistance to fall into a meditative state anymore. Actually, Lance would argue that he needed something to help keep him out of the Astral Plane. He was starting to fall into it regardless if he wanted to not, like when he fell asleep while reading boring texts.

Xana insisted that this disorientation would pass, and that Lance would learn to better control it; but…it was coming up on quintant three or four, and Lance still wasn’t doing any better.

“This sucks,” Lance groaned, pushing the book across the table and letting his head thunk against the surface. This did suck. Everything about this sucked.

This time it’d been Keith trying to kill him. The time before was Hunk, and Pidge before that, and Coran the time before that and… yeah. He was tired of seeing his mental projection of his previous team mates trying to kill him. It was getting old… and sucky.

“Having issues meditating?” Sonali asked from their position by the door. Lance didn’t know where Lotor was, and frankly, in the wake of his current problem, Lance didn’t care.

Lotor had been nothing but concerned and caring. He’d even been understanding and comforting when Lance had woken him with a ‘nightmare’. Although Lance doubted that it could be considered ‘comforting’ when Lotor had given Lance a mini heart attack upon waking.

No one liked waking up to the feeling of another person’s eyes on them, or said person’s hand stroking their face. But hey, at least Lotor had cared enough to try to comfort Lance, as misguided as it’d been, instead of rolling over in his bed and ignoring Lance on the couch.

There were several people here actually, who seemed to care about Lance. While Lotor was the most expressive, Xana was pretty cool too, and then there was always Sonali and through them, Matt.

“The opposite, actually.” Lance called out to Sonali.

“Well… what’s your quintessence type?” Wasn’t that like some sort of personal question or something? Ah, quiznak it. It wasn’t like his life was going to get any better or worse by informing them of it.

“Aquatic? Water? Ice? Hell if I know.” He’d thought he’d lean more towards water, but Blue was very icy. Then again, his beach had been getting cold lately. Cold and empty.

Come to think of it, beyond ex-friends trying to kill him, he couldn’t’ think of the last time he saw
someone on his beach. When the weather had turned sour, his beach had started to empty.

He should probably be worried about that.

He wasn’t human anymore while there either. Perhaps that was a sign that he was becoming more accepting of his Altean features? He no longer wanted to punch every mirror or peel off his scales anymore. That was something positive, right?

“Hmm,” Sonali hummed for a moment. “So that’d make you blue.” They shrugged. “Makes sense. Those with blue quintessence types can be very fluid. It’s what makes it easy for them to adapt and trust so freely.”

Ice was not fluid, but okay. Whatever. He’d roll with it for now.

“Good to know. Useless, but still good to know.” Lance still had yet to lift his head from the table. “That doesn’t exactly help me figure out why I keep drowning.”

“Well, what did you do to keep yourself afloat when with Voltron?” And another probably should be personal question from Sonali. Maybe he should be keeping score to bother them later, maybe dig out some info about themselves out of them.

“Ha. I didn’t.” Blue did all the work. “I sunk, like a rock, and drowned until I learned how to breath underwater.” Not that he actually could breathe underwater or anything. It was more of realizing that Blue wasn’t going to drown him or anything. “I feel like I’m already losing myself.”

“I’m not surprised.” Sonali replied. Lance sat up and twisted in his seat to give them a look. He opened his mouth to question them, but they continued before he could. “They’re trying to influence you rather heavily with the corrupted quintessence. I’m really surprised you haven’t succumbed yet. Then again, you are a former Paladin of Voltron. We were hoping that’d help you resist.”

Of course, it cycled back to his former Paladin status. He really shouldn’t be surprised anymore. It was always his previous position as a Paladin that got him anything, not anything that he did.

“Yeah, I’ve been told I tend to surprise people.” Lance replied bitterly. “And corrupted quintessence? You mean the purple shit that ‘assists meditation’?” Lance asked, doing the hand quotes when needed. “Yeah, okay, that makes more sense now. Soooo, how do I not lose myself? Any tips, oh wise one?”

“I’d suggest what you did with Voltron, but…” Sonali trailed off into a hum. Lance drummed his fingers against the table. “The only thing I could think of would be to find something to anchor yourself to. Something that even if you get dragged down and drown, you can at least hold onto it and find your way back to the surface.”

“So, a totem from *Inception*. Sorta.” There was no response from Sonali, not that he was expecting one given the Earth reference. Matt probably would have got it. “But what to anchor myself with? Would an emotion work? But those change, and none of this is exactly something physical.”

“Well, think of what’s been happening lately in your meditations. What’s a reoccurring thing you can twist to your advantage?”

Keith.

Meditation Keith’s voice rung out in Lance’s head, repeating the words he’d said before his attempted murder of Lance.
Yeah, no.

While Keith was a pretty common factor lately, Lance was almost certain that making him a totem was just asking for a plethora of mental problems Lance didn’t want or need.

People were not designed to be mental anchors, and even if Lance was still on good terms with Keith, he wouldn’t put that pressure on Keith. He’d seen enough of what doing that did to people, their lives, and their relationships.

No thanks.

In the beginning, Lotor had showed up a couple of times, but considering Lance was pretty sure that they were trying to create some sort of tie or relationship there… yeah, no. Lance wasn’t going to play into that more than he already did.

Besides, once again, same thing as with Keith. Lance wouldn’t put that pressure or anything on a person. It just wasn’t doing right by them.

Not to mention that Lance had already woken up once suddenly sharing Lotor’s bed; and no matter how nice that bed was, Lance was not keen to repeat that experience. He hadn’t done anything with the prince, but quiznak, Lance did not want to give the guy any ideas. Not now, anyways. Maybe after he got a better feel for Lotor and his motives.

Sonali made a noise of distinct annoyance, drawing his attention back to them.

“Fine, don’t share. Just figure it out quickly. I’d hate for you to lose yourself before even making it as a Druid.”

Lance narrowed his eyes at them, but didn’t offer a response. They were right, after all. He was failing already, and he hadn’t even begun.

Then again, maybe Sonali had a point.

What did he do with Voltron? Between the five of them, there were always emotions running rampant across the shared bonds, although said bonds only existed when they were doing that stupid training exercise or forming Voltron. Not to mention the individual connections between the Paladin and the lion.

How did Lance not get swept away by Shiro’s steady confidence, Pidge’s sheer determination, Hunk’s overwhelming devotion, or Keith’s insane stubbornness? How did Lance stay afloat in that volatile mixture of emotions and personalities?

Well, that was easy when he thought about it. While the Lions were amplifiers, they were also filters. Blue filtered it all for Lance.

If their bond had been allowed to grow, then maybe then that’d become a concern, but it wasn’t. And it didn’t look like it ever would be. But, it did give Lance a start. He needed a filter, or an anchor. Something to help separate himself from everything else. But what to use?

He didn’t think he could continue to use Blue. She was who knew how far away, and he wouldn’t ask this of her anyways. Who knew what affect this crap would have on her. Besides, he hadn’t felt or connected with her in forever.

She was probably happy with her new pilot.
Lance drummed another beat out on the table, trying not to think of that and instead focusing on what he could do. Just surrendering himself to the currents didn’t sound like a good idea. That sounded like too much like defeat, although his instincts screamed it was a good idea. He was never one for instinct, obviously. Look where it’d gotten him thus far.

Then again, that’s what he did with Blue, and he’d learned to adapt from that. He was good at adapting.

An arm slipped around his shoulder as warmth pressed itself up against his back. Lance jumped, not expecting there to suddenly be someone near him. Sonali was never this ‘friendly’ and he hadn’t heard the door open indicating Lotor’s return.

“You seem deep in your thoughts. A penny for them, Lance?” Lotor’s voice purred in his ear. The warmth removed itself as Lotor stepped away, moving to take the chair across the table from him.

“Sorry. Meditating.” Lance gave a sheepish smile and ducked his head, rubbing the back of his head. It was a half-truth, so he wasn’t lyingparse.

Lotor hummed, tilting his head as he thoughtfully considered Lance. “You’ve put a lot of time into that. I’m impressed by your dedication.” Lance peeked up at him, and upon noticing Lotor’s intense stare, ducked his head back down.

“I just want to look normal again.” Lance admitted quietly.

He’d had a conversation similar to this before with Lotor. Last time, Lotor had tried to use the ‘this is normal for you, Lance. This is how you should look’ argument. It would be interesting to see what he said this time.

“Why?” Lotor questioned. “That Lance was a lie, an illusion; surrounded by people who neither deserved nor respected you. They didn’t care about you. They were killing everything special about you, trying to force you into roles of ‘normalcy’.” Lance physically jerked, looking at Lotor and shaking his head as the prince spoke.

That wasn’t true. None of it was true. But… it was wasn’t it? Those were feelings that Lance had felt. Those were feelings that Lance had indirectly expressed to Lotor when he’d been Tyrac. It was a reflection of how Lance had felt.

His mouth felt dry as he listened to this. He didn’t want to hear this. He didn’t want these feelings to be just tossed back into his face. But he had no protests that he could say.

“And in the end, after you confirmed to what they wanted, they still left you. They abandoned you, Lance.” Lotor continued. “Why do you still want to be with them when they hurt you this much?”

Lance took a deep breath, using the silence Lotor was giving him as a chance to think over a response. His sister once told him that a grain of truth existed in every lie. Lance could use this, no matter how much it hurt.

He needed to get the ‘suggestion’ to become a Druid. He couldn’t fail the resistance. Not when he’d failed everyone else.

“So, what do you suggest? That I stay here?” Lance laughed dryly and shook his head. “I just stay in this room, leaching off you? I can’t, won’t, do that to you. I’d rather live a lie and return home than treat you like that. Especially after all you’ve done for me.”

“Home?” Lotor shook his head. “You are home, here in the Empire, surrounded by those who only
want to help you grow. This is where you belong.” Lotor reached across the table, taking Lance’s hand, stroking the back of it. “I want you to stay, and I know I’m not the only one who holds that sentiment.”

“Okay, so what if Xana likes me too. Big deal.” Lance shrugged. “That doesn’t change the fact I’m useless.”

At the word ‘useless’, the Prince’s eyes flashed and he frowned, shaking his head.

“You’re far more useful then you’ve been led to believe.” Lotor replied. “Those who abandoned you couldn’t see how useful you are. They don’t deserve you. Here, we see you, Lance. And more importantly, we see what you could do. Xana says you’re a quick study, and that he wouldn’t mind teaching you further, if you have the desire.” The grip on Lance’s hand tightened. “And I wouldn’t mind you staying either.”

“Are you, so you’re, I mean. Can I… stay?” Lance furrowed his eyebrows, and shook his head. “What would I do?”

Hook… line…

“Become a Druid. You have talent, Lance, if you put your mind to it.”

Sinker. Gotcha.

“A Druid?” Lance repeated. “You want me to become a Druid?”

“Yes.” Lotor mirrored his answer with a nod. “You’ve got a lot of potential, and I believe with enough study, you’d even be able to contend against Haggar. Think about it, Lance: you’d be the most powerful Druid in the empire.”

Cool, if Lance was into power, he be all up into that. Good thing he wasn’t. After all, power corrupts, and Lance wasn’t interested in that. Although, he’d take these strokes to his ego.

“I… I don’t know. I mean, I know you offered it in the beginning, but… I didn’t actually think it was a real offer… I mean… I just… I don’t know.”

If only Lance could just come straight out and say ‘yes’. That’d make this process go by so much quicker. But that’d be a bit suspicious.

“Make of it what you will, but know it’s the truth when I say I think you could achieve so much here.” Lotor reached forward, brushing his hand against Lance’s cheek – barely missing the scales – with his other hand. “Stay, please?”

And how could Lance say ‘no’ to that? Not that he was planning on doing that. He lowered his gaze, and fidgeted for a moment.

“You’ll never want for anything ever again, Lance. I swear it. Fashion, food, friends? It’ll all be yours, along with power, rank, and prestige. You won’t have anything to fear here, Lance.”

Anything he wanted… except for the war to end with the Galra surrendering, of course. How… tempting. All this and more for the simple tiny price of Lance’s soul. Of course.

“Al…alright.” Lance swallowed thickly, and looked up, meeting Lotor’s gaze. “Alright. I’ll stay.”

It was a relief. After so long of trying to get this event to play out, it was like taking a load off
Lance’s shoulders to finally have it done with. Now he just needed to focus on finding an anchor so he didn’t end up dead before he could be any use to the resistance.

“I’d hoped you’d say that.” Lotor said, “You have no idea how happy hearing you say that has made me. Thank you, Lance.”

Lotor brushed his cheek again; this time, touching up against one of Lance’s scales.

There was a tick of the usual warmth Lance was used to before he was suddenly submerged in cool slick slime. The sensation was enough to cause a physical reaction, and Lance turned his face, hiding it in his shoulder. Lotor chuckled, no doubt thinking Lance was still being ’shy’ or some rot.

Ugh. He should not have thought of rot, especially with the phantom feel of the slime still washing over him.

“I’ll inform Xana at the next meeting. He’ll be so pleased to hear that you’re staying. He was worried about you being left alone in such a hostile environment again.” Lotor smiled. Lance nodded, again. “We’ll have a nice meal tonight to celebrate.” Lance wasn’t sure he had the stomach to enjoy it.

Chapter End Notes

If at any point I forget a trigger warning, could someone please let me know? Thank You! :)}
Meditation Pt. 3

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance has been meditating for a few quintants. He's currently having issues with his Astral Plane. Xana assures him that it's natural, but Sonali informs Lance that the meditation 'assistance' really was corrupted Quintessence and that they were trying to corrupt Lance.

Lance and Lotor played into each other's hands, finally ending with them both getting the result they wanted: Lance agreeing to become a Druid.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warnings(s):** Emotional and Mental Manipulation; Astral Plane; Minor Implied/Referenced Drug Use (Remember Kids, don't do quintessence!)

To some degree, knowing that the meditation ‘aide’ was corrupted quintessence was helpful for reminding trying to not be influenced by it… but no amount of knowledge prevented it from flowing through Lance, cascading over him like warm water.

He hated to admit it, but it was a comfort to put his hands into it and ‘fall’ through it into the meditative state. Then again, that made sense. It was designed to welcome him in, and then later… well… later it tried to keep him.

Now that he knew it was corruption and trying to influence him, he could *feel* that. There were nearly immediate changes towards how he felt towards people and things. The appreciation he felt towards Sonali for their knowledge was already being soured. The memory and feelings of the team’s betrayal was dug up and shoved to the surface.

“Focus Lance.” Lance rolled his eyes, breezing past the initial disorientation that followed falling into the weird Altean meditative state. He didn’t need Xana reminding him to focus to know what he needed to do.

Keith was the one that needed help to focus. ‘Patience yields focus’.

Ha. Lance didn’t need patience. He was flying through all of Xana’s expectations. Excelling at them. Even Lotor was impressed with the progress Lance had made over the past movement.

Finally, something Lance excelled at more than Keith. True, this wasn’t exactly something Keith could do. The Galra couldn’t do half of what a Druid could do with Quintessence. And Lance was doing so well. He was almost able to fully change his appearance back to human.

Not to mention all the cool stuff Xana had promised to teach Lance. Everything ranging from levitation of items to the teleportation. The thing Lance was most excited about was the
manipulation of quintessence. Evidently, Lance showed a great deal of promise in that field.

It was also a talent that both of his parents had excelled in. Which all but promised that Lance would be good at it too.

Oh, Lance couldn’t wait until he met back up with his old team, and showed them what they’d missed out on. He couldn’t wait to show them how much he was worth, when placed with people who valued him.

The room before him faded into the beach. It’d changed since his first visit. It changed almost every visit, actually.

The once warm rays of sunshine had been replaced with a misty fog, which rolled over the darker ocean, mixing with the salt spray of the sea. There was a noticeable chill in the air, which hung due to the dampness caused by the fog and ocean.

His family was no longer around, but that was okay. He didn’t want them here at this beach anyways. This was no longer the beach of his childhood. No, it was his beach.

From the dark wet sand and sometimes ice, to the towering cliffs, and the choppy murky ocean. This was Lance. And he didn’t want his family here to see this. He didn’t want them to see what’d happened to his sunny beautiful beach.

Besides, he’d given up his hope of ever seeing them again. He didn’t need them, not when he was wanted here, with the Galra. Not when he could just ask Xana for the stories of his father and mother.

They’d never accept him as he was now: Traitor to Voltron, and soon to be a Druid in training.

The whole world shifted, the edge of the cliffs cracking and crumbling, falling into the ocean with a grating noise of rock on rock and then finally a giant splash.

No.

No. He was doing this for his family. He was doing this for Earth, and for his family, and for everything that Lance held dear. This darkness, it wasn’t him. Not really. It was just the corruption trying to stain him. He couldn’t lose himself to it. He couldn’t.

The shift of mind was a visible difference. It was like everything brightened. The ocean changed from the murky darker colors to take on a bluer tint. The sky brightened to a lighter grey. It wasn’t perfect, but it was certainly better than before.

Lance looked up at the cliffs and sighed. He was all too familiar with them, considering his mind’s surprising love for recreating the Mufasa death scene with them and Keith.

He knew the sunny warm beaches of his past were behind him. He was too full of ice and cold salt water to ever be properly warm again. Messing around with quintessence and meditation like this had only further driven in that fact.

There was surge of warmth and the brief feeling of static that informed Lance that he was being dosed, again, with the corrupted quintessence. The world around him wavered. With each distortion, he could feel the corruption taking hold.

Now that Sonali had informed him of what it was, he could recognize it better. If he let himself be taken into it, he knew where he’d end up. He’d end up drowning in a sea of black tar, or on a
muddy beach bank. Or worse. It’d take the form of Keith, or another teammate, and he’d be subjected to yet grueling battle to the death where Lance would somehow always end up dangling on the cliff.

“Lance? Is everything alright?”

No, everything was not alright. He still didn’t know what to do to not get sucked into the corruption.

The world stopped distorting, and Lance didn’t have to look down to see that the sand he was standing on was changing into thick sticky mud.

“How about the beach.” He sung out. His foot escaped the mud with a wet squelch, and Lance winced at the noise, wrinkling his nose at it. Maybe the mud was caused by Xana? He was more of the ‘earth’ quintessence type, evidently. Every child and their parent knew that dirt plus water equaled mud.

“I see. Where are you?” Hell. He was in hell. Where did Xana think he was? On vacation at the Bahamas? Oooh. That actually sounded really nice right now. Maybe he could ask Lotor for a beach vacation.

No. No, that was a horrible idea. He didn’t want to ask Lotor for anything, because then he’d owe the prince. But, then again Lotor cared for Lance, and if Lance wanted to go to the beach, then…

No. No. No. Lotor didn’t care for Lance, except in the aspect that he could use him. Lotor wanted to use Lance just as Lance was using him to get into the Druids to spy for the resistance.

Feels were unnecessary but unfortunately involved.

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Feels were unnecessary but unfortunately involved.

“The beach.” Lance answered Xana.

“And are you alone?” Lance rolled his eyes. Always with the same questions. Ugh.

Lance stumbled, falling into the mud. Any curses he would have spoken were muffled by his face meeting the disgusting muck, and he spat it out, narrowing his eyes at the ground. This. Sucked.

If this was indeed caused by Xana’s presence, then he could go quiznak off. But…

This did beat being drowned. While he was messy, he was at least still breathing, wasn’t he? Wasn’t that a gift?

There was another distortion, and Lance’s stomach rolled with the force of it. Thick gooey water washed over him, leaving him sputtering out black oil when the wave receded. The fog returned.

How had Lance never noticed this before? It must be one of those things that one didn’t notice until it was pointed out.

“How about the beach.” Lance answered Xana.

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“Lance? You seem distracted.”

“I’m…” Another wave washed over him, pushing against him with enough force to dislodge him from the mud, and carry him out to sea with the receding wave. Trying to swim through this mess was like trying to fight a rip tide, or trying to swim through molasses. Both options left him going nowhere.

He breached the surface, sucking in a contaminated breath of air before he was forced back under, sent tumbling through the inky darkness of this mess. His hand reached through the darkness, begging someone to help him, although he knew he was the only one there.
There was another distortion, although Lance had no visual clues at first to place it. It was more of a feeling at this point than anything else. The brush of static growing louder before returning back to its usual muted state.

Static. Lance knew static. He’d hidden in static before. It’d sheltered him from the Druids. Or was that the corruption? He couldn’t tell. If he reached for it, would it grant him his salvation or damnation? He didn’t know, but he reached out regardless.

A hand grasped his. He was pulled from the mess: the tar, mud, and goo that had taken over him.

“Are you alright?” Lotor’s warm voice washed over him, cleansing him of the concoction he’d been drowning in. Behind him, Lance could hear the gurgle of the corrupted ocean as it washed upon thick muddy shores.

Disgusting.

“I’m fine.” He could live without this whole experience. Really, he could. Was this all really necessary?

Whatever the true answer, it was at least necessary per the Galra. They wanted Lance to go through this for some reason. Perhaps it was to weed out traitors, and to force people to their side through the corruption.

Lotor smiled at him. Down here in his mind, Lance couldn’t see why he’d ever trusted Lotor to begin with.

Sure, the prince was gorgeous. Lance wouldn’t deny that. The glow of his eyes was highlighted in the fog that surrounded them. The smile brought back the crow’s feet at the corner of Lotor’s eyes that Lance loved so much. It was so hard to fake those, so the smiles Lotor gave him must be real… right?

Lotor said he cared about Lance. He said he cared, and he listened, and he was everything that Lance could have asked for.

The ooze lapped at his legs in the sluggish way that only an ocean of ooze could. Lance accepted it as it was probably not intended to be: a warning. He was slipping again. Quiznak.

“Just as expected. You’re safe here, Lance.” Every word, every syllable literally oozed out of his mouth. It was almost like Lance could visually see the words as they dripped out of his mouth. Sticky words, meant to trap Lance if he let them.

He was going to have to sit down and have a talk with himself about sticky, slimy, oozing, disgusting crap. This was… ridiculous. Honestly, was he some sort of novel, the type his English teachers loved to dissect for symbolism?!

Seriously, Mind. He got it. Lotor was as icky and sticky as the corruption. Bad. He got it.

“Lance? Are you alone?” Xana questioned.

“Lotor’s here.” Lance answered, eyeing the other warily. People didn’t usually come to his beach since the corruption settled in unless they were there to try to kill him. Maybe this was a sign? Or perhaps it was all part of the Druid’s agenda.

Who knew?
Of course, he was still trying to figure out what that agenda could be. Seriously. Why were they training him? Why weren’t they torturing him as they had been before? Why had Lotor stopped them? What did Lotor want?

Too many questions, not enough answers. But maybe, if he passed this… if he became a Druid, then maybe, he’d finally get what he was looking for.

“Of course, I’m here. Where else would I be?” Where ever Lotor usually went whenever Lance was in ‘class’. Lance didn’t know where that was, but he knew where it wasn’t: Lance’s mind.

Lotor stepped forward, not hindered by the corruption, and rested a hand on Lance’s upper arm. His smile, once so warm, looked sharp and dangerous. Lance tried to take a step backwards, but the world distorted again, and suddenly he was falling forward, into Lotor’s chest.

“Is he saying anything?” To his merit, Xana sounded confused about Lotor’s presence. Which confused Lance because where else would Lotor be? Didn’t the Prince just ask that himself?

It made sense that Lotor would be here. He was important to Lance. He’d never outright lied to Lance, besides the whole name thing. He’d listened to Lance. He’d cared about Lance. He promised to take Lance home.

… Maybe Lotor could even give Lance rain. He missed the rain.

Lance sighed, relaxing into Lotor’s hold. He was safe and warm here. The chill of the beach couldn’t permeate through Lotor.

“I’m safe here.” Lance muttered.

Lotor’s arms were wrapped around him, holding him close. The prince’s chin bumped against the crown of Lance’s head, and Lance felt him nod.

“You are.” Lotor purred. His hands slid up and down Lance’s body, rubbing slow comforting circles everywhere. “You’ll always be safe with me. You trust that, don’t you, Lance?”

“Do you believe him?” Xana’s voice sounded strange. Lance couldn’t place what about it was strange, and it bothered him. Lotor’s arms around him tightened. The questions echoed in the empty fog.

Did Lance believe him? Did Lance trust that he’d be safe with Lotor?

Lance looked up, meeting Lotor’s softly glowing eyes. There was something there, something that twisted his stomach. The world behind Lotor seemed to distort, and Lance closed his eyes, dropping his head against Lotor’s shoulder. His head hurt. Everything hurt. There was something he needed to remember.

“Lance?” Lotor prompted quietly. Lance picked his head up and looked up just in time to see Lotor’s smile. Static washed in, and Lance swooned. There were butterflies in his stomach, and it was all Lance could do to smile back and answer.

“Of course.” Was he answering Lotor, or Xana, or both? He didn’t know. He just knew the answer was yes.

“It brings me joy to hear that. I’ll make sure you never fear again. You don’t know how powerful you could be. How much you could accomplish with me.” Lance had never understood the phrase ‘silver tongue’ until he met Lotor. Lance could listen to him speak all day, especially when he’s
saying such things about Lance.

“What is he saying now?” Xana’s voice was an unwelcome intrusion to this, but Lance knew if he didn’t respond, the Druid would become more annoying.

“I’ll be powerful if I stay.” Lance couldn’t care less about being powerful, but there is an appeal to never having to be afraid again. Of being able to finally beat Keith and the others. To put them in their place for making him feel so small and useless.

“Exactly. Don’t you want to stay with me, Lance? Think of all that you’d achieve.”

One of Lotor’s hands slid up his body to cup his cheek. Lance was stuck, staring up at Lotor, their gazes locked. His heart felt funny, like it couldn’t decide whether it wanted to beat faster or stop all together. The butterflies in his stomach increased, flying more frantically as their numbers grew.

He was going to be sick. He was perfectly fine. He was… He was…

“Do you believe him?” Xana asked.

“Yes.” He was responding to Xana, but he couldn’t take his eyes off Lotor.

Something didn’t feel right. There were too many butterflies in his stomach, and it hurt. This wasn’t the pleasant feeling that romance novels had prophesized. He was lied to.

…

Lied to. He was – this was a lie. This was a lie. He tried to look away from Lotor, but Lotor’s hand on his cheek kept him in place. Lotor smiled, the genuine smile with the crow’s feet. Lance’s heart skipped a beat.

“Perfect.” Lotor’s voice was a quiet purr. “I knew you would. You belong here.” The floor felt like it dropped out from below Lance’s feet. He was being swept away by Lotor: his voice, his touch, his eyes, his promises.

No. Wait. That didn’t sound right. None of this was…

“If he’s still talking, what is he saying?” Xana prompted.

Did it matter? Lance didn’t think Lotor would be talking for much longer. Not with how things were going. He smiled and laughed. The butterflies were still in his stomach, fluttering away, tickling him. All was safe here.

Faintly, ‘behind’ Lotor and Xana, he could hear a conversation, but the words were muddled. It was too faint to properly hear. There was also this annoying white noise sound, almost like static, but not quite. It was causing his headache.

He clung closer to Lotor, his hands gripping the cloth of Lotor’s clothes. Lotor would keep him safe. Lotor would ensure Lance had nothing to fear. There was no pain with Lotor. There was no pain for Lance with the Empire, with the Druids.

They’d give him the power to return the pain dealt to him.

“I… belong.” The hand touching Lance’s cheek shifted slightly to touch one of Lance’s scales.

Lance’s world exploded into fractals, the feeling of wrongness multiplying. It grew, expanding around him until he was submerged in just how wrong all of this was.
The butterflies escaped out of Lance, the gentle flutter of their wings replaced by the wrenching realization of ‘not right’. He felt sick to his stomach. Bile burned at the back of his throat, physically threatening him. The world around him tilted, sliding around him, giving him a distinct case of vertigo.

Bits of conversation leaked through to Lance. Quiet voices, barely heard under the roar of the mindscape around Lance.

“…too much.”

“Keep going. He’s almost there.”

Lance closed his eyes, he couldn’t do this. Quiznak the rebellion and the resistance. Quiznak Voltron. Quiznak the Empire. Quiznak everything. He couldn’t do this. He could not do this.

He wrenched himself out of Lotor’s grasp, falling back into the tar. He flailed, panicking. How did it creep up on him so suddenly? No, it hadn’t been sudden. He’d lost himself, again. He was still losing himself.

Lotor was still in front of him, unaffected by the ocean of tar surrounding them, while Lance was drowning, sinking in combination of the thick syrupy liquid that’d been spilling from Lotor’s mouth and the existing ooze of the corruption.

Lotor smirked, walking towards Lance like there was nothing around him. He reached out, offering his hand to Lance.

“You’re my druid. You’re mine and no one else’s, aren’t you?” Syrup bubbled out of Lotor’s mouth like something out of a horror movie. One would think it’d make him hard to understand, but Lance could hear his words just fine.

Lance’s mouth opened, the word ‘yes’ on the tip of his tongue. His hand was reaching out for Lotor’s. He needed to say yes. If he said ‘yes’, then everything would be fixed. He’d be safe. He’d be with Lotor. He’d… He…. He’d be making a deal with the devil if he said yes.

He put his foot down, as best he could when there was no ground for him to step on.

No.

The word was swallowed by the ocean, which roared in his ears. Static exploded in Lance’s head. The world had become a mess of blue, black, gray, and purple.

No.

That word was not allowed here. The only thing allowed here was confirmation. He could either agree to Lotor, to the Empire, to the Druids, or he could agree to the corruption. He could lose himself in it. He didn’t have the strength to fight it on his own. There was no chance for him to win. He needed to accept that.

No.

The static changed. It was now a buzz of Lotor’s voice, repeating over and over the promises he’d offered. The promises that Lance had accepted.

Lance’s skin itched. It burned where the ocean touched it. Lotor was still smirking, his mouth not moving despite his voice echoing around. He stepped forward, and wrapped his arms back around
“Sir!” Xana’s voice sounded distant, sharp, worried. It wasn’t meant for Lance.

Lance tried to kick him away, but his limbs were slow and unresponsive in the goo. His lungs burned with a need for clean air, from the taint of the goo threatening to drown him. The ocean washed over him, submerging them both, although Lance was the only one affected.

He needed to get to the surface, but he didn’t know which way.

“Are you mine, aren’t you?” Lotor repeated, and Lance shook his head.

No. Lance didn’t belong to anyone like that. He’d never be equal with Lotor. He’d always be a trophy won, Lotor’s pet druid, and prized possession. A former Paladin, which Lotor had won.

Lance’s vision was starting to black out, but he refused to give into this. The static was still buzzing in his ears, creating a cacophony of Lotor’s voice and the white noise. His lungs gave out, he needed air, and he gasped into the ooze around him.

He could say yes to Lotor, or drown. Lance didn’t get the feeling either option mattered to the prince.

It didn’t matter. Lance would rather drown a thousand times. He didn’t belong to anyone. The closest thing to that would be the way that Blue owned him. But he owned Blue just as much as she owned him. They were a team.

The static broke, and there was an icy rush around him, a roar in his ears which overpowered the sound of Lotor and echoed through his head into his heart and within his soul.

Lance gasped, the feeling of cool icy water filling his lungs. He wasn’t drowning. Instead the ice ran through his veins, filling his body.

The thick sludge of the ocean was washed away, and after a moment, Lance was washed upon the shore. There was still muddy ooze on the banks, but the water foamed as it washed over it, scrubbing away the filth. The water was freezing, ice forming and spreading on the beach, turning the gritty muddy sand to ice.

The cold left Lance shivering, and when he breathed, he could see his breath cloud in front of him. His clothes felt stiff, and when he looked down at them, he could already see the frost climbing up them.

Lance laughed. He couldn’t help it.

He recognized this cold, and while it wasn’t warm – obviously – it was familiar. He was on his hands and knees, but he stood. His clothes cracked as he moved, and the water washing up glittered as tiny ice pieces formed around him and then were washed away.

Lance looked up at the Blue Lion.

Lotor didn’t exist anymore, crushed under her paw and broken into tiny glittering shimmering particles of ice dust.

Blue’s yellow eyes glittered as frost and ice weaved beautiful designs onto her metal. She moved like Lance, unaffected by the water or ice. She was a goddess of both. The embodiment of cold. She leaned down; the lion equivalent of looking Lance in the face.
There was a quiet chittering noise like a whisper in the back of his mind. Lance’s eyes widened. Talking with Blue before was always more of a feeling, but now he could hear her words almost as clearly as if she were actually speaking.

“You are my paladin.” She purred, quietly. “I have waited thousands of lifetimes, and judged millions of souls. Of all options, I claimed and bonded with you. You are mine, and I am yours. This is an unshakable truth.”

Her voice sounded like how he always believed mermaids would sound. It was crystalline and clear, like chimes on the wind, or a ringing of a bell. It was not soft, but it was not a roar either. It was the sound of waves crashing against the shore. It was the sound of cracking and shifting ice.

Her voice and words were a promise. He was hers, just as much as she was his.

Lotor could try to corrupt Lance’s quintessence as much as he pleased. Blue may not be able to wash it all away, but at least she could give Lance a fighting chance, even from across the universe. Most importantly, she gave him a lesson, and a flicker of hope. After all, his quintessence mirrored hers. She just showed him that he had the power to stay afloat this entire time.

“Do you believe him?” Lance had almost forgotten about Xana, but his voice rang out across the icy ocean-scape. There was an almost frantic tone to Xana’s voice, almost unnoticeable.

Lance laughed. Did he believe Lotor? He looked out at the new form his astral plane, and then up at Blue. She purred reassuringly, the sound reverberating through Lance.

Did Lance believe Lotor? No. But, he believed her. He believed Blue.

He believed Blue with his heart, with his soul.

Lance reached out to her, walking freely on reflective ice. His hand pressed against her muzzle. He smiled up at the Blue lion; shafts of sunlight breaking through the fog with every rumble of her purr. He opened his mouth and answered Xana’s question.

“Absolutely.”
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance continued his classes and training with Xana, knowing now that the meditation 'aid' was really corrupted quintessence. Despite knowing about it, Lance still started to fall for the corruption, however, because he was aware of it, he was able to fight back enough for Blue to give him a hand and assist in resisting.

Trigger Warning(s): None that I can think of. Leave a comment or message me on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com) if you feel there should be one.

Keith’s dreams were full of turmoil, which he supposed was an accurate reflection of his life currently.

Both Shiro and Lance were missing, even though the team had their lions.

They’d found the Blue Lion, but they’d been too late to find Lance. Of course, if the emergency beacons had worked properly, then they might have found both of them. Coran wasn’t sure exactly why the Castle ceased picking up the Emergency signals sent out by the Lions, but he was working tirelessly to fix it.

Slav had mentioned to them that in 50% of realities, they never found Lance in time. Although, Slav admitted it wasn’t always due to castle error like it was this time. Keith wasn’t sure if Slav was trying to reassure him that it wasn’t his fault, or make him feel worse that this was one of the realities where they failed.

There was a Brightside to finding Blue, however: she was much more responsive than Black.

Not that it meant much considering food goo was more responsive than Black, who just laid in a despondent slump where the other Lions had left it… her… him… whatever.

It’d taken Allura a while, but she’d finally persuaded the Blue Lion to allow Coran to temporarily pilot her in times of great need until her proper Paladin had been found.

“This is great news!” Slav has crowed upon hearing this. “In only 5% of realities, Blue allows Coran to pilot her!” He paused. “But, that may not be such a good thing for another.” The look Slav gave Keith was significant, and Keith had to grit his teeth.

Of course, this would impact something with Lance. But they needed the help that Coran could offer. Three Lions were not enough. They’d barely been able to survive when Lance was here, and now that he was gone…
The whole team felt his absence. It was evident in how many times Hunk had to carry Pidge to bed, or the rumble of their stomachs, or how dirty and quiet the castle seemed to have become since Lance’s disappearance.

Allura had been trying to press for a permanent replacement of Lance, but evidently, Blue would not hear of it. To be fair, none of the other Paladins wanted to hear of it either.

Given the situation with the Blue Lion, Keith didn’t blame the Black Lion for remaining unresponsive. Shiro was as irreplaceable as Lance, and if Allura ever wanted them to form Voltron again, then she needed to locate their missing two Paladins, not just replace them.

Not to say that Allura hadn’t already tried to get the Black Lion to accept a new pilot.

“Shiro tasked you with leading Voltron should anything happen to him.” She’d told Keith. She’d pushed him to try to get Black to respond to him. Clearly, he’d failed, and if succeeding meant becoming Shiro’s replacement, then he was happy for once that he had.

Besides, he was already bonded… bonding?... with Red. He couldn’t imagine having both Black and Red in his head demanding his attention.

One Drama queen was more than enough, thank you very much.

Despite Allura’s suggestions, attempts to find their missing teammates had not ceased. However, it seemed that Lance had disappeared just as thoroughly as Shiro had. They’d even stopped by the Space Mall that was near where Blue had crashed, but they’d had no luck.

The moment anyone saw the paladins they clammed up. The whole atmosphere in the mall had been tense, like the mall was at war with itself. After disappearing for a varga, Coran had practically confirmed as much.

Something had happened, although Coran hadn’t been able to find out what, which had basically started a cold civil war in the mall. Keith’s non-existent money was on the cause being Lance.

“You were never going to get any information from them anyways.” Slav informed him quietly once he’d returned to the Castle. Keith didn’t both withholding his groan.

If they were never going to get anything, then why had they gone? Why had Slav allowed them to waste that time?

“Why can’t you just tell me where he is?” Keith demanded.

“That isn’t how this works,” Slav shrugged. “And, if I intervene too much, I could set us off to the higher percentage of realities where nothing works out at all.”

Keith growled, but didn’t say anything more. He was starting to see why Shiro loathed this creature.

Stress on the castle was running high, especially without Lance to diffuse it. It’d started to bleed into Keith’s dreams; filling them with images of Lance dying, or being lost and alone. He still dreamed about the battle where they’d lost Lance.

That said, hearing a lion roar wasn’t an uncommon occurrence in his dreams, but something felt different. It startled him awake, and he laid in the bunk, staring up at the ceiling waiting for any sign that the roar hadn’t been from his dreams.
There were no alarms, no Allura over the speakers calling for the Paladins. Nothing screaming that they were being attacked – again – by a Robeast or a battleship or anything. There was only silence.

At the back of his mind, Red rumbled unhappily. His first clue. Yet when he probed her, she didn’t give him a response.

For a moment, Keith thought that he might have imagined the roar, or it may have in fact been part of his dream.

“Did everybody else hear that?” Hunk’s voice, drifting through the closed door quickly washed away that thought.

Keith was moving before he could think to do so, jumping off the bed, and turning to where his jacket usually hung. He hesitated for a second, perhaps more, as his gaze fell on the familiar brown hanging next to his own jacket. His hand reached out, and he brushed against it before he shook his head, and grabbed his own jacket and left the room.

Lance’s jacket was too warm for him, especially with Red’s heat running through him. Sometimes even his own jacket was too much. Besides, none of the others liked to look at Lance’s jacket.

Hunk and Pidge were already out of their rooms. Pidge rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand, and then stifled a yawn. Hunk looked considerably more awake, but then again, Hunk usually got more sleep than Pidge on a daily basis, so this made sense. They turned to Keith as he exited his room.

“Keith?” Keith acknowledged Hunk with a nod before turning and heading down to the Lion Hangers.

There was a twisting feeling in his gut. Like something changed, but he couldn’t put his finger on it. It took him a moment to realize it was residual feelings from Red. She was secluding herself away from Keith, trying to keep her emotions from burning out her Paladin. Something Keith was grateful for.

He’d only been able to take the burning for so long before he requested that Red to turn it down a bit. Now she was usually a simmering warmth, unless something set her off, in which case then she tried to hold back as to not injure her Paladin.

He sent a quick questioning probe her way. Was something wrong with her? The roar he’d heard hadn’t sounded like her.

He exited out of the elevator into the central area were all the hangars could be accessed, and realized the answer before Red could send one. He stopped in his tracks, crossing his arms and narrowing his eyes at the two standing in front of the Blue Lion’s hangar.

As if to confirm, Red pulled up the color blue in Keith’s mind. Yep. The roar had belonged to Blue. Great.

If Allura and Coran had upset the Blue lion, then they could basically kiss whatever help they were getting from her goodbye.

Blue had been mutinously quiet since they found her without Lance. It was a miracle Allura was able to persuade her into letting Coran pilot her. Now Allura was jeopardizing that. He understood she was just trying to do what was best for Voltron, but sometimes in trying to help, one just made things worse.
There was nothing to be done here, except find Lance and Shiro.

Some of Red’s heat leaked through the bond, although it wasn’t bad. It was comforting and reassuring. She’d liked that Keith understood that they needed to find their previous teammates, not forge new ones.

“Oh no. What’s happened now?” Hunk muttered, and Keith mentally echoed the sentiment. His life lately had been nothing but a repeating vicious cycle of ‘what now?’. He was hoping it’d be done soon, but at the same time, he knew that was a fool’s hope.

“I’m not sure. Something seems to have angered Blue.” Allura was staring at the door, her hand hovering above the console to open it. Keith rolled his eyes. Something, sure. And he was pretty sure that something had a name that started with ‘A’.

Okay, that wasn’t fair. Allura was trying. Getting unreasonably upset at people was part of the reason they were all in the current mess they were in. He’d promised himself that he’d work on that.

‘Patience yields Focus.’ Keith took a breath, held it, and released it. He walked up to stand next to Allura, raising an eyebrow at her.

“You gonna open the door?” He barely finished the question before the cause of Allura’s hesitation became clear.

Another roar came from behind the door. The ship seemed to shake from the sheer volume.

To her credit, Allura didn’t flinch back away from the door, but she did frown.

“Oh. That’s why.” Pidge murmured from behind them.

“Seems like a good enough reason not to open the door.” Keith added, mostly because someone needed to. He turned to Allura. “Any idea what caused this?”

If Allura wasn’t the one who caused this then, Keith could only think of one other person who could have stirred up Blue this much – Lance.

Something about that felt… right. He’d bring that up but like everyone else, he was avoiding bringing up the missing Blue Paladin. It was possible that his disappearance was more of a sore spot than Shiro’s.

That may have been because while Shiro’s disappearance was seemingly a work of fate, Lance’s disappearance was a product of their own combined efforts, or so Keith had discovered. Pidge still flopped on how she felt towards and about Lance, but he knew that all of them – except perhaps Allura, who knew how to hold a Grudge like no one would believe – felt some form of regret or remorse towards Lance.

Looks were exchanged between everyone. They were all on the same page, which was comforting, since they certainly weren’t all on the same page when it came to Lance himself.

The set of Allura’s jaw and the steel in her eyes told Keith that she thought Lance was involved as well, but didn’t want to admit it.

He’d seen the same reactions in her now that he saw when she was giving him the cold shoulder for being Galra. That really sucked for Lance if he… when he returned, but Keith had experience dealing with it. He wasn’t planning on letting Lance handle that on his own, especially when
Lance had continued to act like nothing had changed when Keith found out he was Galra.

“Oh, come on.” Pidge hissed. “You think it’s something to do with Lance.”

For all of her bravado, Allura flinched at the name. “No. There are any number of things that could have set off the Blue Lion.”

“Such as?” Keith stared down the princess. “Because the only thing I can think of is Lance.” There were noises of agreement from the rest of the team, and Keith could see in Coran’s eyes that he agreed. Allura pursed her lips, but didn’t say anything more.

There was silence from the hangar.

In the back of his mind, he felt a flicker of warmth being kindled into existence. The flame he was feeling now was small, light, and warm. It reminded him of those really small candles – tealights, he was pretty sure they were called. It was a comforting warmth, one that spread through him.

He’d take this to the burning anger and ire of Red any day.

Keith’s burned himself a few times now with Red’s fire. He didn’t even want to imagine what Lance went through with Blue. He supposed he briefly encountered it once, when Lance took that hit meant for him. Once was more than enough.

Keith would happily take the fire and burning over whatever everyone else would experience. He’d probably get to experience it all anyways, once everyone’s bonds were fully formed and complete.

“Allura, you’re the only one who can talk to Blue now. Maybe she knows where Lance is.” Hunk suggested.

“She doesn’t.” Allura’s response was instant.

“Maybe she does now?” Hunk flinched back as Allura turned to him, her gaze sharp.

“I doubt it. Now, if you excuse me, I am heading to bed. I suggest you all do the same. Your performance has been poor as of late, and just because we’re missing a paladin does not mean we’re allowed to slack on our duties.” She brushed past them, Coran following after a heartbeat.

A Paladin. Just because they were missing ‘a Paladin’. Keith’s arms dropped, his fists curling until he felt the bite of his nails against the flesh of his palms. He felt too hot, like he was burning from the inside out. Instinctually, he called out to Red to stop it, but it wasn’t her.

The burning anger he was feeling was his own, not hers.

‘Patience yields Focus.’ Keith could do this. He took a deep breath, and tried to center himself.

“Man, this is worse than when she hated Keith.” Hunk scratched the back of his neck and sighed. “At least then we had Shiro to help buffer that.”

“If I could just get the information off that device…” Pidge trailed off, but they all know what she was thinking. If she could get the information, then they could prove Lance’s innocence. Or condemn it.

Keith needed to be a leader now, not some hotheaded kid who was kicked out of the Garrison for punching a teacher.
He turned around, looking at Pidge and Hunk. “Go, get some sleep.” He smiled at Pidge before nodding at Hunk. Hunk nodded back, and together he and Pidge started back towards the elevator.

“You coming, Keith?”

Keith looked from Hunk to the hangar doors. Heat once again blossomed inside him.

“Nah, I’m gonna stay up for a bit longer.” He was still looking at the hangar doors, but he heard Hunk make a noise of understanding. He waited for the sound of the elevator to fade away before he walked up to the door, and then after a brief moment of hesitation, entered it.

The thing about the Hangars was that besides the color schemes, they could all be the same room in the castle. Same bay doors. Same wide-open space. The only differences were the colors, and of course, the lions housed in them.

The Blue Lion was awake, sitting in front of the door as if she’d expected Keith. Her mechanical tail whipped back and forth, dragging against the ground and sending up sparks from the friction every so often.

Compared to when Keith had last seen her in this bay, she was looking much better. Then again, he already knew that. He’d seen Coran pilot her – as wrong as it was. Most of the time he kept the video conversations to a minimum.

It was wrong seeing Coran sitting where Lance should have been.

The Blue Lion glared down at him, her eyes boring into him like she could see his soul. There was absolutely no doubt in his mind that she was looking at him. Without someone at her controls, this was the most alive he’d ever seen the Blue Lion.

This was the most alive he’d seen any Lion without a Paladin at the controls.

In the back of his mind, Red’s presence burned reassuringly.

Looking up at Blue, Keith was lost for words. He’d never been the talking type. That was always more of Lance’s thing, not his. He wasn’t sure what to say to Blue. Did he start with an apology? ‘I’m sorry that I treated Lance badly and pushed him away and helped cause him to leave?’ Ha. That’d go over well.

Even if he knew what to say to her, they couldn’t communicate. It wasn’t like he had a bond with her like he did with Red. He could talk until his words dried up, and she’d have no way to respond to him.

But, he had to try something. He had to do something. He couldn’t just walk into Blue’s territory and do nothing. Red’s protection and reassurance or not, Blue would probably tear him to pieces, and then the team would be down three Paladins.

Red purred, encouraging him. Whatever he did, whatever he said, she’d support him. Keith took a breath, and then released it.

‘Patience yields focus.’

“Is Lance okay?” It was such a stupid question, and he regretted asking it the moment the words left his lips.

Blue responded in a low growl. The hair at the base of his neck stood on end, and he instinctually
took a step back. A resurgence of warmth from Red served as a reminder that she was supporting him. Keith took another calming breath.

‘Patience yields focus.’

“He’s not… dead or fatally injured, is he?” Blue responded to his question with another low growl, but he continued. “Because…” Because why, Keith? What would it matter if he was dead or fatally injured?

“Because,” he repeated, “I don’t care.” Blue’s growl this time was louder. She stood up. “I don’t care if he’s dead or alive, or if he’s injured. I care that he isn’t here.” Blue froze, even her tail ceased its movements. “I want you to know that I don’t care where he is, or what I have to do to get him back.”

The Blue lion sat back down, and Keith could feel the difference in her gaze. She wasn’t glaring him into submission so much anymore as she was judging him. He hoped that she didn’t find him wanting.

“I don’t care what he’s supposedly done. He’s a Paladin of Voltron, and if you’re still bonded to him like this, then clearly you agree.”

Even when Keith found out that he was Galra, Red hadn’t given up on him. There was actually a chance that Red may have known from the beginning. Despite all that’d happened, Red had never given up on Keith. They were all fools to think that Blue would give up Lance so easily.

Blue may have been the most trusting of the Lions, but he didn’t think that the Lion would still be keen on Lance if he’d done what Allura was accusing him of. Even if Lance had done it, Keith didn’t think it’d been done maliciously.

Blue was trusting, and trust was something very easily taken advantage of.

The proof how much a bond could stretch between Lion and Paladin was shown with Black and Zarkon. Despite all that Zarkon had done, they’d had a strong enough Bond that Shiro had been unable to fight against it for a while. Zarkon had found them time and time again thanks to that bond, even all the way across the universe.

Even if they found a new Blue Paladin, Lance would still have that bond with Blue. Perhaps Allura couldn’t understand as she’d never been a Paladin. Her bond with the Lions was different from the bond shared between the Lions and the Paladins.

Keith sighed. Blue hadn’t responded further to his words, but he could still feel her judging him. In his head, Red echoed his sigh.

After a few more moments of silence, he headed over to the nearest wall, and sunk down against it. Blue’s gaze followed him, and stayed on him. Red’s flicker of warmth was ever present, and highly appreciated against the chill of Blue’s hangar.

How could Lance stand it in here?

Keith pulled his jacket closer, and then half laughed at himself. Of course. Lance’s jacket. He was almost always wearing it. Except now.

Wait. Keith looked up back at the Blue Lion.

“Lance’s jacket hangs in my room.” He’d meant to say that a bit more eloquently. The words
tumbled and spilled out of his mouth without his express permission.

Lance’s jacket meant a lot of things to Keith.

First and for most, it represented Lance’s absence. There were plenty of other things that represented that, from the silence that followed conversations where Lance would have made remarks, to the emptiness in the halls. Yet the thing that tended to hit Keith the most was the jacket. Lance wasn’t there to wear it anymore.

It also served as a reminder. A reminder that Lance was in fact missing. A reminder that no matter how many dreams he had of finding Lance, when Keith woke up, Lance was still gone. It was a reminder of more than that, though. It also reminded him of his failure. How he failed Lance… how he failed Shiro.

“Shiro wanted me to be leader.” He scoffed. “Look where that got us. We’re missing Lance, and the team is more fractured than ever before.”

These are things he’d talked about with Red. Things that didn’t exactly relate to Lance in ways that he thought the Blue Lion would appreciate. He tapped his fingers on the floor, the same song he’d often heard Lance tap out.

Blue rumbled, but it wasn’t a growl. Progress. Keith would take it. He’d do more than take it; he’d take it and run with it.

“But Lance probably would have made a better leader.” He paused. “If, you know, we’d actually stopped and listened to him. He was only trying to look out for us.”

The Blue Lion had no response for him. He knew she was still awake from the gleam in her eyes. Even if she had a response, he doesn’t know how’d he’d receive it. Besides, he doesn’t even know if that’s a thing… bonding with another Paladin’s lion. Not that it matters. Blue has never really shown any real interest in Keith.

Besides, he’s got Red. He’s quite content with Red, and similar to how Lance would never… Similar to how… no. No. Of all the team members, Shiro and Lance are the only people he can think of who would never give up their lions. Yet here the lions are and here their Paladins aren’t.

Comparatively, Hunk would give up Yellow in a heartbeat if someone more experienced came along and demanded it. Likewise, he couldn’t imagine Pidge staying if given the choice between this or her family. Pidge already tried to make that choice once before. And Keith…

And Keith… wow. Well, that left him as the only one who’d never give up their lion. Yet he had, more than once. He tried to run away before Allura found him. And then he’d been willing to die in that mission to upload the virus. If he’d died, where would that have left him? Where would that had left Red?

He’d been willing to leave because of… so many things, but the root of it had been his Galra heritage. He’d felt he wasn’t worth to be a part of Voltron because of that. Like he wasn’t worthy of being a Paladin.

Wait a moment.

Was that why? He looked back up at Blue so quickly he got whiplash.

The memory of that battle played often in his mind. It felt like it was constantly there, stuck on
loop in the back of his thoughts, behind the place where Red stayed. He was familiar with it by now from the amount of times he’d replayed it over and over. Blue and Lance jumping in front of him and Red, and then the connection, which he had still yet to explain to anyone.

A puzzle piece clicked into place in his mind. The missing dot was found in the connect-the-dots picture. Suddenly everything was clear. Or at least, clearer than it had been.

Keith understood now, at least a little.

“The reason Lance left, the real reason. It wasn’t because of that argument, was it?” He asked Blue.

There was more than what he was seeing. There was more than what he’d been hearing. He felt like he was onto something. Something new. A breath through in their ‘relationship’… the likes of which they hadn’t had since… since…

“We make a good team.”

Red supplied the memories. Pull up the images of Keith cradling Lance in his arms, or when they were back to back, skin to skin, climbing up the elevator shaft.

It was like the entire universe just shifted about one inch to the left. Everything was the same, but inherently, everything was different.

His memories of Lance were changed with this new revelation. Suddenly tiny little things that hadn’t made sense did. This shift in perspective answered questions Keith didn’t know he had.

With Red’s help, his memories were clear. Even older ones. She was able to pull memories, especially ones that she shared.

“Let’s go down swinging.” Keith repeated Lance’s words from the final battle where they lost Shiro. At the time, he hadn’t thought much of them. After the battle, he hadn’t thought much of them. But now, here they were, repeating in sudden clarity in his mind thanks to Red.

He remembered everyone else’s response. Lance’s was odd. Lance’s response was out of place. Strange. And suddenly, very understandable.

Let’s go down swinging. Shiro had been asking people if they were giving up the fight. Hunk and Pidge said they weren’t. Keith had said that he wasn’t. But Lance had said ‘Let’s go down swinging’. He hadn’t expected to walk away from the fight with Zarkon.

To be honest, neither had Keith. But the way Lance had said it, like he expected Zarkon to win too.

Not to mention how Lance hadn’t fought against his team. He’d told them that they weren’t being fair. He’d destroyed the device, but besides that, all Lance had tried to do was explain. And when that failed… he’d ran.

He’d left, and although he could have continued and left them all to the mercy – or lack thereof – of the Robeast, Lance had returned. That was all the proof Keith needed.

He’d ran like Keith had. He’d ran for the same reason too: worth. Lance didn’t think he was worthy. One piece to a mystery that Keith hadn’t known existed. One piece out of many.

Lance didn’t think he was worthy. Repeating it in his head didn’t solve any more questions. If
anything it raised more.

How could Lance not think he was worthy? Was he not always going on about how much better than Keith he was? Wasn’t he always talking about how everyone loved him? Wasn’t he always acting like he was the sun, and people were lucky to have the chance to look at him?

Keith looked up at the Blue Lion. She laid down, and let out a quiet rumble.

Look at him, Keith the Lion Soother. First, he appeased Red, now he was helping Blue. But he was no replacement for Lance. No one was. He shook his head.

He just couldn’t understand why Lance didn’t think himself worthy. Hopefully, they’d get Lance back and he could ask. Hopefully, then, Keith could understand.

Chapter End Notes

I've seen a couple of comments regarding Allura's reactions and behavior. I've addressed this in the comments as well as in this post.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith still has Lance's Jacket, which he took from Blue when they found after Lance's disappearance. The Voltron team has returned from a trip to the Mall where they were unable to find out any information about their missing teammates.

Allura has been trying to convince Blue to either accept Coran as a pilot to to find and accept a new Paladin. Blue, understandably, does not take well to these suggestions. Keith spent some time with Blue because that's the closet he can get to Lance right now, and he was wondering if she could hold some sort of key to understanding why Lance left and where he could be.

**Chapter Notes**

*Trigger Warning(s):* Bad Flirting, Emotional Manipulation

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It seemed that by passing the weird indoctrination test thing, Lance had been accepted by the Druids with wide welcoming arms.

Which made sense. The test seemed to be designed to help weed out the weak and/or traitorous. If it hadn’t been for Blue, then Lance would have either failed or fallen to the corruption. Instead, thanks to Blue, Lance had passed with flying colors.

It’d been nearly two movements since Lance had passed the test. Two movements shuffled between the few various Druids on the ship as they attempted to give Lance quick crash courses on everything.

Xana was his main ‘teacher’, but every so often someone else would show up to show Lance around, or suggestion some readings, or talk about his parents.

If Lance was honest, it wasn’t bad with the Druids. The Galra military was strange, and Lance found no favor in staying near them.

Galra were rude, barbaric, violent, aggressive, and more than just a little racist. They didn’t seem to care much for the Druids anymore than they cared for their half-breed prince and his half-breed generals – who Lance had heard about but had yet to meet.

As such, many Druids had taken to shifting into a more Galra-esque form. They hid their faces under the terrifying blank masks. Their skin would take a purple hue. Some even appeared to be
‘stuck’ in that form, or perhaps they just liked it. Or, considering the mutation he’d seen to some of their scales, perhaps it was a result of the corruption.

Lance himself had mastered a Galra form alongside his human and ‘natural’ Altean form. Not that he took it often. The racism didn’t seem to exist just for half-breeds and Druids, as Lotor seemed to disdain Lance being in the Galra form.

Lance hadn’t taken that form in a while since Lotor chided him for ‘ruining’ his beauty. Lance’s human form was tolerated, but it his was Altean form that Lotor liked the most.

Lotor seemed utterly enchanted by Lance’s scales, and eyes. He often commented on their color, and how striking they were, especially against the natural tan of Lance’s skin. He also loved Lance’s smile, and often asked Lance to smile for him.

Out among the Galra military, smiles were rare. Laughter even more so. But among the Druids, laughter was freer, flowing through the drifting thick clouds of corrupted quintessence.

Time in space tended to blend and blur. This effect wasn’t helped at all by the quintessence, which tended to fill Lance’s head with static as it swirled around him. It was easy to get lost here.

Lance felt like he was walking along the edge of a sheer drop off on some slipper ice. Like one wrong move, one foot misplaced, and then he’d fall, plummeting to the bottom. One false move, mental or physical could seal his doom.

No wonder the resistance had so much trouble getting and keeping a Druid spy.

Lance was only barely hanging on, and that was only because of Blue’s sporadic interventions and his own force of will. In this place, Blue was a much needed anchor, but even she couldn’t wash away the filth surrounding him… in him.

Neither Lance nor Blue could cleanse the corruption completely; even if they worked together. It was impossible for him to clear his mind of the purple fog and warm static – which often times tried to slide between him and Blue. Lance assumed the reason for the difficulty was due to the amount of time he had to spend around corrupted quintessence.

Thankfully, he only had to deal with it when he was with the Druids, and surprisingly Lance didn’t spend all that much time with them. Lotor took up a lot of his time, especially since Lance had passed the test.

It was like Lance passing the test had sent some sort of signal or something to Lotor which made him more… clingy. Not to say that the prince was clingy or anything. Lance would never say that Lotor was forceful, but he’d been demanding more and more of Lance’s attention.

Which Lance had mixed feelings about. On one hand, Lance would never turn down attention, but at the same time… if Lotor wanted attention, then Lance knew he had a harem that would be more than happy to give it to him.

Lotor’s harem consisted of females, males, and everything else that the universe had to offer; or so Lance had heard. Their rooms were attached to Lotor’s by a door that Lance never used, so if the prince was so starved for physical attention, then he could go find it with them.

As a matter of fact, Lance was sure that Lotor already had. Some nights Lance would wake up and look over to see Lotor’s bed empty, the sheets long cold.

Those were the nights that Lance would go through Lotor’s books and tablet and try to glean as
much information as he could before the other would return. The one time Lotor had caught him, Lance had thankfully been reading a text on quintessence, and had been able to explain that he couldn’t sleep and had decided to study.

Of course, it was possible that the prince was just testing Lance’s boundaries. After all, Lance was the prince’s newest favorite toy. He was a trophy to say, ‘I have an ex-Paladin of Voltron’. Perhaps within time, Lance would even become Lotor’s pet Druid.

Or maybe Lotor’s new need for attention was something else. Maybe he liked the chase, and liked the fact that Lance was giving him one by refusing to put out just because Lotor was the prince and getting a bit handsy.

Or, perhaps Lotor didn’t want anything and was just platonically asking and seeking physical affection.

…

Ha. Okay, so that was funny.

Less funny was the physical attraction Lance could still feel for Lotor. Like, Lance would never admit to being shallow but… Lotor was undeniably attractive. Even when he’d been pretending to be Tyrac, Lance had thought that he was gorgeous.

He’d admitted before that he had a crush on Tyrac, and to take it back now that he knew Tyrac’s true identity would only make a liar out of Lance.

And he knew the attraction wasn’t one-sided. Lance was certain that if he asked Lotor if he could ‘share’ his bed, that the prince wouldn’t turn him down. As a matter of fact, Lotor would probably welcome it.

Once upon a time, Lance had considered sleeping with Lotor. He still toyed with the idea even now. They had fantastic physical chemistry, and maybe once Lance did ‘put out’ then Lotor would get bored and wander off. Or maybe he wouldn’t.

The only reason that Lance hadn’t asked to ‘share’ Lotor’s bed was because a) Lance wasn’t like that, b) because it was Lotor. Physical chemistry and attraction or not, Lotor was still Zarkon’s son. Lotor had still been the main feature of the creepy indoctrination thing. Lotor still left him feeling slimy whenever he touched Lance’s scales. And most importantly, Lotor had motives that Lance didn’t know.

Besides, if Lance did ‘put out’ and Lotor got bored, then Lance would miss the attention.

The Castle of Lions had only starved him of attention, and of touch. Hunk could only give so many hugs. Lance wasn’t meant to be in isolation. He’d always been a people person. He needed attention. He needed to be touched. He needed love.

It was for those reasons that he didn’t exactly mind Lotor’s sudden need for attention. Well, those reasons and also because the prince’s attention felt… good.

Lotor touching Lance’s scales didn’t feel right, but everything else did. If Lotor wasn’t leaning against Lance, then he was touching Lance’s shoulders, arms, or face – his favorite place to touch Lance. Lotor had invaded Lance’s couch, suddenly preferring to share space when reading reports, or doing whatever Galra princes did.

And for as much as Lance could say that Lotor could take out his needs on his harem, the truth was
that Lance enjoyed this. Spending time with Lotor could even be considered soothing.

It was hard for Lance to explain and put into words, but since the test, it’d seemed that not only had Lotor’s need to be more physical with Lance had grown, but so had Lance’s need for physical attention. Especially Lotor’s.

Even the thought of being away from Lotor for too long made him mentally squirm. It was like there was this itch under his skin that he couldn’t scratch, and it seemed the only one who could soothe it was Lotor.

Not that Lance minded when he was laying on the couch using Lotor’s lap as a pillow while the prince read through a report and carded a hand through Lance’s hair. If he was a cat, he was certain he’d be purring at this point.

There were certain benefits to this new physical thing they had going on. For example, Lance got physical attention that felt amazing – especially when Lotor played with his hair – and Lotor got to touch Lance in a Lance-sanctioned away. AND, icing on the cake, due to his position, Lance had a perfect view of the tablet, and by extension, the documents that Lotor was reading.

Bingo.

Today’s document was pretty interesting. If by ‘pretty interesting’ one meant ‘completely and utterly boring but something that the resistance would probably want to know’. Seriously, surely the Galra had better things for their prince to be doing then reviewing trade routes and economics?

Lance yawned, turning his head more into Lotor’s thigh to hide it, and then sighed peacefully. Other benefits to spending time with Lotor was that he, like most Galra to Lance’s understanding, ran warmer than most. It was hard not to get sleepy when he was so warm, comfortable, and relaxed.

Perhaps he shouldn’t be in the presence of his enemy, but there was little Lance could do about it now.

If Lotor had a response to Lance’s actions, he didn’t see or hear it. Lotor’s hand stilled in his hair for a moment before slowly working its way down to the base of Lance’s neck and then further to his back before returning back up.

If Lance wasn’t so relaxed right now, he might have been irritated at being pet like, well, a pet. As it was, he didn’t mind.

“How do you feel about gladiatorial combat?”

Lance made a show of ‘opening’ his eyes, twisting slightly to look up at Lotor and blinked confusedly – not part of the act.

The prince’s gaze was still trained on the tablet, but clearly his mind was elsewhere if Lance had heard him correctly.

“Oh no?” Lance half slurred the question, blinking a little extra as if he’d been woken from a nap. Then again, with as boring as that document had been, he wasn’t too far from falling asleep.

Lotor chuckled quietly. “I didn’t mean to wake you. I was merely wondering how you felt towards gladiatorial combat.”

Huh. So Lance had heard correctly.
What did that have to do with economics and trade routes? Unless the goods being traded wasn’t actually goods but prisoners to fight in the arenas.

…

That document just got a whole lot more interesting.

Lance yawned again, this time covering it with his hand, and then stretched. He also took this moment to flip over onto his back so he could look at Lotor easier.

“It, uh, it kinda depends, I guess. I mean, I don’t think I’d do well fighting. I’m kinda a distance target kind of guy, ya know?”

Lotor’s gaze turned towards Lance, one eyebrow elegantly quirking up.

“You’d think I’d put you in the arena?” Lotor’s voice rumbled with amusement. He shook his head, putting the tablet down to free his other hand to stroke Lance’s cheek. If asked, he’d deny turning his face into the touch. “Nonsense, beautiful. You’re too delicate; it’d ruin your loveliness.”

Well, alright then. So Lance was too ‘delicate’ and ‘lovely’ to participate. Good to know. Also, hello nickname. Was Lotor going to start that up? What were they, a couple?

…

That was probably the worst thing for him to think of. Besides, the idea of sleeping with Lotor. And okay, he needed to stop thinking of blue dancing elephants. He just needed to keep the conversation going, that was all.

“You think I’m lovely?” Lance teased.

Lotor’s lips quirked up and he made a show of looking Lance over. He hummed as he considered his answer.

“Honestly?” Lotor asked, and then waited until Lance nodded. “Honestly, I don’t think you’re lovely at all.”

Well… that didn’t crush Lance’s ego at all or anything. Lance crossed his arms, and pouted, although he didn’t move from Lotor’s lap.

“I think,” Lotor continued, “that ‘lovely’ is an understatement, but if I say what I really think, you’ll think I’m lying.”

“Oh.” Lance’s cheeks flushed. No, more than his cheeks flushed. His ears definitely reddened, and his chest felt oddly hot and tight. Lotor’s responding chuckle didn’t help anything.

“But, this hasn’t answered my original question.” Lotor chided gently.

“Remind me again?”

“How do you feel about gladiatorial combat?” Lotor repeated.

“Huh… well, since I’m not participating,” because he was too lovely. “Then I guess we’ll be watching, and… I… I really don’t know.” Lance shrugged. “It wasn’t… well… it’s not something that existed on… my home planet for some time. At least, not in the legal sense.”
Lotor hummed again and although his gaze remained on Lance, Lance could tell that Lotor wasn’t really looking at him. Lance just happened to be where Lotor’s gaze was resting.

“A penny for your thoughts?” Lance asked.

“As a prince, shouldn’t my thoughts be worth a bit more?” Lotor returned, smiling down at Lance. Lance hummed, tilting his head into Lotor’s touch as he considered him.

“Nope.” Lance chirped after only a few ticks of consideration. “A penny for your thoughts, unless you’re dead. Then it’s a dollar.” Lotor’s nose scrunched up in obvious distaste.

“Only a dollar?” Lotor asked. Despite the prince trying to sound all regal, there was a definite hint of a whine in his voice.

“Only a dollar.” Lance confirmed.

“Hmph.” Lance laughed at Lotor’s response. Lotor pouted, but only for a few ticks. “Well, since you’ve never been, would you be interested?”

“What? To a Gladiator match?” Lance asked, sitting up and twisting his body around until he was sitting next to Lotor, facing the prince.

Was… was Lotor asking him out on a date? Was that what this was? Or was it some sort of threat? Or was it a test?

Lotor nodded, and Lance bit his lip. Honestly, no, Lance wasn’t interested in going. Lotor must have read that in his expression because his face fell a little.

“Are you saying you don’t want to accompany me to a match or two?” Lotor asked after a few ticks, sounding and looking like a regal version of a kicked puppy.

Damn. How could Lance say no to that?

But, Lance just wasn’t keen on going on a date with Lotor to see two other alien species beat each other up until one of them died. Going would probably help Lance sell the idea that he was really on the Galra’s side now. Nothing said, ‘I’m siding with the Galra’ more than going to a gladiator match and cheering on the bloodshed.

He supposed he could try to find some excuse not to go and save his stomach the trouble of having to endure all that death. Not to mention he’d want to help all those aliens. He’d be looking down at them, and he already knew that he’d be seeing Shiro in those poor saps places.

Yeah, no. Lance couldn’t go. He just couldn’t. Sorry, Lotor. But he needed an excuse, as he doubted that Lotor would just accept ‘I don’t want to’ as an answer.

“I never said that, but I gotta know: what’s the occasion?”

“Do I need to reason to spoil my favorite Druid?” Lance rolled his eyes at Lotor. Favorite Druid, ha! Like Lance was actually even half the Druid some of the others were. He was just in training. He’d only been a Druid for two movements.

Wait. IDEA! He could use that!

“Oh, so now I’m not just ‘lovely’, but I’m also your favorite?” Lance teased, leaning forward to poke Lotor in the chest. Lotor laughed and swatted his hand away playfully.
“You are most aesthetically pleasing out of all the other Druids.” Lotor mused. “But you’re also getting off topic. If I didn’t know better, I’d say you’re trying to distract me.”

“Well,” Lance dragged out the word. “I mean… I kinda am.” He grinned, chuckling so Lotor knew he was joking, sort of. “It’s just…” He shook his head. “Never mind, it doesn’t matter.”

“It matters to me.” Lotor’s protest was instant. Lance sucked on his bottom lip, and looked down.

“It’s just… I’m flattered that I’m your favorite but… there’s Druids that are better than me.” Lance sighed, and lowered his gaze, dropping his hand and twisting it with his other.

“Nonsense.” Lotor’s hand was suddenly under Lance’s chin, tilting his head back up until he was looking at the prince. “I’ve heard that the others are impressed with how quickly you’re picking up your studies.”

“But I can’t do the thunder bolt or the extreme speed attacks that the other Druids can do.” Mentally Lance got a kick out of the Pokémon names. But, all jokes aside, Lance did feel rather useless as a Druid. He couldn’t do much, and he knew those were like, the two main attacks used by the Druids.

Or at least that was how Keith had made it seem.

“They’ve also been working on this for far longer than you have. For as young and as new as you are, you’re doing well.” Lotor countered. Well, at least Lance could always count on him to try to stoke or boost his ego.

“But all I’m good at is… interrogation, meditation, and shifting between forms.” Lotor’s nose scrunched due to the reminder of the ‘Galra’ from.

Oh right, internal racism towards Galra FTW. No time to let his internal amusement show though, he needed to be sad and pathetic right now. For extra affect measure, Lance added in a small sniffle of pathetic-ness.

“Give it time, but I suppose you’d rather apply yourself to your studies than attend with me?” There! Lotor provided an excuse for Lance. Perfect!

“You aren’t… mad?” He peeked over at Lotor, noting the turned down lips and furrowed eyebrows. It wasn’t fair. Even upset, Lotor looked attractive. Not wanting to give himself away, he looked back away again.

“Disappointed, yes.” Lance flinched at the words. “But how can I fault you when you want to better yourself?”

“It’s not for myself.” Lance countered. This next part was all bullshit, but he was hoping that the prince would take it.

“Oh?”
“It’s for you. You’ve taken me in, let me stay in your rooms, eat real food. You’ve allowed me to train with the Druids. I just… I just don’t want to let you down by failing.”

He may have been laying it on a bit thick, but it seemed that Lotor was taking it.

“Oh, Lance.” Lotor tsked. “I wish I’d known to take you from Voltron sooner.” Lance flinched again at the mention of Voltron. “It’s so heartbreaking to see how they’ve ruined you so.”

Lance peeked back at him. Lotor’s expression was more tender and warm now. He smiled when saw Lance looking. It was small and gentle, like one would smile when coaxing out a shy animal.

“Even if you were to fail as a Druid, I’m sure there would still be some uses for you on this ship; and I’d still make sure that you were well taken care of.”

Okay. Oh. Kay. How does one even respond to that? What did that even mean? What other uses would Lance have? Unless… unless Lotor was referring to his harem. In which case, yeah, no. No thanks, hard pass. Very strong hard pass.

There were other people Lance would prefer to spend his time with in that way. Some of those people he’d never actually see again. Some of those people, he doubted would ever want to see him again.

He found himself repeating the mantra he’d taken up anytime he even thought of sleeping with Lotor: if only it were anybody else… anybody else, and in any other time and place.

UGH! Why did the people he found attractive have to be evil or on the wrong side or be assholes?! Like seriously, universe! WTF?!

It was an important reminder, given the very noticeable physical chemistry between them. Physical attraction aside, Lance did not want to spend his days as a… as a… a booty call. Like, no offense to those people who were booty calls, and no offense to those in the harem. Hell, no offense to any sex workers, but… uh, yeah, no. That life was not for Lance. Nope. Nada. No.

“I’ll have to make sure I don’t fail then, huh?” Besides, his job given to him by the resistance kinda needed him as a Druid, not as a part of Lotor’s harem. Although, he was pretty sure he’d still be able to get information from Lotor’s tablet even if he was to join that.

“If you insist… but if you do fail, know I won’t kick you out to the cold to live as some space vagabond on a swap moon.” Oh. Sick burn to the Voltron team from Lotor. They deserved it, but still. Ouch.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“See that you do. Although, I’ll remind you if you need it. After all, I know how forgetful you can be.”

How… how forgetful he could be? What did that mean? Lance didn’t think he’d forgotten anything recently. His memory was usually pretty good. Yeah, time seemed to blur here, but it wasn’t him forgetting things, was it?

“…Right, of course.” Lotor smiled patronizingly at him, patting his cheek.

“I’ll have to find something else for you, then, since taking you to see gladiatorial combat is out of the question for now.”
“What? No!” Lance shook his head. “You don’t have to do or get anything for me.”

“You don’t think you’re worth it?” Lotor asked before ‘tsking’ and shaking his head. “You trust me, don’t you, Lance?”

The question sounded so eerily familiar to the one he’d been asked before. The one Blue had interrupted. Lance rolled his lips, but nodded. The corners of Lotor’s lips curled upwards, and his eyes gleamed at the response.

“Good.” He purred. “Then trust me when I say that any GAC I spend on you is more than worth it.”

The tablet on the table beeped and blinked, drawing Lotor’s attention back to it. He frowned, reaching forward to grab it. “Quiznak.” He breathed out sharply, narrowing his eyes as he scanned over whatever he read. He paused to look at Lance, giving him a sardonic smile. “Duty calls, I’m afraid. We’ll have to finish this conversation at a later time.”

Cool. No more awkward conversation about what Lance was worth. Thank you beeping tablet!

He was so down with post phoning this. As a matter of fact, he opened his mouth to say as much, but then Lotor was leaning forward. Lips pressed against his forehead for a tick before the prince was retreating.

“If I don’t see you tonight, we’ll have dinner tomorrow, alright?” Lotor offered as he stood, taking the tablet with him. “I’ll see you later.”

Lance blinked, staring down at the place where Lotor had been. He heard the door slide open and Lotor’s voice as he instructed the guards stationed out there, and then…

“Did he break you already?” Lance shook his head, looking up at Sonali.

“I’m fine.”

“I’d hope so. I have GAC on you lasting longer than our previous attempts.” Sonali huffed. Lance rolled his eyes.

“Sure, like you actually have any faith in me.” Lance twisted, resting his chin against the back of the couch.

Sonali shrugged. “I have faith in Matt.”

“How encouraging.” Lance paused. “How much GAC do you have on me?”

“More than I probably should.” Sonali teased.

“Awh, c’mon. Tell me.” Lance pleaded, using his signature ‘puppy dog’ face on them. Sonali shook their head, resting their hand on their hip.

“You’re such a child.” They sighed. “Anyways, you have anything for us?”

“Geeze, I only just started.” Lance responded. Silence replied, and although he couldn’t see Sonali’s face from under their guard mask, he could just see the unimpressed face they were making.

“I guess.” Lance amended. “How interested is the Resistance in trade routes that may include prisoners for the gladiator arenas?”
Sonali perked up, stepping forward. “I’m listening.”

Lance grinned in response. “Perfect. So… before Lotor was called away, he was reading this interesting little document about the trade routes in system G-95 Vox…”

Chapter End Notes

I would like to take a moment to wish that everyone be safe. I can't speak for the places where some of my readers live, but please be careful.

For those who live in the USA/Near the USA...

The West Coast is in flames and drowning in Ash according to friends who live there. The wildfires this year have been outrageous with The Eagle Creek Fire and Indian Creek Fire merging into one 32,000-acre blaze. Smoke from the numerous wildfires along the west coast can be seen in Cincinnati, Ohio. To give an idea, Portland (where some of the wildfires are) is over 2K miles away from Cincinnati.

The West Coast isn't the only place having issues. The East Coast is about to be hit by yet another Hurricane, this time Cat. 5. And following behind Hurricane Irma is Tropical Storm Jose which is predicted right now to become a hurricane. I know there's quite a few islands in the Carribean which will be heavily impacted by these stores, including but not limited to, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Leeward Islands.

To give people an idea of the damage this storm could cause, Hurricane Harvey was a Cat. 4 when it hit Texas, and did around 23 billion dollars worth of damage and took a reported 70 lives (There may be more unreported.)

And not lets even begin to get into Politics, and what could happen if current tensions in the USA continue to rise, let alone tensions between the USA and other countries.

Once again, I don't know where all my readers are from, but I urge everyone to stay safe and well.
Training

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance and Lotor spent more time around each other, each manipulating each other for their own needs and desires. Lotor asked Lance out on essentially a date, but Lance declined citing his studies. Lotor decided to let this go for now.

Lance also passed long information that he'd read from Lotor's tablet to Sonali about some prisoners who would be used in the Gladiator matches.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Quintessence, Invasive actions, Emotional Manipulation

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://fandom.com). Thank you!

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For any one interested, my parents are fine. They didn't see any flooding (that they've told me about), and everything seems to be fine with them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Training with Xana had a few perks which Lance enjoyed.

For starters, the Druid had known Lance’s birth parents, although he’d been more familiar with Lance’s birth father. Questioning Xana about said birth parents was always a quick easy way to help prove his ‘loyalty’ to the Galra cause.

Additionally, the older Druid was the one who’d first started Lance down this path. He was the one most familiar with Lance and his learning style. So needless to say, under his guidance, Lance flourished.

As a last final perk, Xana was the highest-ranking Druid on this ship. Making him, for all intents and purposes, the one Druid that Lance wanted to schmooze up to. Especially if Lance wanted higher classified reports in the near future.

Lotor seemed picky on just about anybody who was to be ‘by his side’. He’d discarded Zarkon’s original generals and replaced them with his own, and was slowly systematically swapping out others, like the Druids, as well.

As such, there weren’t many other Druids on the ship, at least, nowhere near as many as there were on Zarkon’s main fleet ship.

However, out of all the Druids in the empire, Xana fell just short of Haggar’s former – now dead
thanks to the Blade of Marmora and Allura – disciples. Which was a feat in and of itself already, even if someone didn’t consider Xana’s scales.

It’d been shocking the first time Lance had seen Xana without his mask. Allura had said that she and Coran were the last Alteans alive. But then again, Lance was Altean, and he was alive. So he supposed it shouldn’t have been outside of the realm of possibility that there were others as well.

Like, Xana and the other Druids.

In any case, the scales were evidently part of his Altean culture, and learning about them was one of the many mini crash courses that Lance had been given. For the most part it was informative, although expounded a lot on knowledge of quintessence, and, more specifically, quintessence base types.

The scales on an Altean’s face was a physical representation of a person’s personal quintessence. In more ways than one. While the traditional – read: ten thousand year old Alteans – scales were all uniform except for their coloration, the Druid’s scales had evolved and adapted due to mutations from the corrupt quintessence to form differently, although their functions were much the same.

For instance, Lance had gorgeous – or so said Lotor – blue scales, which started as a thin point above the outer corner of his eyes before swooping down to end midway under the eye, widening at the arc of the swoop and narrowing to points at both ends.

Xana, on the other hand, sported a pair of glittering yellow scales that swooped out from under the eye, biggest and boldest there, before narrowing to a point somewhere near his temple. The bold scales were warped from the corrupted quintessence, giving them the appearance of flaking, drying paint smeared haphazardly under his eyes.

Before he’d become a Druid, he hadn’t thought much of Allura or Coran’s scales. He’d just assumed they were of some cultural importance or some alien thing and moved along with his life.

Now he knew better. Xana’s scales meant that he had a base quintessence of yellow. A yellow base quintessence meant, well it meant a lot of things. It meant, at his core, at his base, underneath all the corruption… Xana was like Hunk.

Yellow was slow to anger, although, it was important to note that yellow was also slow to calm back down. Yellow was strong, sturdy, and steady. The perfect best friend in the chaos of the Garrison. The perfect teacher to deal with Lance.

Unlike Hunk, however, Xana was always there when Lance needed him. Hunk had remained quiet, silence in the face of Lance’s so called ‘betrayal’. Xana was always present the moment Lance seemed to run into any trouble. It was something Lance could appreciate.

It was kinda funny, actually, that Xana seemed more loyal than Hunk considering Hunk was pure Yellow, while Xana was more a golden color.

Then again, Xana’s willingness to be more present for Lance may have been because he wasn’t a true yellow. Just the tiniest hint of red, maybe even less than that, in his personal quintessence made Xana more likely to step in and be proactive, verse the true yellow base trait to be passive and only interfere when it became relevant to them.

Regardless, Xana was always there for Lance; a friendly helping hand that Lance could rely on, especially in matters relating to being a Druid.
"You seem stiff today." Lance jumped at the older Druid’s voice, twisting to look at him. A smile came easily to his face. A sheepish one, but still a smile.

“I’m Blue. I can’t be stiff.” Lance argued, rubbing the back of his head.

Xana snorted, rolling his eyes. “As you should know, Lance,” Xana paused, giving Lance a look. “Blue is the most versatile of all the quintessence as its dual natured. It can be fluid and flexible as water, or as rigid and stiff as ice.”

Lance rolled his eyes. He knew that. Lance was a true Blue base.

The Lions were designed to be piloted by people who ‘mirrored’ their quintessence, and the Lion’s quintessence was the truest to color bases. As a Paladin, or ex-paladin, of Voltron, Lance’s quintessence was a mirror to Blue’s, meaning he was a true base.

“I know, I know.” He huffed. “I get the color base quintessence. It’s the refined quintessence I get stuck on.” Refined quintessence, translation: corrupted crap.

Xana smiled, the patented ‘you’re too young for this’ smile usually reserved by grandparents for their grandchildren. “Have you been slacking on your readings?”

Lance shifted, his gaze sliding down to the ground. “…no.” It wasn’t technically a lie. He skimmed through his readings when he could. It was disorienting sometimes the way the implanted translator would work, and besides, Lotor was kinda an attention hog.

Not that Lance minded since most of the time this allowed him to read what Lotor was reading for spying purposes. Thanks to that weird indoctrination thing, Lotor and the other Druids seemed to really believe that they’d corrupted Lance.

Xana laughed. “You can’t concentrate on them too well, can you? Your mother used to have your father read the texts out to her.” He shook his head. “It was the only way those two would ever be able to read the text. He was worse than her about it otherwise.”

Cool. Good to know that his slacking on readings was genetic. Hopefully becoming an evil Druid wasn’t entirely genetic. Lance was okay with being a Druid, but he didn’t sign up for becoming an evil one.

“So... I need to have someone else read them out to me?” Lance raised an eyebrow, cocking his hip and resting his hand on it. “Really?”

“I didn’t say that.” Xana shook his head. “I’m not sure you’d be able to stop talking long enough to listen.”

“Haha. Very funny.” Lance rolled his eyes.

“Haven’t you heard? I’m a comedian.” Xana teased.

“Uh-huh. Sure, and I’m related to the royal family.” Lance joked.

Xana’s lips curled up into a grin. Not a smile, a grin. That didn’t bode well for Lance at all. At. All. “About that,” Xana began. “I heard something interesting.”

“Oh?” Alarm bells were going off in Lance’s head. Alarm bells and sirens, and air raid noises. He narrowed his eyes, eyeing Xana, trying to figure out what he was getting at.
“Yes. Something about a certain someone being asked to attend the arena and watch a few matches with Prince Lotor.”

“Yeah? Where’d you hear that at?”

“Don’t you know, I hear all.” Xana teased. “But why turn him down? You know the prince is smitten with you.”

“I wish he wasn’t.” Lance hadn’t meant to say that. He hadn’t meant to say that. He really hadn’t meant to say that! Why did he say that?!

“…oh?” Xana questioned.

“I’m not worth his attention.” Lance shrugged. Hopefully, Xana accepted that as an answer. Hopefully, Xana didn’t look too much into this. Lance really hoped he hadn’t just fucked up, he really did.

Xana was quiet for a few ticks. Lance would know, he counted every single one.

“Is that so?” Lance shrugged again at Xana’s question. “What makes you think that?”

Okay. Okay, so Xana seemed to be taking it. He seemed to be buying this. Lance could work with that. He could work with expressing his own lack of self-worth and self-importance.

“I’m… I’m no one important.”

Xana shook his head, and crossed his arms. He furrowed his eyebrows, frowning heavily at Lance.

“You’re a paladin of Voltron.” Xana’s statement was exactly that, a statement. He said it so bluntly, like it was a fact. Lance flinched, shaking his head.

“No, no, no.” Lance held his hands up in front of him, shaking them frantically. “I left that life behind.”

Xana hummed, not looking convinced. A few more ticks passed before he spoke again. “Did you?” He asked. “It was to my understanding that the Lions do not choose so impetuously.”

“Tell that to the Black Lion and it’s on going custody battle between our Emperor and,” Don’t say ‘Shiro’, don’t say ‘Shiro’. Lance scrunch up his nose, contorting his face into a sneer, “the champion.” Success! He didn’t say Shiro!

Xana’s face likewise contorted. “The Emperor will win.” Xana declared after a moment, “and when he does, he’ll need a Blue Paladin.”

Woah. Okay. Left field here. First, they were talking about Lotor, and the relationship between Lotor and Lance… and then they were suddenly on the topic of Lance being the former Blue Paladin and now… now, he was talking about Lance being the Blue Paladin for Zarkon?!

It was just… too much too fast.

“I’m sorry?”

“That is, of course, assuming our Emperor doesn’t fall to his injuries.” Xana shook his head. “Haggar has been running herself to the ground trying to bring back his failing health.” He paused, tilting his head as he considered something. “Perhaps the Champion wouldn’t be so bad as a Paladin. He already has our influence in him, it wouldn’t be much to sway him to our cause.”
Woah. Wait. Hold up. Could someone press the rewind button, and replay that?

“I’m sorry?” Lance repeated, squeaking out the words.

“The Champion was one of our best works.” Xana sighed, shaking his head. “Such a pity to see him be used this way.”

Okay. Irrational anger at Shiro for not being there to stop his worst mistakes could be put aside for this new founded respect and awe. Like, holy quiznak. Shiro was a person, not an experiment! Why didn’t these people understand basic ethics?

Lance blamed the corrupted quintessence.

“You don’t think that Prince Lotor would be the Black Paladin?” Lance asked. Honestly, he just wanted Xana to stop talking about Shiro. If that meant switching the topic back to Lotor, then Lance would take that hit.

“Prince Lotor?” Xana snorted. “You need to work more on seeing quintessence and its colors.” Xana crossed his arms and gave Lance a look. “If he were to be any Paladin, he would be the Red Paladin.”

….Quiznak. Did Lance have a type?! Was it usual for blue based people to like red based people? Was that a thing?! UGH! First, he thought he had a type for long hair, then it turned into Galra hybrids, and now… now, it was a red based quintessence type.

He was destined to like assholes was what he was hearing.

“Right.” Lance nodded. “Of course. Silly me, I should have noticed.”

“You should have.”

“Okay, but let’s say the Emperor recovers and becomes the Black Paladin again. Why me?” Lance shook his head. “I don’t… make sense. I’ve fought against him.”

“And you stand with him, and his son, now.” Xana replied. “Plus, you’re alive to tell the tale. That says something, I would think.”

“Perhaps, but, I’m alive thanks to… the others, not of any real talent of my own.”

“Ah, and we’ve gone full circle and are back to your debatable self-worth. Tell me, Lance, do you question Prince Lotor’s choices?”

Lance jerked, looked over at Xana with wide eyes. “What? No!” Where was this going? What did this have to do with anything?

“Do you trust his judgement? Do you trust him?” Xana continued to question.


“Then prove it to me.” Xana took a step towards Lance, and held up his hands. “Show me how you feel.”

Lance stared at Xana with wide eyes, almost taking a step back.
“The readings say that to touch another’s scales is-”

“Fine so long as permission is granted. I’m granting it.” The older Druid interrupted. His gaze was trained on Lance. Quiznak, Lance couldn’t turn this down. No, this was a challenge that Lance had to meet, unless he wanted to lose Xana’s faith and trust.

And losing Xana’s faith and trust was something Lance could not allow. Not if he wanted to continue to help the resistance.

Did he trust Lotor? That was a question he asked himself almost daily… quintantly.

He did, but he didn’t. And he wasn’t sure if his trust in Lotor would be the type or strong enough to throw Xana off. Besides, by touching Xana, would he feel Lance’s betrayal somehow? Would he find out that Lance wasn’t loyal? See, there was a question they should be asking. Loyalty, not trust.

In any case, he’d fooled Xana once before, when Xana believed the trust Lance was feeling then was directed towards Lotor when in fact it’d been for Blue. Unfortunately, Lance wasn’t sure how to do that outside of the meditation, though.

“I understand your hesitance.” Xana smiled, not unkindly, down at Lance. “Sharing your emotions like this is… very invasive.”

“It’s… fine.” It was most certainly not fine. As a matter of fact, it was the complete opposite of fine. Lance forced a smile. “If I truly trust the prince, then I’ve got to let go of things such as privacy, right?” He gave a nervous laugh. “I’ll have to be open with him, and trust that he’ll take care of me.”

Xana nodded, moving forward until he was directly in front of Lance. He took one of Lance’s hands, holding it as he lifted it to his face. “Just touch the scales.”

Xana’s scales weren’t the unblemished smooth surface of Lance’s own scales. They were dry and flakey under Lance’s touch. It felt almost like touching papery tree bark. Beyond that, there was nothing.

Lance excepted to feel something. What that something was, he didn’t know. But, he certainly didn’t expect nothing. No feedback; nothing. It was just… awkward. On his part, not Xana’s. Xana was probably used to this whole ‘sharing’ thing.

Xana chuckled. “I can feel your nervousness. There’s no need to feel so awkward.”

…

Lance’s point exactly.

“Maybe for you.” Lance replied. He resisted the urge to fidget, and instead played with the sleeve with the hand that wasn’t touching Xana’s scale. Technically, it was fidgeting, but at least it was a more manageable – less annoying – form of fidgeting.

“Let’s see here…” Xana closed his eyes. “I can feel your nervousness and anxiety.” A smile tugged at Xana’s lips. “It’s good to see you’re so happy and content here.”

Xana was digging through his emotions, but Lance couldn’t feel it at all. It was… disconcerting.

“Calm down. Your anxiety is like a river, deep and powerful, with strong rapids made from your
self-doubt.” Xana opened his eyes a little and looked down at Lance. “You should probably get that taken care of.”

Oh yeah, sure. Lance would get right on that. He’d call up the dam builders tomorrow and get that all dammed up. Because that was how things worked.

“The spark of snark was unnecessary.” Xana huffed. He closed his eyes again.

Lance rolled his lips, worrying them with his teeth. Hadn’t Xana seen or felt enough? He was tempted to take a step back, to try to remove his hand from Xana’s scale. Xana’s grip tightened on his wrist.

“Talk to me about Lotor.” The Druid commanded. Lance, unthinkingly, shook his head. “Interesting.” Xana dragged out the word. “What about your old team?”

“My old team?” Lance repeated. He did not want to talk about them anymore than he wanted to talk about Lotor.

“The Black Paladin? I see. What about the Gree—oh. There’s anger there. Strange, Blue doesn’t usually harbor such contempt for long. Yellow? Mmm, what about Re...” Xana’s eyes shot open, their gaze boring into Lance. “Now that’s interesting. You harbored feelings for him.”

It wasn’t a question. Lance trembled, shaking his head slowly, barely moving it. His mind was moving a hundred miles a minute.

Xana was going to find him out. He was going to find Lance out and then he was going to die. He was never going to see his mom or his family again. He was never going to get to say ‘goodbye’. He was never going to see Sonali again, or tell Matt about his sister.

“After all he’s done for you? To you?” Xana questioned. “I can feel your hurt, Lance. He hurt you, and you still care for him, still have those feelings for him.”

“I…”

“No. Wait.” Xana frowned in concentration, his eyes closing again. “Show me how you feel about the other Druids... now show me Lotor again. Ah. I see now.”

This time when Xana smiled, it wasn’t kind. “All those with who you’ve grown to know with a red base spark the same.” He chuckled. “The crush isn’t on the Red Paladin so much as it’s on the base red.”

Good to know that Lance’s earlier assumptions had been correct. Now, if only he’d found out through a significantly less creepy way.

Xana tsked, shaking his head gently, still holding Lance’s hand to his scale. “Blue’s a very cold color for you, isn’t it? You long for the warm waters of your birth home; for the warmth of your system’s Daystar. For the heat of flames and fire.” He chuckled again, a very mirthless sound. “It’s amusing since you’ve been burned by red before.”

Lance whimpered, trying to take a step back. Xana had said this was invasive, but, Lance hadn’t realized it was to this degree. He didn’t want to share any of this with Xana. He didn’t think that the Druid could see memories. That wasn’t how this worked, but... at this point, Lance wasn’t sure.

“You’re afraid of that which you want. I can feel how conflicting it is.” Xana tsked again. “But,
none of this is why we’re doing this.” Xana paused. “Think of Lotor again. There you go, Now, where is… ah. There it is.”

Xana hummed, pressing Lance’s hand closer against his scale.

“Blue trusts so easily, you know. It’s a shame that yours has been buried so much under so much self-loathing and doubt.” Xana frowned. “It feels… frozen. Fractured. What ever happened to cause this must have been painful. Do you blame our prince for the fight? Hmm, that won’t do at all.” Xana’s eyes opened again. “Let me fix that… don’t worry, it won’t hurt.”

Uh… how about he didn’t? Lance was sure he could go find a counselor. Go talk to someone who wasn’t as… creepy as this. Man, and he’d been thinking that Xana wasn’t all that bad. Guess he’d been wrong again.

Xana’s other hand grabbed Lance by the head. Out of the corner of Lance’s eye, he could see the corrupted quintessence swirling around it. He didn’t even get a chance to fight back before he screamed.

Xana lied. Static flared up. It filled his vision. It filled his ears. It was all he could taste, it was all he could smell. It was all.

He was drowning in white noise, but not even the static could shelter him from the twisting pain. It was like a headache before a storm, but worse. Hitting deeper than an icpick headache, but so much more painful.

He lost time, he lost himself. He only found himself again when his knees hit the floor and his hands automatically reached out to catch himself.

His arms were shaking, threatening to give under his weight. Corrupted quintessence sparked across his fingers, circling around his wrists before racing up his arms, leaving him feeling numb and disconnected. He couldn’t breathe, but he knew he was. He could hear his breath, heavy and ragged.

Across the room, Xana chuckled. Lance wanted to snarl, to ask him what was so funny, but his tongue was stuck; heavy, weighted, and numb from static. Xana didn’t seem to have that problem.

“I wondered why Haggar took such a long time with you.” Xana stood, using the wall as leverage. “It’s not often we get to experiment with someone with a blue base.” He took some steps towards Lance.

“For as trusting as it is, it’s usually pretty set in its ways. It’s not easy to change the course of a river or the shores of an ocean.” Xana paused. “Even ice requires a delicate touch, I suppose. It’s easier to mold, but… one needs to chisel away carefully, in small increments.”

“It’s a shame that Haggar’s work didn’t stick as it should have. Conditioning someone isn’t easy to begin with, and your blue base didn’t make it any easier.” Xana kneeled down in front of Lance.

“No matter, I’ll fix it.” Xana tugged on Lance’s hair, pulling his head up to look him in the face. Xana grinned, and for once, the sight of teeth didn’t set Lance at ease. After all, he’d learned by now that in the empire showing teeth was a sign of aggression. It was a threat.

No. It was worse than that. It was a promise. A promise Lance didn’t want kept. “Don’t worry, you won’t remember a thing; I promise.”
Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the Info Dump about Quintessence. Unfortunately, I don't think this will be the last time this happens. I've tried to limit the info dumps and spread the information out, but since there's not much about Quintessence in Canon, I've had to basically build all of it, which requires explanations, lol.

If you guys have any questions, hit me up on Tumblr :D

Edit: Ri-Ri-Land has drawn a fantastic fanart piece for Lilac Sweet, and it's gorgeous! Check it out, HERE! :D
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance had a training class with Xana, his mentor. During the training, Xana brought up Lotor asking Lance to the Gladiator matches and noticed something 'off' with Lance's response.

Xana investigated further, and upon discovering that some of Lance's conditioning from his time with Haggar wasn't quite sticking like it was suppose to, Xana decided to take matters into his own hands and 'fix' the problem.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Mentioned/Referenced Gaslighting

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

Lance yawned, grabbing his pillow and hugging it, burying his face into the soft warmth. His body tingled, the type of tingle that came from one’s body being asleep, or when someone stuck a fork in a plug outlet. It wasn’t pleasant, but it wasn’t unpleasant either. It was just there.

He stretched, letting go of the pillow to reach out to nothing. A groan worked its way out of his mouth, his muscles aching pleasantly from the sensation.

What had he been doing before he went to bed that he didn’t do his usual stretches?

He yawned again, reclaiming his hold on the pillow. It wasn’t often that he was allowed to sleep in, and he was pretty sure that some family… wait.

Wait. This wasn’t his bed. The pillow he was cuddling did not smell like home. It was too soft and large to belong to the Garrison or… or the castle. Lance sat up, blood rushing to his head, causing the room to spin.

“Oh good, you are alive.”

Lance blinked. His stomach twisted. The sudden comfort of the bed he was on vanishing. This was…

“Why am I on Lotor’s bed?” His voice was unnaturally high. He scrambled off the bed, nearly falling to the floor in the process.

“Woah, woah!” Sonali caught him before he could fall, holding onto him to give him some form of stability. “It’s okay, Lance.”
“Okay?!” Lance’s voice was still shrill. “Okay!?” He repeated. “What part of waking up in Lotor’s bed is okay?”

“Okay?!” Lance’s voice was still shrill. “Okay!?” He repeated. “What part of waking up in Lotor’s bed is okay?”

“The part where I’ve been here the entire time, and Lotor didn’t come back to his room last night.”

Emotions slammed into Lance like a tidal wave. There was relief, but also disappointment, and a good deal of confusion. He slumped into Sonali’s hold.

“He… he didn’t?”

“No, he didn’t.” A gloved hand ran through his hair, another rubbed Lance’s back. “You were like a zombie heading back here… and just… collapsed onto the bed. I haven’t seen you leave Druid training looking that wrecked ever. The Druid who handed you off to me said that you over exerted yourself.”

Druid training.

That was right. He’d gone to training, because he was having problems with manipulation. What did he do afterwards? What had he done while there? Evidently, over exert himself.

Lance furrowed his eyebrows. “I… over exerted myself?”

That just didn’t sound right. Lance wasn’t the type of person to push himself like that. He usually knew his limits and while he’d push them, he wouldn’t wreck himself like that. That was more of a Keith thing.

And Lance was not Keith.

“And evidently fried your brain, yes.” Sonali pushed Lance back down onto the bed before crossing their arms. “Maybe you should get some more sleep.”

Lance blinked, looking up at the guard. He didn’t want to sleep. He just woke up; and what a hell of a wake up it was: waking up in Lotor’s bed with no memory of how he got there.

Huh, maybe Lotor had been right, Lance was forgetful.

“I’m not really all that tired.” Lance shook his head.

“If you’re planning on going back to training, I suggest you don’t.” Sonali interrupted. The guard pulled out a small tablet, unlocking it and scrolling down. “Besides, you already have your usual mandatory training with Xana later today, and…” Sonali paused. “Dinner with the prince?”

Dinner with Lotor? Lance furrowed his eyebrows and looked down at his lap. Huh. Twice now in row really wasn’t just coincidence. He really was becoming forgetful. No! Wait! He remembered Lotor saying something about that.

“I guess so. I think I remember him talking about that. Since when do you have my schedule, anyways?”

If Sonali could, Lance was pretty sure the guard would have been giving him a flat look. Sonali sighed, again, shaking their head.

“Since it became my job, per the Prince, to stay your personal guard… remember?” Sonali scoffed. “I guess being his favorite has perks. Like a personal guard-slash-secretary.”

“Hey, hey. No need to get snippy.”
“Besides, it makes things easier on us to pass information. You have no clue what I went through
to get this job.” Sonali crossed their arms. “Speaking of information…”

Lance looked up as Sonali trailed off. He knew they wanted to know if he’d found out anything
interesting or anything that the Resistance could make use of. His job was to collect that, after all.

“I don’t have anything.” Lance shrugged. “I haven’t seen anything interesting on Lotor’s tablet,
and I haven’t heard anything with the Druids. I’m still just a newbie.” And red didn’t trust easily.
Most Druids had a red quintessence base, even if it’d been covered up by corruption. “Accepted
and welcome doesn’t mean the same as trusted.”

“I guess your best source of information is the prince, then.”

“For now.” Lance fell back onto the bed with a sigh.

So long as the prince continued to trust Lance, then yes, Lotor was Lance’s best source of
information. Right now, Lotor didn’t think much of anything about letting Lance lay in his lap
while going over sensitive documents. So long as Lance didn’t do anything jeopardize that trust, he
was fine.

….  

Trust. That was the root of all Lance’s issues right now, wasn’t it? Whether or not he was trusted,
and by who.

Matt trusted him. Sonali and the rest of the resistance didn’t trust him so much as they trusted
Matt. His old team didn’t even trust him, not when it mattered. They all thought he’d turned on
them, sharing information about them. Which he supposed he had.

Just like he was doing to the Galra. Just like he was doing to Lotor. Lotor trusted him, and he was
betraying it.

Lance sighed again, a hand reaching up to run through his hair before he let it lay over his eyes.
His stomach felt like it was in knots. He evened out his breathing, taking a deep breath and
counting before letting it escape, slow and steady. Another, and so on.

“I thought I didn’t suggest training.” Sonali’s voice drifted in. Lance frowned, sitting back up to
glare at the guard.

“Good thing it was a suggestion and not an order. Besides, I’d hardly consider meditation as
‘training’.”

“If you say so. I’ll just… go over here and shut my… quiznak.” If Lance were able to see their
face, he was almost certain Sonali would have been sneering. “See if I ever care about you again.”
They muttered, returning to their post by the door, arms crossed and leaning back on the wall.

“Wake me if you need anything.”

Lance flopped back down on the bed. He closed his eyes, and refocused on his breathing. When he
opened them back up, he was at his usual place on the ice shelf. He wrinkled his nose, curling his
lip at the amount of corruption there.

“This… was not here yesterday.” He muttered to himself.

He knew that because he made a point to try to meditate every day, usually after other routines,
like yoga. Like the one anime said: a sound soul rests within a sound body and a sound mind. Or
something like that.

Blue was usually his go-to for this, as the Lion tended to be able to clean this up easier than him, but today, the lion was nowhere to be seen. Not unusual, but not not unusual either. He shrugged, turning to give a critical eye to the icy ocean.

Oil and sludge bubbled up on the surface, washing up onto the ice shelf with every wave. Lance crossed his arms, frowning down at the sludge.

What had he done yesterday? Besides evidently over-exert himself.

He knelt down examining the corruption. It was strange to think that this was really so dangerous, considering it didn’t really look like much. Without thinking about it, he leaned over, brushing against the corruption with his fingertips. The ‘edge’ of the world blurred, the sounds of the waves turning to static.

“Quiznak!” He pulled back, frowning at the black discoloration staining his fingertips. Oh yeah, not cool. He didn’t want this stuff here.

Well, no time like the present to practice cleaning himself up without Blue. He may not have been able to save himself from drowning without Blue yet, but he could at least do this much without the lion, right?

He needed to learn how to do this without her. He wouldn’t have the benefit of her presence forever, her absence now proved that.

After all, the team would be replacing him soon, or at least, they should be thinking about it by now. There was no way Coran was a permanent replacement. And besides, Lance could vaguely recall being told that they’d managed to form Voltron or had replaced him.

In any case, Shiro was irreplaceable, but Lance? Lance wasn’t anything special.

Not to them, anyways. Oh no, they were probably happy to be rid of him. Stupid useless Lance, who couldn’t do anything. Stupid useless Lance who betrayed them.

Hell, he was useless to the resistance, right now. He couldn’t get them any information that they wanted. They wanted information on the Druids, not on whatever trade routes he could read about from Lotor’s tablet.

“I’m so useless.” Lance muttered.

“I’ll say. You can’t even clean this mess up on your own.”

Lance jumped, spinning around at the voice. Shiro crossed his arms, and frowned down at Lance.

“You aren’t real.” No one in the Astral Plane was real except for him, and even then, he wasn’t technically real. Not real-real. Like, if he died here, like, actually died, then he’d die in the real world.

Shiro’s eyes glinted as he tilted his head, considering Lance. “Do you believe that?” He laughed, the cold sound echoing against the ocean behind Lance and the icescape around them. “It doesn’t matter.” Shiro took a step forward. “You don’t matter.”

This wasn’t real. It was a projection of the corruption, designed to distract him, to stop him from trying to clean it up. It wasn’t real… but the pain it inflicted was.
Lance winced, shrinking into himself as if he could make himself smaller, as if he could hide from Shiro’s dark gaze.

“I don’t know why I ever thought you could be a Paladin of Voltron.” Shiro continued. “I don’t know why the Galra think you’ll ever be able to become a Druid. All you ever do is disappoint.” Shiro shook his head. “You were already a seventh wheel before… what number wheel are you now?”

“You aren’t real.” Lance repeated.

“None of this is real.” Shiro countered, raising his arm and stepping forward. In response, Lance took a step back. “Not me.” Shiro’s arm lit up, and Lance took another step backwards. “Not you.” Shiro’s gaze slid downwards, the corner of his lips tugging upwards. He let out a chuckle. “That isn’t real either.”

Lance froze, mid step back, and looked down. Black sludge washed over his shoe, sticking to the material, staining it black. His stomach twisted. Shiro laughed again.

He looked up just in time to see Shiro swinging his arm at him, and Lance completed the back step, barely missing Shiro’s attack. His foot sunk into gooey corruption, and kept sinking. He flailed, losing his balance.

Hitting the ‘water’ wasn’t like actually hitting the water. Sure, there was still a slash as his back hit against it, but this wasn’t water. It was oil; it was sludge; it was ooze and slime. It was thick and sticky. Trying to fight against it just got him more stuck, more entangled in it.

He managed to break the surface, gasping for air. He reached out, seeking help he knew he wouldn’t find. There was nothing here besides himself, his demons, and the corruption. He’d have to help himself, if he could.

A wave of corruption washed over him, coating him in more of the ooze, dragging him back under. Despite years of being on the swim team, and knowing what not to do, it still didn’t stop him from repressing that first initial instinct.

Lance took a breath.

Except instead of air, he got water. He got water, and all that previously mentioned corruption. It filled his lungs, coating the inside with the thick slime, threatening to choke him out. It slid down his throat, pooling heavily in his stomach.

He gasped as he sat up, hand going to his chest as if he could physically hold his heart and calm it down. Sweat rolled down off his forehead, following his nose until it dripped off the tip. He felt sticky and wet, like the... vision? Meditation?... hadn’t just been all in his head.

He wiped the back of his hand against his forehead. It came back shaking, and glistening with sweat.

Lance looked to where Sonali was. The guard was still by the door, apparently unaffected by him. Presumably, they were sleeping. They’d wake if the door was opened, he was sure. He took a deep breath, and then another – more to reassure himself that he could than out of necessity.

He slipped down out of the bed. He shivered, the phantom sensation of the ooze still on him, not helped by the sweat.

See? This was why he hated physical training.
He hated getting all sweaty and dirty. It made him feel disgusting. Brightside, he wasn’t limited to the tiny showers the castle provided anymore. Nope. Here, he had the luxury of Lotor’s overly luxurious bathroom, and its magical bath.

Perks of being the holder of the Prince’s affection.

He stripped, dropping the spoiled clothes into the ‘laundry shoot’ and then turned on the water. Maybe a bath wasn’t the best idea after having a dream about drowning. But, baths had always been a way for Lance to calm himself and relax in the past. And, he refused to believe that’d actually been his astral plane.

Denial wasn’t just a river in Egypt, after all.

He sighed, looking at the various soaps and oils – which he ignored – that he could pour in. Normally he went for the more salt and ocean smelling soaps, but… he hesitated, the sharp icy salt scent of the dream coming to mind. His eyes landed on the smokier fiery scent, but that reminded him too much of… someone he’d rather forget at this point.

After a few more ticks of debate, he settled on a warm floral scent. It smelled like… sunflowers and lilacs, or at least, the space equivalent.

He took a deep breath of it, finding it immediately put him at ease. Lance smiled, and poured it in. This was exactly what he needed. And after he was done, he could ask Sonali to bring in a space brunch of some fruit or something.

Chapter End Notes

For those who don't know, I was informed yesterday of a Wattpad user who had posted the first 7 chapters of this fic on Wattpad without crediting me, without using this fic's proper name, and without giving a source location. When I asked for it to be taken down, the poster responded rudely... Although, they did take down my story. They then proceeded to complain about me and the fact that they had to 'take down seven chapters out of their book'. They said that I should be grateful that they were sharing my story, and that no one cares how long I've been working on this fic. (I've been working on it since Feb 26, 2017.)

As you all can imagine, this whole ordeal has left a sour taste in my mouth. Reposting someone's work isn't cool. It's not 'promoting' them, or 'sharing' their work. It's claiming it as your own, even if you have a blanket statement saying 'This isn't mine'.

In the future, if you would like to repost my story... Don't. I have given only ONE person to repost and that was for translation purposes (and I don't believe they've done that yet). If you ASK, I may take it into consideration, but at this time, the answer would most likely be 'no'.

On a brighter note, Ri-Ri-Land has drawn a fantastic fanart piece for Lilac Sweet! Check it out, HERE! :D
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance woke up and was informed that he’d over exerted himself during his previous training. Lance attempted to meditate some, and experienced a vision with Shiro. Waking up from that, Lance decided to take a bath and try to relax before lesson with Xana and his dinner with Lotor later.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Cat Fights, Mentioned/Referenced Harem

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How does it feel to be his favorite?”

Lance looked up, both at the sudden question and the sudden voice.

Normally, Lance didn’t pay much attention to the door that led to Lotor’s harem. After all, they didn’t bother him, and he didn’t bother them. For the most part, they all just… stayed out each other’s way.

The girl standing there, Lance knew had to belong to Lotor’s harem.

The prince had banished them from his room when Lance came to stay with him, although, he knew that Lotor still visited them from time to time. The sweet-smelling perfume which sometimes lingered on Lotor long after he’d seen them, and jibes from the other Druids told him that.

While he knew of their existence, he’d never actually meet them. Much like Lotor’s infamous generals.

Perhaps Lotor didn’t want to scare Lance away, or perhaps he thought he was fooling Lance into thinking Lotor only had eyes for him. Or maybe it was simply because Lotor knew the members of his harem and had come to know Lance and just didn’t want to risk any cat fights.

Regardless of the reason for the segregation, Lance never had a reason to seek any of the members of the harem out. He preferred to stay in Lotor’s rooms and ignore the door, or in the common areas of the Druids, training and studying.

If it was his choice, he wouldn’t interact with them at all. But, it appeared it wasn’t his choice anymore.

“What’cha mean?” Lance asked, warily looking the woman over.
There was no place for her to hide a weapon, not in all that see-through gold sheer, which was draped around her. It glistened in the lighting, showing off tiny gems imbedded into it. He politely refrained from looking at her more intimate areas, her breasts clearly visible through the golden material ‘covering them’. He refused to let his eyes stray down past her waist.

He may be a flirt, but he had manners. He flirted with people to make them laugh and smile, not for... this.

“I used to be his favorite, you know.” She crossed her arms, the gem embedded sheer moving to follow her movements, attached to shiny golden bracelets at her wrists, which were connected by thin chains to a ring.

Lance pursed his lips. After such a nice de-stressing bath… of course he’d have an ‘incident’ following it. His luck at the finest.

At least this lady had waited until after he’d gotten dressed and was perusing the bookshelves for a book on quintessence to read over. His appreciation for that aside, what was he supposed to say: ‘Oh, sorry, here, you can have him back’? Oh yeah, that would go over real well.

“Has he given you any jewelry yet?” She was asking a question, but she wasn’t asking so much as demanding and answer. If Lance actually had an answer, he’d be sure to give it to her, but as it stood he needed clarification.

“Jewelry?” Lance furrowed his eyebrows as he asked. Lotor hadn’t given him any jewelry, and he kind of hoped that Lotor never did.

His childhood memories of movies and romance told him accepting jewelry from a prince was never a good idea unless you wanted to be involved with them. Which… Lance was still on the fence about. But those were thoughts for later. He didn’t have the mental capacity to deal with this right now.

She held up her arm, letting her hand flop over to show off the ring and the braided chains that connected it to the golden bracelets. She shook her hand, letting the jewelry jingle.

“Jewelry,” She repeated. “Or do they not have it at whatever primitive world the Prince picked you up at?”

“Hey, lady, that’s uncalled for.”

She arched a thin eyebrow, and pursed her golden glossed lips, glaring him down.

“Look, Lady-” Lance didn’t want to make enemies here. He really didn’t. He certainly didn’t want to go around starting cat fights with the harem girls. They deserved better than that, but really. He hated using this phrase, but she was asking for a fight.

“Corral. Princess Corral.” She interrupted. Her nose wrinkled after she finished, like she was disgusted that Lance couldn’t even tell who she was.

It was Lance’s turn to raise an eyebrow. “Oh? My apologizes your highness; but the princess of what?” Okay, so he just shamelessly stole a line from Pidge. It wasn’t like he was going to be seeing Pidge again, ever, so what did it matter. “Lotor’s harem?”

“Excuse me?” She snarled. “You dare talk to royalty that way?”

“What royalty?” Lance laughed. “You still haven’t answered my question, Princess.”
She held up her chin, sticking her nose up in the air. Real princess-like behavior there. He could see why she used to be Lotor’s favorite.

“When he gets what he wants from you, he’s just going to kick you to the curb.”

Okay, so that kind of confirmed Lance’s earlier thoughts about Lotor potentially not caring about him anymore once Lance put out. Then again, this was also coming from a biased, upset source; so, he should accept her word with a grain of salt.

“Oh? Talking from experience?” Lance asked.

Corral huffed. “At least I know he’ll always come back to me.”

Lance gave her another look over, this time making it very obvious what he was doing.

“Pluh-ease. Like he’d ever go back to you. He’ll pick up a replacement for me before he returns to you.” Lance replied, rolling his eyes.

“He’s returned to me in the past.” She declared. “He comes to see me some nights still.”

Oh big whoop. Lotor was only doing that cuz Lance wasn’t warming his bed. “Probably cuz I won’t sleep with him.” Lance replied.

Her eyes widened, and Lance cursed himself for that comment almost immediately. “Once I do, he’ll probably never return to you again.” Those words did not make him sick to say at all. Because, oh geeze, what if she reported them back to Lotor?

But what choice did he have?

If he hadn’t told her that he would sleep with Lotor, then she could just as easily tell Lotor that Lance never intended to sleep with him. Which would then make Lotor think something was wrong and start paying more attention to Lance. Which was something Lance simply could not afford.

“You haven’t slept with him?” She asked.

Lance narrowed his eyes. “What, is too hard for you to imagine someone not spreading their legs for him just because he asks?”

She crossed her arms again. “He’s just interested in you for the challenge. At least I’m not in this for the jewelry.”

“Oh yes, that makes perfect sense. I’m in it for the Jewelry that I’ve only just now discovered he gives away. Of course.” Lance gave her a level look. “Look, Corral, I’m not here to make an enemy of you. I don’t even want to bother you, and I’m sorry if I’m Lotor’s new favorite. Believe me, I didn’t ask to be, nor do I think I deserve to be.”

Lance was quiet when he finished, mirroring her position of crossed arms. He met her gaze, and challenged his own, lifting his own chin up ever so slightly.

Corral laughed, the sound high pitched and distorted. When she finished, she smiled, eyes flashing the same golden hue she was adorned in.

“I look forward to you joining our ranks.” She purred. “It’s been too long since I’ve had any other company than the prince or some other sniveling simpering fool.”
“So, what? I’m off the hook for now?” Was this some sort of test? For what: her or Lotor? Was this nothing more than just an attempt for her to try to establish herself as the alpha bitch, or was she trying to see if he a person she could just walk all over and bully him?

He’d thought that being in Lotor’s harem would have taught her unity. Maybe even concern.

Then again, he didn’t know how Lotor ran things. He didn’t know the stories of these people. He didn’t know who’d agreed to join, or for what reasons. He didn’t know who’d been forced to join. He didn’t know who’d been trapped into joining it like he’d been trapped into joining the Druids and playing spy for the resistance.

“So long as you keep turning him down, he’ll continue to come to me. It’s only a matter of time before you give in and join us, or he gets bored. Either way, he’ll return back to me in the end.” Corral shrugged. “In the meantime, I can at least appreciate good conversation when I can, until he breaks you in.”

“You’ll be enjoying good conversation for a while then.”

“All I’m seeing is more benefits for myself.”

“Cuz’ that’s all that matters, of course.” Lance replied dryly. She blinked at him, a more genuine smile curling at her lips.

“You’re getting it now.” Lance rolled his eyes at her response. She nodded into the room, gesturing to it with a wave of her hand. “Mind if I enter. His lordship’s asked that we only enter with your permission.” This time she rolled her eyes. “It’s like he’s afraid that we’ll scare you off or something.”

Lance raised an eyebrow. “I think you mean that he’s afraid that I’ll scare you off,” Lance corrected. It may have been ill advised, but seeing as no one was actually there to advise him, he waved her in.

Corral pursed her lips, looking him over again before taking a step in, and then marching over to Lance’s couch and sitting down on it. A wave of perfume trailed behind her, smelling way too sweet to be enticing.

“A Red Giant is still a Star.” She waved her hand. “It doesn’t matter.”

Lance snorted. “On my planet, we’d say ‘same difference’.”

Corral tilted her head, taking his words into consideration. “Same difference.” She shrugged. “How very odd. And what, praytell, planet have the Alteans claimed now?”

“I’m not…” Altean. But he was.

“Oh, sore point?” She asked, crossing her legs and leaning back to settle into the couch cushions. Lance resisted the urge to wrinkle his nose. This lady did it enough for the both of them… although he was seriously hating that he’d be smelling her perfume all night long when he was trying to sleep.

“You could say that. Alteans weren’t… common where I came from.”

“Were any aliens?” She asked.

“Not that I could say.” Lance shrugged.
“Hmph. So, I was right: you are from a primitive world.” She scrunched up her nose. “Why is the prince interested in you again?”

“Rude.” Lance returned.

Her hand went to her chest, splaying out. “Who? Me?” Good to know that was a universal gesture.

“Why are you here?” Lance sighed, sinking into the arm of the chair Lotor had originally claimed before he invaded Lance’s couch. Corral eyed him, but didn’t say anything other than to answer the question.

“I told you, I wanted to see if you were even worth having a conversation with.”

“I’m regretting passing your test already.”

“Now who’s being rude?” She clicked her tongue. “Aren’t Alteans supposed to be diplomatic?”

“Quiznak if I know.” He ignored her gasp. “Do I look or act like a proper Altean?”

Corral was quiet for a few ticks. “No. I suppose not. I always though Alteans wore more… lighter colors.” She nodded down at the dark under suit he was wearing instead of the robes. “Then again, I heard you were studying with the Druids.” She paused. “How… prestigious.” She smiled. It didn’t reach her eyes.

“At least I have a use outside of pleasing Lotor.” Lance fired back, ignoring how her eyes flashed at Lotor’s name.

“At least I have the manners to refer to our lord properly.”

“I’d rather be useful than have manners. The useful tend to live longer than the polite.”

She considered him for a moment before shrugging. “I suppose I cannot argue with that logic. Let us bless the stars that we both have our uses.”

“You have a use other than tending to… our lord?” Lance sneered the last part.

“You may not refer to him as such outside of mocking now, but you will learn.”

“When he breaks my spirit?” Lance asked, rolling his eyes.

Corral flashed her teeth in a sharp smile. “He tends to get under the skin and unravel you from the inside out. I’ve seen plenty of people with more spunk than you break to his ministrations.” She paused, standing back up and heading back towards the door she came from. She paused there, looking back to Lance from over her shoulder.

“Count my words, you won’t last long.” She smiled, and exited from the room.

Lance watched her go, but didn’t respond to her last comment. She wouldn’t hear it even if he did. Truth be told, she’d hit more sore points than he’d like to admit.

While he may not have liked his use here, it was still a use. He was needed here, to be a Druid, to be a spy. If those uses required he became another – to please Lotor – then so be it. He stood by what he said: he’d rather be useful than not, as the useful tended to live longer.

He’d learned that lesson at the Castle, around the same time he’d learned how truly useless he was there. His time with Voltron had taught him well.
He’d had suspicions. Suspicions he’d only started to believe around the time they broke Slav out of the Beta Traz.

He took a deep breath, immediately regretting it when he was assaulted with that overly sweet perfume. He’d deal with his own lack of self-worth later. He had a lesson with Xana to get ready for, and dinner with Lotor in about two vargas. He couldn’t afford to get distracted.

“She’s a real piece of work, isn’t she?” Lance turned to eye Sonali. The guard was standing at the door, as per usual when Lance was ‘on his own’.

“She’s a treat alright.” Lance scoffed.

“Most people don’t handle her as well as you did.”

Lance raised an eyebrow and gave Sonali an unimpressed look. “Oh? You’ve seen Lotor’s other harem candidates pass through here?”

“Not exactly. He doesn’t usually let them stay in his rooms.”

“Guess I’m just special.”

“I guess so. He doesn’t usually let them become Druids either, although, I can assure you, most of them have spent at least some time with the Druids.”

“Oh, I’m sure.” Lance replied dryly. He stood up and headed towards where he’d last put his robes. “No doubt letting the Druids poison their quintessence or something.”

Sonali was quiet for a moment. “I know they can influence people with the corrupted quintessence, but to poison someone with it? They can do that?”

Lance snorted. “You’d be amazed with that they can do with that shit.”

“I’m pretty sure that it’s used to corrupt the ‘cured’ quintessence that the rest of the universe uses to power things.” Only the Alteans seemed to use ‘pure’ quintessence, no curing or refining needed. It was obvious that corrupted quintessence powered the Galra ships. “It’s also what the Druids use for combat and their powers.”

Sonali hummed, obviously thinking this over. “So, the power of the Druids is borrowed from the corrupted quintessence?”

“Sort of. I think the older Druids have either figured out how to convert their own quintessence into the corrupted stuff, or they themselves have become corrupted to the point that is their quintessence now.”

For some odd reason, Lance thought of Xana almost immediately after he spoke. Which didn’t make sense, because Xana was such a great guy.

Lance shrugged. “I’ll need to work more with the quintessence manipulation aspects of being a Druid to know for sure. Hopefully we’ll be going over that during this lesson.”

“All this has been enlightening, but how’ve you been holding up?”

“What’cha mean?”

“I know you’ve found your anchor, but even still, I doubt you’re unaffected by the corruption.”
Lance paused, thinking of the icy beach and the cold salt water, coated in oily corruption. He thought of the images of his previous team who’d show up every so often. Like Shiro, earlier this morning – although, he still wasn’t convinced that it wasn’t just a dream.

He thought of Blue, of how she’d roar every so often – less so now – to try to wash it all way. He thought of how the past few times, he’d had to try to wash it all away himself. He shivered, feeling the cold of his astral plane already seeping into his bones, and resolved not to think of it again.

“I’m fine.” He breezed past Sonali, raising his hood and hiding under it. Sonali couldn’t talk to him out in the halls, and besides, he had a lesson to get to.

Chapter End Notes

Princess Corral was indirectly referenced in Chapter 13.

For those who don't know, Princess Corral was the princess of Planet Demos in the original Voltron. She was originally meant to be wed to Lotor, however, Lotor denied her. She's in the Episode 'The Sleeping Princess'.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance finished with his relaxing bath only to meet one of Lotor's more... interesting harem members. Princess Corral of Demos doesn't like sharing, and she informed Lance of much before informing him that as soon as Lotor got what he wanted, he'd be dropping Lance like a hot potato and running back to her.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Manipulation, Gaslighting

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

From the moment Lance entered the room, Xana had been staring at him, and while Lance knew he was a fine piece of ass, he somehow doubted that was why Xana was staring so intently at him. Besides which, Xana was old and no thank you? Lance wasn’t interested in being with someone his father’s age.

In any case, that left only a few reasons that Lance could think of that would cause the staring.

The first reason he was pretty sure was wrong. Lance was almost 99% certain that he hadn’t been late. After all, he’d left before Sonali even mentioned leaving, so by that logic, Lance should have actually been early. Perhaps he’d come too early, and that was why Xana was so interested in looking at Lance.

But somehow, neither of those options felt right. The way Xana was watching him reminded Lance of a predator watching its prey. While he didn’t necessarily feel like Xana was going to attack him, the staring was still unwelcomed attention.

Which was weird because normally Lance didn’t mind people staring at him. Like, yes, he knew. He was beautiful. But something about the way Xana was staring at him just made the hair stand up on the back of his neck – and not in a pleasant way.

“How are you feeling?” Xana stepped forward, his gaze still intently trained on Lance.

“Uh, fine?” Lance took a step back, noting that something passed on Xana’s face as he did so. Displeasure? Disappointment?

“You sound uncertain.” Xana noted. “I’d like to apologize for our last session. In my own distraction, I failed to prevent your over-exertion.”

Oh. That explained the watching! Huh, well, it was sweet that the Druid was just worried. Lance
relaxed, his shoulders slumping and arms crossing casually as he grinned at the other.

“Awh!” He cooed. “Were you worried about little ol’ me?”

“Clearly I was wrong to.” Xana replied good naturedly. “In any case, I was thinking the lesson could be a bit more, how do you say it… ‘laid back’, I believe?” Xana’s eyebrows furrowed, and his hand tapped on his chin. “Whatever you use for ‘soothing’ or ‘relaxing’.”

“You had it right. It’s expressed in many ways, but I think what you’re really trying to say, is that we’re having a lazy day.”

If Xana wanted to take an easy day because of guilt over Lance’s over-exertion, then who was Lance to argue otherwise?

So, Hecks yeah, he was so down for a lazy day. He slept in, took an awesome bath. Minus his conversations with Sonali and Corral, his day had been really good so far. And with his dinner with Lotor later… he’d be a fool to turn down a chance to relax.

He didn’t know what was so special about the dinner with Lotor, but evidently it was a Big Deal™.

“A lazy day?” Xana repeated. “Yes, that does sound correct.”

“Right on!” Lance dropped his arms from their crossed positions to point at the cushions. “Are we gonna stand all day, or is this a sitting lesson?”

“Sitting, I think, would be preferred.” At Xana’s response, Lance walked over to the cushions, flopping down onto them before crossing his legs and looking expectantly up at the Druid. He opened his mouth to speak, but Xana beat him to the punch. “I was thinking we could go over pure quintessence color base types.”

“Oh man.” Lance groaned. “I did not study for a pop quiz.”

“You study?” Xana quirked an eyebrow as he teased. He took a seat on the cushion across from Lance. He was still overly watching Lance, but now that Lance knew it was due to worry, it was easier to ignore.

“Ha, ha. Very funny.” Lance replied dryly.

“Well, I was under the impression that you were too busy being distracted by our prince to study.”

“Hey, hey, hey! Leave Lo- Prince Lotor out of this.” The look Lance was giving Xana was the same look of a petulant child, including the crossed arms and the pout.

“Dropping honorifics already?” Xana teased. Lance’s face flooded with heat, and not for the first time, Lance thanked his lucky stars that he didn’t show off blushes that easily. He did not need to give Xana more ammo in teasing him about Lotor.

“It’s not like that!” Lance protested. “We’re not like that!”

“No?” Xana’s laugh was pleasant to listen to, usually. It wasn’t often Lance could get the other Druid to laugh. He just wished that Xana’s laughter didn’t come at his expense.

“No! There’s nothing between us!”

“The Prince does seem rather smitten with you.” Xana argued slyly. “That doesn’t seem like
It hit Lance hard and without warning; it being a sudden and strong wave of déjà vu. It was like he’d had this exact same conversation, or at least something similar to it, with Xana before. Yet, he couldn’t recall actually having a conversation with Xana about this.

Maybe it was the topic? Maybe he’d talked with Sonali about Lotor’s attraction. It wasn’t like it was a bad thing that Lotor was attracted to Lance. After all, that attraction was what opened the door for Lance and gave him so many opportunities.

But as for how Lance felt about Lotor… that was still a sticky situation. Like, Lance wouldn’t deny the guy looked nice. It helped that he smelled nice too, reminding Lance of… lilacs, actually.

Oh no.

Had he used Lotor’s shampoo and soap earlier? Oh no. Oh no! He had dinner with Lotor! He couldn’t show up smelling like him! Who knew what ideas the prince would get. And what did it say about Lance that he’d basically bathed himself in Lotor’s scent, and… and…

“Lance?”

Lance literally jumped, eyes widening as he looked at Xana’s concerned face. “Uh, sorry,” His smile was sheepish and he ducked his head. “Got lost in my thoughts for a moment.”

Xana hummed, nodding his head.

“But yeah, I guess he is. Smitten with me, I mean. Lotor, uh, Prince Lotor is. Oh, you know what I mean!” Lance sputtered.

What was wrong with him!? Normally he was such a smooth operator! Then again, He was distracted by the fact that he kinda sorta smelled like Lotor right now. Not to mention that Xana was kinda like an uncle, and Lance had never been able to be smooth when his uncles and aunts had teased him about his crushes before.

…. Not that he had a crush on Lotor, because that’d be ridiculous. Except he kinda, sorta, maybe did, and he might have already admitted that to himself, or at the very least admitted that they had some chemistry.

Could anyone really blame him for being so wishy-washy on his feelings? He was still on the fence, and he didn’t think anything anytime soon would change that.

“Sounds like he might not be the only one smitten.” Xana continued to tease.

“Who me?” Lance laughed nervously. “No way. I don’t… I … uh… It’s not like that. Why’re we still talking about this, hmm? You got a crush on him?”

“A… crush?” Xana repeated. He was quiet for a moment before shaking his head. “If you are asking if I am interested in our prince, then I’d have to decline. But since we’re on the topic of him, I wonder if you could tell me the base color of his quintessence?”

Okay. Okay, Lance could handle that a lot better than he could the teasing, except for the fact that Lance didn’t know the answer. He felt like he should know, but when he tried to think of what it could be, his mind just blanked.

“Why does it matter?”
Xana arched an eyebrow.

Which was weird to look at because it didn’t look like Xana had the kind of eyebrows that could be arched. Xana wasn’t like Lance, who spent hours in a bath, or in a bathroom, readying himself for the day. As a matter of fact, the prettiest thing about the Druid was his scales, which… were kind of flaking off, and were definitely far from ‘elegant’, and kind of reminded of papery tree bark.

Huh. Weird. Why’d Lance just think of papery tree bark suddenly? That was strange and oddly specific.

He couldn’t ponder on that any more before Xana was answering him.

“In honesty, knowing the prince’s base color does not matter. Learning how to tell a base color, however, is.” The Druid paused. “There are several ways to do this. For example, someone could tell you have a blue base because…” Xana trailed off, giving Lance a chance to chime in and explain.

“Because of my scale color, duh.” An Altean – Druid or not – always had scales which matched their quintessence. That was like Druid Basics 101.

Xana frowned. After a moment he opened his mouth, and then closed it. “…Well. Yes. But you won’t always have the benefit of scales. So, someone can tell that you have a base blue because…”

“Oh…”

Xana sighed. If he was Shiro, he’d be pinching the bridge of his nose by now, and giving Lance the patented ‘I’m too tired for this’ look.

“Alright, Lance. What defines the blue base?”

“Well, Blue represents water and ice. It’s both liquid and solid; flexible but rigid; which makes it the most versatile. People with a blue base usually seem to be the most trusting, but they can also be stubborn and stuck in their ways.”

Xana clapped. “A short summary, but, essentially yes. Now, what about me?”

“You got yellow scales, so I know you have yellow base.” But Xana didn’t want him using scales as an answer. “But, I can also tell because base yellow is slow to anger, but slow to calm down too. Yellow base is… strong, steady, and… sturdy. That describes you.”

“That is correct. I’m a base yellow. Now, would you say either of these two are the prince?”

“No way!” Lance barely let Xana finish the sentence before interrupting him. “Lo… Prince Lotor is… Well, he’s… he’s passionate.”

There wasn’t really any other way to describe Lotor. He was passionate. He was passionate about ruling the empire; about his desires to bring down rebellions. Even as Tyrac, Lotor had been passionate, especially towards Lance’s plights and drama’s. He was very driven, and more than a tad ambitious. Especially in regard to his plans for the empire. But…

“He’s also impulsive.” Like when Lotor decided to bring Lance on. When he decided to allow Lance to become a Druid. Like when he decided to check out the Lion on the moon, and see if he could make a friend out of its paladin. Yet, despite all, “He doesn’t trust easily either.”

Actually, come to think of it, was he describing Lotor or…
Lilac eyes, Lilac scent. They weren’t really all that different, were they?

“He’s a red base.” Lance realized. “Prince Lotor has a red base.”

Just like most of the Galra, and Druids raised by them. Just like Keith. No wonder Keith was the team member who ended up being part Galra. Most Galra tended to have a red base lately. Probably due to the Galra having owned the Red Lion at one point. Zarkon had probably been looking for a Paladin for it.

He didn’t know if that was thing, breeding people with a specific color base quintessence. But, he knew the Galra had the Red Lion before Voltron did, and he knew most Galra, at least the ones in the military according to other Druids, had a red base. Perhaps there was a connection, perhaps there wasn’t.

“Very good. But, you won’t always have the luxury of knowing someone’s personality to figure out their base.” Xana reminded him.

“Yeah, and I know, I know. I need to know their base so I can correctly estimate what they’re gonna do, and react before they can even figure out for themselves what they’re doing.” Lance rolled his eyes as he spoke. Honestly, he’d heard this spiel like a hundred times by now.

“Exactly, which is why we need to work on your quintessence awareness.” Xana shook his head. “You’re fine with the two easier methods to tell a base, but it won’t last you forever.”

“Alright.” Lance sighed.

“This exercise will be similar to meditation. Except, with meditation, you’re trying to see inside yourself. I don’t want you actually going to the Astral Plane.”

“I’m sorry, but what? Could you, I don’t know, explain that a bit more clearly?”

Xana sighed again. “Try to see your color, if it helps I can provide a mirror.”

Wait a tick. Trying to see one’s own ‘color’? Using a mirror? Laughter bubbled up, escaping out before Lance could stomp it back down.

“You want me to see my aura?” Lance shook his head, still laughing. “Are you kidding me? I haven’t done that since I was a kid! That’s actually legit?”

Xana didn’t seem to know how to respond. He stared blankly at Lance for a few ticks, his eye twitching.

“Aura?” He finally asked after a bit. Lance nodded.

“Yep. Aura. It’s like the color of someone’s soul. You could tell their personality, health, and even their current emotions based off the colors you saw.”

Xana opened his mouth and shut it a few times. “Can… can all Humans do that?”

“Psh. Please.” Lance rolled his eyes. “Those who can are usually considered crazy.” Lance shrugged. “Which was why I never really talked about it or did it. And then, eventually, the colors just faded and I didn’t see them anymore.”

Xana pressed his lips together in a heavy frown. “So they repressed it.” His tone was sour. “Such a primitive race.” He shook his head. “A waste of potential.”
Lance raised an eyebrow – his was more elegant than Xana’s. He groomed his eyebrows to be absolutely gorgeous, regardless if he was quirking them or not.

“Dude chill. I think I remember how to do it. I just gotta work on it again. I got this.”

The look Xana gave Lance was nothing but skeptical. Heh, Lance would show him. He’d succeed at this, no problem!

“Alright. Since you are already aware of this, then I suppose I can let you go early.” Wait, what? Seriously?! “If you promise to work on it.”

“Dude, I do.” Xana frowned at Lance’s choice of words, shaking his head.

“And, next session, we’ll be going over the two other pure quintessence bases: green and black.” Xana added. Lance groaned, scrunching up his nose.

He already knew all that. He wanted to move on, and try to work at some of the more advanced stuff.

“I’m tired of this stuff, Xana.. when will I learn the cooler stuff?” Lance whined.

“Once you have the basics.” Xana replied.

Oh, well if that was all Lance needed...

“Kay, well, Black technically doesn’t exist, but manifests in purples and pinks. It’s super rare because it means leadership, and there are very few people that are born leaders.” Allura, Shiro, and Zarkon were included in this grouping. “And Green is super inquisitive and curious. There, there’s the basics.”

Xana laughed. “Alright, alright. We’ll work on some advanced techniques next time, if you’ve learned how to properly recognize a base.”

“Promise?” Lance couldn’t see his own eyes, but he was sure they were sparkling with mini stars in them.

Man, he couldn’t wait. Not only would he get to learn some cool stuff, but it’d also be taking him closer and closer to getting into the more sensitive projects that the Druids worked on. He hoped to eventually get on a major project where he could give the resistance some important and major information.

The Robeast Project would be a great project to be on for that reason, although Lance wasn’t sure he’d be able to stomach it. Not to mention, it was Haggar’s personal project, and therefore, it was doubtful that Lance would be assigned it.

Unless Lance ended up being really talented with quintessence manipulation, but even then it was still doubtful he’d be assigned to something as important as Project Robeast.

Lance supposed it didn’t matter exactly what project he was given once they thought he was ready, so long as it was something he could give the resistance information on. And besides, it’d probably be a while before he was ready for a project.

Rome wasn’t built in a day, but Lance was getting there.

“Yes. I promise. Now, go. Shoo. Begone with you and your promises and begging.” Lance
laughed, scrambling up to his feet as Xana shooed him away. “And have fun with your dinner.”

“You know about that?!” Lance cried, spinning back around to give Xana a horrified look.

“I know everything.” Xana replied. Again, a wave of déjà vu washed over Lance, but he shook it away. “Now, shoo. Go have fun.” Xana made the ‘shoo-ing’ motions again.

Lance laughed, shaking his head. “Alright, alright, I’m going, I’m going!”

Sonali looked up from where they were stationed by the door as Lance danced out of it before spinning around and slumping back against it.

“Easy lesson?” They asked.

“The easiest.” Lance replied, bouncing off the door and down the hall. “When’s my dinner with Lotor?”

“In little over a Varga. Your session was shorter than usual.” Lance hummed, not really caring to answer the implied question there.

“Cool, sooooo, I got time to shower.”

“You… showered earlier.”

Well, yeah, he did. But now he’d realized that he’d washed with Lotor’s shampoo and soap. He couldn’t show up to their dinner looking like that. Plus, he’d met Corral, and he was sure that Lotor would smell her perfume.

“Shush. We’re in the halls. No talking.” Lance stuck his tongue out at the guard once he was done talking.

Sonali groaned in response, but fell obediently quiet.

Perhaps for the better. Lance’s stomach was suddenly full of butterflies at the thought of the dinner. It was special, for some reason. Like, he wanted to think it was a date, but… nah. It couldn’t be a date. Lotor didn’t seem like the dating type.

Lance mentally sighed. He guessed he’d find out in a bit.

Chapter End Notes

If this chapter seemed like it was repeating information previously stated (Chapter 30), that's because it is. It was a design and style choice made, hence the chapter name. There is a reason for this, and I'm curious as to how many of you guys can/will guess it. :3

*Hint: It actually has little to do with Xana, and more to do with Lance.*
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance had another lesson with Xana. Lance was delighted to hear that his lesson was going to be an 'easy day', and talked with Xana about quintessence types. Xana promised to teach Lance further once Lance could prove that he had an awareness of Quintessence which would allow him to sense other people and their quintessence type.

Xana let Lance go with time to go get ready for his dinner with Lotor.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Bad Flirting, and Emotional Manipulation

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

Sonali crossed their arms, blocking the exit to the room. The guard was staring Lance down, resolute in their decision to block the exit.

“Oh, come on.” Lance whined, dragging out the words as he said them. “Are you being serious right now? Like, I said I’m fine.”

“It’s my job to watch over you.” Sonali replied, looking down at Lance and crossing their arms.

“And I told you, and I’ll tell you again: I’m fine.” Lance spun around, as if to physically prove that he was fine. “I’m wearing the nice clothes Lotor gave me, and I took another bath.”

The nice clothes had been left on the bed when Lance returned from his Druid lesson, and consisted of a nice new cloak and a new under suit. To be honest, the ensemble kind of reminded Lance of longer fancier version of the night clothes and bathrobe he’d been using at the Castle of Lions, except in Galra colors.

The reason he’d taken a second bath was because he could only imagine the response Lotor would have to Lance showing up smelling like Lotor. His stomach twisted at the idea of Lotor’s response, although if it was nerves or excitement, Lance couldn’t tell.

Sonali sighed. “I’m just… worried about you. You were so out of it… and… I just… I don’t want to have to put you out of your misery if I can help it.”

Lance flinched back at the reminder. It felt like someone poured cold ice and water down his back, or like someone had ‘walked over his grave’, as his family would say. His shoulders slumped and he shook his head.
“Oh, Sonali.” He whispered. “It’s okay. I’m fine.”

They didn’t even really know him all that much, and yet… here they were, still concerned over him. Over his well-being. He was touched, really he was. That was twice now that someone had been concerned over Lance today alone.

“I know you are.” They huffed. “I just… I don’t like that you’re having dinner with him in the Gardens.”

“The… gardens?” Lance repeated. “This place has gardens?”

Why had he not been told about this before? Did all Galra ships have gardens? Could he visit said gardens? …Did it rain in these gardens?

These were very important questions that Lance needed answers to.

“Yes. But access is very restricted. I won’t be able to follow you in. Anything could happen there, and I wouldn’t know.”

Well, that explained why they were so upset that Lance was going on this dinner. It actually had little to do with Lance and everything to do with the possibility of Lance betraying the Resistance.

It was possible that Sonali was legitimately concerned for Lance’s safety outside of where they could see and influence, but… Lance’s estimated likelihood of that possibility was tiny. It was far more likely that they were more concerned about themselves.

Being out in space didn’t stop people from being selfish.

Still, concern was concern – no matter how ‘misplaced’ it was – and Lance would take it.

“I’ll be fine.” At this point Lance was starting to feel a bit like a broken record. How many times would he have to assure Sonali that he was fine until they accepted it? “Lotor’s infatuated with me, I doubt he’d do anything.” Lance attempted to wave off their fears. “I’ll be fine.” He repeated, hopefully for the last time. “I hate saying this, but… trust me.”

Sonali sighed, but seemed to let the subject drop. “I… I suppose you’re right. We should be off then, if we don’t want to make you late.”

Lance blew a raspberry, rolling his eyes. “Plu-ease. I’m pretty sure I’m basically Cinderella in this situation – a reference I’m sure goes way over your head, but follow with me. It basically says that I can show up as late as I want, sweep the prince off his feet, and be home by midnight.”

“I’m not sure I want to understand that reference, but if you say so.” Sonali gave him what he suspected – stupid helmets hiding facial experiences – was a self-indulgent look before turning their back and heading out. Lance followed, not even a step behind.

The halls were unusually empty, although, perhaps those normally in the halls were off getting food for themselves. He was actually kinda glad that there weren’t many around.

Normally, he walked these halls with the safety and ambiguity of the Druids robes and mask. Wearing these nice silken clothes that Lotor had provided for him gave him no such protection. Thankfully, that was what Sonali was for.

Not that Sonali was particularly needed today as the halls seemed vacant. If anything, Sonali was being used as a map more than a deterrent or a ‘protector’. This ‘garden’ wasn’t close by, and
although Lance tried to keep track of the turns and steps, it was rather difficult.

Hopefully Lance would be able to learn for future purposes. Restricted area or not, if Lotor was letting Lance enter now, then there was a super high chance that Lance would be able to visit again. And while Lance was pretty sure he’d have Sonali with him anytime he ventured off to the gardens, it never hurt to know his way around without the guard.

Just in case of anything.

Honestly, Lance had expected something a bit more to the doors of the Garden. If he’d been honest, he’d expected the Galra Space Ship equivalent of double French doors with some stained glass or something. Instead, he was just looking at a standardized bulkhead door.

“This is it.” Sonali muttered. “Only Royalty, some Druids, and a few drones are usually allowed in.”

Well that was good to know. And, also, Score! Some Druids were allowed, and with any luck… then Lance could become one of those privileged Druids.

“I’ve heard some of the Harem members and Lotor’s personal guard can enter too…” Sonali added on just a tick later. “Be careful.”

Lance blew another raspberry. “Stop worrying.” Lance half sung out. “I’m not worried, so neither should you.”

Well, that was a blatant lie if he ever said one. He was worried. He was worried about this ‘dinner’ in the ‘restricted’ gardens, with Prince Lotor. Of course, he was worried. Or that ball of ‘worry’ in his gut could have been anxiety. Or gas.

He tended to get gassy when he was nervous. It was a trait he shared not-so-fondly with Anna from that ancient Disney movie his sister loved, although it wasn’t anywhere near as ancient as that first Cinderella movie, but please, talk about the classics.

But talking about Disney princesses brought up unwanted memories. Like all the conversations/debates he’d have with Hunk about who everyone was. Like, c’mon… Allura was totally Aurora! Both of them were super gorgeous, and slept for like a couple thousand years while their society and kingdom crumbled before being awakened by a handsome ‘prince’.

Plus, both their names started in ‘A’, AND, sorry Hunk, Allura’s long gorgeous hair was more like Aurora’s than Kida’s. And another AND, Kida wasn’t even recognized as an official Disney princess!

Lance shook his head and took a deep breath. There was no need to get worked up or emotional right before this dinner. Lotor would sense it like a shark sensed blood in water.

He took a deep breath and pressed the button to open the doors before stepping through into an airlock like space. Well, that was different, and bit more… expected? It made sense that the garden would be separated from the rest of the ship through more than just a single door.

After a few ticks, the door across from him slide open with a quiet ‘whoosh’ and Lance continued.

Lance would like to say that he noticed Prince Lotor waiting for him first. He’d like to say that he’d acknowledged the Prince and greeted him with a charming smile. If asked, that would be how Lance would present the story. But, honestly, Lance would be lying.
In truth, Lance was too busy gawking over the gardens to notice Lotor.

When he’d heard ‘garden’s he hadn’t expected much. Like, his highest expectations had been some ‘rain’ via some sprinklers in the ceiling, and even then, he’d doubted it. He’d thought that the gardens would be just a small little greenhouse like place with only a few plants.

He never thought he’d be so happy to be wrong.

If Lotor’s private rooms were hell, then this was paradise. The flooring under him was tiled with various shining crystals which faintly glowed, illuminating the path.

The planters were made of the same dark metal of the ship, built into the ground and coming up about to Lance’s waist. The plants in each planter were thick, full, and colorful. From where he was rooted at the entrance, he could see a myriad of colors, although, most were shades of green.

Off in the distance, he recognized the low rumble and roar of running water… a lot of it. It sounded like it was free falling, giving Lance the impression of a waterfall. In which case, he wondered just how large these ‘gardens’ were.

The lighting here was weird, fluctuating as some of the plants swayed in a non-existent breeze. It wasn’t helped by the glowing path either, which casted strange shadows as light came from two different sources and directions.

“I was worried your guard may have gotten lost.” Lance jumped at Lotor’s voice, and the gentle touch to his arm.

Of course, once he saw Lotor, the garden’s beauty and splendor paled in comparison. His stomach flipped in a way that it hadn’t since Lotor had touched Lance’s scales, so long ago. His mouth felt dry, his response became stuck in his throat.

Lotor smiled gently down at Lance, crow’s feet once again making an appearance at the corner of the prince’s eyes. His hair was tied back, although some strands refused to be captured and instead framed his face. Lotor’s eyes were brighter than any of the lights on the ship, which should have been enough to set Lance on edge, but instead reminded him of another’s purple eyes.

Both of the people who Lance had felt the strongest attraction to were so similar, when Lance thought about it.

They both had a red base. Both were partially Galra. Both had physical similarities. Perhaps Lance had a type after all, and how lucky he was to find another who matched it so perfectly after the disaster that was the red paladin, and Lance’s relationship – or lack of one – with him.

No. No, like with Hunk, Lance wasn’t going to think about that. He wasn’t. He just wasn’t. He was going to enjoy his dinner with Lotor and not think about… them. He wanted to think about Lotor instead, and how nice he looked.

Now to verbalize that. “Uh,” Lance’s mouth finally worked out. Lotor’s responding chuckle was well worth the embarrassment, and Lance bashfully ducked his head, rubbing the back of his neck as he mentally screamed.

This was like… Lance’s childhood dreams come true! A fantastical dinner in a beautiful fantasy garden with a hot guy who happened to be a Prince. Quiznak. Maybe for one night Lance could forget about who Lotor truly was and just enjoy himself.

And what did he do? Just say ‘uh.’ Ugh! He was such an idiot. Not that Lotor seemed to mind as he
Well, it wasn’t like Lance could reject him, now could he? Besides, he doubted Lotor was inviting him to die. His hand fit perfectly against Lotor’s, and it didn’t matter how well Lance’s skin tone hid blushes, he was certain Lotor could see it when he raised Lance’s hand to brush his lips against Lance’s knuckles.

“You look stunning.” Lotor’s voice was a low purr, and Lance would be lying if he said it didn’t do anything for him. Why was denying Lotor’s affections and advances a good idea again?

“You took my breath away.” Lance admitted, almost shyly. He’d never been one to be shy, but suddenly, standing in this garden with Lotor looking at him the way he was… Lance felt like it.

“I think you’ll find there’s several things in here that will do that.” Lotor replied. “And, I assure you, I am the simplest thing here that will.”

“Oh? Gonna give me a royal tour?” Lance teased. Lotor laughed again, the sound literally reminding Lance of sunflowers and sunlight.

Lance took a half step back, and the prince allowed it, gently lowering Lance’s hand as he did so. Lance needed to be careful. Despite his earlier brief wishes of just enjoying the night, he needed to remember where he was, and who he was here with.

He was playing with fire here – literally – and he couldn’t afford to mess up. The feelings he was having right now… he couldn’t act on. He needed to stay firm.

Maybe if Lotor wasn’t the prince of the Galra empire. Maybe if Lance wasn’t technically part of the resistance. Maybe if things were different…

“If that is what you would like; your wish is my desire.”

Lotor offered Lance his arm. Lance considered it for a moment, but ultimately, he didn’t really have a choice but to take it. Actually following through on that was easier than Lance would have thought. It was surprisingly easy to force himself to press up against Lotor. They fit together like puzzle pieces, perfect.

It was like Lance was made just for Lotor; or like Lotor had been made just for Lance. They were made for each other.

…and that was sickeningly sappy. Lance needed to get ahold of himself. Ugh, what was with him today?

Thankfully Lotor was more than happy to provide a distraction. “These gardens span a decent sized portion of the ship.” Lotor informed Lance, setting off at a slow leisurely rate down the path. “They’re used in part for life support purposes but also for… pleasure as well.”

“Pleasure, you say?” Lance inquired, looking up at Lotor. Lotor smiled down at him.

“Mostly relaxation, although, I know some Druids have experiments and pet projects in here.” Lotor sighed. “Nbayd had been interested in poisons and toxins before his death. As pretty as some of those blossoms were, I couldn’t have been happier when Haggar called him to my father’s side.” Lotor sighed and shook his head.

“Nbayd… wasn’t he one of the Druids of the Four Directions?” Also, one of the only green based druids in existence. Green was often associated with plants, nature, and growth. It made sense that
he would be interested in growing things, even if those things were poison.

“Indeed, he was.”

Lance was quiet. After all, he hadn’t known any of the previous Druids of the Four Directions, and he didn’t know who Haggar had replaced them with. As far as he knew, the positions were still open, as Haggar was too busy tending to Zarkon to figure out who would replace her previous disciples.

“Did you know him well?” Lance questioned after a moment. Lotor shrugged with one shoulder.

“As well as I knew any of the Druids of Four Directions. They were loyal to Haggar, and through her, my father. But, as far as Druids went, he was one of the more talented in the ranks.” Lotor paused, stopping to turn to Lance and stroke his cheek. “You’re the Druid I’m most familiar with. It is my hope to one day have you at my side the way Haggar is at my father’s.”

Sorry, wait.

What did Lotor just say? That was like, Commitment with a capital ‘c’ talk right there. Like.. Lance thought he might have heard something along those lines before, but he wasn’t sure and that was all a hazy memory and… just… Lance shook his head.

“You want me to be your Haggar?” Lance asked, still not believing that he’d heard correctly.

“No, not the way I’d put it, but yes.” Lotor confirmed, as he dropped his hand, and gestured for Lance to continue walking.

“Why not Xana?” Xana, who was basically top-dog as far as Druids on this ship went. Xana, who was basically next in line to become a Druid of the Four Directions, if he so desired.

“Do you not want the position?” Lotor tilted his head, studying Lance.

“I… I don’t know.” Lance admitted quietly.

Lotor hummed as he thought about Lance’s response. “Obviously, you’re in no place for it yet.” He agreed after a few ticks of contemplation.

Lance flinched at the words, tearing his gaze away from Lotor to study the colorful blossoms surrounding them so that Lotor couldn’t see how affect Lance was by those words. “But then again, you’ve only gone through what, three movements of training? Time will help you improve.”

Huh. That made Lance feel better, sorta.

“You really think so?” Lance asked. “You really think that... that I’d be able to replace Haggar?”

Lotor bumped his shoulder against Lance’s, prompting him to look back up at the prince.

“I know it.” Lotor affirmed, smiling almost gently at Lance. “I know you’re more than capable of replacing her. When we’re done, she and my father will be standing in our shadows, their names just footnotes in history compared to ours.”

Lotor came to a stop, and then reached over to once again grab Lance’s hand and kiss the back of it.

“I can think of something better to show you than these flowers. Would you be interested?” Lotor asked.
Lance nodded, and Lotor once again gestured for him to continue walking. The rest of their walk was quiet, although, the roar of the water Lance had heard earlier was growing steadily louder. Was Lotor going to show him the source?

They turned the corner, and it was like someone had stolen Lance’s breath again.

The first thing he noticed was the waterfall. It arced through the air, helped and assisted by a rock wall with a plethora of vines and flowers growing over it. To prevent people from falling, there was a railing, which also had vines entangled in it.

Off to the side, was a small gazebo. The light gray of the gazebo was a nice contrast against the darker metals of the ship. Like the railing, vines that were growing on it, giving it living flowering curtains.

This was literally straight out of some fairytale fantasy story.

“You like it?”

Lance laughed, the sound escaping out him as he took in the sights. He wanted to go over to the railing, he wanted to look at the waterfall, he wanted to stand in the gazebo. This was fantastic!

“Like it?” Lance repeated, incredulously. “I love it! It’s beautiful!”

“Go on,” Lotor inclined his head, and stepped back, dropping Lance’s arm and allowing him free range. “This overhang is my favorite.”

Lance didn’t need permission twice, racing forward until he was at the railing. The blossoms there were a soft amber, and each one was larger than Lance’s own hands. But, those weren’t what he was there to see. He peered over the railing, trying to spot the bottom of the waterfall, and it wasn’t until he was actually hit by some droplets of water that he realized the most marvelous thing about it all.

“The water’s in reverse.” Lance muttered.

He watched it with wide eyes, not believing what he’d just said or what he was seeing. “That’s… impossible. Lo-” Lance spun around, intent on asking the prince about it only to cut himself off. His mouth went dry again, words leaving him as he looked up at Lotor. When had Lotor crept up directly behind him like this, so close they were basically touching. Lotor reached out, putting his hands on the railing behind Lance, mere centimeters away from Lance’s waist. Trapping him against the railing.

“Yes?” Lotor replied.

It seemed that all at once Lance realized the position they were in. How close they were, how… romantic the scene was. This wasn’t just dinner with Lotor. This was a date. A very nice, beautiful, romantic date.

Quiznak. He was an idiot to deny that earlier. The nice clothes should have given it away, along with Xana’s teasing.

Heat flooded his face again, and he tore his gaze away, choosing instead to look off to the side. His heart was pounding heavily in his chest, beating so loudly he was surprised Lotor couldn’t hear it. His stomach twisted again as he thought of how close they were… close enough to kiss, if Lotor wanted. If Lance wanted.
And there was the root of the problem, wasn’t it?

Lance didn’t know what he wanted. He knew who he wanted, but, both options seemed so unobtainable and farfetched, that he’d never stopped to imagine that they could be options. Keith was gone now. Out of the picture, but Lotor… Lotor did want him.

Perhaps too much, if the slimy feelings that Lance had felt before from Lotor were true.

“I have a gift for you.” Lotor was close enough that his breath tickled Lance’s cheek, making a shiver run down Lance’s spine and his stomach to clench into a ball as his heart became a thousand butterflies. Quiznak. This was a problem.

Lotor was too close, way too close, and he smelled really good – just like the soap that Lance had used, and quiznak, he liked that scent. And if Lance wanted… all he’d need to do would be just look back up at Lotor…

But no. No. Lance couldn’t. He wouldn’t. Besides he was curious about this ‘gift’. His curiosity was enough for him to peek back at Lotor.

Lotor was watching him, and it was enough to make his stomach untangle to become a bunch of butterflies again.

“A gift… for me?” Lance repeated.

This garden wasn’t a gift enough? Like, seriously, he knew Lotor wanted to spoil him ever since the conversation – which was never finished – a few quintants ago about the gladiator matches. But this garden… and now a gift?

Lotor hummed an agreement. “You’ll have to wait till after dinner.”

Finally, the prince took a step back, gesturing to the gazebo with a wave of his hand. “Come, let us enjoy the food, and company of each other.” He looked back to Lance as he finished speaking.

A romantic dinner date with a prince in a beautiful garden’s gazebo overlooking a waterfall. Quiznak.

Lotor was going to ruin him.

Chapter End Notes

For anyone interested, there'll be a Bonus Chapter on 10-02-17. :)

Also, for the record, I agree with Hunk. Allura is totally Kida. If anyone wants to talk Disney Princesses and Voltron with me, then hit me up on Tumblr. I'm going to be posting which Disney Princess (even unofficial ones) I think each character is. :D
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance's dinner with Lotor turned out to be, in fact, a date. Lotor took him on a tour of the gardens, and revealed to Lance that it is his desire to eventually have Lance at his side much like how Haggar was at Zarkon's. He took Lance to a gazebo near an outcropping overlooking a reverse waterfall, where they'd be having dinner.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Bad Flirting, Emotional Manipulation, Crying (a lot of it), Mention/Referenced character being triggered, Referenced/Mentioning of Giving Up, Self Depreciation, Feeling Trapped, Maybe Gaslighting,

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

If someone were to look up the definition of a hopeless romantic, there would be an image of Lance directly beside it. There would also be a small little footnote which would read, “See LANCE, pg. 698”. So, it went without saying that Lance was, and had always been, a hopeless romantic.

Not that anyone could blame him. He’d grown up sitting right there next to his sisters, being outvoted and forced to watch whatever Disney Princess movie they wanted to see. But what had started out as forced had very quickly become him suggesting the movies and sighing along with his sisters at all the romance and true love.

His favorite Disney Princesses were the old classics. Like, the really old classics, like ‘Cinderella’ and ‘Sleeping Beauty’. He’d go to bed humming the songs, dreaming about the day he’d either get to sweep someone off their feet, or maybe, he’d be the one being swept off his feet.

Lance wasn’t picky, to be honest.

“If you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true.” Those words had been Lance’s life for a while. He’d lived by them when he’d worked to become part of the Garrison. He’d lived by them through his time at Flight School.

And, he’d lived by them for a while for his fantasies of a love life.

His dreams varied. Sometimes they consisted of him rescuing a beautiful royal, who’d kiss his cheek in thanks. Other times, he was a flirt, wooing their attention with carefully said words. They’d swoon into his arms. He already knew exactly what necklaces and jewelry to give them.
But, he’d also dreamed the opposite.

He dreamed about being saved by charming royal. He was fine with a princess being the one to save him instead of a prince.

It was a nice alternative to him being the one to save the day: imagining someone else coming and heroically rescuing him.

Younger Lance was even willing to offer up a few kisses of thanks to his savior. He was definitely more than willing to give up his love and his heart… and, if he got some courting jewelry, he certainly wouldn’t say no to that.

“If you keep on believing, the dream that you wish will come true.” Well, Lance must have believed enough because here he was, finally, after years of dreaming… and he couldn’t have been more conflicted.

If only younger Lance had known what royalty was really like; then maybe he wouldn’t have believed so strongly. If only Lance had known how most Princesses weren’t of the Disney variety: all sweet, kind, and caring.

Allura may have been a magic space elf princess, but she was fairytale princess in looks alone. She lacked most of the gentle mannerisms of the Classic Disney princesses. She wasn’t a soft spoken flower who attracted animals like black pants attracted white dog hair. She was more like Xena than Snow White.

And… as it turned out, real life Princes were just as equally far-fetched from their Disney counterparts.

The last words he’d use to describe Lotor would be brave, chivalrous, and kind. He couldn’t imagine Lotor to be the type to face a dragon with a sword and attack it to protect his love – no, that was an image once reserved for Keith… Keith who had faced death via android gladiator to rescue Lance from being sucked into Space through an airlock.

Much like Allura, Lotor was only a fairytale prince in appearance. Appearance, and evidently courting gifts.

Corral’s words from just a few vargas ago echoed in his mind. She’d wanted to know if Lotor had given him any jewelry yet. Well, he could now positively answer that question the next time he saw her. If he ever saw her again.

Lance’s hand trembled as he reached out, lightly tracing the swoops and curves of the Galra Empire emblem crafted on the piece with the tips of his fingers.

He couldn’t tell what the metal was, but it wasn’t the warm gold of Corral’s jewelry. Instead it seemed to be made of a similar material to that which the ships were made of. A dark gray which shinned dimly in the light.

Presumably that design had been made on purpose so that the emblem didn’t outshine the true eye catcher of the piece: a thumb nail sized purple jewel. He refused to acknowledge who’s eyes the gem reminded him of. The gem hung, suspended by delicate chains made of the same metal as the rest of the necklace. The jewel glittered in the lighting of the garden.

As a matter of fact, the gem glittered almost too much.
Lance’s hands faltered as he dipped down to the jewel of the necklace, lightly touching it. There was a brief spur of energy which sparked against his fingers at the touch.

Quintessence. This gem, whatever it was, was holding corrupted Galra quintessence.

Lance licked his lips, opening his mouth to speak and then shutting it when no words came to him. He couldn’t accept this, but he didn’t have much of a choice. Where his heart had once been fluttering, now it existed as a solid lead weight.

“Do you like it?” Lotor’s voice was unusually quiet, like the prince actually cared whether Lance liked it or not.

He didn’t.

“It’s very beautiful.” Lance answered instead.

There was no point to go more into the question. He cared for the necklace as much as Lotor cared if Lance actually liked it or not. But, there was little Lance could do or say. Even if he admitted that he didn’t care for the necklace, Lotor wouldn’t care.

For once in his life, Lance knew it was better to remain silent.

“But?” Lotor prompted.

Lance’s eyes rose from the necklace to look at Lotor. He tugged his bottom lip into his mouth, worrying it. His chest still felt tight, his heart fluttering too quickly, trapped by the bones there. There was that tugging sensation again. That strange feeling of being a tug of rope in a war between desire and remorse. Between Lance’s freedom and his pleasure.

He blinked down at the jewelry, honestly not sure how he felt about it. This time when he touched the jewel, he traced it and the design almost absent mindedly.

When Lance had imagined getting jewelry like this… he’d always imagined he’d be able to turn it down. To turn down the person and continue on his life, or accept it and change his life forever. This… this wasn’t something he could turn down. Not if he planned to continue helping the resistance. Not if he planned to continue to live.

But he had to think of the connotations of accepting this gift; the consequence of his actions. Lotor didn’t present it as a courting gift, but, contrary to popular belief, Lance wasn’t stupid.

Even he knew what it meant when someone, especially a royal someone, presented a piece of jewelry to the person they liked. Especially a piece like this.

Like a record on repeat, Lance’s mantra sprung back up in his mind: Perhaps if it was someone else, perhaps a different time, a different place… a different person.

Yet, perhaps he was going about all of this the wrong way. If he had to keep denying this to himself, then maybe… maybe Lance did want this after all. Or, maybe, what he really wanted was for this to be on the soft white sands of a beach, with sun shining down, warming his skin. Perhaps, if his partner was… was… warm violet eyes and black messy hair.

Lance’s heart physically ached at the sudden scene in his head. One he refused to indulge another moment of.

In his mind’s eye, the vision shattered, the shards swept away like dust under a rug. He had to let it
go. It wasn’t going to happen. Keith had left him. He’d left Keith. Their non-existent relationship was done.

That ship sunk a long time ago. It sunk in an over-used training room, destroyed by harsh words thrown around like cannonballs, and then the wreckage was battered and beaten by asteroids and days of being left alone.

Keith, and the others, had left Lance. And Lance had left them.

He had no one back there. No one except for Blue, and he wouldn’t have her for forever. He wasn’t naïve enough to think he would.

No matter how much he wished he could just go back, he couldn’t. He couldn’t go back to Earth, and he certainly couldn’t go back to the Castle. He couldn’t even go back to the Space mall. But… Lance was here now, with Lotor, spying for the resistance.

He blinked down at the necklace again, and then blinked a few times in rapid succession, as if that would clear up the sudden blurriness in his vision. Perhaps said blurriness, and pressure building up behind his eyes, was from staring at it too long. And not from what Lance was afraid they were from.

“I’ll ruin it.” Lance answered, his voice breaking halfway through the word ‘ruin’. His hands were still trembling. The pressure behind his eyes seemed to increase. He felt like he couldn’t swallow, he couldn’t breathe.

Because Lance ruined everything. He ruined his life on Earth when he left, including the lives of his family and those he held dear. He ruined his chance with… He ruined his life at the castle. He ruined his team. Even if he didn’t want this necklace, didn’t want what this necklace stood for… he’d still ruin it.

And, for all he knew, this necklace didn’t mean what he thought it did. It was possible that the Prince just wanted to give Lance something pretty to wear around his neck.

Or a collar to leash Lance to his side. A choker to strangle Lance into submission, to remind him of his place. A courtship gift in which acceptance meant…

Lotor’s hands wrapped around Lance’s holding them, and the box, steady.

“Is that what you’re afraid of?” Lotor asked.

Lance looked up to see the white of Lotor’s teeth shown through with a smile. One of his hands slid up Lance’s arm to cup Lance’s cheek. Lotor made a soft shushing noise as he brushed away the beginning of Lance’s tears.

“Darling, I was afraid that it wouldn’t be worthy of you.” Lotor attempted to soothe. “You’re beautiful.”

Darling.

Lotor had called him ‘Darling’. That was new. New and terrifying. New, and terrifying, and something Lance wasn’t sure he was ready for. He wasn’t sure he’d ever be ready for that. Maybe in time. Maybe if Lotor wasn’t… Maybe… Maybe…

Lance took a deep shaky breath, and then turned his face into Lotor’s touch. The breath he’d taken filled his lungs with the familiar sweet scent of lilacs.
Lilacs. Huh. Lance could have laughed. Except, he couldn’t right now.

Lance didn’t like new things when it came to Lotor. New things meant change, and change wasn’t something Lance could anticipate here. He especially didn’t like the way his heart jumped at the… at the pet name.

“It’s very beautiful.” Lance repeated from earlier.

He tore his gaze away from Lotor’s and looked back down at the necklace. Once again, Lance was struck with the thought of just how much the gem resembled the color of… lilacs. The evident flower of Lance’s love life: Keith’s eyes, Lotor’s scent.

He was still absentmindedly stroking the gem, taking some measure of pleasure as the trapped quintessence resonated within him. Yes, he could understand the feeling of being trapped.

The jewel felt warm under his fingers, pleasantly so.

“Less so than you.” Lotor’s slim fingers picked the necklace out of the box, slipping it out from under Lance’s touch.

He watched it as it hung from Lotor’s hands, suspended in the air, glittering and shining as it caught the light. It felt like someone was physically holding his heart, squeezing it tighter and tighter with every breath, with every moment, with every twirl of the dangling gem. His fingers already felt cold with the removal of the jewel from under them.

Lance was willing to bet that it’d be warm around his neck. A comfortable reminder that he was wearing it. That he was now collared.

“My robes will cover it.” Lance realized aloud. He blinked, surprised in himself that he’d spoken. And then blinked again at the realization of what he’d said.

Perhaps, he could get away with not wearing it! Lotor would only ever know that he wasn’t wearing it when Lance was out of his robes.

But… what if he forgot? What if he forgot to put it back on, or worse, what if he lost the necklace?

“I don’t think it will, and if it does, then it’ll be our little secret.” Lotor replied.

Lotor stood, slipping around to stand behind Lance. His fingers were warm against Lance’s skin, contrasting against the cool metal of the necklace and the event soft lining – except for the warm jewel. Lance’s heart still felt strange, fluttering uncontrollably in his chest, and breathing was difficult.

Putting a necklace on someone was always portrayed as an intimate moment. Lance had never thought much of it when he helped his sister put on a necklace, but now that someone else was putting a necklace on him, everything was different.

“I should have given you a necklace long ago.” Lotor commented.

Lance could feel him finish clasping it, feel the softness of the cloth martial of the band, and the weight of the necklace as it settled against him. It was heavier than one would first assume, or perhaps the weight was entirely metaphorical.

“Yeah?” Lance asked. His voice sounded breathy, like he was in a daze. He supposed he was. After all, none of this felt real. It was all just some weird dream, right? But then again, a dream was a
Lotor hummed. “It compliments your form rather nicely.” His fingers stoked the skin above where the necklace sat, before sliding down over the necklace and falling to Lance’s shoulder. Lotor’s hands rested there for a moment before he pulled away, heading back to his previous seat. He hummed again, his eyes on Lance.

“Beautiful.” Lotor breathed out.

Lance wondered what was: the symbol of the Galra Empire on his neck, the tears he could still feel in his eyes, or the image of him being collared. Instead of asking, Lance plastered on a smile. “Pretty as a picture?”

“Prettier, I believe.” Lotor chuckled. “I was correct: the necklace is nothing compared to you.”

“You’re a prince.” Lance half laughed. “I’d expect nothing less than for you to be correct.”

Already, he could feel the necklace weighing down on him. Physically, the necklace wasn’t much, but mentally, it was like a ball and chain. The necklace itself was the chain, and the jewel was the ball. It took everything Lance had not to reach up and touch the jewel again.

“This has nothing to do with my ranking.” Lotor disagreed. “I know I’m not a perfect man, and there are times I am seldom correct.” Lotor paused, leaning forward and grabbing the wine glass that he’d been using through dinner and looking down into the dark liquid. “We all have our pasts, Lance, with the mistakes we’ve made that haunt them.”

Lotor smiled wryly, and then looked back up at Lance. “Would it be too terribly wrong of me to be thankful for the mistakes of your past? After all, they are what drew us together.”

Oh, Lance was well aware of the mistakes he made that led to this. He regretted every single one of them. Starting with leaving Earth.

“I’m afraid-”

“Don’t be afraid.” Lotor interjected.

“I don’t know you well enough to speak the same of yours.” Lance finished.

“You have no need to fear here.” Lotor continued. “You’re safe.” Lotor put the glass down and leaned forward, cupping Lance’s cheek again. “You’re beautiful; precious to me. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

And what did Lance pay for that protection? His soul? His heart? His sanity?

He already felt too vulnerable right now as it were. He suddenly longed for the security and comfort of the Druid robes. At least he could hide in those; blend in with the other Druids, vanish into their ranks.

But no, Lotor would never allow that. Lance would never be able to escape from him, not with this necklace. Not with what it meant. Not with what Lotor wanted from Lance.

Lance looked away from Lotor, letting his gaze drift until it fell upon some flowers near the railing protecting people from falling into the water. Something about the amber golden color of the blossoms pulled at his mind. He’d been thinking of it earlier, whatever it was.
“Has he given you any jewelry yet?” Corral’s voice drifted to him on a nonexistent breeze.

Lance grasped onto that memory and thought. He grasped and held on until he felt more like himself. Anger flared up within him, sudden and inexplicit, but it felt right. It felt normal. Lance blinked and slid his gaze back to Lotor.

“Do you give all your prospective conquests jewelry?” Lance asked, his tone souring. Lotor reared back as if Lance had slapped him.

Lotor opened his mouth to speak, but Lance didn’t let him. He wasn’t done.

“Or just your favorites? Do you whisper the same sweet nothings in their ears? Offer them the same sugared promises?” Lance drew in a shaking breath which turned into a broken laugh. “Will I be left abandoned and alone in the room next to yours; just existing to entertain you when you finally remember me again?”

The conversation from before dinner drifted into his mind. Lotor’s desire for Lance to take over for Haggar. To be what she was for Zarkon for Lotor.

“Or am I just your Druid plaything? You saw how things were with Haggar and your father, and thought you wanted it too. Do I have a purpose for you outside of that? Outside of… whatever it is you want from me?”

Because that was something that was still bothering Lance. What did Lotor want from him? Why had he decided to spare Lance on the moon? Why did he save Lance from the Druids? Why hadn’t he tried to get any information about Voltron or anything from Lance? What was Lotor’s motives? Lance needed to know.

Surely, it couldn’t have been just his appearance. Surely, it couldn’t have been just Lotor’s feelings for Lance. Surely, it couldn’t be that simple. It just couldn’t. Things didn’t work that way.

Lance stood, amazed that Lotor was still allowing Lance to continue. That the prince was allowing Lance to stand over him and look down upon him. Lance’s lip curled, the thought that had been haunting him since Lotor presented the gift slipping out through his lips.

“By wearing this necklace, is that the ‘safe’ future I accept?” Lance asked, his voice growing both in strength and volume.

“You’ve spoken to one of the harem.” It wasn’t a question, and both of them knew that. It didn’t stop Lance from nodding in affirmation.

“I have.” Lance raised his chin, standing resolute.

“Jealously twists their words.” Lotor’s voice was surprisingly calm.

LANCE narrowed his eyes at the response. It was unacceptable, not that Lance knew what was acceptable anymore. Hell, he didn’t know how he felt about Lotor anymore. It was all confusing, like a twisting hedge maze that he just couldn’t find his way out of.

“Just as it will mine when I am in their position.”

Lotor coolly regarded Lance for a moment, his almost lilac eyes trained on Lance. A cold prickle ran across Lance’s back, and he just knew what Lotor was going to say. He’d let him talk to give him the benefit of the doubt, but the moment he said what Lance thought he was going to say…
“Don’t you trust me, Lance?”

Lance wished he hadn’t asked that question. It felt like something in him was breaking every time he heard it. It felt like he was dying every time he confirmed that he did. He wasn’t cut out for this type of work… and if his next responses blew his cover, then Lance would be happy to be rid of it.

He was done. He couldn’t do this anymore. Sorry unnamed resistance. Sorry Matt. Sorry Sonali.

He hoped Sonali would forgive him if he didn’t end up walking out of here. He was done with the feelings he felt for Lotor. He was done with struggling as a Druid. He was done being some pawn in Lotor’s games. Most importantly, he was done with that question.

“I am so tired of that question.” Lance shook his head, wiping the air with his hand. “It’s not relevant here, Lotor. I’m not stupid. Not enough to believe that you’d change for me. To believe that I’m ‘it’ for you.” Lance paused to laugh.

Because the idea really was laughable.

Honestly, what had Lotor been expecting. For Lance to just accept his words when Lotor sprouted out stuff about how safe and loved Lance was here? Lance could count the number of people that had ever truly loved him on one hand, and he sincerely doubted anyone on this ship could be included on that count.

Perhaps Lotor’s affections were real. But why would a prince like Lance like that? It was unfathomable. Lotor wouldn’t change for Lance. He’d find a way to make Lance change for him. He’d find a way to shape and mold Lance to his desires, if he hadn’t already.

No. No, Lance didn’t think he’d already started. Lance’s own affections felt too real. The cause for his feelings may have been false, but the feelings themselves felt true.

Which made this all the worse, because Lance actually liked Lotor.

“Lan-”

“I’m not finished.” Lance cut him off. “I know you’ll discard me off to that damn room once you’ve achieved whatever you want from me. Like I said, I’m not stupid enough to believe otherwise. I’d hoped that you’d at least be honest with me. Trust is a two-way street!” Lance let out a sigh, shaking his head again. He pursed his lips after a moment, and stared Lotor down.

“Don’t lead me on. I don’t…” Lance huffed. He threw his hands up in the air, mimicking the movements of throwing up paper in exasperation.

He felt… tired. Mentally and physically. Lance sighed. Well, he wasn’t dead yet… he was of half the mind to continue, but instead he tried to calm down and keep his cover.

“I’d do anything for you, and I… I don’t expect the same of you. But if you’d do anything for me, even just one thing, then do this: don’t lie to me.” If there was one thing Lance wanted, it was that. That Lotor not lie to him.

Not that he expected Lotor to actually do that. The silver dripped from Lotor’s tongue too easily.

Lotor opened his mouth to speak, but Lance help up a hand, palm facing towards the prince. He shook his head. This wasn’t the time for Lotor to speak. Not yet anyways. Pressure was still building behind his eyes, and Lance hated that.
He always cried easier after crying earlier. He hoped he could at least hold off until he was done.

“I want to make this clear because I am sick of that question.” Lance started. He’d spoken the truth earlier when he said that trust was a two-way street. “I do trust you, but I trust you to be you. I trust you to lie, cheat, and kill your way to whatever you want.”

Once again, Lance had to hold up a hand to prevent Lotor from speaking. “I trust you to promise me things that will never happen. I trust you’ll leave this conversation telling me more beautiful lies, because you know that I’ll want to hear them. You asked me if I trusted you. Your Druids have asked me if I trust you. I’ll answer again, for a final time. I trust you, but no one’s ever thought to ask how I trust you.”

“You tell me not to be afraid. You tell me that I’m safe here. Then you ask me to trust you, to trust those words. It’s because I trust you that I don’t trust them.”

Like the verbal vomit exploding from Lance’s mouth, wetness started to drip down his cheeks, leaving salty trails shining in the strange lighting of the garden. The trails stopped at the scales, and traveled along the edge, like raindrops meeting a crack in glass.

Lotor didn’t allow for a single tear to drop off Lance’s face before he was standing. Lance didn’t even get a chance to blink before his face was pressed into Lotor’s chest as the prince wrapped him up in a hug.

The hug was enough to break the floodgates, large ugly cries escaping from Lance along with tears. His body trembled, and he collapsed into Lotor’s hold, holding onto the prince if only because Lotor was the only thing for him to hold onto.

“So, this is how you really feel?” Lotor shook his head. He didn’t seem to know how to respond to any of this, like he didn’t believe the words he’d heard. “You trust me, but in all the… wrong ways. I see I’ve gone about this all the wrong way.”

Lotor’s words were faint echo of his earlier words about how he wasn’t a perfect man, and how there were times that Lotor was in the wrong. He must have realized that this was one of those times.

“I’m sorry, Lance. I should have noticed this earlier. I knew you were damaged,” Lance flinched at Lotor’s choice of words. “But I never thought that Voltron had damaged you so.”

Lance felt like his throat was closing up. He sniffled, pulling his head away from Lotor’s chest to turn it so his face wasn’t smashed. He tried to take deep even breaths, trying to steady himself. Each breath gave him a lungful of the cloying scent of lilacs.

“You should have spoken to the Druids about this. Promise me you’ll talk to Xana.” Lance made no such promise. Lotor could ask until he passed, Lance didn’t intend to open back up like this again. It hurt too much. Physically, mentally, and emotionally.

His heart hurt. His head hurt. Everything hurt. Worse yet, he didn’t quite know what had set him off. Why he’d revealed so much to Lotor. Flying off the handle wasn’t like him. He’d just been so upset, and worse, he knew if he was asked again if he trusted Lotor, he’d reveal just as much again. He was just so tired of that question.

Lotor sighed. One of his hands had moved to cradle Lance’s head; the other, Lotor ran up and down Lance’s back. “Or not.” He breathed. “I’m honored you… were able to come to me about this, Lance.”
“You’re honored that I trusted you.” Lance corrected. His words were slurred from being held against Lotor, but the prince understood them nonetheless. Lotor let out a half laugh which was more a sharp exhale of breath than anything.


“Especially then.” Lance confirmed.

“Alright.” Lotor’s voice quieted as he spoke. “I can do that for you, pet.”

The necklace around his neck was no necklace. It was a collar. A reminder of who Lance belonged to. The nickname Lotor just called him confirmed it. He was no ‘darling’. He was ‘pet’. A pet Druid, a passing fancy. The flavor of the week.

Lance closed his eyes. Hearing that confirmation didn’t make things better, but Lotor had done as Lance had asked. He hadn’t lied to him.

“I never lied about your beauty.” Lotor muttered. “It was one of the things that first drew me to you. That and how emotional and expressive you were. I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but few here are as lively as you.”

“Beauty,” Lance began, choosing to only focus on that for now; because the rest sounded too real for Lance to deal with, “is in the eye of the beholder.”

Now that his tears and sobs were fading, he could feel the numb coldness that often followed an emotional breakdown like that. The cool apathy was welcomed. “And love,” Lance scoffed, as if Lotor could love. “Love is blind.”

Lance listened to Lotor’s heartbeat. It was strange to think that something that sounded so warm and so human was so far from it.

“Wise words, but, in this case they are wrong. Anyone who denies your beauty must be blind.” Lotor argued gently.

“Mmn.” Lance was quiet for a couple minutes. “Perhaps you’re the blind one. I am damaged after all.”

“You’re upset about the choice of wording, it’s the truth. Besides, I prefer damaged. There’s something appealing about taking someone broken, and rebuilding them; of helping them flourish and grow.”

Rebuilding them, right. Because Lance was being rebuilt right now.

Lance sighed. “I want to stop hurting.”

“Then let me take away the pain.” Lotor shifted, tilting Lance’s head back so the other was looking up at him.

He cupped Lance’s cheek, briefly stroking over Lance’s scales, but not keeping his touch there long enough for any feelings to show through, which was actually kind of sweet. He wasn’t forcing his emotions on Lance. Not that it’d really affect Lance’s emotions, but he supposed it was the thought that mattered.

“Let me take care of you.” Lotor whispered. He dipped his head down, stopping just centimeters
after from Lance.

After the emotion breakdown that Lance had just gone through, he couldn’t believe this was happening. But it was. Worse, it seemed to be working on him.

The strange feeling was back in Lance’s stomach. It was in his stomach, in his head, in his heart, in his lungs… He took a shuttering breath, and released it. He was tired. He was so tired, and here was Lotor, offering to take that away. If only Lance would let him.

If something sounded too good to be true, then it usually was. But Lance knew what he was getting into here if Lance agreed. Perhaps he didn’t know exactly what, but he had an idea, and sometimes, an idea is enough.

He was just so tired, and he was only human. Except he wasn’t human anymore, was he? But he was still entitled to mistakes, and if that was what this ended up being, then so be it.

He’d add it to his ongoing growing list. Because as much as he wanted to keep fighting the good fight… Lance was so tired. Fighting against everything was tiring. Fighting against himself, and his own desires was tiring.

The effort and energy put into this fight could be put elsewhere. It could be put into his training. It could be put into his spying. It could be put to better uses. He was done with this fight, at least for now. At least for this exact moment.

The next breath Lance took was calm and steady, even as his heart felt like it was going to burst through his chest. One tick was all it took to decide. One tick, a little over a second for him to make a choice.

Lance’s eyes slipped shut as he leaned up the remaining few centimeters.

Chapter End Notes

Friendly Reminder: Bonus Chapter on Monday, October 2. :)

OH! If anyone is interested, they can see what the necklace looks at by looking at Ghost Remnant’s Druid Lance picture HERE!
Bonus: Uninvited

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: The continuation of Lance and Lotor's date. Lotor gave Lance a necklace, which Lance viewed more as a collar than a necklace. Lance had an emotional breakdown, where he laid his emotions bare for Lotor.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Referenced/Mentioned Stalking, Referenced/Mentioned Unfaithful Relationships, Referenced/Mentioned Sorta Voyeurism, Referenced/Mentioned Privacy Invasion

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ezor sighed, resting her hand on her hip as she looked up to the empty commander seat where Lotor usually sat.

When their prince had originally been exiled, his father had left him several ships to use at his disposal. One of which was the cruiser that Lotor favored with his generals at the helm. The other was an old Druid based experimental ship, which functioned more of a base that Lotor could return to. There were others, but those were the two ships Lotor seemed to use the most.

Although, compared to how much use the cruiser saw, the command ship seemed practically abandoned by Lotor. Not to say that he didn’t use it, because he did, but it was very clear that he preferred his cruiser.

Given his harem’s location on the command ship, it wasn’t unusual for Lotor to disappear for a few days to the other ship to tend to them – or more accurately for them to attend to him. However, it was unusual for him to be returning back to it so often, and staying there for as long as he was.

While he wasn’t always the most open with his generals, usually he at least would be nice enough to tell them things. Sometimes he made them prompt, but usually he was good about not treating them the way his father treated his generals.

Lotor’s treatment of herself and the other generals was something that had first driven Ezor’s loyalty to Lotor.

Most people looked at her and saw ‘half-breed’ or ‘hybrid’. They might not have said it, but she could see it clearly in their expressions and tones. She was looked down upon. A traitor to her mother race and a waste of blood to her father race.

But Lotor… when he looked at her, it was never with anything less than a thoughtful glance. He
didn’t look at her and see ‘half-breed’ or ‘hybrid’. No, he looked at her and saw her, and her potential. He’d picked her up off the ground – almost literally as no one ever wanted to give a half-breed the time of day, let alone a job – and took her in.

Now when people looked at her, the first thing they usually saw was the symbol on her chest and the Empire’s emblem on her shoulders. People didn’t look at her like she was something disgusting caught under their shoe, but in fear and awe – if she let them see her to begin with.

And it was thanks to Lotor that she was where she was. He seldom disrespected her or the other Generals. So long as they remained loyal to him – and Ezor couldn’t think of any reason that she’d not be loyal to him when he’d done so much for her – then he didn’t have a problem with them.

As a matter of fact, so long as they remained loyal and did what Lotor asked, he didn’t care what they did. So, times when he went to the command ship to check up on XYZ or his harem was usually free time.

And while Ezor would never complain about free time, they’d been given an awful lot of it recently. Sure, Lotor would send them off to do his errands, but it wasn’t the same as when he was with them.

Lately he’d seemed so preoccupied, and worse, he wasn’t talking with them about what it was keeping him. It just wasn’t like him. And while Ezor trusted him – really, she did – she just didn’t like him closing up on his Generals like this. They were a family, right?

She sighed again, this time prompting Acxa to look up from her station where she’d been running diagnostics, again, for lack of anything else to do. Narti and Zethrid were both on the other ship, presumably off terrorizing the poor sentries.

“If you’re so bored here, you can always go aboard the other ship.” Acxa huffed before returning to her screens. Kill joy.

But Acxa was right. If Ezor wanted, she could go onto the Druid ship herself and see what was going on. After all, there was nothing saying that they all had to stay on the cruiser.

And it wasn’t like Ezor hadn’t been on the other ship before. The last time she’d been on the ship it’d been to visit the harem to see if any of them would catch her fancy. Lotor didn’t mind his generals using his harem within reason and with a few exceptions.

Like that Princess from Demos. Like, honestly, Ezor didn’t know what Lotor saw in her besides her pretty face. Ugh, if she wasn’t off limits, Ezor didn’t think she’d be interested in that princess.

She supposed she could go and see if Lotor had made any changes to his harem. Generally, he kept it small, filled with the people that he could see himself eventually returning to bed with every so often, if only to ease his own personal loneliness.

He didn’t mistreat his harem in any way, beyond the fact that it was a harem. Ezor supposed that Lotor’s strange desire to ‘take care of’ the harem was his way of ‘making up’ for the fact that he used them all in some way, shape, or form.

In any case, not all harem members remained. Some chose to succumb to quintessence poisoning, not because of Lotor, but because of their own personal demons. Other’s asked instead to be put to use for the Empire and were given over to the Druids.

While their ends weren’t always the most pleasant, at least they lived in luxury and safety before they left, however they decided to leave.
In any case, Lotor’s harem changed perhaps every half a deca-phoeb or so. The newest addition that Ezor had heard about was that bratty princess from Demos, so the chances of there being someone there to interest Ezor was slim to none.

Besides, she wasn’t really feeling it right now.

She debated her options for a moment – a word Lotor had brought back to them after one of his undercover stints – before ultimately deciding to explore the ship. It wasn’t like there was anything new to discover, but it was fun to go through people’s stuff and snoop around. That was always different, and she needed to catch up on the latest gossip anyways.

There were certain people who were always on board, like the Druids – although Ezor didn’t usually snoop through their stuff – or the bridge officers; and they usually had interesting tidbits of information stashed away in their stuff.

Like, for example, Bridge Officer Sonali had a ‘mysterious admirer’, aka: Private Glaucia, who was constantly littering her locker and room with love notes. Last Ezor had heard, he was worried about being transferred off the ship soon and didn’t want to leave Sonali behind. Poor thing had no clue that Sonali burned most of the letters in the incinerator. Apparently, she had no desire for love, or to find out who was so infatuated with her.

Oh, and then there was Bridge Officer Bmuth who was having an affair with Sentry Thrak. Which was interesting considering that Bmuth was married to Bridge Officer Kynia in secret. Speaking of Kynia, last Ezor checked, he was cheating on Bmuth with Captain Goud – Bmuth’s brother.

Oh, and then Sentry Alxc was totally crushing on Lotor AND on Zethrid, and wrote very, very, very, interesting little stories about the three of them.

Now, Ezor considered herself fairly flexible, but she was pretty sure she couldn’t even do some of the position described there. Also, Zethrid was not sugary sweet and most certainly did not smell like either Furë a kuqa or Seksi fruit. Ezor couldn’t confirm this, but she was also pretty sure Zethrid didn’t taste like Seksi fruit either.

If anyone ‘tasted’ of Seksi fruit, it was Lotor because if there was Seksi fruit in the vicinity, then by the time he left there’d be none. She couldn’t confirm it, and he was denying it, but Ezor was about 99% certain that Lotor had been the one to eat her last Seksi Pastry Puff.

In any case, it wasn’t like there was a shortage of things for Ezor to do on the other ship. There were options that were way more entertaining that the vast emptiness of space and Acxa’s personality.

Besides, she could hit up Lotor’s personal rooms and see if she happened to stumble across whatever had captured Lotor’s attention so thoroughly lately.

Her mind made up, Ezor practically bounced as she headed for the airlock to board the command ship. Acxa didn’t even look up as Ezor exited.

Maybe she should have said something, but… oh well, Acxa would figure out where Ezor had wandered off to eventually.

Her journey in the ship was largely uneventful, but then again, she was also invisible. That tended to help with not causing any incidents in the halls. It also helped that it was around dinner time, and while there were grumbling guards on duty, security was more relaxed.

Which technically shouldn’t have made sense because, hello, Prince Lotor was on board… but
then again, Prince Lotor was on board and if there was anyone who could handle himself, it was
Prince Lotor and his Generals. They’d take out an enemy before the guards could even think to
shoot.

In any case, she decided to swing by Lotor’s rooms first. As enticing as finding out more about the
drama of the various bridge officer’s lives, she was more interested in what had been affect her life.

Besides, Lotor deserved to be snooped. He was keeping things from his Generals. Like, who did he
think he was? The prince of the empire?!

Ezor snorted quickly at her own private joke. Too bad none of the other Generals would care for it.

The door slid open with a quiet swoosh and Ezor grinned to herself as she stepped inside.

If she wasn’t such a beloved and valued General of Lotor’s, she was pretty sure that Lotor would
have murdered her long ago… with love and affection. Especially since she had a habit of snooping
through his stuff. A habit he allowed only because she snooped through other people’s stuff as
well, and often found interesting information that sometimes Lotor liked to hear.

“Let’s see here.” She half sung out as she bounced through the prince’s room. She raised an
eyebrow at the general disarray, which was definitely unusual for Lotor. He usually liked the room
much more orderly than this, and Ezor would know.

This was far from the first time she’d been in his room. How scandalous! She giggled to herself,
only to cut that off as she realized the books on the table were Druid books.

“Druid books?” She muttered, flicking through one idly.

She tsked quietly, shaking her head. Was their wayward prince thinking he could do Altean magic
again? Silly little weblum. Ah well, if their prince was aspiring, again, to do magic, then who were
his Generals to try to stop him and remind him of his past failures?

Awh, who was she kidding? Gossip could wait. She needed to nip this in the bud before Lotor
became grouchy and depressed. She could go out and try to find him… after all, it wasn’t like this
ship was huge, but…

Why do that when he was bound to return to this room eventually?

She jumped over the back of Lotor’s couch, and landed on a pillow. She blinked, looking down
almost comically at the pillow and the blankets spread out on the couch.

Pillows and blankets on the couch? Books on Druid magic? Room in disarray? None of this made
sense for Lotor… Ezor gasped, her eyes widening.

It wasn’t Lotor who was trying to learn magic! He must have found a Druid to become his
‘Haggar’! Wow. For someone who was all ‘I am not my father’ he sure did like to follow in his
footsteps.

She jumped back over the back of the couch, scrambling for the door.

She needed to tell the others about this! They totally needed to tease Lotor about this next time he
was in a good mood. She needed all the details: how they met, when they met, when was Lotor
planning on introducing them, and when was the wedding?

She didn’t care what Lotor said, Haggar and the emperor were totally married. Okay?
Was the Druid a male, a female, neither, or both? Did they wear dresses? What colors would the wedding be? Traditional dark colors? Lotor’s colors? The Blue and Orange would look nice together, especially tied with dark gray or that almost purple on their uniform.

Ohh! She was so excited! She needed to tell the others, but where could they be? There was always the chance that Narti and Zethrid were out roaming the halls, terrorizing the sentries, but it was dinner time. There weren’t many sentries for them to terrorize.

Which meant… The Gardens!

Narti liked the gardens, as she liked to touch and feel the plants. Kova liked the gardens too because he could run and play through the flowers. And where ever Narti was, Zethrid was probably close by since she could only stay entertained for so long without being able to kill the few sentries on duty.

This in mind, Ezor skipped, invisible, over to the garden. She frowned at Sonali, who wasn’t on the bridge where the bridge officer should be, before easily bypassing around her. Poor thing was so tired she was practically sleeping on the job.

Ezor would have to look into making sure that Private Glauca was transferred. Maybe that’d make some things easier on her.

Ezor had been right, unsurprisingly, about where her comrades were. She usually was, after all.

She found the other two generals, in one of the higher parts of the garden. “Heya girls!” She chirped becoming visible again. Zethrid spun around from the railing where she’d been looking down at something and pressed her finger to her mouth.

“Shh!” Zethrid hissed before turning back. Ezor blinked, and then joined the other two at the railing, looked down and…

She slapped her hands over her mouth to hold in her gasp. Quietly she bounced, mentally screaming. How quiznaking cute!???

“Acxa!” She half whispered, half screamed into their communicator devices. “Acxa~!”

“Yes?” Acxa ground out.

“Have you seen Lotor’s new little pet Druid!? He’s positively adorable!” She continued to whisper scream to the last general.

“…Stop spying on our prince.” Acxa replied firmly. Ezor pouted, sighing dramatically as Zethrid quietly laughed at her.

“But Acxa~. He’s so cute!” Ezor leaned forward on the railing, trying to get a better look at the Druid as Lotor tried to put on some moves. Awh! No wonder Lotor had been so distracted lately! He had this adorable little Druid to return to.

How could he hide this from them!? Did he think they’d tear the poor thing apart? Ezor eyed Zethrid. Well, she might, Ezor mentally amended. But if he really was a Druid worth replacing Haggar over, then Zethrid shouldn’t be a problem to the Druid.

Narti’s arm was suddenly around her waist and she was pulled back. She pouted, and then brightened up, dancing away from Narti’s hold. “I could just go down and see them!” She sung, turning invisible as Zethrid tried to catch her.
“Quiznak.” Zethrid muttered. Narti could probably find her, but the other general was more than content to let things be, evidently.

She snuck down to the gazebo where Lotor had guided his new pet Druid to, saying something about a meal. She peered cautiously between some of the foliage and watched the two of them. The Druid didn’t seem to know how to react to Lotor, but clearly liked him.

How adorable!

She mini squeaked, and then froze as Lotor’s sharp gaze looked over to where she was hiding. He narrowed his eyes, and stared at the spot for a moment before turning back to pay attention to his Druid.

Uh-oh. She was caught. There was no way he didn’t know it was her.

Well, Brightside, Lotor was having a date so he couldn’t march over to her and throttle her yet, and because they were eating, the Druid didn’t seem to have caught Lotor’s glance in Ezor’s direction.

Huh. Maybe Lotor had been right to keep him from his Generals then. The Druid must have been a newbie if he hadn’t sensed her. Stupid Druids and their abilities to sense crap. It made it so difficult to sneak around!

Thankfully, it was a dinner, so the Druid didn’t seem to catch Lotor’s glance in Ezor’s direction. He must have been a new Druid too if he hadn’t sensed her. Druids were such a pain to sneak around!

Idly, she pulled a flower down off its stalk, playing with it as she listened to some of their dinner conversation, only to drop said flower and squeak again when she caught the name.

Lance?!

As in the Blue Paladin of the Blue Kitty? The same Lance that Lotor had purposely allowed to go free? The Lance that Lotor had been speaking to practically nightly to help gain trust, favor, and awesome inside information? The Lance that had been radio silent for like ever now, and had legit upset Lotor with said silence?

That Lance?!

She had no clue that Lance was Altean! Although, that did explain why he was a newer Druid. AND, that also explained Lotor’s interest in him!

Okay, never mind her thoughts about it making sense why Lotor hadn’t shared yet. This new information made it downright rude of Lotor not to share! Especially since he’d been such a grouch when Lance had stopped calling him.

Rude! He was so rude! Ugh!

Although, why was Lance here? And training to be a Druid no less?

Wasn’t he a paladin of Voltron? Piloting the Blue Kitty? Then again, when they’d watched Voltron fighting the Robeasts lately before they’d lost them, the Blue Lion was always the last to join the battle. Sometimes she didn’t join at all. Was Lance being here the cause of that?

Was that why Lotor was all like ‘observe, don’t interact?’
Well, this explained so much, like Lotor’s lack of interest in that little detail! Every time she, or one of the others, tried to bring it up to his attention, they’d been expecting some form of interest. Yet he’d just brushed it off.

Now they knew why!

Okay. So, now she really needed to get some information on this ‘Lance’. She stealthy crept back out of the gardens, once again sliding around Sonali – she had to make another mental note to get that taken care of – and headed for a terminal that she could download some information from.

She scrolled through the data on Lance, and shook her head. “How horrible.” She muttered. “Poor thing.” No wonder Lotor liked him so much, if there was one thing Lotor liked more than useful pretty things, it was broken useful pretty things that he could put back together.

But still… she tsked. To be betrayed by his team like he had… well, she just couldn’t believe it. Thankfully, Lance was in better hands here with Lotor. Lotor would take care of Lance. It might take Lance a while to see that, which was why Lance was in the very capable hands of the Druids.

Or not so capable since she was able to dig up under some classified information using Lotor’s key – which he knew she knew – to pull up. Poor Lance wasn’t taking to the conditioning very well, but, it seemed like Xana had found a solution. At least for now.

She’d keep an eye on it, although she had faith in Lotor – and to some degree the Druids.

Voltron had blinded Lance, but between the Druids and Lotor, Lance would be able to see the truth. It was only a matter of time before Lance stopped fighting them. He’d already started to stop, from what she’d seen in the gardens.

Now, she just needed to wait for when Lotor would return to the cruiser to tease him about this. Oooh, Lance would look so pretty in Lotor’s colors. Especially since it looked like his eyes matched Lotor’s uniform.

Ah, it was like it was meant to be!

Ooooh! She couldn’t wait to meet the Druid! Hopefully, it’d be soon, she was dying to meet him.

She closed out of the information, and tapped her finger against her chin. She had a bit to wait before Lotor showed up at the cruiser, sooo, she could probably fill that time with snooping. She did need to find out what had happened with Bmuth and that situation… she also needed to find out about Glauc.

All of which she was able to do, have Glauc transferred out on the next transfer, and still have time to spare before Lotor showed up – the next morning – and when he did, he was frowning. But not the ‘I’m disappointed with you’ frown, but the ‘I’m actually unhappy’ frown.

“Awh, did your dinner not go well with your little Druid?” She teased. Acxa shot her a look, but didn’t say anything. Zethrid sighed.

“Ezor.” Lotor’s voice alone was a warning.

“Secrets, secrets are no fun! Secrets, secrets hurt someone!” Ezor sung out. “Did you really expect me not to get curious? Nothing usually holds your attention like this.” She paused. “Well, Princess Corral did for like a movement, but then you seemed to be bored with her.” She hummed.

“Actually, you seemed to get bored with her right after…”
Her eyes lit up, and she could see from Lotor’s face that she was right. She grinned.

“OMG! You actually like him! You have since you met him when you were undercover!” She cried out. “That’s. So. Cute!” She cooed.

“Ezor. If you value your life and position, I suggest you stop.”

Awh, how cute! He’d already regressed to threatening her life and her position. He hadn’t stooped that low in years without major baiting from her. Not that he’d ever do it.

She tsked, and sat on a blank spot on the console. Lotor had it specifically put there for Kova and herself. “I’m just teasing.” She sighed. “He’s totally adorable. I approve. So, when do we meet?”

“Never, if you keep this up.”

“Awh! Don’t be like that. But fine. I’ll behave… for now. But if this gets more serious, then I wanna meet him!” She grinned. “I’ve been wanting to talk to him since I first heard you guys talking!”

Lotor sighed, and sat down in his chair, sprawling out on it. “If you must.” He droned, before continuing. “Currently he’s emotional. I don’t think it’d be in anyone’s best interest for him to meet you lot yet.”

Emotional? Yeah, she supposed that made sense. “That might be the quintessential conditioning you’ve authorized on him.” She paused to give Lotor a half flat look. “If things go south…”

“They won’t.” Lotor growled. “His emotions are true, we’re just helping him realize that. Now this discussion is over, understood?”

She sighed and shook her head. “Only if we get to meet him soon, kay?” She asked. Lotor glared at her, but after a moment, nodded his head.

“Very well.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey Guys! As a head's up, today's 'actual' Chapter might not be posted till a bit later than usual.

Also, this Chapter was about 90% Beta'd but Ghost got caught up in some stuff and wasn't able to finish reading through this. I skimmed through it as I posted it, but I've been known to miss mistakes before. Let me know if you see anything, please. :)

Also, Kudos to anyone who figures out the reason why Ezor's calls Lotor some of the things that she does.

Also, Skiewrites requested a POV Prompt from Haggar's POV of her thoughts on Lotor and her 'replacement'. You can check it out on my Tumblr here.
Interlude: Rumor

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: Ezor snooped through Lotor's stuff and discovered that he'd taken a Druid in under his wing. In going to inform the other Generals, she inadvertently witnessed the Garden Date, and spied some on it before finding out who Lotor's new Druid was. Upon discovering the Druid's identity, she left to research him, and then waited to 'tease' Lotor.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** None (I think)

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith sighed, watching with no small amount of amusement and irritation as Allura tried, once again, to convince the Blue Lion to accept a new Paladin. If it wasn’t for the fact that the Black Lion was still completely unresponsive, Keith was sure she’d be trying to bargain with it as well. Probably for the better that she couldn’t. One pissed off Lion was more than enough.

Sitting on the ground next to him was Pidge. She had needed a break from the broken remains of the communication device, and was running through some diagnostics on Blue.

He didn’t know exactly what she was looking for, but he knew that she was trying to see if there was something wrong in Blue’s code that was causing her to turn more and more hostile towards her pride ma- the other Lions and the Paladins.

Hunk had retreated a while go, citing that he was unable to watch this anymore. Not that Keith blamed him. This whole situation was kind of a mess.

Hopefully Hunk had headed to the kitchen. During his time in the desert, Keith had eaten some questionable things, but even he was getting kind of sick of all the space goo. And while he couldn’t be certain, he was pretty sure that everyone else was too – including the Blade of Marmora members on board.

The Blade of Marmora guys were a new addition to the ship. They’d hailed the castle a couple days ago and offered their assistance since they’d noticed how Voltron seemed to be struggling.

And it wasn’t like they were wrong. Voltron was struggling, but what else could people expect when they were missing two paladins and had two out of commission lions: one of which was despondent, and the other being more temperamental than Red.
Despite her original misgivings about the Blade of Marmora, Allura had welcomed the help. Honestly, they all had.

Blue growled, her eyes flashing as she regarded Allura. Keith wasn’t always the best with people or creatures, but even he could feel the hostility wafting off her with each threatening rumble of her growls. In the back of his mind, Red rumbled her own warning, although it was directed more at Blue.

Red been disgruntled about Blue ever since she attacked Red the other day during a battle. Not much harm had been done, but…it was fact that Blue had attacked at all that bothered Red; and to make matter’s worse, Blue didn’t show any signs of ceasing her behavior. She was becoming more and more unruly and dangerous as the days went by.

Now, Keith didn’t disagree with Allura and the others on the point of there being something wrong with Blue. The thing was, he didn’t think antagonizing Blue was the way to fix the problem. That just seemed like asking for trouble. As someone who was evidently the ‘chief authority’ on asking for trouble, he was pretty sure he knew what he was talking about.

But it wasn’t like he had any other suggestions or ideas to offer up beyond ‘finding Lance’. And until he had an alternative suggestion that wasn’t the evidently impossible, then no one was going to listen to him.

Red ‘pawed’ at him, mentally brushing up against him to get his attention. Despite her growls, it didn’t seem like Blue was going to attack Allura anytime soon, so Keith turned his attention to the strange mental connection he shared with Red.

Red had an idea, or maybe Green had the idea, and was using Red to pass it to Keith since Pidge was still deaf to her lion unless in the heat of battle. It was hard to understand exactly what the Lions were saying whenever they decided to play telephone. And man, did they love to play telephone.

Keith closed his eyes, sinking back into Red for her to pass the message along better. He frowned, trying to keep up with the feelings, thoughts, and ideas flying around. There was just too much, and he couldn’t understand them.

“I don’t get it.” He muttered to Red.

“Yeah, me neither.” Beside him, Pidge sighed. Keith ignored her, instead choosing to focus on Red’s irritation.

Red dug through his memories, the sensation more than a little painful since she wasn’t exactly careful. The memory she pulled up was dull and faded, most likely as a result of time and the fact that he didn’t have Red to help him preserve his memories at the time.

Keith watched as they all found the Blue Lion. Lance knocked on the particle barrier, and then it fell down. Yeah, he knew that. What was so special here?

Red snarled with frustration, and replayed the scene. Lance was saying something stupid, and then he just walked up and knocked on the barrier and… yeah, Keith still didn’t see what was so special about it.

She growled and dove back into his memories, digging through more recent ones until she found the battle with Druid on the hidden Galra base. She replayed the scenes with the glowing containers, and then the magic that the Druids had used.
The next memory was also faded, but it was when Allura was talking about the lions. What had she said? Something about more than science could explain… No! She said something about a mystical bond!

Maybe something was wrong with that bond!

Red’s responding purrs were so strong that Keith felt like he was vibrating. Okay. That was the idea. Awesome! Now to convey it to the others without seeming like he was crazy.

Which was harder than it sounded, especially since Keith wasn’t always that good with people. Like, he tried, he really did, but there were things that just didn’t make sense to him, like Lance’s stupid cheer, or half the references Lance made – although he appreciated that Lance tried to explain them to him.

He’d have to just try. Maybe he’d come across crazy, or maybe he wouldn’t. But now he had an alternative option than provoking Blue. Maybe Allura would listen to him now.

“Hey Allura?” He called out, bouncing off the wall and walking towards the princess. Above them, the Blue Lion growled threateningly, her tail flicking back and forth in her agitation.

“Not now, Keith.” Allura called back before resuming talking to Blue in a quiet low voice. What she was saying Keith didn’t know, but he wished she’d stop. Whatever she was saying was clearly upsetting the lion.

“No, I think I have an idea!”

“We are not wasting time looking for Lance.” Allura spun around, and glared at him. Not even a second following her words, Blue’s paw slammed down on the hangar floor next to her. Allura would have fallen had Keith not raced forward to catch her.

“No, I think I have an idea!”

“We are not wasting time looking for Lance.” Allura spun around, and glared at him. Not even a second following her words, Blue’s paw slammed down on the hangar floor next to her. Allura would have fallen had Keith not raced forward to catch her.

“Careful.” He warned Allura, while glaring up at Blue.

Blue glared back down at him.

In the back of his mind, Red issued her own silent growl of threat. She would not forgive if Blue hurt her Paladin. The waves of hostility coming from Blue faltered for a second before returning full force. Keith could only imagine Blue’s response, probably involving Lance.

“Thank you, Keith.” Allura stood, looking over her shoulder at the Blue Lion. She stared her down for a moment before looking back at Keith with a sigh. “What was your idea?”

“What if we’re going about this the wrong way?” Keith asked. He could already see Allura’s eyebrows knitting together as she considered his words. He licked his lips, and took a breath for continuing, knowing that her response to the next part would not be as… friendly. “I think it has something to do with Lance.”

The change was instantaneous. Allura’s who body stiffened, her eye’s narrowing. “Lance is gone, Keith.” Allura returned flatly.

“I know that!” Keith shouted before realizing that he was doing it again. He took a breath, repeating Shiro’s motto. ‘Patience yields focus.’ “I know that.” He repeated a bit more calmly. “But that doesn’t mean Lance can’t be involved. She won’t take another Paladin because Lance still is her Paladin.”

Allura pursed her lips and looked back at Blue. “Black took another Paladin despite Zarkon still
“Well, that’s Black.” Keith huffed. “Weren’t you the one who said that the bond between Lions was mystical or something like that?”

Allura froze. “Bonds.” She repeated, spinning back around to face Keith, her eyes practically glowing. “Keith! That’s it!” She cried out.

Keith took a mini half step back, looking at Allura with some measure of uncertainty. What was ‘it’? The bonds? She was actually listening to him? He needed clarification. “What’s it?”

“It shouldn’t be possible… but I mean, I suppose!” Allura prattled on for a moment before finally explaining.

“You’re talking about the bonds between the Paladins and the Lions! If Lance is still tied to Blue, then something could be passing through that bond.” She spun back around to look at Blue. “The bond is created through a mirroring of quintessence, which is why my bond with the lions is different than the bond that you all share with yours.”

“So, this quintessence stuff is causing the problem?” Pidge called out. She was still by her computer, a safe distance away from Blue should the Lion decide it wanted to go on a rampage. “Good job, Keith!”

It hadn’t really been Keith who’d figured it out, but he couldn’t credit the Lions without seeming crazy. Well, the team already thought he was crazy to some extent, based on how Lance talked to him, but… he didn’t want to seem ‘crazier’. But not crediting the Lions seemed… wrong.

Man, was this what Lance always had to deal with? It sucked.

In the back of his head, Red rumbled. The sound felt light and airy, like she was laughing at him. Well, at least she didn’t mind him not bringing her up.

“It’s a likely cause.” Allura confirmed, she spun back around and looked up at Blue. “I think I can verify it too.”

She reached out and touched Blue’s paw. Where her hand was placed on the lion, a small spark of blue light started to glow. Allura closed her eyes, and bowed her head. Above them, Blue was still growling threateningly, although it slowly started to taper off.

Allura gasped, her head shooting up as she looked up at the Blue Lion. “This cannot be!” She cried out. “That shouldn’t be possible! How did this happen?”

“How did what happen?” Keith asked. Pidge echoed his question not too long later. “Allura?”

Allura pulled back her hand, acting as if she’d been burned. Which was total nonsense because the only burn that Keith could see Blue giving was freezer burn. She was blinking up at the Blue Lion, her mouth dropped almost comically open.

“It’s like…” She paused, knitting her eyebrows as she considered her words. “It’s almost as if the Blue Lion’s… There’s something wrong with her quintessence. It feels like the Galra crystals.”

Keith’s head erupted into pain as Red mentally lashed out at the confirmation. She wasn’t lashing out at him, but at the world in general. Keith tried to calm her down. He needed to hear what Allura and Pidge were saying, but Red was too distraught.
‘Patience yields focus.’ Keith could do this. He took a deep breath, and forced himself to ignore the Lion wreaking havoc in his mind. He’d deal with the headache she was causing later. He’d pushed himself through worse pain. This… was nothing.

“I suppose it wouldn’t be much different from purifying the Balmera.” Allura responded to whatever Pidge had asked.

“So, you can fix this?” Keith asked. He needed to know, both for Red’s sake, and the sake of his own sanity.

Allura took her sweet time responding, looking up thoughtfully at the Blue Lion. “I think so.” Allura replied. “But if this is caused by Lance, then it is now imperative that we find him.”

It should have been imperative that they found him from the very beginning.

Keith gritted his teeth, holding back his remark at this. Honestly, this was worse than when it’d been discovered that Keith was part Galra. But he was the acting Team Leader now. He couldn’t just pick a fight with Allura, no matter how much he wished to.

“Oh, get over it!” Pidge shouted. “Lance fucked up, but if his lion hasn’t given up on him, then we shouldn’t either!”

Keith turned, wide eyed, to look at Pidge. Likewise, so did Allura. Unlike Allura, however, Keith smiled at Pidge, nodding his head in appreciation. “Thank you, Pidge.” Keith agreed, crossing his arms as he looked at Allura. Allura pursed her lips and exhaled sharply through her nose.

“This isn’t the time, Paladins.” She remarked. “I’m going to go ahead and try to purify Blue.” She paused, looking at Keith. “I suspect you already have, but you may want to see if our guests have heard anything new about our missing Paladin…s.”

Keith wanted to comment on her near slip up, but at that point he’d be displaying Lance levels of pettiness; and without Lance, Lance-levels of pettiness just wasn’t the same. Besides, he didn’t need to start a fight, which is why Keith shrugged and nodded.

“Sure.” Keith walked towards the doors to the castle proper. Maybe he could also find Slav and see if he could get any relevant information from him. “Pidge, could you help out Allura in any way you can. I’ll go check with our ‘guests’.”

“Will do!” Pidge chirped. As the door shut behind Keith, he could hear Pidge explode into a thousand and one questions, presumably on quintessence and the ‘bond’.

Keith headed to the main bridge where the two members of the Blade of Marmora members onboard the castle usually gathered. His walk through the castle was blissfully quiet. Even Red had quieted, evidently calmed by Allura’s belief that she could ‘fix’ Blue.

Keith hoped that Allura would be successful. He hoped for a lot of things. He hoped that this would stop Blue from attacking them. He hoped that whatever Allura did to Blue would be a two-way street and help Lance. He hoped that it’d be enough for Lance to come back to them. He hoped that he could have the team all back together again.

He missed the team. He missed Lance, and Shiro… and he missed how things used to be. He’d gladly listen to Lance insult his mullet again if it meant he could hear Lance again and know that he was safe.

Keith paused, looking at his reflection in one of the windows in the castle. He ran his hand through
his hair, rubbing at the ends before dropping his hand. His hair was getting kind of long… Maybe if he cut it then Lance wouldn’t pick on him about it as much?

He shook his head, turning away from the window. Lance wasn’t back yet, and Lance would probably just start boasting about how Keith finally started to listen to him or something stupid. He was being stupid.

It wasn’t like changing his hair would make Lance like him.

Not that he wanted Lance to like him. It was just… he wished they weren’t always fighting. Like, yeah, sometimes it was fun, but other times – Lance’s responses from when Keith blew up at him before he left flashed in his mind – they took it too far.

Keith stopped in front of the doors to the bridge, and took a deep breath. Lance wasn’t here now, but he would be, and then… Keith could… Keith could… And then once they found Lance, then they could focus on finding Shiro again, and then they’d all be together, a whole team, again.

But first, they had to find Lance.

Keith entered the bridge with that thought in mind, and nodded at Myklar, the taller of the Blades, when he raised his head in acknowledgment. Coran wasn’t too far from them, looking over some holographic star charts.

Keith blinked, thinking that he might have been mistaken, but he was pretty sure the star charts Coran had been looking over had been of… the Milky Way.

The star charts were immediately closed out the moment Coran noticed Keith, and he grinned, tugging at his mustache. “Ah! Number 4! What brings you up here? And where’s the princess?”

Keith frowned. Why would Coran had been looking at star charts of the Milky Way? That didn’t make any sense unless he thought Shiro or Lance had found a way back there.

Mysteries for later.

“Blue’s hangar.” Keith replied. “She said she was going to try to ‘purify’ Blue like she had the Balmera.”

Coran hummed thoughtfully for a moment. Keith mentally counted to three before he saw the realization of his words in Coran’s eyes. Coran dropped his hand, his whole body freezing. “Wait, what?”

Keith half shrugged, and then side stepped out of Coran’s way as he bolted for the door.

“Purification?” Azur, the other Blade, asked. “Why would she need to purify a Lion of Voltron?”

“She said that Blue’s quintessence was like what the Galra use on their ships.” Keith replied. “Do you know anything about that?”

“The quintessence is refined by the Druids for optimal performance.” Azur answered. “I didn’t think it could ‘infect’ a Voltron Lion.”

“One should never underestimate anything from the Druids.” Myklar rebuked. “I’ve heard some resistances refer to refined quintessence as corrupted.” He informed Keith. “The luxite in our blades helps negate most of its effects.”
As if to add on, Red thrust the image of the Druid and the glowing purple stuff back into Keith’s mind. Ah, okay. So that was what that stuff was. The more he knew. She also followed up with the image of how the Druid seemed to just… disintegrate into his Marmora sword when he had fought them.

Alright. So, Blue had weird Galra Druid corrupted quintessence in her, but how did she get it?

Allura had mentioned something about the mirroring of quintessence, and that it was now imperative that they find Lance. …Oh no. Was Lance somewhere with Druids?

Keith had barely survived his first fight with one without his Marmora sword. Shiro had unspeakable amounts of damage, both mental and physical, after one year in their ‘care’. How would Lance fair under their treatments?

Quiznak. Keith should have fought Allura harder. He should have searched more. He should have been better. Why couldn’t he just be better?

Always the ‘best’ but it was never enough. He could never keep people from leaving, he could never get anyone to stay. Not his family, not Shiro, and not even this new team.

“Do you have an idea of how the Blue Lion came in contact with it?” Myklar’s question distracted Keith from his thoughts. “If the Druids are able to influence Voltron, then this is grave news.”

Keith could work with this. He needed to work with this. He needed… He licked his lips and tried to channel someone that Shiro would be proud to come back to. “Allura thinks it has something to do with our missing Paladins.” Keith paused, looking both of the Blade of Marmora members over. “You haven’t heard anything new about them, have you?”

If the Blade of Marmora hadn’t, then perhaps they could return back to that Space Mall. Slav had basically confirmed that it was useless, but it was the only lead they had so far.

There had to be something. If not there then… Keith watched the two Blades exchange looks.

He may not have been the best with people, but he knew that move. That was the ‘we’ve heard something but we didn’t think it was important, so we didn’t tell anyone and we really should have’ move. Or the ‘we know something you don’t know’ move.

“What did you hear?” Keith demanded of them.

If they had information on Lance or Shiro, then he needed to know. He needed to get the team back together. Things were already going to hell in a handbasket. There were Robeasts scattered across the universe from where they’d run from them, and team relations was at an all-time low.

If they could just get either Shiro or Lance back, then everything would be fine. Everything would all work out.

“Just a rumor.” Azur replied.

A rumor, huh? Well, if it led Keith to either Shiro or Lance, then he was willing to listen. He made the ‘go on’ gesture, and Myklar sighed.

“Our operatives in the Empire have so far been unable to confirm or deny the rumor.” Myklar paused to give Keith a look. “It’d be folly to try to attack the Empire for just for a rumor.”

“But there was a rumor?” Keith confirmed, pressing for more information. “What was it?”
“Yes. There was a rumor.” Myklar confirmed. “Someone who was believed to be a Paladin of Voltron was found at a Swap Moon.” Okay, so that all checked out, “and was taken into Galra custody. However, we’ve been unable to find anything to support this.”

Rumor or not, it was their latest lead on where either of their two missing Paladins were, and that first part was too close to reality to be ‘just a rumor’.

Damn it! Why hadn’t they brought this up earlier? If that rumor was true, then Lance was in Galra hands… then he was with the Druids. He was probably being tortured, maimed, and experimented on, much like how Shiro was… and it was all their fault.

Quiznak!

If Keith had been a better leader, none of this would have happened. If he’d been better in the fight, had been quicker, then Lance wouldn’t have taken that hit. Lance wouldn’t be gone. Lance wouldn’t be suffering right now.

Quiznak. Now he’d failed Shiro and Lance. Why couldn’t he just be better?

“Is there any other information? Any idea that the Blades have on where a ‘possible’ Paladin could have been taken?” Keith demanded.

“You can’t be serious.” Myklar laughed before he realized that yes, Keith was serious. “With your current team state, it would be suicide to attack the Empire.”

“Our team will remain in its current state unless we do!” Keith argued, raising his voice. “Now, where is the most likely place they would have been taken?”

The two Blade members exchanged another look, and Keith growled. He didn’t have time for this! He was here arguing with these two when they could have been confirming the rumor and possibly returning another Paladin back home!

“Knowledge or Death, right?” Keith asked. “If one of our missing Paladins is there, then we need to get him out.”

“A Druid facility.” Azur quietly informed Keith. “Which one, I could not say. But if they truly believed someone to be a Paladin, then they would want to interrogate him.”

Right. And in the Galra Empire, ‘interrogate’ meant ‘tortured by the Druids’. Quiznak.

“Then I guess we’ll need to find out which one.” Keith paused. “Besides, you just said our blades are good at handling Druids.”

“A good blade does not a warrior make.” Myklar instantly replied. “Fighting Druids can be difficult.”

“I know.” Keith returned. “I’ve fought three, and won twice. Pretty good odds as far as I’m concerned.”

Now, he just needed to figure out which Druid facility their teammate had been taken to.

“Any other rumors?” Keith asked. “Not necessarily about the missing Paladins.” He clarified just in case. It never hurt to know extra rumors on the off chance that something that didn’t sound related was.
“Do you just want all the gossip?” Myklar asked. “A swap moon would be better for that.”

“Well, there’s a rumor that Prince Lotor’s been working on a new project.” Azur gave Myklar a look, as if to say ‘really’ at his suggestion. “We haven’t been able to find out anything about it.”

Wait. Rewind. What did Azur just say? Did he… Had Keith heard him correctly? Prince?

“I had wondered why he had ceased hunting our order down.” Myklar replied. “Whatever he’s working on it can’t be good for anyone.”

“I don’t know.” Azur furrowed his brows. “The Prince has seemed better than his father. I heard that under him, Demos has been allowed to maintain their government and culture.”

Myklar laughed dryly. “At the expense of that scandal with their Princess.”

“I’m sorry, did you say Prince?” Keith interrupted. “Like… Zarkon’s son?”

Both of the Blades looked at Keith, and he got the feeling that they were silently judging him for not knowing who this ‘prince’ was. But seriously, all their time spent fighting Zarkon, and not one person had thought to bring up the fact that Zarkon had a son!? 

“That would be correct. He was exiled when he was a child, but due to Zarkon’s defeat, he’s been brought back as Emperor Pro Tem.” Azur explained.

“He’s been after the Blade of Marmora for years, and has taken down quite a few other resistances and rebellions.” Myklar added on. “Despite being exiled, he still had some control in the Empire, and started to amass his own military force. I’ve heard his Generals are quite formidable.”

Okay. So, Zarkon had a son who was acting in Zarkon’s stead, and he had some sort of project, which the Blades were sure wouldn’t be good for anyone opposing the empire. Keith was willing to bet that either Lance or Shiro were involved in that little project.

Was it Shiro? Was it Lance? It didn’t matter. Whoever they were, they’d suffered enough. It was time for them to come back home to Voltron.

“Do you know where he’s doing this project?” Keith asked. The Blades exchanged another look.

“Well?” Keith prompted after a few moments of silence. Azur sighed and looked away.

“No one does.” Myklar finally responded.

“So far we’ve been able to find out that he uses two ships. One is a battle cruiser that had been outfitted for him. The other is an old Druid research ship that I heard he uses for his command base. Unlike his father’s command ship, Prince Lotor keeps his in constant motion.” Azur further informed Keith.

“And no one with the Blade knows where they are?” Keith found that hard to believe. It seemed like the Blades were all over in Zarkon’s military, even as high up as ‘Commander’. It seemed strange to think that none were in Lotor’s ‘military’.

“No.” Azur’s short response was clear enough, but thankfully he chose to continue without Keith’s prompting. “It has been more difficult to get one of our members working under Prince Lotor than it was for Zarkon. He screens his higher personnel more often, and doesn’t trust as easily. Compared to all of Zarkon’s commanders and generals, Prince Lotor only has four.”

“You can’t be seriously thinking about going after Lotor, can you?” Myklar asked.
Keith frowned, and then turned around, heading back down the hallway he’d come from without answering their question. He ignored the Blades as they started a conversation as he left, something about them not believing he was going to be doing this.

Well, they’d better.

This was going to happen, but first, he needed to know where Lotor’s ships were. Someone had to know where Lotor’s ship were, and the best place to learn that information was by hacking into Galra ships.

Which meant he needed Pidge.

Of course, like all things in the world, he just couldn’t just have a quick quiet journey back to Pidge. He just had to run into Slav.

Keith crossed his arms and glared down at the shorter creature, willing – daring – Slav to say something. As if sensing that, Slav looked up at Keith with his large eyes. Keith resisted the urge to scream, and instead sighed.

“What? Are you going to tell me not to do this?”

“Are you following your instincts?” Slav replied, which didn’t really answer Keith’s question. Keith narrowed his eyes, trying to think of where Slav could be going with that question. Why did it matter? “I’d suggest you follow those.” Slav continued after a moment.

“No percentages to give me this time?” Keith asked warily.

“You wouldn’t like them.” Slav replied, shrugging before he turned and left. Keith ran his hands through his hair, resisting that urge to scream again…. He failed.

“Can’t you just tell me for once?!” Keith shouted after him. Keith was half tempted to chase after the creature, but past experience told him that chasing after Slav would only result in frustration and pain – on his end. It wasn’t worth it.

He dropped his hands to his side, flexing them so he wouldn’t just ball them up into fists. Why was everyone testing his patience today!? It was like they were trying to annoy him! Red rumbled in his head, trying to soothe him as best she could.

He took a few deep breaths and after a moment, thanked her and continued on his way.

Hopefully, Pidge would less aggravating. He stopped outside the hangar to the Blue Lion, checking with Red to make sure that he wouldn’t be interrupting the ‘purification’. Red assured him that Blue was considerably calmer now, and that procedure had been finished. Coran had taken Allura up to her room to rest.

Perfect. No Allura meant that she wasn’t there to tell him no to this plan.

He entered the hangar, and was pleased to see that his hunch had been correct. Pidge was still running diagnostics. If he had to guess, she was probably trying to see if there was a difference in the coding now that Blue had been ‘cleansed’.

Upon seeing him, Blue let out a friendlier rumble, reminding Keith of their ‘talks’ about Lance before she’d started getting hostile and violent. Well, good to know she wasn’t going to kill him or anything while he was there.
“Hey, Pidge?” He called out. She looked up at her name. “Think you’re up to hacking into some Galra ships? We might have a clue on where to find one of our missing team members.”

Pidge’s grin was all the answer Keith needed.

Chapter End Notes

For all those wondering how Team Voltron is doing... I hope this answered your questions. :)

Also, this was, to my knowledge, unbeta'd. But I wanted to post this today as per schedule. Ghost ran into some... complications which made her unable to properly beta this chapter.

Also, anyone want to talk about the Season 4 Sneak Peek I saw floating around on Tumblr? Hit me up there, for those who don't want to see Spoilers in the comments, please.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Allura discovered (thanks to Keith and the other Lions) that Blue has been slowly corrupted by residual corruption from her bond with Lance.

Keith reached out to the Blade of Marmora members that came on board the ship for any news regarding either Lance or Shiro. The two Blades brought some rumors to Keith's attention, although they cautioned that the rumors hadn't been confirmed and would be dangerous to act upon.

Keith didn't care, and asked Pidge if she was up for some hacking to see if they could find out any more information.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Manipulation, Referenced/Mentioned Self Loathing/Depreciation, Referenced/Mentioned Suicidal Thoughts

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

Lance had never been overly religious, not like how some of his family could be.

Religion just hadn't seemed all the important to him in between family dinners, his swim practice, his brother's soccer practice, his sister’s instrument recitals, and the general mayhem of his family and everyday life.

Graduating and being accepted into the Garrison had only added more to his already hectic lifestyle; and then leaving with the others in Blue... he just never really had the time for religion.

Which, yeah, okay, blasphemy and sins. He knew. His abuelita would be in angry righteous tears if she knew this. Although, Lance had to wonder, what would upset her more: Lance’s own lack of faith, or the fact he made a deal with a devil and sealed it with a kiss?

At least, that was how it felt.

To win wars, battles had to be lost. If he wanted to win, wanted to succeed, he needed to get stuff off his plate. He needed to spend energy used on lesser battles for those greater ones.

When this was all said and done, Lance knew he’d have to face himself and what he’d done. He’d have to accept the choices he’d made, and the consequences of those choices. He’d have to live with himself and the knowledge that he’d pushed his own lines and boundaries of morality and ethics.
He was, after all, sleeping with the enemy.

Well, perhaps not that. Not yet, anyways; although, he had the feeling it was an inevitable outcome.

All they’d done was kiss. But a kiss was a kiss, and a battle lost was a battle lost. Lance just had to hope that the risk he took by losing that particular battle weighed out in the end.

Brightside, now he could focus more effort and energy into getting better at being a Druid. If he could do that, then he’d get better access to information like Projects. Maybe he could even find out more about the Robeasts and put an end to them.

Another Brightside benefit, Lance now knew where he stood with Lotor. Their relationship – if one could call it that – was a bit more defined. Evidently confiding in Lotor as he did was the right choice, as it seemed to make Lotor trust Lance more. Only time would tell if that was truly the case or not.

Either way, hurray for small victories, he supposed.

And as much as Lance hated to say it, he trusted Lotor when he promised to never lie to Lance.

Perhaps it was due to how sincere Lotor had sounded, even as he confirmed Lance’s fear of being nothing more than Lotor’s new pet Druid. Perhaps it’d been the fact that Lotor had confirmed it at all.

Of course, he was still working through how exactly he felt about all. It was for that reason that he’d hidden himself away as soon as he’d woken up the morning after the ‘date’.

Escaping from Lotor’s prying eyes was easier than Lance had anticipated. Then again, perhaps the prince had expected this and had allowed Lance this disappearance. It wasn’t like Lance was trying particularly hard. He’d gone to the one place in this spaceship he felt the safest: Lotor’s bathroom.

Like a teenage girl hiding away in a bathroom during a bad date. He knew it was ridiculous. But, the bathroom was always a strange place of sanctuary for him.

It was a place he could curl up in the shower or bath and just pretend that all of his worries were being washed away by the water and dragged down into the drain, never to be seen again. There was something calming about the gentle white noise of a shower, and water swirling down a drain. The quiet pitter patters of water droplets falling around him.

In space, this was the closest he could get to rain without trying to find a planet with it.

Not to mention, if he turned the water hot enough, then it would fog over the mirrors. Normally, this would be a travesty, as Lance wouldn’t dare deny his vanity, but lately… he hadn’t liked what his reflection was showing him.

From the too obvious signs of his new-found origins – the pointy space elf ears, and the admittedly pretty swoops of blue scales under his eyes – to the newest sign of Lotor’s ownership of him.

He had stared at his reflection for what had seemed like to him only a few ticks but what had actually been nearly a varga when he first entered the bathroom.

Lance didn’t want to admit it, but… Lotor was right: the collar choker did beautifully compliment him. The jewel still glittered, even outside of the strange lighting of the garden. However, no matter how pretty it looked, the sight of it still made Lance’s heart clench painfully.
Surprisingly, it hadn’t hurt to sleep in, but then again, Lotor had probably had it designed with the intent for it to never be taken off. Which meant it’d be comfortable. Besides, Lance didn’t even think he could remove it. When he’d felt the back, he hadn’t been able to find a clasp that he could use to take it off.

It didn’t even seem to be bothered by the shower. It seemed that this collar would never be removed.

“Lance?” Sonali called through the locked doors.

Since Lotor had left earlier this morning, Sonali had been trying to talk to him. Lotor had attempted once, before seemingly backing off. Sonali had informed Lance that the prince had gone to use a different bathroom. Probably one that belonged to the harem.

Compared to Lotor’s one attempt, Sonali had tried four or more times. Honestly, Lance had lost count.

Like every other time before now, Lance remained silent, staring at the water as it swirled down the drain.

“Lotor may be content to let you drown in there, but I’m not.”

As if Lotor would truly be okay with letting his pet Druid drown. No, the prince probably had some other way of ensuring Lance didn’t die. Maybe it was something built into his new unremovable collar?

“Water is not a renewable resource on a space ship, Lance.”

Lance blinked, the water that was caught on his eyelashes disappeared, only to be replaced mere ticks later. Lance shook his head, droplets of water flying from his hair.

Not a renewable resource his ass. There was an inverted waterfall on this spaceship. Sonali could shut their quiznak about water not being a renewable resource.

Huh. He paused, his mind catching on a specific part of that thought. An inverted waterfall… that was an unnatural thing, right?

Perhaps it was some like weird symbolism in his life that the universe was trying to show him. Perhaps it was a sign. Of what though? That he wasn’t doing the right thing? That he was in the wrong? That he was… unnatural? Or that these events were?

Well, no shit, Universe. But what other choice did he have? None. He had no choice, and this collar around his neck only proved it.

“Quiznak. How does Matt make this look so… ah-ha!” The light indicating the door’s locked status blinked out, and the doors themselves slid open. A wave of steam rolled out of the bathroom flooding the bedroom, just as a wave of frigid cold air from the bedroom invaded the bathroom.

Once upon a time, Lance would have shivered at the cold. Now, he felt it was a testament to how little he cared that he didn’t even react. Or perhaps, a testament to how much he’d changed.

“You’re a wreck.” Sonali huffed, shaking their head. They exited out of Lance’s view.

The water turned off, but Lance still didn’t respond. The water that remained was still going down the drain, and Lance watched it, wishing he could just melt and go with it.
When he was little, he used to play with the little tiny whirlpool that would sprout up from the drain in the bathtub. Sometimes he would sail his little toy ships towards it and pretend they were caught, unable to escape.

His life now was much like those little boats. The only escape he had was death.

The Voltron team wasn’t going to come for him. They’d left him on that planet, where he’d crashed Blue. They’d left him, and then only come for Blue once he’d left. It shouldn’t have been too difficult for them to figure out where he’d gone. If they’d just gone to the Swap Moon, they would have found him.

But they didn’t. Because they didn’t want to find him. Instead they’d replaced him. He wasn’t needed there. They didn’t want him there. Without Tyrac, he had no escape there; and he very well couldn’t continue talking to Tyrac after what all happened.

Tyrac didn’t even exist.

The resistance didn’t give two shits about him. They’d already stated that if he was caught, they wouldn’t do anything. If he turned on them, then they would eliminate him, or at least try to. Sonali only cared about whether their cover was blown, and if they needed to put him ‘out of his misery’.

Lotor wasn’t the escape that he’d once been as Tyrac. Instead now, Lance was seeking to escape from him. Not that he could. Unremovable collar, and dates that left Lance confused with twisting guts and a clenching heart, and all that.

There was no future for him that ended happily. He would either die here as either Lotor’s pet Druid, or a resistance spy.

He would die. He would die. He would die. He didn’t want to die. He didn’t… he didn’t…

Something warm and fluffy settled around his shoulders, and then another on his head, half covering his face. There were hands touching him, but they were gentle, rubbing the soft fluffiness against him with slow circular movements, and then wrapping him up in it.

“This was not part of my job description.” Sonali muttered.

Then why were they doing it? Lance wondered, but he didn’t ask. He felt like he’d been hit with the Kumar again. Except, it’d sucked up all of his energy instead of quintessence. Or were they one in the same? Lance didn’t know, nor did he care.

All night long, he’d been awake, questioning if he’d made the right choice. If giving in to Lotor’s advances, and his own body’s desires, had been the right idea. Not that it mattered, he’d already committed. He was stuck with his new life: Lotor’s future replacement for Haggar and bed warmer.

But Lance was more than that. He was a spy for the resistance, although, not a very good one. He was… he was…

A Failure. He wasn’t a good spy, he wasn’t a good pilot, he wasn’t a good paladin, he wasn’t a good student, he wasn’t a good Druid. He wasn’t… a good anything.

Sonali was careful as she dried around his neck, but she still hit the collar. Not that he needed a reminder of its existence, of what it meant.
Ugh. He couldn’t even be a good pet. He was betraying Lotor, and he wasn’t even good at distracting or entertaining the prince. Right now, Lotor was only interested in him because he was new. Lance was a novelty which, in time, Lotor would lose interest in.

Perhaps he’d been better off not knowing how Lotor really felt. Perhaps he’d been better off only guessing what the slimy feeling he’d get from Lotor touching his scales was. It wasn’t love. It wasn’t admiration, or care, or anything positive. It was possession. It was obsession. It was poison.

“Well, Corral will be happy to know that she was right.” Sonali muttered.

The guard was done wrapping his body up – as much as Lance would allow to be wrapped up when he refused to move – and had moved on to Lance’s hair, attempting to dry it with the towel as best they could without jostling him too much.

“I never thought I’d say this, but I think I’d prefer you talking to this, right now.” They removed the towel from his head, tossing it somewhere, probably in or near the laundry shoot. “You’re seriously starting to worry me kid.”

Huh. Maybe he’d been wrong about Sonali. Well, it was good to know that someone on this stupid ship cared for him. That there was someone in the vastness of space that cared about him.

The Voltron team didn’t – hadn’t. Lotor did to a degree – no one liked their toys being broken, of course. Oh. Wait. That was worse, wasn’t it?

Which was worse: a toy or a pet? Well, one was an inanimate object that didn’t feel. It was used and abused. Pets were at least alive, but that didn’t mean they were any less abused.

“Which is worse: being a toy or a pet?” Lance’s voice was hoarse from the shouting he’d done yester-quintant, and then his silence since then. He hadn’t meant to speak, but the question had slipped out, driven by his own morbid curiosity.

“It speaks.” Sonali said. Their voice was dry, the worry Lance had heard in it moments before suddenly gone. “And none of that talk.” They chided. “You’re a spy; not a toy or a pet. It doesn’t matter what Lotor calls you.”

But it did. It did matter what Lotor called him because Lotor owned him now, didn’t he? After all, Lance had accepted the collar, and the kiss. He’d basically surrendered. Screw winning a battle; Lotor already had the whole quizzaking war.

Why couldn’t he ever just be Lance, a boy from Cuba? Why did he have to be Lance, the Altean; or Lance, the Druid; or Lance, the cargo pilot; or Lance, the Blue Paladin? He didn’t want to be Lance, the spy; or Lance, Lotor’s pet.

But he didn’t get that choice now, did he? Once again, Lance didn’t have the luxury of choice anymore. It’d been taken from him long ago. It was just only now really hitting him and having a true impact. It was like accepting that necklace was the last straw that sent Lance into a nuclear meltdown.

“Oh, come on, kid.” Sonali sighed. “If this is about the necklace, it’s a pretty one at least? I mean, we all kind of knew the jewelry thing was going to happen eventually.”

It wasn’t about the jewelry. It was about what the jewelry meant. It was about what Lance had silently agreed to, twice. He could scream and shout all quintant long that he had no choice, but that wasn’t true. He could have died.
Instead he’d lived. He’d lived and let Blue down. He wasn’t hers anymore, or so said the collar around his neck. Or did this mean that Blue belonged to Lotor now via proxy of him?

He looked down into the fluffy towel, blinking back a new fresh batch of tears.

“Lance,” Sonali sighed. “Look, I don’t know what’s got you down, but you got stuff to do. You can’t do this all quintant.”

Sonali was right, of course. He did have things to do. Plus, he was sure Lotor wouldn’t allow this for much longer. Lance didn’t want to see how the prince would try to fix this. Lance was lucky he’d been allowed this at all for this long.

He just needed to get over himself. He needed to accept what he’d done and move on. It was the only thing he could do. It was what he had to do.

He was broken and hurt, but that was how people learned right? Sometimes things had to be destroyed to make something beautiful. Although, Lance wasn’t sure he’d be beautiful if he made it out of this all alive. Or maybe he would be as Lotor’s beautiful pet Druid.

…At least he’d be getting some awesome jewelry out of this all.

Yeah. See? He just needed to find a Brightside to this. He just needed to find the silver lining the mushroom shaped cloud of his life, and move on. He was Lance. That’s what he did. He found the silver lining, the bright side, the place with the greener grass.

Lance closed his eyes, feeling a bit more at peace with himself. He was a failure, and he knew he was a failure. He just needed to accept that, move on, and try to be better. No, not try. He needed to be better. And he would.

He’d be the best god damn Druid that Empire had ever seen, and the best damn Spy that the resistance had ever seen.

He’d make the Voltron team regret abandoning him. He’d make Lotor proud to have given him a chance. He’d make the resistance awed that he’d lasted longer than any other Druid spy.

And to start, he needed to get over himself and get up off the bathroom floor.

Lance opened his eyes, and at the corner of his vision, he saw the faintest flicker of color. He turned to look; and blinked, staring at Sonali.

Colors exploded out from Sonali, fading in and out, constantly moving and changing. Closest to Sonali, the color was a bright, almost lime, green. Although the further from Sonali it went, it changed to be a muddy red.

He looked down at his own hand, and stared at the brilliant blue which radiated from him in a thin outline. He blinked a few times. It didn’t fade away.

Uh. This was not okay.

Was he hallucinating from all the crying? Or was this a side-effect of the corrupted quintessence in the stupid beautiful unremovable collar? He didn’t want to see this crap.

It felt like a switch was physically hit, but the sensation was all mental. Lance blinked again, and there were no colors. Snippets of Xana’s teachings in the beginning parts of the meditation era sprung up in his mind.
Holy quiznak.

Lance’s quintessence was Blue based. He saw blue coming from him. He’d just seen his own quintessence. Which meant that he’d just seen Sonali’s quintessence.

He was seeing quintessence.

Had his sudden self-realization triggered it? Xana had said that the only way to move forward was to know oneself or some rot like that. So perhaps his breakdown had triggered it.

Perhaps something good could come from something bad.

“Lance?” Sonali asked, touching him tentatively. Lance turned and blinked back up at them. He couldn’t see the quintessence anymore now that he’d turned the power off, but he couldn’t ‘unsee’ what he’d seen.

“Green is a weird quintessence color for a guard.” He said, still in a stupor over having seen the quintessence at all.

Come to think of it, green was a weird quintessence base for any Galra. Most guards were Red, or so he’d been told. He’d never encountered someone who was described to be an inverted watermelon before. Seriously, all that had been missing was tiny pockets of black to be the ‘seeds’.

“How did you know that?” Sonali asked after a long moment of silence. “Do the other Druids know that?” The frantic tone of Sonali’s voice knocked Lance out of his stupor.

“Oh, no? They all think you’re red.” Because they did. Lance could clearly recall one of the other Druids commenting on it, now that he thought about it. Xana often lamented how much red quintessence filled the empire, or at least the military. “But you’re gree-“

“Yes, yes, I know!” Sonali interrupted him. “How do you know that?”

“I saw it?” Lance replied, furrowing his eyebrows.

Somehow, he’d seen it. Now, how had he managed that? Could he turn it back on? How could he retrigger the ability?

“What do you mean you ‘saw it’?” They hissed. Lance shrugged. “Don’t shrug at me! I need to know!”

“You were Red along the outside.” Lance supplied. “And if the Druids thought you were ‘off’ or something, then they would have done something about it by now.” Lance paused. “Why are you Red on the outside?”

Sonali let out a noise that sounded like a low hiss of a curse before pausing.

“No one else can see that?” They asked after a moment.

Lance shook his head, staring at them with wide eyes. He didn’t think they were going to do anything drastic to him, but, he wasn’t willing to place nonexistence GAC on that. Sonali had the power to end his life if they thought he was a threat to the resistance.

Sonali exhaled sharply. “Quiznak.” They shook their head. “Don’t tell anyone. It’ll blow my cover, and then we’ll all be screwed.”

“That didn’t answer my question, but okay.” Lance nodded slowly. “Okay.” He repeated, although
it was more directed at himself. “Okay… so… yeah.” He took a deep breath, and nodded to himself.

First thing he had to do was get some clothes on. After that, he needed to try to figure out how to ‘turn on’ and control this new ability to see quintessence.

It might have been due to both towels overlapping there, but the collar around his neck felt warm. Absentmindedly, he reached up to touch it, stroking the jewel.

A smile tugged at his lips. Heh, he’d told Xana that he’d figure out how to see quintessence by the next lesson. Guess he’d showed him. He’d show everyone, even those who weren’t there to see him anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos to anyone who figures out what's up with Sonali. :P :)

Also, this was Beta'd late at night. My Roomie's normal 'reading' times have been taken over by her work temporarily. This shouldn't last long, but I've asked her to go ahead and read a couple chapters in advance on her day off (Thursday), so that you guys won't have an unbeta'd chapter in the event something like this past week happens again.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance reached a dark place after the date with Lotor. He felt trapped, and hopelessly stuck, like nothing he could do would make a difference.

Fortunately Sonali was there to prevent him from continuing to wallow in his misery in the shower.

Lance made some mental revelations which 'unlocked' his latent ability to see quintessence; which was an ability he hadn't used since he was a small child and told that seeing 'auras' was BS and fake.

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**Trigger Warning(s):** Bad Flirting, Emotional Manipulation

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

Whenever Lance expected getting super powers, he always imagined that it’d be something that he’d be able to just do. With the exception of a few super heroes, it always seemed like they just knew how to use their powers.

As it turned out, Lance was one of those few who realistically had no clue how to control his newfound power. Worse yet, the blossoming brilliant bright colors appearing and disappearing in his vision each time the power turned on and off was giving Lance painful little ice pick headaches.

No one said having cool powers was supposed to be painful.

And his new ability was cool. He couldn’t just see people’s quintessence, but quintessence in general. The world seemed to glow brighter with latent quintessence in the air. There were bright purple veins which crisscrossed the ship as it traveled the circuits supplying power. Water seemed to have just the faintest glow – a similar hazy glow of the air.

It was… different, and cool. But it wasn’t all sunshine and rainbows.

He could also see thin veins of corruption running through his own quintessence; the bright purple pulsing against his blue, occasionally fracturing out and growing.

He should have been worried about that, and he recognized that he should have been worried about it… but at the same time, he felt numb towards it. After all, there wasn’t a lot he could do about it.

He could cleanse it as much as he wanted – sometimes with Blue’s help – but it’d only push it back for a little bit before it reappeared. Not to mention with his position as a Druid, he couldn’t exactly
just suddenly not have any of it in his system anymore.

The ship he was on was literally ran on corrupted quintessence. Every tick that he was on the ship he was being exposed; although the latent exposure was miniscule at best.

So, long story short, he couldn’t do anything about the corruption. It was a waste of his time, energy, and everything to worry about it.

Sonali’s unique coloring on the other hand… that was curious.

They still hadn’t told him why they were Red on the outside, but he got the feeling that asking again would only cause the guard to freak out again. It was presumably within his best interest not to remind them. Sonali hadn’t brought it back up since the ‘shower’ incident, and Lance was no hurry to bring it back up.

Not for the first time Lance wished that he could just slip out his smart phone and google something.

If he could just google ‘how to see auras’ he felt sure that it’d help him control this new ability – although his problem was with turning his ability off. But Google didn’t exist in space, and even if it did, he doubted he’d get the cell reception to get the data to google something.

Shame.

So instead, he was forced to go through Lotor’s countless books, scrolls, and tablets on various readings to see if there were any suggestions or ideas hidden in there. Never before had Lance been so happy that Lotor practically owned a small library in his room.

Lance scowled down at a book, narrowing his eyes as he used the tablet to try to translate the text into something he could read.

For all of its capabilities, the universal translator wasn’t designed for work like this, and translating multiple texts of this magnitude at the same time just wasn’t something it could easily do.

It certainly didn’t help that surrounding Lance was a mini army of books, scrolls, and everything else that Lance thought might even mention quintessence and the ability to see it. He’d even pulled up some of Haggar’s reports and research that was ‘free floating’ on the Galra server.

Most Druid reports and research was locked up safely in the Druid quarters or terminals, but there were some more commonly referenced pieces that were left on the main servers.

Despite Haggar being the ‘mother of quintessence research’, all her reports and research had been useless to Lance thus far. The most interesting thing he’d come across was something about Balmera crystals.

From what he understood from that research, once a crystal’s energy was used up – or the crystal was broken – then the only solution was to get a new crystal from a Balmera and corrupt it.

Which was a waste of time.

If they could figure out how to revitalize the crystals, it would streamline the process so much. It’d also help out the Balmeras as there wouldn’t be a near constant demand for new crystals.

Not to mention, Lance was interested to see if they could figure out a way to revitalize other quintessence types. Lance totally wouldn’t object to having a pretty blue based crystal, or a green
based crystal.

Would they power a ship the same as a standard Balmeran crystal, or a corrupted Galra one? Or would the difference colored crystals serve different purposes? Would the presence of a green crystal have any effect on surrounding plant life?

After all, the corruption system was, from Lance’s understanding, an attempt to create black quintessence. So, it went without saying that if they could corrupt a crystal and change the quintessence it outputted, then why couldn’t they change a crystal to a different color base?

And why not go one step further than that? If they could inject a crystal with a specific quintessence base, then what about a creature?

Of course, that particular line of thought was in Project Robeast territory, and while Lance wouldn’t mind getting on that Project for spying purposes, the real reason he was interested was much simpler: he wanted to try to make the ice bats – Keese – from ‘Legend of Zelda’.

Not that it mattered right now, as he was nowhere near ready for a project like Project Robeast.

Perhaps he could revisit this topic once he’d learned quintessence manipulation. Lance didn’t have any projects or tasks officially assigned to him, and so he could work on that as his own little pet project, later.

His current ‘project’ of trying to see quintessence wasn’t going anywhere. He slid his current text to the side and pulled out another one. Thankfully, no translator was needed on this one, and dove into the readings.

Man, Lance had thought his days of having to do homework like this were over when he left the Garrison. Guess he was wrong. At least this stuff was interesting some of the time.

So, absorbed in his task, Lance didn’t even notice when the door slid open and Sonali left. He did, however, notice the bright, almost candy apple red, which appeared in the corner of his vision just a tick before he was being gently touched on the shoulder.

“Someone seems to be feeling better.”

Lance jumped, twisting to look over at Lotor. The candy red of Lotor’s quintessence was broken up by thick lightning like veins of corrupted quintessence. If it wasn’t so evil, Lance might have said that it was kinda pretty, in a way.

It sounded weird, but Lance wanted to touch it. Like, he knew that was a bad idea, but it was like how a kid would want to touch a red-hot stove.

That damned uncomfortable itch which Lotor occasionally triggered resurfaced under Lance’s skin as he forced himself to look away. Although, said itch was slightly soothed when Lotor leaned over him as the prince looked over what Lance was reading, and after a derisive scoff headed over to the bookcase to select something different.

“This one would probably help more, if you’re looking into quintessence awareness.” Lotor handed Lance a book and grinned at him. “It’s good to see you getting so involved in your studies.”

“Well, I wanna be the very best.” Mentally, Lance ignored the mental continuation of the theme song. As catchy as it was, it wasn’t applicable here.

Lance accepted the book, but he couldn’t take his eyes off Lotor, or more accurately the colors
surrounding him. It wasn’t fair. How come something so bad for Lance looked so pretty? Like, it wasn’t bad enough that Lotor looked so pretty, now his quintessence was too.

“I’m sure you will be.” If Lotor noticed Lance staring at him, he didn’t say anything about it. Instead he moved some of the books so that he could take a seat on the table, leaning against it. “I wanted to talk to you this morning, but you didn’t seem to be up for a conversation.”

Lotor’s tone was light, and his body language was open, but here was a current of something that Lance didn’t like in the words themselves. He stiffened at them, biting his lip and finally looking away from Lotor.

Heat flooded his cheeks, and he resisted the urge to rub the back of his head in embarrassment, instead tightening his hold on the book Lotor had given him. He had hoped that Lotor would just let that whole thing slide, but evidently not.

“You know you can talk to me, right?” Lotor prompted. “Just like we used to, when we were separate. It hurts to see you so upset.”

Said the guy who’d tried once to contact Lance before leaving. Oh sure. Lance believed him. But then again, Lotor seemed sincere, and he was a prince. He couldn’t afford the time to sit around and coddle Lance.

And hadn’t Lotor already proved that he cared for Lance? Time and time again? He’d taken Lance in, and given him food and a place to stay. He’d allowed for Lance to be taught how to control his Altean abilities, and become a Druid.

Lotor had felt sincere when Lance had… Lance sucked on his bottom lip, trying not to think of the kiss he’d shared with Lotor the night before.

“I’m fine now.” It wasn’t technically a lie; Lance was fine now, sorta. He kinda wanted to kiss Lotor again, but that was such a bad idea on so many levels, and he already regretted the night before so much.

And he just wished that he could just stop being so wishy-washy about this and Lotor.

“Are you mad at me?” Lotor didn’t whine, but he came awfully close in that moment. “You were the one who locked the door. I just thought I’d give you the time you so clearly needed.” Lotor sighed dramatically. “I’d hoped that after last night, we would be more open towards each other.”

“It’s nothing, Lotor. Really.” Lance looked back up at him to offer a quick smile.

The candy red glow around Lotor was gone, although Lance wasn’t sure if he should be grateful or not. He kinda wanted it back as it was a nice distraction, but Lotor was wanting to have a serious conversation, despite his dramatics.

Lotor frowned, and shook his head.

Upon seeing Lotor’s disappointed face, Lance back looked down. Subconsciously, his hand rose to play with the jewel of the necklace. After a couple moments of silence Lance sighed.

“Really, Lotor. It was just me feeling like I was going to let you down. That’s all. I’m over it.” Lance still wasn’t looking at Lotor, but he could just feel the prince quirking an eyebrow as if to say ‘oh really?’. “Like I said, I just want to be the very best. I don’t want to fail you.”

Lotor stood, and then took a seat much closer to Lance. He leaned down to gently take Lance’s
chin in hand and turn his face upwards.

“It would be very difficult for you to fail me, pet.” Lotor’s voice was a confident purr, and just the sound of it sent chills down Lance’s spine.

“But I fail everyone.” Lance muttered.

He was very proud at his lack of physical reaction at the nickname. Mentally, he still cringed. Although, the more Lotor called him ‘pet’ the less Lance reacted. Perhaps that was on purpose?

Probably for the best. Lance needed to get used to it. Actually, he needed to do more than get used to it, he needed to own it. But, he could wait a little on that. After all, one small step at a time, right?

“But because they don’t know how to treat you. They don’t bolster your strengths, or help you grow stronger. They just use you for themselves, to help themselves grow stronger.” Lotor paused. “I’m helping you grow. The only way you could disappoint me is to stop. It’s time that you used them, the way they used you.”

“How?”

“You’d be amazed at how motivated someone can be by spite alone.” Lotor shrugged, seeming nonchalant about that statement, yet the way he said it made it sound like such a fact of life. It left Lance wondering just what spite motivated Lotor, for him to say those words with such certainty.

“They mistreated you. Abused you. Treated you like trash and a maid. And then they abandoned you! Doesn’t that upset you? It wasn’t you who failed them. It was them who failed you.”

Did it upset Lance how the Voltron team had treated him? Absolutely.

Lotor was right, spite was a great motivator. After all, that was why he was going to be the best now. That was why he was going to make Voltron regret abandoning him. He was going to show them. He was going to show everyone.

Lotor half chuckled. “There’s that spark back in your eyes.”

Lance wanted to duck his head, but he couldn’t when Lotor was still holding him under his chin. Lotor hummed, studying Lance for a moment before dropping his hand and letting go of Lance. He leaned back on the table.

Lance watched Lotor for a moment, before realizing he’d been playing with his necklace. In the Galaxy Garrison, they hadn’t been allowed necklaces, so Lance had thought his habit of playing with one would have faded by now, but evidently not. Either way, he was sure that Lotor had noticed. Heat once again flooded his cheeks as he dropped his hand to his lap.

“It’s no problem.” Lotor assured. “I said I’d take care of you, didn’t I?” That was right. Lotor had offered to take care of Lance.

Lance nodded slowly. “Yeah, you did say that.” Well, Lotor had demanded that, right before… Right before Lance had kissed Lotor. He supposed that Lotor took that as an acceptance to his demand. But what did that mean exactly? What did that entail?

“I’m glad you recalled. In that case, I suppose you wouldn’t object to me taking you planet side in a few nights?”
Lance froze, blinking at Lotor. “Planet side?” Lance squeaked.

Why was Lotor taking him to see a planet? What good would that do? Here Lance was in a safe controlled environment. A place where Lotor could affect things. Out on a planet, there were too many variables. Too much that Lotor couldn’t take in effect for.

“Of course.” Lotor purred. “Last night went so well, I thought it’d be a good idea for you. I have a surprise.”

“A surprise?” Lance repeated. Lotor hummed his confirmation. “For me?”

“I’m positive that you’ll like it.”

“I can’t.” Lance shook his head. He gestured at the books. “I’ve got so much—”

“You’d deny me another chance to spoil you?” Lotor interrupted. “You agreed to let me take care of you. Besides, with how diligent you are, I’m sure you’ll be able to afford a night of fun and pleasure.” Lotor reasoned.

Lance looked between the books and Lotor helplessly. While the studying was an excuse, it was also a legitimate reason. He needed to be a better Druid so he could get access to better information.

He needed to be a better Druid for Lotor. He needed to be a better Druid for himself.

BUT, he couldn’t decline the date. He’d already declined the Gladiator match, and he wasn’t sure how much more Lotor would allow. It didn’t help that Lotor was right. With the date a few nights away, Lance didn’t really have an excuse not to go.

Quiznak, another date with Lotor. Part of him was excited, but another part of him was terrified. He hoped that he wouldn’t be given more jewelry. He wasn’t prepared to handle that. He wasn’t prepared for any of this.

“I—”

“Shh.” Lotor held a finger to Lance’s mouth, silencing him. “Let me take care of you.”

He didn’t really have a choice. Lotor was bound and determined to take him out, whether Lance wanted him to or not. After a moment, Lance nodded. Lotor grinned, his hand dropping from Lance’s mouth.

“Wonderful.” He purred. “You’ll love this, I promise.”

Lance wasn’t convinced. He didn’t know what the surprise was, and honestly, he was kind of scared to see what Lotor thought he’d like. Reminded of an earlier conversation, Lance took a chance to make a request.

“No gladiator matches, please.”

Lotor chuckled. “Of course.” Lotor’s tablet beeped from somewhere in the room, and Lotor’s smile fell. He sighed, the sound long and drawn out. “The duties of a prince never cease.” He complained.

Lance was half tempted to tell Lotor that if he didn’t want to be a prince so much that he could disband the empire. The only reason he didn’t was because he knew saying that would only annoy
Lotor and nothing would be done. There was no point. Instead Lance only shrugged.

Lotor hopped off the table, heading over to where the tablet was. Lance heard him groan and the noise of the tablet hitting the bed.

“Are you father’s generals still giving you difficulties?” Lance asked, spinning the chair around to look at Lotor. Lotor side eyed Lance, narrowing his eyes slightly.

“Where’d you hear that?” Lotor asked. Lance shrugged again.

“Gossip gets around.”

Lance wasn’t lying. He’d heard from both Sonali and the other Druids that the Empire’s military hadn’t exactly been welcoming to Lotor. As a matter of fact, they disdained him for being a ‘half breed’, and bringing along his own generals.

Zarkon’s military had been full of nothing but racists and elitists. Good thing Lotor was there now to fix that.

The Gladiator match that Lotor had invited Lance to not too long ago had been his ‘debut’ to the Empire’s military to show off his strength and might.

It was kind of sweet that Lotor had attempted to show off to him.

“They’ll be taken care of soon enough.” Lotor didn’t elaborate on the statement, and Lance didn’t exactly want him to. It sounded vaguely threatening enough. “Along with any traitors within their ranks.” Lotor shook his head, disdain clear on his face.

Now that Lance had to ask about; considering he was one, and he knew of at least one other.

“Traitors?” Lance questioned. “I heard some Druids saying that they’d already been fished out by Haggar.”

“I don’t trust that they got them all. I doubt that Commander was acting on his own.” Lotor replied, scrunching up his nose. “I still can’t believe my father hadn’t realized that sooner.”

Lance hadn’t met the guy, but he was sure that he’d been a good spy to work himself up to the Commander rank. That took a good deal of skill to pull off.

“All the better that you’re in charge now, right? I mean, I heard it was your specialty to track down rebellions and traitors.”

“I made of habit of it when I was bored, yes.” Lotor replied, grinning at Lance. “It was fun when it was something I did by choice.” The tablet once again beeped and Lotor’s grin fell. “It appears I must leave you. Promise you won’t spend all night studying.”

"I make none." Lance teased. "I sleep better when you're here."

Mostly because then Lance knew exactly where Lotor was. When he wasn't there, Lance was always paranoid that he'd walk in on Lance snooping through his stuff or something. Plus, he had the feeling that Corral wouldn't randomly pop in if Lotor was there.

Of course, it wasn't until after he saw Lotor's responding grin that he realized what he'd said. Quiznak.

Well, there was no rewind. No take backs. No way for him to just make Lotor forget that he’d said
that. Best he just own it.

“Is that so?” Lotor was still grinning, and remained grinning even when his tablet beeped again. “In that case, I’ll have to make sure I return to ensure you get a sufficient amount of beauty sleep.”

“Hmph.” Lance crossed his arms and turned away.

“Oh, don’t be like that.” Lotor came up behind Lance, and wrapped his arms around him, resting his head on Lance’s shoulder. He stayed there for a few moments before the tablet beeped again. Lotor sighed. “I’ll be back before you can even miss me.” Lotor promised before pulling away.

Lance shrugged. “As long as you return, I’ll be happy.” Because if Lotor didn’t return, then Lance had reason to worry. If Lotor didn’t return, then who knew what would become of Lance.

Lotor laughed. “Of course.” He picked up the tablet and headed for the door. “I’ll leave you to your studying now. Have fun!”

The moment Lotor left, Lance heaved a huge sigh of relief. He let his head fall forward onto the table with a thunk. Almost instantly he felt the tinge of pain associate with the power coming back on. Great. Just great.

“That doesn’t look like studying.” Sonali commented. Lance groaned again, but sat up. He pulled the book that Lotor have given to him closer and opened it up. Lotor had to have given it to him for a reason. Maybe it’d answer his questions.

Chapter End Notes

I've been informed of two more beautiful pieces of fanart for this fic:

Inktober Altean!Lance (Chapters 16+) by 3esty

Druid!Lance (Chapters 16+) by Cahannie

Thank you so much! I appreciate all the hard work you've gone through.

Also, Season 4 shows this week! I’m so excited. As a reminder to readers new and old to Lilac Sweet, I usually only update Monday and Wednesday, but occasionally for special occasions, I update on Fridays. A new season is such an occasion, so be looking out for an update on Friday, Oct 13. As an added extra, there'll also be a BONUS chapter posted on Friday. :)
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance worked on controlling his newfound ability to see quintessence. Lotor asked Lance on another date, this time planet side.

**I Highly Recommend you read the Trigger Warnings for this Chapter. While there isn't any sex, there is some possibly explicit content which my Beta has recommended that I warn about.**

Chapter Notes


I can not stress the warnings on this chapter enough. There is questionable content in this chapter. Nothing too extreme, like actual acts of sex, but it’s heavily implied.

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

Much like vacation days when Lance still went to school, the time slipped away faster than Lance would have liked until it was time for his date with Lotor.

Nothing else had occurred between them, but that didn’t stop Lance’s heart from beating erratically in his chest at the mere idea of this date. After all, at the last one, he’d kissed Lotor, and liked it. And while that was fine and dandy and everything, it wasn’t fine and dandy at all.

He’d been cycling through these thoughts over the past couple of days, teetering on the fence of indecision in regard to how to act. At this point, there was no denying that there was something between him and the prince, so denying his feelings at this point was pointless. But whether he should act on those feelings or lock them up and away... that was the question.

To be, or not to be. To return Lotor’s affections, or not to.

As if sensing Lance’s nerves, Lotor reached out and gently took Lance’s hand, holding it as they entered the planet’s atmosphere. Lotor rubbed his thumb over the back of Lance’s hand for a moment before lifting it and kissing Lance’s knuckles gently.

Lance’s heart lurched at the gesture. If this was a movie, then a younger him would have been squealing in joy and hiding his face into a pillow as he screamed out his second-hand embarrassment.
On the Brightside, Lance didn’t have to worry about his newest ability flaring up while on this date. He’d finally figured out how to control it and, like he’d predicted, Xana had been stunned at how easily Lance had picked it up.

As a matter of fact, Xana was beyond stunned. Evidently, most Druids could just sense a person’s quintessence, and a few could see it, but none to degree that Lance could. It kinda made Lance feel all fuzzy inside to know that he could do things that others couldn’t.

His new ability flaring up and giving him a headache was one less thing he needed to worry about while on this date; and he could already imagine so many things going wrong.

With his free hand, Lance reached up to toy with the gem of the necklace, fiddling with it absent miredly as he got lost in his thoughts. But, then again, for as many things that could go wrong, the chances of them were slim.

He was with Lotor, the Emperor Pro Tem of the Galra Empire, for goodness sake! He shouldn’t be worrying about what could go wrong on their date. After all, nothing would happen to Lance so long as Lotor was there. Lotor was safe.

“You shouldn’t be so nervous, pet.” Lotor leaned down to whisper that into Lance’s ear. His breath was warm against Lance’s skin, and caused his hair to tickle against his neck.

“I’m not.” Lance replied. It was a half-truth. He was still nervous, but he wasn’t at the same time. He felt like he was going to be sick from all the conflicting feelings inside of him.

“Oh?” Lotor questioned.

“It’s just… been a while since I was planet side.” Lance offered another half-truth. Being planet-side after so long in a space ship was… different, and while he was excited, he was also anxious about what to expect.

Not to mention his wish-washy choices on how to deal™ with the obvious chemistry between him and Lotor.

Which brought him back to the thoughts of how he kissed Lotor after one date.

What would happen after two dates? What if he started liking Lotor more than he already did? How much further would Lotor force Lance to stretch his ethics?

How much more delaying would Lotor allow? He hadn’t asked for anything after the kiss. He hadn’t demanded more kisses, or tried anything. For all intents and purposes, Lotor had been a perfect gentleman.

It unnerved Lance because Lotor was impatient.

Lotor was impulsive. He wasn’t really the type to sit back and let Lance come to him. Except, he was. He was letting Lance set the pace, and it just seemed too good to be true.

“It’ll be good for you.” Lotor tried to assure Lance. “If you loved the Garden, then you’ll love this.”

Lance nodded, but remained quiet, playing with the necklace.

He hadn’t really had a necklace since the Garrison to play with, and despite knowing what jewel was on this one, he couldn’t help himself but to play with it. It was something to fidget with and to
help preoccupy his mind. He’d rather play with it than bite his lip.

Lip biting was bad, especially since he still didn’t have any Chapstick. Woe be Him.

“Where’re we going?” Lance asked after a moment of silence.

“Bsët.” Lotor replied. “Specifically, the city of Hësë.”

Lance mentally clasped onto the information, trying desperately to use it to help distract him from his never-ending cycles of thoughts.

“The planet has been under Galra rule for a while now.” Lotor continued. “They’re the main source of the erëz plant, which is a commonly used spice across the universe. It grows so well here thanks to the underground magma pools in the area.”

“You’re taking me to a farm?” Lance asked, crinkling his eyebrows.

It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Lotor to take him somewhere nice for their date, but… a spice farm? Lance had tried his hand at farming once, and uh... yeah, no thanks. A farm wasn't in his definition of a 'date'.

Lotor laughed and shook his head. “Oh no. I’m taking you here for something else. In any case, these people are fond of spices and herbs, so if at any point you feel overwhelmed let me know. The Furë a kuqa has a rather strong scent to it, and it can be a bit much at times.”

Right. Lance wasn’t even going to try to pronounce that. Although it was touching that Lotor was concerned about Lance being overwhelmed by what sounded like incense.

It didn’t take long following this conversation for the shuttle to land and the doors to open.

Lance’s first glimpse of the planet wasn’t anything impressive. Which isn’t to say that it didn’t look interesting, because it did. It just didn’t look impressive.

The land around him looked like how he’d always imagined Mars to look like, kinda. Whenever someone walked, a plume of rose colored dust appeared before dissipating into the air. Dry looking planets were scattered all around, making a network grid across the ground.

Had there been any wind, Lance would have expected to see a tumbleweed roll by.

If the vines were the spice plants, then they looked kinda… dead. Then again, Lance wasn’t a biologist, or a plant doctor, or whatever that profession was called.

The best part about this place, so far, had to be the sky. It was a pale blue, a close reminder to Lance of home. In the distant horizon, Lance could even see clouds.

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There was a village not far from where they landed made up of a mixture of giant dead husks of trees and their roots, and the crumbling ruins of a city long gone. Cloth hung in the doorways of these dwellings, and when the native species exited, clouds of dark pink – almost red – colored smoke escaped.

If Lance had to guess, the village’s cloying candy sweet scent was probably a product of that smoke. Kind of like how Hersey, PA always smelled like Chocolate. The only reason he knew that was because his family stopped there once on their way to New York.

In the center of the small village was a well which housed the only true greenery in the area. There
was a patch of vines that were still alive, intertwined around the well. They extended out for about 10 feet in any direction from the well, before their vines started to slowly die off.

Lance spun around, ignoring Lotor as he approached the well and started to speak with presumably the leader of the native species here.

Said species appeared to be humanoid, which was reassuring. They were thin and willowy, ducking in and out of their cloth doors with flexible ease as they looked at Lance, Lotor, and the Galra Soldiers.

Lance paused in his examination when he stopped a symbol rather familiar to him etched on the rocky surface of one of the ruins. He’d recognize that anywhere, especially since the last time he saw marks like these, it was when he found Blue.

“Voltron.” He muttered, reaching out to touch against the markings.

“The Red Lion was found here.” Lotor informed Lance, causing him to jump and spin around to look at the Prince. “My apologies. I didn’t intend to scare you.”

“You took me to where Red was found?” Lance’s tone dipped as he spoke. Lotor only nodded his response. “Why?” Lance hissed out.

He didn’t want to be here. He didn’t care about Red. He didn’t care about Voltron. The only thing he cared about when it came to that stuff was Blue. Blue was his. He could care less about the others, especially Red.

Lance didn’t even wait for a response before he was spinning around on the heel of his foot, fully intending to chalk this date up as a failure and sit in the ship until Lotor realized how ‘not okay’ this all was.

Lotor seemed to have other plans as he reached out and grabbed Lance’s arm, spinning him back around. “Have faith in me, Lance. I didn’t take you here for that.” He continued to manhandle Lance around until Lance was looking at the well.

…

If this was some ‘The Ring’ crap, then Lance was out of here. Out. Of. Here. Or ‘IT’ crap. He was out of here if some clown popped his head out of that well.

“That’s the Lula a shiut.” Lotor informed Lance, and Lance was ashamed to admit it took him a moment to realize that Lotor wasn’t talking about the well but the green vines around the well. “It only blooms once a deca-phoeb, on the same quintant.”

“You took me here for a flower?” Lance’s tone was as flat as shaken soda that’d been left out in the sun for a day.

If Lance wanted to see a flower there was a very nice, very lovely garden up in the spaceship he could use.

“Not just any flower.” Lotor sighed. “Its blossoms have a chemical effect on all of these plants.” He waved his hand at the dead vines on the ground and then at the trees. “They come back to life for three fourths of the deca-phoeb before slowly dying back off until they reach this point…. Upon which the flower reblooms and restores life again.”

Lance hummed, considering this information. That did sound… marginally better.
“Alright.” He muttered after a moment, twisting around to look up at Lotor. “That sounds kinda cool.”

Lotor smiled and let out what could have been a sigh of relief. Awh, was the prince nervous that Lance wouldn’t like this? How cute.

“The Leader would be honored if we stayed to watch the blooming.” Lotor suggested. “And while we wait, we can try some of the local dishes. I’m most fond of the Seksi fruit.”

Lance nodded and that was all Lotor needed to shift his hold on Lance until he was holding Lance’s hand as he guided Lance to the largest tree near the well. The leader saw them coming, and held open the cloth, letting clouds of color escape into the air. Lance’s nose twitched at the scent.

Well, Lance was right about that smell coming from the smoke… and Lotor had been right about the smells and scents of this place being a bit overwhelming. Lance fought the urge to sneeze, wiggling his nose as he tried to adjust to the overpowering scent.

Lance’s head swam in the scent. He could taste it on his tongue, thick and syrupy. He felt like he was getting more smoke than he was air, causing him to breath in more as he attempted to get more air. His head felt light.

Lance was reminded of the time he’d walked into a dorm room in the Galaxy Garrison where the occupants had been smoking way too much weed and the room had been hazy with the smoke. This was just like that, except this smoke was pink and sweet smelling.

Lance barely stepped over the threshold before he decided it was too much. He tugged on Lotor’s arm, and tried to backpedal out. He tripped over his own feet, and in trying to not fall, ended up stumbling forward.

Lotor turned to catch him at just the right time, and he fell onto Lotor’s chest. He heard Lotor exhale with a ‘oomph’ and take a half step back to catch him. He felt bad, but he couldn’t figure out how to work his legs anymore, and so he just stayed there.

Great. He was an anime girl falling onto her love interest now. That was just perfect. Well, his life was basically an anime now. He found out he was a magical girl™ and his love interest was a space prince™. So of course, he’d fall on said love interest like this.

And he was referring to Lotor as a love interest.

…

His life was officially over.

He felt his face flush and he buried his face into Lotor’s chest. He was not going to look up at him. Nope. Not going to happen. Besides, Lotor’s body and clothes helped filter out some of the smoke; and Lance wasn’t going to lie, he preferred the soft scent of lilacs that Lotor was fond of.

He breathed in deeply, unable to stop himself from doing it. Was it weird that he liked how Lotor smelled? It was probably weird. He should probably stop before he made even more of a fool of himself.

The more he breathed in, the more the world seemed to warp around Lance. Noises blended into sights, and sights into tastes.
It was official, Lance was experiencing some sort of weird high from this smoke.

He could hear Lotor speaking to him, but he couldn’t focus on the words when Lotor was distracting him by running a hand up his back. Lance shuddered at the sensation and pressed himself closer to Lotor.

The next moment, Lance’s stomach dropped as the ground beneath his feet vanished as he was swooped in one smooth move. He laughed, wrapping his arms around Lotor’s neck and resting his head against the prince’s shoulder. The fact that Lotor could so easily pick up Lance and carry him bridal style did things to Lance.

He was carried for a moment before the world spun around as he was manhandled and put back down. He laughed as he was laid out on a soft pillow-like cushion. Lotor sat down beside him and it took Lance all of a moment to maneuver himself so he was sitting in Lotor’s lap.

The Prince didn’t seem to know where to put his hands, and after a moment of watching him fumble, Lance took them and put them on his waist. “You can touch me, you know.” Lance informed him. “I’m not gonna break.”

If Lotor had a response, it was never spoken, especially not when Lance reached out and tucked a stay piece of Lotor’s hair behind his ear.

“You’d look pretty with a flower crown.” Lance realized out loud, before gasping and putting his hands over his mouth. He hadn’t meant to say that out loud. Oops. “I mean, you’re always pretty.” Lance tried to fix what he’d said, but somehow, he thought he might have just made things worse.

“Is that so?” Lotor’s voice made Lance feel all sorts of funny, and he giggled, nodding. “Mmmhmm. You’re so pretty. Haven’t I told you that?” Lance laughed at the expression that his words gave Lotor, feeling all too pleased with himself. He liked it when Lotor smiled, and he especially liked it when he smiled because of Lance.

“Not really, no.” Lotor admitted.

“Well, I am now.” Because it was true. Lotor was very pretty, and Lance would have said it had to do with the fact that he was royalty, but Lance had seen Zarkon and he was not pretty. “And your hair is always so silky.” Lance continued.

He recognized that he was word vomiting, but he couldn’t quite care enough to do anything about it.

“Perhaps some Seksi would help him?” A foreign voice asked, and Lotor took his eyes off of Lance to acknowledge the other.

“Yes, Prince Lotor.” The voice replied. “And it is my people’s belief that eating some of the Seksi should help as well.”

“Leave it here.” Lotor nodded off to the side. Lance twisted around to watch the village leader drop off a plate of something before he left. “Would you like to try to eat something, pet?” Lotor asked him, one of his hands rising from Lance’s waist to gently touch his cheek and guide Lance to looking back at him.

“Is it as sweet as you?” Lance teasingly asked. Lotor’s smile tightened and after a moment he
nodded. He leaned over, taking a piece of the food and the pressed it to Lance’s lips.

“Try for yourself.”

Obediently, Lance opened his mouth, accepting the cool tart, but oddly sweet, flesh of some sort of fruit. He chewed it a few times before swallowing and then licked his lips to catch more of the flavor.

It was sweet, but tart. It kinda felt like a peach, except not.

“I knew you’d like it.” Lotor’s gaze flickered down to Lance’s lips before the prince grinned. “Do you want another piece?”

Lance licked his lips and then after some deliberation decided that yes, he did. “Please?” He asked. Lotor’s eyes seemed to darken, and his grin seemed just a bit sharper when he picked up another piece to give to Lance.

This time when Lotor gave Lance the slice of fruit he let his fingers linger. By the time he’d processed the thought he’d had, Lance was enacting it. He kissed Lotor’s fingertips, licking against them when he accepted the fruit.

It wasn’t like Lance didn’t know what he was doing, but it was more like he didn’t care what he was doing. He felt… alive, daring… adventurous.

Weird was another way to describe how he was feeling. It was like he’d handed over reigns to the control of his body to someone else, and the scary thing was that he didn’t particularly mind.

There was barely the hint of a thought about kissing Lotor, but he was never given a chance to enact it as Lotor kept him busy with fruit or his fingers. Which didn’t bother Lance any. He liked things being in his mouth. He liked the feel of it.

He liked having something he could suck on, like a lollipop, or a piece of fruit, or Lotor’s fingers. Heck, with the fruit juice on them, Lance could almost pretend that Lotor’s fingers were lollipops.

“So such a good boy.” Lotor breathed out after a moment. The only clue that Lance had that Lotor hadn’t meant it was the widening of his eyes and the shocked quick intake of air.

Regardless if Lotor meant it or not, it didn’t matter. The praise went straight to Lance’s head, and he preened the compliment. Yes! Yes, Lance was a good boy, and he’d do his best to try to fish more compliments like that out from Lotor.

He chased Lotor’s hand when he pulled it away, sucking on his long thin digits and twirling his tongue around them. Lotor’s entire body stiffened, his face flushing a beautiful shade of darker purple. He licked his lips before swallowing thickly.

“Look so good.” He muttered after a moment. Lotor’s gaze flickered between Lance’s eyes and Lance’s mouth, where he had started to slowly pump his fingers in and out. “You like hearing that, don’t you?” He continued a bit more boldly.

Lance hummed around the fingers.

“This is such a good look for you.” Lotor commented as he slid his fingers out of Lance’s mouth and wiping them on a small towel that had been provided with the plate of fruit.

“You’re a good look for me.” Lance replied smartly. He leaned forward, invading into Lotor’s
space. Once again, the thought to kiss him resurfaced, along with some other not so decent thoughts which followed along the line of the fruit they’d just shared.

Except Lotor hadn’t had any of the fruit. He’d given it to Lance. How… sweet of him. Ha! Wasn’t Lance just so punny?

“Are you feeling better?” Lotor asked, distracting Lance from his less than pure thoughts.

Lance hummed, leaning back – and ignoring Lotor’s very quiet, barely noticeable, sigh of relief – as he contemplated Lotor’s question.

Well, his head felt considerably less foggy than it had in the beginning when he’d told Lotor how pretty he looked. He still looked pretty. Especially since he’d changed to a bit of a darker shade of purple which Lance was realizing must have been a…

“Are you blushing?” Lance asked.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” Lotor’s response was rushed, although after his question he took a breath and then continued like normal. “You’ve never… displayed this openness before.”

“I think it’s cute.” Lance grinned. “You’re cute. I like you a lot.”

Lotor smiled, mildly awkward. “That’s… nice. I take it you aren’t feeling better?” Oh yeah! Lotor had asked him about that, hadn’t he?

Lance laughed. “Sorry. I’m forgetful… but I feel better. I always feel better with you.”

“Maybe some sleep would help?”

“Help with what?” Lance asked. “I don’t need a nap.”

Lotor smiled, almost patronizingly, and reached up to cup Lance’s cheek and caressed him. “Says the one who’s high on Furë a kuqa.” He sighed. “I really wish you’d informed me when it was too much.” He muttered.

Well, Lance’s bad. It wasn’t like he came here with the intent to get… high. Well, quiznak. He just broke another ‘Don’t Do Drugs’ pledge that he’d made in middle school. First the corrupted quintessence, and now this. What a record.

“But I don’t feel as weird as before.” Lance whined. Of course, it was only after he spoke that he realized how true that was. Like the smoke in the room, his mind seemed to be clearer than before. Speaking off… when did the room air out?

He could recall Lotor saying something about windows, but it’d seemed so unimportant at the time.

“That’s promising.” Lotor arched an eyebrow and looked over him like he didn’t believe him. “I’d still feel better if you took a nap. It’ll be a while yet before the Lula a shiut blooms.”

“Fine.” Lance dragged out the word in an overly dramatic sigh as he rolled his eyes in an equally over dramatic fashion. “I suppose I could take a nap. If it’d make you feel better.”

“It would.” Lotor assured him.

Lance rolled his eyes again, sliding off Lotor’s lap only to reclaim it as a pillow once Lotor had put a pillow there. Lance eyed the pillow before shrugging it off. If Lotor wanted to act weird, then he
could act weird. It wasn’t Lance’s problem.

His eyes snapped open only what felt like a moment later as there was a loud crackling noise.

A loud rumble following the crack, and echoed in the room. Lance tilted his head back to see that the sky outside had darkened immensely. A flash of light lit up the sky as lightning arced across it. He blinked, taking a moment to recognize what he was seeing.

“Is that a... a storm?” His words were still half slurred. His mouth tasted weird, like how mouths usually taste when someone hadn’t brushed before going to sleep, but worse. Like he’d been eating something sweet.

But he couldn’t pay attention to that when there was lightning arcing in the clouds.

Lotor didn’t stop him as Lance rolled off his lap and stumbled to the window, looking out and taking a breath. He’d recognize that scent anywhere: rain.

“It triggers the blooming of the *Lula a shiut*.” Lotor replied after a moment. Lance blinked, confused for a moment before the memories of the vines in the middle of the village resurfaced. That was right, they were here to see the blooming of a flower.

Lance looked over his shoulder to see Lotor watching him. He raised an eyebrow at the pillow in the prince’s lap. It took him even longer to remember that he’d been using his lap as a pillow. He’d been doing something else with Lotor, something involving fruit.

He licked his lips, tasting the sticky sweetness of some sort of fruit.

Yep, fruit had been involved.

Actually, yes. Fruit had definitely been involved. And fingers, and thoughts that Lance usually kept locked up and hidden in the far reaches of his mind. Stupid Space Weed making him say the things he thought and meant.

… Maybe he could play off not remembering and just continuing his relationship with Lotor like normal? It wasn’t like the Prince had forced him anything, although all of Lance’s actions had been due to him being under the influence.

And that didn’t open a giant can of worms.

But it wasn’t like it was Lotor’s fault. Lotor hadn’t planned for Lance to get high. As a matter of fact, he’d specifically told Lance to tell him if it became too much. Lance getting high was entirely Lance’s fault.

That didn’t change what had happened… but…

Oh well. Time for Lance to do what he did best. Ignore that and press on. Especially since he just heard another crack of lightning. He bounced on his toes, rolled his lips and glanced back over his shoulder at the window before looking to Lotor.

“Can we go look?”

“The *Lula a shiut* usually blooms after the storm.” Lotor furrowed his eyebrows. He patted the pillow on the floor next to him and smiled. “Why don’t you come back and eat some more fruit? We can wait out the storm in here.”
Ugh. No. Nope. Nuh-un. Lotor had taken him to a place that had a storm and was suggesting that he ‘wait it out’?! Lance didn’t think so.

Lance frowned, shaking his head. “I wanna see the storm.” He walked over to Lotor much easier than he’d walked over to the window, and dropped down to his knees since the prince was still sitting. “Please?”

Lance was trying the puppy dog pout, making sure that his eyes were extra big and that he looked pitifully and pathetic as he asked. Hopefully Lotor wouldn’t be able to say no to him. He sniffled after a moment for good measure.

Lotor sighed, and looked away, shifting as if he was uncomfortable. “I don’t see why you want to, but fine. Do as you want.”

While he was pretty sure he’d slept off most of the effects of that smoke, Lance must have still been under at least some of its influence as he didn’t realize what he was doing until he was already moving.

Lance sprung forward, wrapping his arms around Lotor’s torso as he muttered a litany of ‘thank you’s. Then as quickly as he’d started the hug, Lance was backing away, and heading to the open door.

Besides the open windows, that must have been how the smoke had escaped the house so quickly. Probably for the best as Lance couldn’t imagine what being stuck in it for long term would have done to him.

Not that it really mattered anymore when he was outside, taking in a deep lungful of the air, tasting the rain. Quiznak, he loved rain.

He loved jumping, slipping, and sliding in the puddles. He loved being drenched in the downpour. He loved the rainbows that sometimes showed up after the storm. He loved how clean and fresh everything smelled afterwards.

Lance just loved the rain.

As a couple of raindrops fell into Lance’s outstretched hand, Lance felt a small empty place inside of him fill with coolness for the first time in what felt like forever as he connected with Blue outside the Astral Plane. She roared along with his laughter as the rain came down heavier and the wind picked up.

Water was their element. Of course, he’d connect to her here and now. And of course, she’d share in his joy.

For once, Lance didn’t care about his vanity as the wind attempted to style his hair and the rain flattened it down. Water streamed down Lance’s face, mixing in with salty tears of happiness from the fact he was able to experience rain again.

Screw his earlier reservations for this date. Sure, he’d been drugged, and said and did things he probably shouldn’t have…. But this? This more than made up for it.

Before long the rain had become a steady downpour, and Lance was loving it.

“Lance!” Lotor’s voice came from the nearby tree Lance had exited. He spun around, laughing as he kicked up rain in the puddles. Lance danced towards Lotor, spinning around in the rain until he was almost at the prince. “This isn’t~”
Lance cut Lotor off, crashing into him, and after a moment, slotting their lips together. He was hasty and not very graceful, bumping his nose against Lotor’s but oddly enough, once his lips were pressed against Lotor’s all that clumsiness seemed to melt away in the rain water dripping between them.

For a heartbeat Lotor was unresponsive, clearly caught off guard by either an armful of Lance crashing into him, the kiss, or both.

But once that heartbeat passed, Lotor’s hands fell to Lance’s waist, holding him close, and responding to Lance’s lips, pressing them back against Lance’s gently.

Lance pulled back, grinning and giggling. “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Lance breathed out.

Lotor’s expression seemed dazed, but he smiled at Lance none-the-less. His gaze was warm as he looked at Lance, his expression softening like he was looking at Lance in a new light. “Of… course.” He belatedly responded.

He licked his lips and Lance’s gaze darted down to watch the movement before he returned his gaze to Lotor’s eyes.

Some part of Lance was aware that he was soaking wet and that he was probably ruining Lotor’s clothes – he wasn’t in his armor for once. Heck, he’d probably gotten some of the red mud on him, not that the prince seemed to care given how… tenderly he was looking at Lance.

Lotor licked his lips again. “…May I?”

It didn’t even take Lance a tick to recognize what Lotor was asking. He needed less than a heartbeat to be decide, and heart thudding loudly in his ears, he nodded.

Lotor leaned down slowly, giving Lance the option of pulling back or running away if he wanted. Lance’s lips parted as Lotor pressed his against Lance’s.

Kissing was always awkward, what with keeping a person’s nose in mind, and then whether the kiss was too wet or too dry or too bitey. Lance wasn’t a fool to think that kissing Lotor would be perfect… but, damn if it wasn’t close.

Considering the water dripping down off Lance’s face and hair it was hard to tell if the kiss was too wet. Water tended to make things wet, and Lance didn’t really mind. The taste of the rain mingled with the sweet taste of the fruit that Lance could taste between him and Lotor.

Lance shivered at the slow kiss, practically melting into Lotor as his knees seemed to become weak. He reached up and ran his hand through Lotor’s hair. They parted a moment later just before the need for air could burn in Lance’s lungs.

Lotor smiled at him, before leaning down again this time to press a kiss to Lance’s cheek. “Go on.” He murmured. “Have fun.”

Lance nodded as he took a step back, turning to face the downpour with a grin before throwing himself back out into the rain, twisting and twirling around as he jumped in puddles.

He’d kissed Lotor. Not once, but twice. He’d allowed Lotor to hand feed him, and had licked Lotor’s fingers. He’d gone on another date with the prince and had undoubtedly given Lotor more ideas than he probably should have.

But how could he care about that when there was rain falling against his face in torrents, washing
away his worries, concerns, and fears? How could he care about that when Blue’s internal roars echoed in his laughter?

What he’d done was future Lance’s problem, and he’d take care of it all later. Right now, he had better things to do than to worry.

Like dancing in the rain.

Quizznak… Rain. He’d never thought he’d see it again, yet here he was.

He felt so light and free. He felt happy. Happier than he’d been in a long time. Happy enough to ignore the headache he could already feel coming on, and the sweet taste of Lotor. Happy enough to ignore his soaked hair and clothes, and muddied legs.

Lance twirled in the rain with his face tilted to the sky. The lightning exploded, cracks of light dancing in dark clouds. Thunder drummed in his heart, and for the first time in ages, Lance felt more than alive. He felt like he was living. He felt like he was… Free.

He laughed as the rain hit his face, and after a few moments, looked over his shoulder to see Lotor staring at him. His hand had been near a pocket, but he was crossing his arms as he leaned against the doorway, still sheltered from the storm inside the tree.

The prince looked dazed, but when he noticed Lance looking at him he smiled. It was the same tender smile that he’d given Lance before. The same tender smile that made Lance’s heart beat louder than the rolling thunder.

Lance grinned back, and then laughed as another crash of thunder followed the lightning arcing across the sky.

Screw the flower that Lotor had brought him here to see. This was the better gift. He didn’t even care that he’d kissed Lotor in thanks. Lotor had given Lance rain, one of the things that Lance missed the most about Earth.

Warmth blossomed in Lance’s chest at the thought. He licked his lips, tasting the rain mix with the flavor of Lotor, and humming.

If Lotor had given him rain, then perhaps Lance could live with this. Perhaps him being with Lotor wasn’t all that farfetched after all. Lotor may have been the prince of the enemy, but that didn’t mean he was the enemy.

Besides, he treated Lance so well, and took care of Lance, and had given him rain. What more could Lance ask for?

Chapter End Notes

Season 4 Comes out on Friday! Woo Hoo! As I’ve been reminding people, I will be releasing both a Bonus and a Chapter on Friday! I hope you guys enjoy it!

Feel free to hit me up with your thoughts on Season 4 on Tumblr.

As a Friendly Reminder, Lilac Sweet is NOT canon compliant past the season finale of Season 2. While I will try to incorporate information from Seasons 3 and up, I can not
guarantee anything as some things are already in motion and it is too late to change them to meet canon compliance.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance went on his planet side date with Lotor, and while there were some hiccups in the beginning, the date turned out better than Lance could have ever imagined. Getting high on the Planet that the Red Lion was found on wasn't high on Lance's priority list, but it was a fair price to pay for being able to dance around in rain again.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** None, I think

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It wasn't often that Lotor texted his generals. Usually if he needed them then they were usually either nearby, or only a video chat away. If he did text them through their communicators, then it was usually a quick small message of 'come here', and usually he only did it around the Central Command Ship.

So, when Ezor's communicator let out a series of chirps that she'd programed to represent a message from Lotor, she was surprised.

He'd sent them off to on a recon mission to see if they could just 'locate, not engage… Zethrid' the Paladins of Voltron. Presumably he did this to keep his generals out of his hair while he went on his *date*.

She rolled her eyes as she jumped up to sit on the console – ignoring Acxa's disapproving glance – and crossing her legs. She pulled out her communicator, unlocking it with a few quick movements.

If there was one thing more surprising than their prince texting her it was the content of the ‘message’. She titled her head, furrowing her eyebrows as she looked over the photo. The question of why he'd contacted her had an answer now at least.

She'd been bothering him for ages about his little pet Druid. The smug bastard was just rubbing things in by sending her a picture. He knew that she wanted to be snooping around on the date.

It took her less than a tick to decide that this took priority over their stupid mission and transferred the picture over to the ship, putting it up on the 'big' screen and blowing it up to get a better look at it.

“What are you doing?” Acxa’s question was more of a sigh than a question, although she didn’t ask further once the picture of the Druid showed up on the screen. Zethrid looked away from Kova,
blinking at the change, but evidently having no objections either.

“That’s the Druid?” Zethrid asked, giving Kova the piece of meat she was teasing him with before shifting her stance to rest her hands on her hips.

Ezor leaned back, looking the picture over. If Lotor wasn’t a prince and had no obligations, Ezor would have suggested that he became a photographer. For a quick snap, it was adorable. Although, its contents were… questionable, like the location, or more accurately, the weather of said location.

“Presumably.” Acxa replied before pausing. “Didn’t you see him before?”

“Just a glimpse and from a distance. Ezor saw him better than Narti and I.” Zethrid replied. She scrunched up her nose and leaned forward for a tick before shifting her stance to crossing her arms. “Small thing, isn’t he?”

“He seems to be weathering the storms of Bsët alright.” Ezor commented. She was pretty sure that Bsët was where Lotor had talked about going. Presumably for the blooming of the *Lula a shiut*.

Initially, when Lotor had told her about the date (read: when she confronted him about it after snooping through his stuff and finding out about it), she’d felt kind of bad for the Druid. Storms on Bsët could get pretty nasty, and it was just a stupid flower. Big whoop.

Well, jokes on her. The Druid seemed to be loving the storm if the picture was any indication. It didn’t answer the question of ‘what the quiznak, Lotor? Why in the worlds are they are out in the storm?’ but she supposed if it made the Druid happy then whatever.

As long as Lotor was happy then she was fine. And right now, Lotor was happy if the Druid was happy… and there was no fabricating the pure emotion captured in the picture.

It was plain as day to see the emotions in his face and body. The picture had been snapped hurriedly, with the Druid – Lance – in motion, but that didn’t take away any beauty from the picture. The Dr- Lance was practically twirling through the rain, cracks of light running through the sky behind him.

His face was tilted up to the sky, and based on his expression, he was undoubtable laughing. He probably didn’t even now that a picture had been taken. Stupid photogenic people.

“He looks kinda wild here.” Zethrid commented after a moment. “I can see why Lotor’s interested.”

Ezor could also see why. There was something… enchanting about the former Blue Paladin, and this picture seemed to capture it flawlessly. She could suddenly understand how Lotor had become so enthralled.

She’d always heard about how gorgeous Alteans could be, but she’d never really understood until now.

Still, enthralled or not, she couldn’t help but to wonder when Lotor’s thing with the Druid would end. Relationships with Lotor like this never seemed to last long. Something pretty and shiny would undoubtedly catch his attention, and then he’d be chasing after it like Kova after pieces of meat that Zethrid teased the kitty with.

Although, now that she thought of it… Lotor had been ‘with’ the Druid for a while….
“How long has he been working on this one?” Zethrid might as well been reading Ezor’s mind with her question. “And you think he’ll be tossed to the harem?”

Acxa hummed, tilting her head and bringing her hand up to her chin as she considered the question. “Longer than usual.” She replied after a while. “And I don’t think the harem is within Prince Lotor’s plans for this one.”

“He’s never trained one of them to be a Druid before.” Ezor chimed in.

Behind them, Narti flicked her tail against something, adding in her two cents on the matter, whatever it was. Kova let out a loud rumble of a purr.

Ezor pulled back up her phone with the intent of pulling up the reports and documents on the Druid, but then froze, her eyes widening at the caption she hadn’t noticed before. “Oh.” She muttered quietly. “Oh!” She repeated, gasping it louder this time.

Well… that changed things.

“What?” Zethrid huffed. “You can’t just ‘oh’ like that and not give a reason.”

Normally Ezor would continue to try to bait Zethrid until either Lotor or Acxa – the buzzkills – intervened, but she didn’t have the time, patience, or the capacity to care right now. Not with that caption.

“Harem is not in the plans!” She squeaked, clasping the communicator as she flipped it around and shoved it in Zethrid’s face. “Read, read, read!” She mini chanted, bouncing up and down so much that Zethrid couldn’t read.

“Get it out of my face!” Zethrid growled, batting Ezor’s hands – and the communicator – away. Both of them froze, staring as if in slow motion as the communicator was knocked out of Ezor’s hands and went sailing through the air.

It seemed with each heart beat the communicator flipped, and Ezor swore that her heart stopped the moment Acxa caught it.

Acxa glanced down at the screen, and Ezor saw the exact moment that Acxa noticed the caption due to Acxa’s eyebrows arching up in surprise and the small gasp of surprise.

“Oh no, if it’s got that response from Acxa, I want to know!” Zethrid demanded.

Acxa opened her mouth, shut it and took a breath before reading out the caption. “‘I think I’m in love.’?”

“He thinks he’s in love!” Ezor confirmed in a squeal. She bounced, pulling her hands away from Zethrid – who only allowed it as she was in shock – and pumped her fists. “That’s. So. Adorable!”


“Nope.” Ezor sung out, dancing around to grab her phone from Acxa. “He doesn’t.”

Zethrid was far from wrong, as a matter of fact, she was 100% correct. That was new. And unusual. Lotor didn’t usually ‘do’ love. He didn’t believe in it; at least, not like this.

He knew about ‘love’ as in the love of comrades. In his own special way, he loved his generals. After all, he let them play with Kova, or goof off. He kept sending pilots to try to get the Altean
ship out of the glowing quintessence portal despite all failed attempts because he knew that made Zethrid happy. He’d even hugged Acxa when she returned from the Weblum.

And most importantly, he never yelled at Ezor much when she snooped, even if she was snooping through his things.

It was in little ways that he showed that he cared and loved his generals, but actually saying those words? Well, Ezor thought she’d never hear him say anything remotely close to that. Or, well, text it.

If he was admitting that he thought he was in ‘love’ then he must have been feeling like this for a while. Lotor didn’t just make proclamations like this, so he had to have been sitting on this for a while. Or something happened on this date which pushed him over his reservations.

Regardless, Lotor thinking he was in love explained so much, like the sheer amount of patience he was giving Lance.

He wanted this – whatever it was – to be… genuine. Well, as genuine as it could be with the Druids influencing Lance’s emotions; carefully carving out his quintessence and molding him to Lotor’s desires. Corrupting him to the ways of the Druids slowly but surely.

Lotor could say that the Druid’s feelings were genuine all-day long. And perhaps, to some degree, they were. Or at least had been. After all, the Druid’s had to start somewhere, and according to the reports, all the Druids had done was cultivate existing emotions.

But, at the end of the day, there was no denying that Lance had been influenced by outside forces, and it was possible that whatever genuine feelings he’d had in the beginning were now false, crushed under the weight and expectations of the corruption and manipulation.

But, then again…

Ezor studied the picture again, ignoring the conversation going on behind her between Acxa and Zethrid. Lance’s emotions seemed so… real in the picture. She’d even thought it earlier – there was no fabricating the emotions there.

Looking at this picture, it was easy to forget that Lance had been conditioned to be more ‘open’ to the idea of loving Lotor. That he’d been manipulated into being more… confident and sure of his abilities, that he was worth the prince’s attention and desire. That he too shared those desires.

But, she’d been studying the reports, even the ones that Lotor ignored after a customary glance. Lance had been incredibly resistant to the conditioning in the beginning to the point that Xana had to basically recondition him from the beginning and then step in and periodically reinforce said conditioning.

Although, it seemed said conditioning was finally sticking to Lance.

Perhaps then… perhaps this was real then. If anything, she hoped for Lotor’s sake that it was. That he’d been right and all Lance had needed was a nudge or twelve in the right direction.

They did look cute together.

She’d only seen them at that one date, but even then, she’d seen how Lotor had looked at Lance. And now, well… Lotor didn’t just take pictures of people like that and send them to her. And if he did, he certainly didn’t add the caption ‘I think I’m in love.’

She sighed and pulled her phone back up, staring at the caption for a moment before pushing past
it. “Sooo, when are we gonna meet him? ;)”

She wasn’t expecting a response to her text, so she wasn’t too terribly bothered when she didn’t receive one.

It was still surprising that he’d texted her at all. She couldn’t imagine what must have triggered it, but if it had anything to do with that picture, then well, she could only assume Lance had done something to confirm the Prince’s feelings.

In any case, there was no way she was not going to meet Lance now. Especially since Lotor was texting things like *that* to her. It was just a matter of time and bothering Lotor until he allowed it.

Chapter End Notes

YO! This is the first of two updates today, Oct 13, 2017 in celebration of Season 4.

I stayed up ALLLLL night just to watch it, and man, I don't regret it at all. Hit me up on Tumblr if you want to talk so we avoid spoilers in the comments for others. :D I can't promise I'll reply right away, as I'm probably going to head to bed after I post, but... leave a message and I'll get back you ya. :D

As a friendly reminder: I may pull content from Season 3 (and future seasons), but Lilac Sweet is not Canon Compliant past the Season Finale of Season 2.

I WILL NOT be amending the story to make it canon compliant.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Ezor didn't usually get texts from Lotor, but she received one with a photo of Lance dancing in the rain, and an unexpected (even more so than the text) comment attached. She contemplated the future of Lance and Lotor.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s): Guilt**

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com). Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For as little as Lance cared about them, he guessed the flowers were pretty.

The blossoms were about the size of his head, and had about like 50 or more petals per flower. They kinda reminded Lance of his mother’s Dahlia flowers, except pale pink with blue veins and attached to thick vines.

True to Lotor’s words, almost immediately after the first flower bloomed, the area of greenery increased exponentially. It was gorgeous to see happen, but if Lance was honest, he still cared more about the rain.

But who could blame him?

Of all the things he missed about Earth, baring his family there, rain was one of the things that he missed the most. And finally, after who knew how long in space, he’d been able to dance around in it again.

Wow. Just thinking about it made Lance feel giddy all over again, making him grin and smile like a love drunk idiot. He supposed he might have been that too, considering what he’d done.

He’d kissed Lotor… again.

Like, he’d heard the phrase ‘I’m so happy I could kiss you’, but he’d never thought he’d act it out. Lotor had been strangely silent the entire time back to the ship, and had stared at Lance. Which would have been creepy if Lance hadn’t kissed him… twice.

And enjoyed it.

Quiznak, he’d enjoyed it. The actions themselves were from being caught up in the moment, but the relief that he’d felt after doing them wasn’t. That was real, and really, he should just stop questioning himself.
Perhaps once Lance would have been all up in knots freaking out over this, but strangely, he felt at peace. It’d felt way to natural to kiss Lotor like that, to look at him and not even think about his actions before doing them.

Romance books always talked about how being with ‘the one’ felt like puzzle pieces falling into place, and while Lance didn’t think Lotor was ‘the one’, he thought that he might understand those romance books a little more now.

Furthermore, if Lance had thought that just being physically close to Lotor solved that itch under his skin, then he was wrong. This was the least annoying it’d been since he’d first noticed it. Not to mention, that rain just seemed to have made Lance’s whole outlook brighter.

Sure, he was a little ‘under the weather’ from his dancing in the rain, but it was just a head ache and some minor sneezing. Nothing that would keep him down, and certainly nothing that some quintessence – or attention from Lotor – wouldn’t resolve.

Xana even came to visit him at one point, giving him a pointedly disappointed look before giving Lance some low stress lessons and some ‘homework’ to work on.

Although, Lance wasn’t sure if the headache was caused by the training he’d been doing with Xana or the dancing in the rain. He’d had an intense training session only a few quintants after he returned from the planet, and honestly, the two events were too close to properly determine the true cause.

Or perhaps this was a product of two events combined. Not that Lance was complaining. Being pampered by Lotor was nice.

Lotor sighed, running his hands through Lance’s hair before tsking quietly. Lance heard him inhale, and, already anticipating Lotor’s question, cut him off. “Yes, it was worth it.”

Lotor chuckled quietly in response, and Lance fell quiet, heaving a nearly silent sigh of contentment. Yes, being pampered by Lotor was nice.

So nice that it was incredibly easy for Lance to begin to drift off. Beyond the little pockets of conversation, it was quiet in the room. Not quiet like a pin could drop and one would hear it, but a comfortable quiet.

There was the soothing dull lull of the classical music that Lotor liked to listen to, the soft hum of the ship, the occasional tap on the tablet and sometimes a responding low beep, and...

“Lotor!” A female voice shouting out Lotor’s name from the doorway.

Lance was not the only one startled, as evidenced by the appearance of Lotor’s somewhat retractable claws. Thankfully, the only appeared for a moment before Lotor regained control. It would have been funny if it wasn’t mildly terrifying to feel the claws.

Now, Lance had faith that Lotor wouldn’t hurt him like that, even accidentally, but even with that faith, Lance doubted he’d ever be able to feel those claws without some measure of fear. He could remind himself that he was safe with Lotor as much as he wanted but there was still that unwarranted fear.

Unwarranted because he knew that nothing would ever to happen to him with Lotor.

Regardless of how safe he felt with Lotor, combination of the claws and the unknown voice was enough to startle Lance out of his sleepy daze. Lance’s eyes shot open, his hand going to chest as if
he could physically hold and calm down his erratically beating heart. He sat up, looking over the back of the couch at the doorway.

The woman standing there had her arms across over her chest, but even still Lance could see the symbol denoting who she was. While it was different, Lance still recognized the symbol there as one related to the symbol Lotor himself wore.

Given how informally she addressed Lotor, how she’d entered Lotor’s personal rooms, and the symbol on her chest, not to mention the matching colors of her armor… Lance could probably assume that this was one of Lotor’s infamous generals.

However, Lance had no clue which one. He watched her with wide eyes and then turned to look at Lotor just in time to see his eye twitch.

“Ezor.” Lotor greeted. Well, now Lance had a name for this chick. Hadn’t he heard it before? Ezor… Ezor… Ezor… hadn’t Sonali said something about an Ezor? Sonali had warned him about the Generals, which was probably where he heard the name from… but he couldn’t quite place it. Was she the wildcard? Or the cold aloof one? Or… what had Sonali said?

Ezor gasped and Lance looked just in time to see her almost literally bounce over to them. “Is this him?” She asked, leaning over the back of the couch to peer at him. Instinctually he fell back, until he was back to using Lotor as a pillow.

Okay, so this definitely wasn’t the cold aloof one. Definitely not. But that was fine, there were enough cold and aloof people on this ship already. Besides, he should have guessed that from her appearance.

Some cold and aloof couldn’t be as colorful as Ezor.

She was colorful, in fact, that amidst the darkness of the room, it almost hurt to look at her. Her primary color seemed to be a shade of not-red, but not-pink, and possibly not-orange either… but somehow being all three colors at once. That wasn’t even including the blue, green, and yellow of her… ponytail either.

Like Lotor, the ‘whites’ of her eyes were actually yellow. Unlike Lotor, her irises were a blue green color. Lance would never admit it, but he thought that Lotor’s eyes were prettier.

She was gorgeous in a ‘this lady could probably kill Lance in 101 ways with just her pinky’ kind of way. There was something about the sharpness of her eyes and smile that set off alarms in Lance’s brain, like she could judge his soul or something.

Despite that, he thought that she and him would probably become great friends. Especially if she was always this… bubbly.

He hoped that all of Lotor’s generals were this friendly, although he somehow doubted that.

Lotor sighed. “I suppose this was bound to happen eventually.” He muttered.

Lance blinked up at him in mild confusion before he pieced it together. So Lotor’s generals, or at least this one, had wanted to meet him. That was… surprisingly expected.

Of course, they’d want to meet him and make sure he wasn’t a threat to the prince. As if to confirm that, Ezor chirped out her response. “I told you I wanted to meet him!” Ezor paused, and looked Lance over. “Poor thing doesn’t look so good though.”
“He thought dancing in the rain coupled with intense training would be a good idea.” Lotor replied, running his hand through Lance’s hair and scraping gently at his scalp. “It’s nothing some rest won’t fix.”

Lance hummed in agreement, mirroring Ezor’s hum. He watched as she shifted to sit on the back of the couch, looking down at Lance.

“I mean, he’s super cute.” She leaned down as if to study him more. “You gonna talk to me or just continue to stare?”


“Uh, thank you?” Lance replied to her comment. Normally he’d be all over a gorgeous girl – alien or not – telling him that he was super cute, but somehow, he just didn’t feel comfortable with that with her. Or maybe it was Lotor’s presence, since he was… something with the prince.

He just didn’t know what he was with Lotor. Maybe they didn’t need labels. Then again, Labels kept people in Florida from drinking Windex. Then again, neither Florida nor Windex existed out here on this ship or in space.

No offense to people in Florida or anything.

“Awh. So cute!” Ezor cooed. “I can see why Lo-”

“Is there a reason you’re here?” Lotor interrupted.

Lance pouted. He wanted to know the ending of her statement. As if knowing that she winked at him and then turned her attention back to Lotor.

“Hmm?” She furrowed her eyebrows as she contemplated the question before her eyes lit up. “Oh! Oh yeah! I came in to give you that report you asked for.” She pulled a small chip out of nowhere and waved it around some before handing it off to Lotor.

“And you couldn’t have just sent it because…?” Lotor trailed off as he put said chip into his tablet, although he didn’t open whatever was on it.

“Oh, come on. You really think I would let an opportunity to possibly meet him pass me by?” She laughed. “I’ve been trying to meet you for ages,” She informed Lance. “But Mr. Possessive won’t share.” She stuck her tongue out at Lotor.

“I share plenty with you.” Lotor replied hotly. “Perhaps more than I should if you’re going to snoop like this.”

Lance snorted quietly at their exchange. It was comforting to see that Lotor allowed this kind of behavior, even from his Generals. By now, Lance was certain that Ezor would have been sentenced to death at least three times by Zarkon.

Lotor truly was different from his father. Lance could see Lotor being a good leader to the Galra empire one day.

“Well, now that we’ve met, we could do a meal or something later?” Lance offered. “I wouldn’t mind sharing a lunch with a lady as lovely as you.” Ezor giggled into her hand while Lotor stared in mock offense at Lance’s words.

“Are you saying I’m not lovely?” Lotor retorted.
“Pluh-ease. Everyone knows I’m the lovely one between us.” Lance’s replied came partnered with a grin. “You’re the handsome one.”

“You think I’m handsome?” Lotor instantly replied. “I’m flattered.”

“You two are sickening.” Ezor complained, rolling her eyes.

“If it bothers you so much, then leave.” Lotor replied, shooting her a cool look. “That’s what you get for snooping.”

She sighed and once again rolled her eyes, this time extra dramatically. “Oh, alright.” She paused and looked back down at Lance. “We can have lunch sometime. I look forward to meeting you when you’re feeling better.” She winked, and stood.

Lance waited for the sound of the doors sliding back shut before speaking. “She seems like a handful.”

“She has her uses.” Lotor shrugged. “She’s good at what she does, and I can’t fault her for that. Although, I was hoping for a different introduction.”

Lance laughed. “Why? That was perfect. It showed me exactly how you guys are.” Lance smiled up at Lotor. “And… for the record, if that’s any indication, I think you’ll be a great emperor.”

Lotor’s hands froze in Lance’s hair and there was a certain gleam to his eyes when he looked down at Lance. “Is that so?” He half laughed. “I guess we’ll see.”

“Speaking of, any news about your dad?” Lance asked.

He hadn’t asked about Zarkon in a while and while he knew Lotor was still Emperor Pro Tem, he hadn’t heard anything further on the subject.

“Haggar is still working with him, but she cannot say when, or if, he’ll ever wake. Voltron really did a… number on him.” Lotor paused. “I used that correctly, right?”

Lance laughed and nodded. “Yeah, yeah you did.”

Some part of Lance felt like he should be guilty. After all, he’d helped put Zarkon in that coma, but on the other hand, the universe was so much better off without Zarkon. Lotor was 100 times the better emperor.

Lotor was great with the planets he ‘captured’ in the name of the Galra, allowing them to keep their identity while still integrating them into the Empire.

Lotor’s idea of government was kind of like the United States, in a way. The Galra empire was DC/Washington, and each of the planets Lotor captured was a state. Those planets were allowed to keep their identity, their culture, their government. They just had to listen to Lotor every so often.¹

But at the same time… that guilt wouldn’t be silenced. The universe may have been better without Zarkon, but he was still Lotor’s father. Lance had been responsible for putting his… for putting Lotor’s father in a coma.

And although Lotor didn’t seem to really care – there was no love lost between Lotor and Zarkon – it didn’t change the fact that Lotor was still Zarkon’s son, and Lance was… still partially responsible for what happened.
“Don’t worry about him.” Lotor soothed Lance. “Haggar will see to him, and should I ever be so lucky that he never wakes, then all the better.” Lotor stroked Lance’s face. “The universe doesn’t need him or Haggar when it has me and you.”

Lance smiled thinly in return, leaning into Lotor’s touch. The guilt grew, changing into bile that soured Lance’s mouth. He thought to his tablet, rife with information that he’d stockpiled for his own purposes or to give to the resistance.

Right. The universe didn’t need Zarkon or Haggar when it had Lotor and Lance. Except Lance was betraying Lotor.

“You seem troubled by my words.” Lotor commented.

Lance smiled tightly again, shaking his head. “It’s nothing.” He started before sighing. “I just don’t feel like I’m up to the task of taking up Haggar’s mantle yet.”

Like so much he’d said to Lotor, it wasn’t exactly a lie. For all the leaps and bounds he’d made in his Druid training, he didn’t have anywhere near the amount of experience as Haggar. In a fight between them, there was no doubt in his mind that she’d win.

“I have faith in you.” Lotor replied. “I know you won’t fail me.” He played with Lance’s hair, looking off in the distance. He paused suddenly, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly before he looked down at Lance.

Lance blinked up at Lotor, his mind a blur as he tried to figure out why Lotor was giving him such an intense look. “Lotor?” He asked after a moment.

Lotor blinked and looked away, and it may have been the lighting, but Lance thought he appeared to be a bit darker than normal, like he hadn’t meant to just stare at Lance for so long. Or to be caught doing it.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Lance asked.

“Not now, pet.” Lotor resumed playing with Lance’s hair. “Perhaps another time.”

It sorta irked Lance that Lotor wasn’t sharing, but he supposed that the prince was entitled to his own secrets. It wasn’t like he had to share everything with Lance.

That didn’t stop Lance from sighing extra dramatically and rolling his eyes. “Fine.” He dragged out the word as he spoke. “Keep your secrets.”

“It won’t be for long.” Lotor promised. “I just need to work out some things…” He trailed off, his eyes going distant.

Lance rolled his eyes again, this time a lot less dramatically. “Alright, alright. Like I said, keep your secrets.”

“Keeping my secrets is what’s kept me safe all these years. It’s a hard habit to break.” Lotor sighed. “Just give me some time, pet. The only thing I can tell you now is that these plans fall outside the Empire.”

Outside the Empire? Well, at least Lotor’s plans weren’t just the cliché ‘take over the Empire and rule it’ plans that most sons of evil Emperors tended to have. But, Lotor’s use to words did intrigue Lance. Zarkon ruled most of the known universe.
What could Lotor have been planning that it fell outside of the Empire?

He felt like he should try to pry, but he was lucky he’d gotten what he had from the prince. If Lotor wasn’t ready to share, then he wouldn’t. Besides, if he pried too much, then it was doubtful Lotor would tell him anything at all in the future.

“I trust you’ll tell me when you’re ready.” Lotor’s eyes lit up the moment Lance spoke. Lance mentally sighed, preparing himself for what he knew he’d just triggered. Ugh. But, he couldn’t be too bitter since he had no one to blame but himself for the question that he knew would follow his statement.

“You trust me?” Lotor teased, referencing Lance’s hatred of that question and word. Lance groaned, once again dramatically rolling his eyes.

“Rude. You’re rude, and I hate you.”

Lotor laughed and shook his head. “You don’t.” He countered. “but thank you.” His tone was considerably softer when he spoke, and when Lance looked up at him, the strange gentle look from the date was in Lotor’s gaze.

Just seeing that look, and seeing it being directed at him was enough to send his heart and stomach on a roller coaster ride.

He didn’t deserve to be looked at like that. Not when he was betraying Lotor. The guilt was eating him up inside, and the only defense he had against it was the continued belief that he wasn’t betraying Lotor so much as Zarkon and Zarkon’s empire.

Well, that and focusing on other things than his guilt. Like the ‘thank you’.

There wasn’t much that Lotor could be thanking Lance for. Dropping the subject? Trusting Lotor on it? He wasn’t sure, but it wasn’t like Lotor gave him much time to respond before he was speaking again. “You should rest some more.”

Lance wasn’t really all that tired anymore, but he knew that Lotor was right. Besides, it gave him the perfect opportunity to just… he didn’t know, ignore the softness and gentleness? Ignore the thanks and appreciation? Just slip right past the awkwardness Lance felt in his very bones?

“Yeah, alright.”

Chapter End Notes

1 - This is referencing a conversation from Chapter 18 between myself and another user, ‘I am shy’. They brought up the US states analogy, and I asked if I could use it on a later chapter.

This was the second of two updates today, Oct 13, 2017 in celebration of Season 4.

Hit me up on Tumblr if you want to talk Season 4 so we avoid spoilers in the comments for others. :D I can't promise I'll reply right away, but... leave a message and I'll get back to you. :D

As a friendly reminder: I may pull content from Season 3 (and future seasons), but
Lilac Sweet is not Canon Compliant past the Season Finale of Season 2.

I WILL NOT be amending the story to make it canon compliant.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance was a little under the weather from a combination of dancing in the rain, and some some training sessions. Xana checked up on him and gave him low stress lessons, while Lotor comforted Lance.

During this time, Lance met Ezor and was able to see how Lotor interacted with at least this General.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Manipulation

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

Lance hated to admit it, but… he secretly kind of liked it when Lotor stared at him. There was something comforting in the way that Lance always seemed to have some degree of the prince’s attention.

But there were times when it was annoying. No. That wasn’t the right word. Distracting sounded more correct, and with what Lance was doing, distractions could be deadly.

As if to prove this point, the ball of concentrated quintessence that he’d been working on…‘wobbled’ for lack of a better term. Lance narrowed his eyes, rotating his hands as he fought against it to keep it compressed before safely dispelling the ball of quintessence and allowing it to dissipate into the air.

It was interesting how in its concentrated form, quintessence could be seen, even by those with low quintessence awareness.

The quintessence released, he turned his attention to the prince, huffing quietly when Lotor didn’t even bother to hide the fact that he’d been staring. As a matter of fact, he seemed to confirm it, the corners of his lips tugging upwards into a smirk.

“Yes?” There was a minor bite to his words as he spoke, but it’s source was only minor annoyance. He’d promised Xana he’d be a pro at this by their next class, and that meant Lance needed to practice. As if reacting to his annoyance, he could feel quintessence energy spark between his fingers.

In response, he curled his hand into a fist, tightening down on his mental control on the quintessence inside him.
“Admiring the view.” It felt like Lotor was contemplating a piece of fine art as he looked at Lance. Which, okay, yeah, Lance kinda was a piece of art; but still.

“Oh?” Lance arched an eyebrow. “And a penny for your thoughts on it?”

“You don’t have a penny.” Lotor teased. “But I was thinking about how much you’ve grown here.” Lotor shifted, picking his head up off his fist so he could lean forward and touch Lance’s face. Lance closed his eyes, letting out a quiet sigh as Lotor’s thumb brushed over his scales.

If he focused, he could still feel slimy stickiness under the current of warmth, but he didn’t want to focus. He just wanted to enjoy the warmth of Lotor’s affection. Lotor was always so safe and warm, and Lance loved it.

Why had he ever thought fighting against Lotor, or what was there between them, was a good idea, he’d never know.

“It seems like it’s been so long since you were a timid little thing, hiding away in my bathroom,” Lance opened his eyes when Lotor continued on. “Terrified of the world those who would dare to hurt you.”

“It wasn’t that long ago.” Lance replied quietly. “I’m still…”

“You’re more than that now.” Lotor cut him off. “You’ve progressed faster than any other Druid. That’s an accomplishment you should be proud of.” He paused, and when Lance looked up at him through his lashes, he could see Lotor smiling. “I’m proud of you.”

Lance would be lying if he said that those words didn’t send his heart into a frenzy of palpitations. Each frantic beat echoed in his ears like drums. Lance swallowed thickly and adverted his gaze.

Lotor’s hand dropped away, and Lance immediately missed it.

“Also, I like watching you. There’s something… graceful about how you manipulate quintessence.”

“I manipulate it just like anyone else.” Lance playfully rolled his eyes, laughter in his voice as he shook his head. “There’s nothing ‘graceful’ about it.”

“I think everything about you is graceful. Even when you fall over the couch at some ungodly varga in the morning.” Lotor teased.

“That’s rude.” Lance wrinkled his nose. “Super rude. Rude AF. I’m so offended right now, you don’t even know.”

Lotor snorted, rolling his eyes as he leaned back to settle into his seat. His gaze was still warm and thoughtful on Lance, making Lance’s stomach twist with every tick. He knew that look. He knew what it meant, and the anticipation was killing him.

He’d been on a few dates with Lotor since the one where he’d danced in the rain. He’d shared a few more kisses with Lotor too. The guilt once associated to the action had all but vanished by now, leaving instead fuzzy warm thoughts, which, if left unattended, tended to turn a bit more heated and steamy.

Not that Lance would act out on those. Not yet, anyways.

He’d indulged once, under the influence, while on that planet with the rain, and he didn’t intend to
indulge again until he was certain that Lotor wasn’t going to just discard him once he put out. Not that he thought Lotor would do that, but… well, it was better to be safe than sorry. And thus far, Lotor seemed to understand and respect that.

Lance couldn’t have been more pleased.

Besides, he didn’t feel comfortable sleeping with Lotor when he was betraying him. Just because his relationship with the Prince had changed, didn’t mean that Lance wasn’t still spying.

Just a quintant ago he’d talked with Matt through Sonali’s communication device – a rare event – and had been asked to see if he could either find out more information on Project Robeast or any other classified but high-profile project like the Kumar.

It was doubtful Lance would be assigned to either anytime soon, but he’d promised to do what he could.

The Resistance was having to clean up Voltron’s messes, and evidently, they’d been leaving a grid lock of robeasts in their wake. Which was worrisome. Why weren’t they taking care of…

Lance winced, a sharp stab of pain cutting across his thoughts. Stupid ice pick headaches. He’d been low key wondering when it was going to kick in. They often did after he’d been practicing quintessence manipulation.

Lotor moved almost immediately, getting up and moving so he was closer to Lance, placing a hand under Lance’s chin to tilt his head up so Lotor could look at him.

Xana assured him that it was natural for Lance to get them, considering Lance’s quick progression. And Lance was progressing quickly. Lotor hadn’t just been flattering Lance when he said that no Druid had progressed as quickly as Lance had.

And it seemed that Lance was only getting better and better. Quick speed might not have been Lance’s forte, but quintessence manipulation evidently was. He was picking it up like a fish picked up swimming.

Lotor had been correct so long ago when he said that just a little bit of spite was great motivation. Especially since in terms of quintessence manipulation, Lance had already surpassed Xana’s expectations.

Just like he had with his quintessence awareness.

Xana had a few theories on why this was. The first theory was that it could have been due to Lance’s base quintessence.

After all, different bases meant that some abilities would be more difficult, and others would come with more ease. Xana himself was a great example for this. As a yellow base, utilizing the ‘extreme speed’ talent was something that never came easily for him, much like how it wasn’t really Lance’s thing either.

The second theory was that it had to do something with the fact Lance was an ex-Paladin of Voltron.

The Lions had a greater view of quintessence, which helped them choose their Paladins.

Xana believed that the Lion’s ability may have somehow enhanced Lance’s own ability. Which, to some degree, made sense. The Druids were still unsure of what affects piloting a Lion of Voltron
could have on a person’s quintessence.

But Lance didn’t think that theory had anything to do with his ability to see quintessence. He’d been able to see quintessence as a child, and that was well before he’d met Blue. If Blue had influenced anything, it was his quintessence manipulation, and even that Lance was loath to associate to her.

Besides, they had a living example of the first theory in Xana and ‘extreme speed’. Also, Xana couldn’t tell Lance much about the last blue based Druid, Lance’s mother; so, there wasn’t exactly a precedent for Lance.

As for Blue, Lance could still connect with her. She still showed up, every so often in his astral projection, although neither of them were ever able to do much about the corruption anymore.

It hurt Lance to see her there, to watch her as she tried to make her way to him with the sludge slowing her down, and the corruption smeared across her body. He tried to clean her when he could, but as corrupted as he himself was getting, there wasn’t much he could do.

Although, lately, Blue had been returning to him cleansed and clean. The last that had happened he’d begged her to leave him. She was free, and he wasn’t. She’d snarled at him about him being hers, and tried to dig him out.

A few times she’d tried to cleanse him. But, at this point, Lance had given up on the corruption. Trying to keep the corruption out was like trying to sweep the outside during a dust storm.

It just wasn’t going to happen.

Besides, Lance didn’t mind the corruption so much anymore. Especially since he’d figured out how to manipulate it in the astral plane. It was no longer controlling him. He was controlling it.

The only thing he didn’t love about his progress as a Druid was the headaches. Seeing ‘auras’ or people’s quintessence was hard on Lance’s eyes, which helped start them. Manipulating quintessence was a headache in and of itself. Which brought him back to here, with Lotor looking him over.

“Another headache?” Lotor’s question was spoken quietly, barely above a whisper just in case the sound hurt Lance.

“Mm, nothing bad.” He was thankful for the dim lighting. Bright light was almost never pleasant when paired with a headache, nor were loud noises – to which he was thankful to Lotor and his consideration to not speak loudly.

“How in the world could he ever once feared Lotor hurting him? Despite the strong undercurrent of slimy possession – or maybe it was obsession? – Lotor’s feelings were so very safe and warm. Lance could bask in them all day; he didn’t even mind the slimy undertone anymore.

A spark of amusement filtered through the connection, and Lance peeked open an eye to give Lotor a look before he remembered Lotor asking him a question.
Oops. His bad.

“He said it was natural.” Lance muttered. “Cuz of how fast I’m progressing.”

“You’re very talented.” There was a surge of pride which Lance both heard and felt, and he flushed, surprised at how strong it was. He pulled away from Lotor’s hands with wide eyes, and then ignored Lotor’s amused chuckles.

“Sometimes I forget how… modest you are.” Lotor’s laughter died down as his spoke, his eyes growing distant as his smile faded into something bitter. “I’m lucky to have you.”

Lotor didn’t need to continue speaking for Lance to understand were his thoughts were going. It wasn’t Lotor who was lucky to have Lance, but Lance who was lucky to have Lotor. He was thankful that Lotor had found him, and helped him.

For as much as he talked, words in situations like this weren’t usually his forte, so he resorted to actions. He leaned forward again, just barely brushing his lips over Lotor’s cheek. The prince hummed, his hand finding Lance’s and loosely holding it, only squeezing briefly when Lance pulled away.

“I should be thanking you.” Lance’s voice was tender as he spoke, as soft and gentle as the kiss he’d just given Lotor. When he looked up at Lotor, he was pleased to note the ever-so-slightly darker shade of purple against the Prince’s cheeks and upper ears.

Lotor hesitated for a tick before chasing after Lance, pressing an equally gentle kiss against Lance’s lips. He moved slowly, as if to give Lance time to turn his head away if he wanted. Lance appreciated that Lotor offered him that silent choice, although he never took it.

Lotor almost always kissed him like that, unless Lance had been the one to initiate it. Like Lance was fragile glass who’d be broken at the first touch. Like Lance was delicate. Like he was something… special.

His lips curved upwards into a smile, pressing a bit closer as he closed his eyes. A small breathless sigh parted his lips just slightly, and he moved them against Lotor’s, inviting the Prince to deepen the kiss if he so desired.

A hand cupped the side of Lance’s face, the palm hot against his cheek. Lotor didn’t take the invitation, instead pulling away just so he could press his forehead to Lance’s.

Lotor’s eyes were usually so focused and intense, but now they were soft and kind. Still intense, but in a different way than they usually were.

“You’re beautiful.” Lotor’s voice was breathless and quiet, like a thought not meant to be heard. But Lance heard it, and his face heated up even as his smile grew. He ducked his head, pulling away easily from Lotor.

“You were gonna ask me something?” Lance prompted, still looking down to avoid looking at Lotor. Despite Lotor’s responding laughter being warm, it sent shivers down Lance’s spine.

Lotor took Lance’s hands, holding them loosely. “I was wondering if you’d like to accompany me to the gardens later today?”

Lance bit his lip, looking up at the prince from under his lashes. His hesitation crumbled at the hopeful look on the Prince’s face, and really, who was Lance to say no? It wasn’t like he had a reason to say no, and besides, the past couple dates with Lotor had been nothing short of pleasant.
“I’d love to.” Lance replied. Lotor’s smile might as well as been a sun for how brightly it shone. He pulled Lance’s hands to his face and kissed his knuckles before dropping them.

“Thank you.” Lance flushed, looking away yet again. His face felt hot, and he just knew he was blushing. “I’ll pick you up after your lessons.”

Lotor touched Lance’s chin, turning his face upwards so he could press a chaste kiss to Lance’s cheek. “I’ll go ahead and get things ready.” He muttered. “I’ll see you later.”

He pulled away from Lance, and Lance watched him leave. Sonali entered just a few short ticks later, and Lance got the distinct impression that they were eyeing him, judging him. He scowled. “What?”

Sonali looked away with a short quiet sigh. “Nothing.”

Lance narrowed his eyes, studying the guard for a moment before turning away. He switched to his other vision, biting back the hiss at the brief stab of pain it caused him and looked around to verify that there were no invisible eavesdroppers lurking around.

Speaking of the invisible eavesdropper… Lance ought to check when his next movie night with her was. She’d taken to ‘kidnapping’ him occasionally for some ‘bonding’ time. It wasn’t really all that bad, since she was pretty cool to talk with.

Hands down, Ezor was Lance’s favorite general. Although her ability to turn invisible made things a bit difficult for him and Sonali.

“Yes.” Lance asked once he was sure the coast was clear. He was referring to the Resistance, a fact the both of them knew about. Sometimes Matt recorded little holovids asking for specifics in some of the information Lance fed them.

He didn’t have much interaction with Matt, but he had enough to stop thinking of him as the Green Paladin’s brother, and instead as his own entity.

Some part of Lance hoped that Matt would never find out about the Green Paladin. There was no way that Matt wouldn’t be loyal to his family, and to be honest, Lance didn’t want to deal with the fallout after he helped Lotor destroy team Voltron.

He smiled at the thought of them on their knees before him, finally realizing the mistake that they made in abandoning him. In ignoring him. In mistreating him. He’d show them all, and he’d make sure that the last thing any of them saw was him.

“No.” Sonali sounded tired. They wouldn’t say what was going on, but the little bit he’d managed to get, something had happened during the last transfer of guards. He didn’t know what that something was, but it’d had Sonali on edge. If he were to hazard a guess, then he’d assume that a resistance member was transferred away, someone they didn’t like had been transferred in, or they’d received bad news.

Not that Lance was supposed to know anything about that. He was supposed to only think that there was Sonali and no one else. Or something like that.

He picked up his personal tablet – a gift from Lotor – and scrolled through his schedule to double check when his date with Lotor would be, and to check his movie night with Ezor. “They were wanting more information on Project Crystal.”

Lance paused, pursing his lips at the mention of the abandoned project. “Why?” He turned around
to look at Sonali. “The project’s been abandoned. It was found to be unserviceable to the Empire.”

“They wanted to know how the Druids would graft Balmerian crystals into a creature.” Sonali replied, shifting uneasily. “And why exactly the project was abandoned.”

“It was abandoned because it wasn’t working.” The ‘duh’ in Lance’s statement wasn’t said, but even Sonali should have been able to pick up on it. “I don’t know how they were grafting the crystals, the reports don’t go that much into detail. But none of the experiments survived.” Lance shook his head. “They were going about it entirely the wrong way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Drazil.” Lance replied, pulling up the image of the Robeast and displaying it to Sonali. “This fucker right here.” He pointed at it for good measure. “It became infused with Balmerian crystals after the Balmera attempted to kill and imprison it.” Lance shrugged. “It went from difficult to kill to damn near impossible.”

“So, the project was a success?” Sonali gasped. “Lance, this shou-”

“It was a failure, technically.” Lance interrupted. “Project Crystal was designed to create fake Balmeras, not… whatever Drazil became.” Lance closed the image. “And as far as I know, the Druids aren’t aware of the fate of that Robeast after it’s imprisonment.”

“What about the Kumar project? You said you were going to try to get more info on it.” Sonali prompted.

“Not much to add there.” Lance replied. “The Kumar still isn’t operational, and won’t be until Haggar assigns new Druids of the Four Directions and trains them on the project. Even then there’s a likely chance of there being differences due to the different balances in base quintessence that will have to be accounted for.”

Lance paused, and then looked at Sonali. “And before you can ask, because I know you’re gonna… no I don’t know when Haggar will assign new disciples. Or who they will be. It’s a popular rumor that Xana will be chosen, but I’ve heard Petyr is a possible candidate as well.”

Sonali hummed, pacing a bit as they took in this information. “And that’s it?”

Lance narrowed his eyes at them again, leaning back against the table. “You want more?”

“Anything you can give us on the Robeasts.”

“I’m not able to access that classified of a project yet.” Lance replied coolly. He scrolled through his tablet, pausing at one particular document. He scanned it over before looking back up at Sonali and half shrugging. “I don’t have anything else. I haven’t seen anything more about weapons or people trading beyond what I’ve already given you, and I don’t think you want repeat info, do you?”

Sonali shook their head. “Of course not.” They sighed. “But if you recall something, let me know, alright?”

“Of course.” Lance smiled thinly and deleted the document he’d saved about the prisoner transport ship heading for a Druid base in the Ulippa System. As much as he wanted to help those people out, he’d given the Resistance too much information and he had to be careful.

He was walking a thin line lately. If he shared too much, then the Galra would suspect a spy. If he
didn’t share enough then the Resistance would think that he turned. He wouldn’t be able to help anyone if he was dead.

Not that he thought Lotor would kill Lance. If anything, they’d stop his lessons and throw him into the Harem where he couldn’t do any further harm. But, if he was caught, then it was doubtful that Sonali would escape.

Regardless of how it went down, Sonali would be impacted, and honestly, given how tired they seemed lately, Lance didn’t want to make their life more miserable than it already was.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, I'm doing a "No Excuses Writer's prompt" on Tumblr. I've been doing it for a while, but it's really kicked up recently, lol.

I've created a new story which is attached to this one through a Series where I'll be putting the finished prompts. That way people won't have to dig through my tumblr to find them. :)

You can find the prompt list Here. Drop me a prompt on Tumblr. :D

Muffarino drew beautiful fanart for this fic. You can find it Here!
Bonus: Sweet

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: Lance made a questionable decision in what information to give Sonali.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** None.

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

I just now realized that I forgot to tell people that I was going to be posting a Bonus Chapter today. My bad. Sorry. Whelp, here, enjoy this bonus chapter anyways. We need something cute to balance out what's to come later today/tonight.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance frowned as he swirled the straw around the oddly bright and colorful drink Ezor had provided him. Its texture was something like a mixture between a milkshake and a slushie, or maybe a smoothie? Whatever it was, it smelt like it could rot his teeth if he smelled it long enough.

“It’s not gonna kill you, silly.” Ezor chirped from beside him. “Try it! You might like it.”

“Or he’ll be normal and sane, like us, and hate it.” Acxa argued from across the table. She stirred her own drink – a dull red thing that looked like the stuff Lotor drank only in a slushie form.

“Lotor said that he likes sweet things!” Ezor protested. “And you weren’t invited anyways. Go away.”

“I’m making sure you don’t kill him with that poison.” Acxa replied, pointedly looking at the colorful banded cold drink in Lance’s hands. “Prince Lotor doesn’t even like it, and you know how much he loves Seksi.”

“Lotor’s a wet blanket.” Ezor paused, scrunching up her nose at what she just said. Likewise, Acxa’s lips turned downwards and her whole body seemed to twitch. “Did I use that correctly?” Ezor asked Lance. “It doesn’t sound like I did. It sounds kinda gross.”

Lance rolled his eyes, shaking his head fondly. “You used it right.” He informed her.

Ezor cheered, sticking her tongue out at Acxa. “See! I told you I was using it correctly!”

“Doesn’t make it any less insanitary.” Acxa replied.

“Well, maybe if you spent more time with Lance….” Ezor trailed off, giving Acxa a meaningful look.
“I only just met her Ezor, chill.” Lance laughed, putting the questionable drink on the table to pat the air in the ‘chill’ motion.

As a matter of fact, this lunch was his first meeting with Acxa ever. He knew about her from Ezor, who was a chatterbox when it came to stories about the others and Lotor but he had yet to meet any of the other Generals until now.

His impression of Acxa was much the same as it was with Ezor, except for the whole ‘color’ thing. He was still about 100% sure that Acxa could kill him 101 ways with just her pinkie. Probably without trying either. And based off what he’d heard about Narti and Zethrid, he was sure they were probably the same.

“Fine.” Ezor crossed her arms almost like she was pouting but she was still giving Acxa a look. Lance sighed, feeling a bit like a parent trying to get his children to behave. Man, was this how Lotor felt when managing his generals? If so, no wonder he kept tossing them off on missions to keep them busy.

Also, no wonder Lotor always seemed so stressed. Maybe Lance could braid his hair later and give him a manicure? That usually helped him de-stress.

“Lance!” Ezor cried out a moment later. “You didn’t try the drink!” Her hands went to her cheeks as her gaze shifted between Lance and the drink in rapid succession.

Lance sighed, picking the drink back up and moving to take a sip of it only to pause when Acxa spoke.

“I wouldn’t.” Acxa advised. “Her mother species lives off Ylik and fruit. Unless you want your teeth to rot, I wouldn’t suggest drinking that.” Right… Lance didn’t know what ‘Ylik’ was, and based on the name he didn’t want to.

“Oh, shut your quiznak!” Ezor snarled.

Acxa froze, her mouth dropping open as pure undulated horror overcame her features. “Ecxuse. Me?” She growled out a few ticks later.

“I learned it from Lance!” Ezor quickly said, throwing her hands out at Lance and turning invisible like that’d save her from Acxa’s fury. Like, yeah, sure, okay. Throw Lance under the bus for that, he didn’t care.

Whelp, if there was one thing he’d learned from his family, it was that if he didn’t want to talk then he’d better fill his mouth.

Acxa’s murderous gaze turned on him just as he put the straw in his mouth and sucked. Acxa’s expression mirrored Veron Dursley’s from the first Harry Potter book, except in reverse. She went from murderous rage back to horrified in less than a tick.

“It wasn’t exactly a tropical smoothie – the texture was too… blocky and icy for that – but it wasn’t
a slushie either. And the taste was just off for lack of better word. He could taste the Seksi fruit in it, along with something that tasted vaguely of mango, pineapple, banana, and maybe apple.

Yet despite all those flavors, it still tasted kind of bitter. Like he was drinking a sugar-free lemonade with hints of those other fruits.

Acxa physically flinched, leaning back away from Lance. He couldn’t really tell, but he thought she look a bit green. “Prince Lotor was right to keep you two separated.” She hissed.

“Needs more sugar.” Lance muttered as he stirred the drink again, frowning down at it. “The fruit’s too bitter.”

“Sugar?” Ezor asked.

“Yes.” Lance popped the ‘p’ and took another sip of the drink. “It’s a sweetener.”

“Oh!” Ezor crowed. A bowl drifted down in front of him, courtesy of his invisible friend. He peered inside it at the light blue powdered substance. “Ylik!” Ezor informed him cheerfully. “Narti loves this stuff.”

Lance looked at the drink, looked at the bowl, and then at the spoon in the bowl before shrugging, picking up the bowl, and pouring it inside while stirring with the straw.

He took another sip once he’d finished, and hummed thoughtfully. “Much better.” Well, Acxa definitely looked a bit more on the greener side now. Interesting.

“You might as well as just be drinking liquified Ylik.” She muttered, aghast.

Lance shrugged and took another sip. “Tastes like home. Man, I bet that Ylik would make some awesome cotton candy.”

“Cotton candy?” Both Ezor and Acxa asked, abet with completely different tones.

“Mmm, yeah. Air spun sugar. It’s basically that stuff spun around super-fast so it turns fluffy and then you eat it.”

Ezor reappeared at his side, and Lance swore he could see stars in her eyes. “Tell me more!” She demanded, taking a seat.

“You’re both demented and crazy.” Acxa muttered.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this cute little tidbit. I felt it was important to have something cute and light in preparation for later. :3

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You can find the prompt list [Here.](#) Drop me a prompt on Tumblr. :D

I've been debating what to do for Keith's birthday that's coming up, and I think I may be posting on Friday. :) We shall see since I'll be going to a Theme Park that day. :D I'm so excited!
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance had a nice lunch with Ezor and Acxa where he got to try a sweet space fruit smoothie.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Manipulation, Referenced/Mentioned Drinking, Dubious Consent and Situations

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance had the feeling that he was nearing towards the end of his training with Xana. It wasn’t that Xana had said anything about it, but it was just something Lance had realized after the sudden increase in difficulty. Things always got harder right before they were done.

It was always darkest before the dawn.

Some trainings weren’t so bad. Lance walked away from them feeling… energized yet tired at the same time. Other trainings were so bad that Lance would wake up in Lotor’s bed, his body stiff and his mind sluggish as he barely recalled the previous quintant’s events.

But those times were fading, becoming less and less common as the quintants passed.

Lotor helped when he could. He comforted Lance after those rare trainings, allowing Lance to braid his hair, or to use his lap as a pillow while Lotor carded his hands through his hair and massaged his scalp. A few times Lotor had even drawn a bath for Lance, adding some of Lance’s favorite bath bombs which turned the bath into a shimmering shinning golden color; like he was bathing in liquid gold.

Lance always emerged from those baths feeling like he was absolutely glowing, and the shimmering shine of the glitter which clung to his skin and hair only helped reinforce that.

There were other benefits to the comfort as well, seeing as Lotor took this time to look over reports. Surprisingly, the soft classical music Lotor preferred to listen to was soothing to the headaches. If it was a lap-pillow kinda day, then if Lance was up for it, then sometimes he could glean bits of information.

Rarely, Ezor would show up to watch a movie with Lance, or take him out for a lunch in the gardens, citing Lotor’s inability to escape whatever princely meeting he was attending at the time. Even more rare was the random occurrences of Zethrid, Acxa, or Narti and Kova.
It was enlightening to see each of the different Generals in ways that he suspected that none besides Lotor and themselves had seen. For example, Zethrid was an artist. For as much as she loved to destroy, she had talent with creating works of art – although her topic was usually explosions.

Acxa apparently did more paperwork than Lotor, but she enjoyed showing Lance the star charts that she’d made herself of uncharted areas where she and the others had gone. And while Lance couldn’t say much of Narti, Kova was the softest quizznaking thing in the universe and it totally had some weird Jedi mind purr powers that just put Lance right to sleep.

But this quintant was not one of those quintants where Lance spent time with the various generals; nor was it a day where Lance needed comfort and attention from the Prince.

He’d been on a date with Lotor just a few quintants prior, and had seen a movie with Ezor the quintant before yester-quintant. His lessons hadn’t been too tough on him, but this was a free day for him. And he was intending to spend it exactly as such.

Which meant he was sprawled out on the couch, lazily watching holographic images display across Lotor’s ceiling in a way that was supposed to emulate trees. His hand lit up briefly with quintessence energy as he used his powers to make the holographic display ‘skip’ to the next design.

“You seem to favor this one.” Lotor muttered as the colors in the room changed to a cooler shade, the holographic designs now displaying patterns and ripples similar to what water reflection from the sun looked like.

“It’s calming.” Lance replied.

He’d been so irritated when Lotor had first showed him this that he hadn’t been shown it earlier. Irritated to the point that Lotor had granted him control over it just about anytime he wanted now.

It hadn’t taken Lance long to figure out how to ‘hack’ it with quintessence, although poor Lotor had to use an application on his tablet or a remote.

They lapsed back into a comfortable silence, Lotor’s hand occasionally drifting down to languidly pet Lance’s hair as he read through his reports. After a while, Lotor broke the silence with a familiar, common question.

“Penny for your thoughts, Lance?”

Lance hummed, tilting his head back to look up at the prince through half lidded eyes. “Maybe if you had one.”

“Oh?” Lotor questioned, arching an eyebrow as he looked down at Lance. He put the tablet down on the table near them, and turned his full attention to Lance. “How about something worth more?”

“Oh yeah? Like what?” There were tons of things worth more than a penny that Lotor could give Lance, so it didn’t really give away any hints. Gifts were just a perk of whatever he had with Lotor.

Lance wouldn’t quite call it a relationship, and he definitely wouldn’t introduce Lotor as his boyfriend or anything, but… they were something. His mind drifted back to Bsët, where the line had been blurred and possibly crossed.

They might have been considered… lovers there, if Lance believed that Lotor knew of love. He wasn’t a fool to think he could be the one to teach the Prince, but… there was something appealing about the idea.
Not that Lance could ever properly return that love. For as good as Lotor was to Lance, Lance could never be that good back to him. Not so long as he was betraying the Empire, and, by extension, Lotor.

“I was thinking,” Lotor started his reply. His eyes slid from Lance’s face, and his hand trailed along Lance’s neck to play with the loose jewel hanging from the choker. “Something shiny to match this?”

Lance’s breath was caught at the movement and the feeling of the tips of Lotor’s claws barely scratching against his bared neck. He swallowed thickly and hesitated less than one tick before he was grinning and tilting his head back further to allow Lotor more room.

Something shiny to match his necklace, huh? Well, that could be any number of things, but that at least lowered the options down to jewelry. Lance could work with that.

He’d look really good in some earrings, but his ears weren’t pierced. Unless Lotor decided to help Lance out with that, earrings were unfortunately out. Rings as well, since Druids used their hands with quintessence a lot.

A bracelet wouldn’t be bad. Or an armlet. An anklet wouldn’t work well with his boots… so it was probably a bracelet or an armlet.

Neither of which would bother Lance. He used to wear bracelets and jewelry all the time from his younger relatives. He could pull off just about any style bracelet or armlet, no problem.

Regardless of what he was given, the only thing Lance could be absolutely sure of was that it’d have a Balmerian crystal on it. Not that that bothered Lance either. He hadn’t been affected adversely by the necklace he was wearing, so clearly it was safe for him to have more.

“And here I was,” Lance purred, “thinking about how good you treat me.”

Lotor’s responding quiet bark of laughter was like hearing audible sunlight. “Is that so?” He questioned. Lance nodded, humming as Lotor’s fingers trailed up and down his neck, claws ever so gently scraping against his skin.

“Good to know I’m treating you right.” Lotor continued to speak. Lance hummed in agreement again. Yes. Lotor was treating Lance right. Certainly better than how Lance had been treated at the hands of the Paladins of Voltron.

Lotor’s hand skimmed up, ghosting over Lance’s face to briefly touch his scales before sliding down to the tips of Lance’s ears. “Have you considered piercing these?” He asked.

“Thought about it once, but… it never worked out.” Lance half shrugged. He’d wanted to go to space, and his best bet of that had been the Galaxy Garrison. He’d been limited to what he could do there.

Also, Lotor was losing his touch. That question practically screamed to Lance that he was going to get earrings. “You gonna get me earrings?” Lance asked, grinning as he shifted to sit up. Lotor allowed the movement, pulling his hands away.

“It was a consideration, yes.” Lotor tilted his head in a short-lived nod of agreement. “I thought a pair or two may look good on you.” He paused, as if to consider his words. “Then again, I believe just about anything would.”

Lance chuckled awkwardly at the admission, twisting around so he was on his knees on the couch.
facing Lotor. “You spoil me.” Lance accused, pointing his finger and poking Lotor in the chest.

“Am I not supposed to?” Lotor returned. “You deserve it, but if it bothers you so… how about a movie tonight?”

Lance’s eyes lit up at the prospect. The last movie he’d seen with Ezor had a trailer to something that he was absolutely dying to watch. Specifically, he was dying to watch it with Lotor, if only to see his reactions.

“My choice?”

“You have a preference?” Lotor asked, before shrugging. “No matter. If you want to see something, I’ll do my best to obtain it. What movie?”

“Battle for the Stars: Return of Altea.” Lance announced. “I heard they made Allura extra hideous… and I just have to see this.”

Lotor’s smile faded to a neutral frown at the mention of the movie, his eyes narrowing briefly before he nodded. “I wasn’t aware you were familiar with the cartoon.” Lotor commented.

“Last season I watched was Battle for the Stars: Curse of Altea. Man, I was soooo hooked that I’d beg my boss to let me off so I could watch it.”

Lotor hummed. “If it means that much to you, then of course. That’s the live action movie that just came out, right?”

“Sure is.” Lance nodded.

“Then we can watch it after dinner.”

Lance’s face cracked into a giant smile, and he pressed a quick kiss against Lotor’s lips. “Thank you.” He whispered as he pulled away.

Lotor’s eyes were smoldering, and his hands flexed, curling into a fist for a tick before relaxing. The returning smile was tight; not that Lance thought anything of this. Lotor was weird sometimes after Lance kissed him, although he suspected it was because Lotor wanted more kisses.

“I…” Lotor cleared his throat. “I’ll be back. I need to locate that movie.” He stood, a bit too stiffly, and quickly retreated. Lance snorted quietly, shaking his head. For as smooth as Lotor could be sometimes, the poor prince could easily turn into an awkward turtle at the strangest of things.

What Lance would give to be able to read Lotor’s thoughts sometimes and see what he was thinking of.

Whatever. Lance flopped back down on the couch, already missing Lotor’s warmth and attention. But… hey, movie night. And if there was one thing Lance knew about movie nights, it was that they made the best for snuggling and cuddling.

Sonali entered the room not long after, sighing as they walked over to look down at Lance. “You’re a mess.” They informed him.

“A hot mess.” Lance replied, stretching out.

“Debatable.” Sonali rested their hands on their hips, frowning down at him. At his lack of response, they sighed, heading back over to the door and leaning against the wall, crossing their
Lance flipped over to his stomach, grabbing his tablet off the table as he did so and turning it on to check through the archives for anything interesting. He skimmed over the quintessence manipulation and elemental reports that he’d saved, and instead paused at another report of prisoners being sent to Ulippa.

Something about Project Kuron, although that was all that Lance could find about it. He frowned, and deleted that report from his tablet before locking it and sitting up.

He had a few vargas to go until the dinner and movie, but… he supposed he could go ahead and set up some things, like cleaning up the movie area, and getting ready for the date.

The movie area, aka, Lotor’s library area, had a pulldown screen where a movie could be projected. Which would have been nice if Lance didn’t leave his Druid books all over the place. He heaved a heavy sigh as he stood. Some of the books he carried, others he practiced his telekinesis aspect of quintessence manipulation.

“You’re getting better at that.” Sonali commented from the doorway.

Lance laughed, moving the books and cleaning up the room with a gesture of his glowing hand. “Of course. Xana says I’m a prodigy with manipulation.” Lance sung out, boasting slightly. “I’ve got real talent here.”

Sonali snorted, and shook their head. Lance laughed and flipped them off, before cancelling his manipulation, and surveying the now mostly clean room. “Better than Mary Poppins now.” He grinned to himself.

He spun around, nodding to himself before heading to the bathroom. He paused at the door and glanced at Sonali. “If I’m not out in two Vargas or by the time Lotor returns, let me know, yeah?”

“Will do.”

A couple of vargas later saw him at the couch, waiting for the movie to start.

To be honest, he’d been on movie dates with Lotor before, but something about this date felt different. Like there was a different energy about it.

And Lance’s feelings on this had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that Lotor was trying to persuade him to try Kanki, which was the wine stuff that Lotor was always drinking.

Lance toyed with his necklace as he shook his head in a quiet ‘no’. From his understanding Kanki was basically wine, like he thought it was, and sorry, not sorry, Lance just wasn’t interested.

He’d been white girl wasted on wine before, and he’d vowed never again. Also, aliens didn’t always have the best sense of taste with those sorts of things. He’d tried the Altean version, Nunvill, and had vowed ‘never again’. And he was Altean, so that was saying something.

“This is nothing like Nunvill, Lance, I promise.” Lotor assured pressing a glass into Lance’s hand. “Try it. I promise you’ll like it.” Lotor grinned, keeping the glass in Lance’s hand by holding his own over Lance’s.

Lance sucked on his teeth and looked down at the dark liquid. He stared at it for a moment before looking up at Lotor and biting his lip.
Well, he had been thinking it was about time to possibly start toeing the line between them… like they had in Bsêt, and if he was going to do that, then he needed some form of liquid courage. Then again, perhaps it was best if he didn’t… but…

He probably wouldn’t mind if they did take another step forward in their relationship. Maybe. Probably.

No. No, he should go into the step with a clear head. Bsêt was a mistake. A step in the wrong direction. Neither of them should have done what they did… But that didn’t mean Lance couldn’t try the stupid Kanki. If anything, he was trying it just to shut Lotor up about it.

“You sure I’ll like it?” Lance asked.

“Definitely.” Lotor replied. “It’s much smoother than Nunvill, and doesn’t have such an awful taste.”

“What’s it taste like then?” Lance pulled his hand – still holding the glass – away from Lotor. Idly, Lance swirled the liquid in the glass like he’d seen sophisticated rich people do on his mama’s soap operas.

“Try it and find out.” Lotor encouraged. He took a sip of his own glass, and then looked at Lance. “See? I didn’t die. No poison here.”

Lance laughed, and shook his head. “You’ve been drinking it for a while. You’re probably immune.” He sighed, and lifted up the glass. “But fine.” He took a small tentative sip, and then immediately took a larger sip.

“It’s good, isn’t it?” Lotor’s grin was sharp enough that it could probably cut a hole in fog like in the old cartoons. Lance probably shouldn’t have found that as attractive as he did.

Lance looked away and hummed, shrugging noncommitally. He took another sip, holding it in his mouth as he tasted it before swallowing.

He licked his lips, the sweet tart tang flavoring of the liquid still there. It reminded him a bit of the fruit on Bsêt, and maybe a little bit of some other things too. He hummed again, considering it.

Well, Lotor had been right on more than one account with this. Kanki was in fact smoother than the Nunvill. And a lot easier to down too. It was sweeter, and more fragrant. Tasting like a juice more than an alcohol.

Despite how much it tasted like juice, Lance knew it was an alcohol.

Now that he’d drank it, he could feel the slight burn, and the pleasant tingling warmth that filled his body. The itch to be near Lotor returned, which didn’t make sense, since they were sitting so close together already. Whatever, Lance could ignore it.

In front of them, the movie started to play, not that either of them noticed.

“Yes.” Lance muttered, dazedly looking down at the partially empty glass. “It wasn’t so bad.”

“Would you like more?” At Lance’s nod, Lotor leaned forward to picked up the bottle off the coffee table. He smiled as he poured Lance another glass.

Lance was careful to sip this glass slowly as he finally turned his attention to the movie. He knew his limits with wine. It always seemed way too easy for him to get white girl wasted, which was the
last thing he wanted to be around Lotor.

It wasn’t that he didn’t trust Lotor, but more of him not trusting himself. He knew how he acted when he was white girl wasted, and while he was thinking of making his relationship with Lotor more… physical… he hadn’t committed to that yet.

It seemed that he was doing well as every time he took a sip, he’d yet to run into an empty glass.

About a quarter of the way through the movie, Lance noticed that the room seemed to be much warmer. He shifted uncomfortably but was distracted by some action on the screen as the act they’d found for ‘Shiro’ finally found the Black Lion.

The actor that they got to play Shiro wasn’t human, but it was the most humanoid that he could manage, and Lance could appreciate that. ‘Shiro’ attempted to report back to Zarkon but was under attack by the other Paladins who had been ‘seduced’ by Allura already.

He leaned back into the couch and took another sip of his wine before waving ‘bye’ to Shiro as he too was seduced by Allura. Bye Felcia.

The room started to fade into a smoky fog, leaving only the screen where the movie was projected.

Half way through the movie, and Lance jumped as a hand touched his thigh. He blinked, and realized belatedly that he’d been just staring at the screen for a couple of doboshs, and had no clue what was going on.

It looked like some sort of battle between a badly done CGI Voltron and some Galra battleships. Shrio was attempting to break out of Allura’s seduction, but was failing. ‘The Yellow Paladin’ blew up a Galra spacecraft with his possible girlfriend on it.

He looked down at the hand before following it to Lotor. Lance blinked as Lotor took his hand, the one holding the glass, and pulled it out of his grasp.

“I think that’s enough, don’t you agree, pet?” The room swam in and out of focus. The only thing he could focus on was Lotor, and his grin. Lotor placed the empty glass on the table.

Lance blinked at the glass. When had it become empty? What was happening? That itch from before was back, and suddenly so much worse than ever.

Lotor leaned away, settling back against the couch cushions, and watched Lance, his grin never fading. “Why don’t we have some fun?” The lazy way that Lotor purred the question sent chills down Lance’s back and created goosebumps on his arms, despite how warm he was feeling.

Lance blinked, the room was still fading in and out. It felt like this mind was full of warm static fog. Quintessence. He could feel it, could feel the energy in his body, tugging at him like a magnet towards Lotor.

Lance frowned, and shook his head. The room spun with his refusal.

“Pet.” Lotor called as he patted his lap as an invitation. His eyes were smoldering as he eyed Lance. “Come here.” He crooned, and crooked a finger when Lance didn’t move.

Lance shook his head after a moment of heavy debate. There was some tiny part of him that recognized that he was wasted. The same part of him that recognized that on his birthday – last year? Was it Last year? – and prompted him to make himself sick so he wouldn’t have a hangover later.
He didn’t think there was a Space McDonalds that he could get an extra-large order of greasy fries nearby so he could make himself sick.

There was, however, a bad idea lurking around nearby. A bad idea that Lance was already tempted to do sober.

As much as he wanted to be sober, or to do nothing, or to keep denying Lotor… a larger part of him wanted… differently.

Lance blinked and looked over at Lotor again. The price was leaned back against the couch, his body very open and his lap looking so very inviting. Lotor’s lips were quirked and he made the ‘come hither’ motion again.

Lance shook his head again, but despite that found himself crawling over the span of the couch to climb onto Lotor’s lap. He straddled him, facing the prince.

Lotor’s grin was smug as he looked over Lance. “Good boy.”

Chapter End Notes

Alright guys, so I've been debating how to do the whole smut thing, and the NEXT CHAPTER will be Smut. I'll post a bunch of warnings on it so that'll be very clear, lol. I'll even include in the title.

There will be practically nothing plot relevant occurring in that chapter.

I will be posting it later tonight, probably when I get home.

The upcoming Smut Chapters will be one of two planned smut chapters so far, the other one being sometime in the future. I don't usually write smut and I found it rather difficult, so you may not see more than these two chapters.
Chapter Summary

**THIS. CHAPTER. CONTAINS. SMUT.**

There is no sex, but there is extremely explicit content. If you are younger than 18 years of age, or what ever age of consent/adulthood/etc in your country, then please **do not** read this chapter.

This chapter is not needed to continue Lilac Sweet. This Chapter is *OPTIONAL*. If you do not want or like to read Smut then you absolutely do not need to.

Additionally, this chapter is very **DubCon**. Lance is under the influence (alcohol) and Lotor will be taking advantage of that. I do not condone this behavior in real life. In real life this is not acceptable behavior. I do not support this behavior in any way, shape, or form.

Chapter Notes

**PLEASE READ THE CHAPTER SUMMARY**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Finger Sucking, Blow Jobs, Detailed Explicit Content regarding Sexual Acts, Referenced/Mentioned Alcohol, Very Dubious Consent, Pet names, Dirty Talking, Probably a lot of Other Things That I am Missing

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on **Tumblr**. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more **notes**

A hand lazily ran up Lance’s spine, and he shivered, arching his back away from the touch and forcing himself against Lotor. Lotor’s praise echoed in the haziness of his mind.

“So hot.” Lance muttered.

He leaned against Lotor, and despite what he’d just said, he shivered. Electricity ran from inside his body to Lotor, and it felt so good; but he wanted to feel more. He wanted to feel better.

But he didn’t. He wasn’t ready. They’d only been kissing, and Lance didn’t want anything else. Not yet. He opened his mouth to protest, but for some reason the words to say wouldn’t form in his head.

Actually, Lance’s lack of words might have been from Lotor’s lips finding his own. Lotor swallowed down any protests that could have come from Lance. And then, when Lotor found the zipper at the back of Lance’s bodysuit and slowly began to tug it downwards, Lotor swallowed down Lance’s responding gasps.
He could feel his skin prickle as the cooler air of the room hit his flushed skin. Once again, Lance shivered as Lotor’s hand ran back up his spine and cupped the back of his neck. His other hand fell to Lance’s hip, where he massaged. Lotor pulled away, leaning back to break the kiss.

Lance’s whine was embarrassingly audible, not that he cared. He licked his lips, chasing the flavor of Lotor and the wine.

“Feel better, pet?” The hand on his neck squeezed.

Lance nodded, and then leaned forward, wrapping his arms around Lotor’s shoulders and neck. No sooner had the thought crossed his mind that he was pressing his lips against the prince’s again. The kiss was sloppy and wet, not that Lotor seemed to mind.

Unlike previous times, Lotor was allowing Lance to take command of the kiss, giving Lance the choice to deepen it or keep it more chaste.

Naturally, Lance deepened it. He could taste the wine and Lance let out a low moan at that favor. Lotor’s hand on his neck slid back down, joining his other hand before they both slid to Lance’s ass, palming him and squeezing.

Lance groaned as he was pulled against Lotor closer, and rolled his hips. He couldn’t decide which he liked better, pressing back into Lotor’s hands or pressing forward and brushing against the growing bulge in Lotor’s pants.

Lance slid his one of his hands from Lotor’s shoulder and started to map the clothed planes of Lotor’s chest. Lotor’s eyes were practically burning as he looked at Lance, and allowed to touch him to his heart’s content.

“Like what you see?” Lotor asked him. Lance nodded, biting his lip.

Lance couldn’t remember why he’d been wanting to protest earlier. Lotor wouldn’t do anything that Lance didn’t want, right? He’d take care of Lance; he already had by helping Lance cool off when he was so hot.

Lance licked his lips, still tasting the sweet wine and hummed. Lotor’s smile grew, and removed one of his hands from Lance’s backside. After a moment, a finger was at Lance’s mouth. “Suck.” The demand was simple, short, and went straight to Lance’s other head.

He didn’t even need to think about following the command before he obediently opened his mouth, licking the finger.

“Gorgeous.” Lotor breathed as he watched, almost enraptured as Lance licked up the finger, following the dripping trail of wine. Once that was done, Lance returned back to Lotor’s finger which was pressed into Lance’s mouth and hooked. Lance moaned around it, his eyes sliding close.

“That’s right.” Lotor cooed. “Such a good boy.”

Quiznak, those words did so much for Lance. Especially when Lotor straightened out his finger and pulled it out of Lance’s mouth only to press two more in a moment later. Lance sucked on them both, running his tongue around them.

Lotor pumped his fingers in and out of Lance’s mouth, seemingly content for now to watch. “You like things in your mouth, don’t you?” Lotor asked, sliding them out. A string of spit followed, connecting Lance’s mouth to Lotor’s fingers.
Lance opened his eyes and licked his lips, breaking the string. Lotor swam in Lance’s vision, hazy smoke like fog still filling his brain. He whined, needing something, wanting something.

Lance leaned forward, and with no shame pressed Lotor’s spit slick fingers against his cheek before kissing them. “Please.” The word escape Lance in a breath, and then in another and another until he was quietly chanting out ’please’ with every breath.

“Please what, pet?” Lotor teased. His fingers traced around Lance’s mouth, not letting Lance take the fingers in.

“I need.” Lance whined. What did he need? He needed something. He wanted something. And he knew Lotor could give it to him. He rocked forward, and pleasure sparked up his body, setting already inflamed nerves alight. Beneath him, Lotor moaned. “Please.”

Lotor’s fingers slipped into his mouth at the last plead, and Lance moaned around them. Once more Lotor pumped them in and out of Lance’s mouth. “I bet you’d like something else.” Lotor commented. “Do you want something else? Something better to suck maybe?”

Lance moaned around the fingers and when Lotor removed them nodded. “Please.” He begged. The hand still squeezing his ass stopped, and patted him for a moment.

“On your knees.” Lotor commanded.

Who was Lance to deny a command? Lotor would knew how to take care of Lance, and if Lance needed to be on his knees for Lotor to do that, then Lance would fall to them. He slid off of Lotor, feeling boneless and limp as he sank to his knees between Lotor’s legs.

He had a foggy idea of what Lotor wanted, and Lance was… excited. His mouth felt dry, although he knew the opposite to be true. He rested his head on Lotor’s thigh, and gazed up at him, waiting for Lotor’s next instructions, or some praise.

A hand ran through his hair, and tugged at the hair from the scalp. “So gorgeous.” Lotor muttered as he shifted. He palmed himself with his free hand, and Lance’s gaze darted to the hand and then to what it was palming. “You look so perfect between my legs like this.” Lance preened at the words.

After a moment, Lotor stopped palming himself and pulled down a zipper. With bated breath, Lance watched as Lotor coaxed out his member.

Like a human’s would be, Lotor’s dick was hard and glistening. A pearl of precum was already starting to form at the tip.

Unlike a human’s, Lotor’s head was a bit more less of a head? It didn’t really separate itself from the shaft, although there were some frills that sort of circled around where the head divider would be before running almost vertically down the shaft.

Clear liquid oozed from both sides of the frills, and Lance wondered what it’d taste like. He was actually kind of excited to find out. Lotor pumped himself, pulling a quiet moan out of the both of them.

Lance mouth still felt dry, but the trail of drool that slid down his chin told him otherwise.

Lance leaned forward, transfixed on what Lotor had present him. His mind was screaming at him again, but he couldn’t care less about what it was saying. All he knew was that he wanted whatever Lotor wanted to give him. Lotor would take care of him.
“Like that?” Lotor asked, lightly slapping it against Lance’s cheek. More liquid seeped out of it, smearing on Lance’s skin as Lotor gently slapped it against Lance’s face. Lance nodded. “You want this?”

Lance tore his eyes away to nod up at Lotor. Lotor’s smile widened. He held it still, in front of Lance’s face. “Show me how much you want it.” He commanded.

Lance leaned forward and kissed the tip before licking it. He tongued the slit at the top, where the precum was. At that, more precum leaked out. Lance lapped at it, humming as he took in Lotor’s member up to the fills and swirling around the ‘head’.

The stuff coming from the tip was a different consistency than the clear stuff coming from the frills, although the taste was similar. The stuff from the frills seemed to be some sort of lubricant, based on its texture.

“Good boy.” Lotor moaned.

He pumped himself again, careful not to dislodge Lance’s mouth from his tip. Lance looked up at him from through his lashes and once Lotor’s hand moved, pressed forward, slowly sliding Lotor’s dick inch by inch into his mouth, working it in and out.

He batted Lotor’s hand away and ignored the responding chuckle. Lance wrapped his hand around his girth, feeling it’s weight and width in his hand, and pumps what isn’t in his mouth.

The closer he got to the base, the wider and thicker Lotor became, until it stretched Lance’s mouth wide around it and the tip nudged the back of Lance’s mouth.

“That’s it. Gorgeous, pet.” Lotor moaned, the hand in Lance’s hair tightened, but he wasn’t pulling, not yet. His body was practically quivering with the exertion it took not to buck up into Lance’s mouth.

Lance was only able to get about three quarters of it in his mouth, but he didn’t care when it feels so heavy and thick on his tongue. He pulled back, hollowing out his cheeks and sucking even as he rocked backwards off of Lotor until the tip remained.

He swirled his tongue around it, paying special attention to the leaking slit and the frills. Warm slippery fluid oozed into his mouth, sliding down his throat with every swallow. He pulled himself off with a pop, looking up at Lotor as he kissed the tip and then licked him down to the base.

He held up Lotor’s dick, pressing his tongue flat against the underside of his dick, and hummed as he felt it twitch in his hand. He licked up to the tip, opening his mouth and taking it back in as a little spurt of fluid came out.

“You like that, don’t you?” Lotor asked. “Like how it tastes?”

Lance hummed and Lotor bucked once before he got himself back under control. Lance was pleased to see that he was panting, and that the hand not in Lance’s hair was clutching the armrest of the couch like a lifeline.

Lance grinned around Lotor. Oral always had been a specialty of his.

Although, this wasn’t what Lance really wanted, but it was good enough. Electricity hummed through his body, temporarily sated for now by this.

Lotor’s hand came free from the couch and touched Lance’s lips, smearing spit and precum.
“Quznak.” Lotor breathed before moaning as Lance sucked hard.

Lance could have beamed with pride. He’d caused Lotor to swear and moan. Maybe if he treated Lotor right, he’d give Lance what he really wanted.

He pressed forward more, forcing himself to ignore his gag reflex as he swallowed Lotor down. Jaw ached, but Lance pressed through it until he couldn’t anymore and he pulled himself off. Spit, precum, and the other fluid connected Lance to Lotor in a spider web of strings.

But he wasn’t done. He leaned back in, until just the tip was in his mouth and continued to explore it and its frills. What he didn’t have in his mouth he pumped, sliding his hand easily up and down the shaft thanks to the mixture of fluids.

Lance squeezed, experimenting with different pressures and grips as he tongued the frills, listening for Lotor’s moans and occasional curses to know what worked best. Then he worked his way up to the leaking slit, sucking on it harshly.

“That’s it, pet. Just like that.” Lotor purred.

Precum squirted out, coating Lance’s tongue, and he moaned. The taste was sweet, like the quintessence spiked wine he’d been given. He wanted more of it, and he knew exactly how to get it. After all, he could do oral in his sleep.

Oral had always been a favorite of Lance’s.

He smiled lazily around the tip before popping off with an audible noise. He took Lotor in his hand, and rubbed him in slow circles, working his way up until he was at the base.

He removed his hand, sliding it down to the tip and working Lotor there while he lathered the base in licks and kisses, slickening it up with a mixture of precum and spit. Then he licked and kissed his way back down to the tip, working Lotor with his hand where ever Lance’s mouth wasn’t.

Above him, Lotor moaned, telling Lance just how much a good job he was doing.

He sucked back in the tip, once again tonguing the slit until another gush of precum came out. Lance moaned around him, and then took in more of Lotor.

The hand in his hair had loosened its grip over time, but it suddenly tightened again. That was the only warning Lance was given before Lotor was holding his head and bucking up into Lance’s mouth. Lance did the best he could, relaxing his jaw and trying not to gag as Lotor fucked his mouth.

Lotor’s free hand went to Lance’s face helping to hold him in place as he rutted into Lance’s mouth. The hold on Lance’s hair remained tight.

By the time Lotor started to slow down, Lance’s jaw ached worse than before. His lips felt stretched.

Saliva leaked from his mouth with every thrust. Finally, with one hard thrust, Lotor finished. Lance gagged as the sudden strong stream hit his gag reflex, and tried to pull away, but he couldn’t with Lotor holding him there.

“Swallow.” Lotor growled.

Lance went pliant, throat loosening to constantly swallow the stream like he was chugging milk.
After what seemed like eternity, Lotor’s stream slowed to a stop, and for a moment, his spent dick filled Lance’s mouth before it slipped out.

A small amount of the mixture of semen and spit spilled from Lance’s mouth as Lotor slipped out. And Lance licked his lips, trying not to let it escape. “Good boy.” Lotor purred. “Now clean me up.”

Lance whimpered, but obeyed, leaning forward to lick and suck Lotor’s limp member clean.

Once done, Lance pulled completely away. Lotor petted Lance as he quickly tucked it back away. “Such a good boy. You did so well.”

Lotor tugged his head upwards, and Lance obeyed, climbing up into Lotor’s lap. The hand in his hair loosened, and then slid down to Lance’s back, stroking up and down his spine leaving trails of goosebumps.

“You did so good.” Lotor muttered into Lance’s ear.

His hands were all over Lance’s body, stroking his spine, and gently pulling away clothes. The cool air felt fantastic as it hit Lance’s heated flesh and he moaned, practically turning boneless in Lotor’s lap.

One of the hands slid between Lance’s body and Lotor’s, and then massaged Lance’s upper leg, slowly moving upwards until Lance was gasping, clinging onto the prince as he rocked his body into Lotor’s touch.

*That* was what Lance had needed. Just finally being touched nearly brought Lance to tears, and he half sobbed, half moaned as his head fell onto Lotor’s shoulder. Through blurred vision, he could see Lotor’s hand massaging the tent in the fabric of the body suit.

“Such a good performance requires a treat, right?” Lotor purred. “Do you want that, pet?”

Lance nodded, moaning as he rocked into Lotor’s hand. Except Lotor’s hand was gone, and Lance practically cried as he watched Lotor pull away. Pressure prickled from behind Lance’s eyes, and within a few blinked, the tears were falling slowly.

“Please.” He sobbed. “Please, I need.”

Lotor’s hands were on his face in an instant, brushing away the tears. “Tell me what you need, pet.”

Lance shook his head, the words to explain what he needed unable to come to his mind. He just knew that he needed. He needed Lotor touching him. He needed Lotor on him. He needed something, he needed Lotor.

Quiznak, he needed Lotor. He needed this to end. He needed this to be over. He couldn’t take this anymore. He felt strung out, like he had been stretched too thin.

Without his permission, his body bucked, grinding up against Lotor until there was pressure back there, where he needed it. He was given some relief for a moment before Lotor’s hands left his face and were instead on his hips, stopping his motion.

“Please.” Lance begged. “Please, please, please.” He just started repeating the word like a prayer, hoping that Lotor would take pity on him and give him what he needed.
His prayers were answered.

He wasn’t aware of when his bodysuit had been moved, but suddenly Lotor’s hand was wrapped around Lance’s painfully hard member, stroking him with quick even strokes. Pressure coiled in Lance’s lower body.

Lance’s begging trailed off, turning into a mixture of begs and moans. Lotor chuckled and then leaned forward, capturing Lance’s mouth with a kiss.

Lotor twisted his hand, his thumb toying with Lance’s head and slit, and that was it. Lance’s world exploded, the pressure in his abdomen suddenly expanding out. His back arched, and he threw his head back, his mouth opened in a soundless scream as he came into Lotor’s hand.

Faintly he was aware of Lotor talking. Telling him how good he’d been, how gorgeous he’d looked, but he couldn’t concentrate on the words proper. Not when Lotor was still taking care of him.

Lotor continued to milk him through until Lance had come back down, and slumped once more against Lotor. Lotor’s hand had caught most of Lance’s release, and Lotor shifted him with his free hand, holding up his soiled hand to Lance’s face.

He didn’t need to say anything as he pressed his dirty fingers to Lance’s mouth. Lance opened his mouth, sucking in the fingers before licking and cleaning his own release off Lotor’s hand.

“Gorgeous.” Lotor muttered. It seemed that was his favorite way to describe Lance. Not that Lance minded.

He was still surfing the high that came after a release, content to just lay on Lotor and absentmindedly suck on the prince’s fingers. He felt sated. The itch under his skin had died down to a dull throbbing over the span of their time together, leaving Lance feeling content and calm.

He whined as Lotor slipped his fingers away, and then gasped as his world spun. He was being shifted, lifted and carried before being dropped into a cloud. Lance landed with a quiet ‘oomph’, and Lotor chuckled.

He leaned down and carefully removed Lance’s clothes. The cool air felt good against Lance’s skin, so he laid there, pliant as Lotor undressed him. “Stay.” Lotor commanded as he pulled away.

Lance tried to sit up, but nothing was cooperating with him. The ceiling swam in his vison, and before he could try to get out of the cloud he was on, Lotor was suddenly on the cloud with Lance.

Lotor sat next to Lance, and gently ran something that was warm and kinda damp on Lance’s face. It took Lance a moment to realize that Lotor was cleaning him off with a small towel, wiping away the mess that had been made.

Once he’d finished, Lotor disappeared, only to return moments later to run the soft cloth down Lance’s body. He left again, and when he returned, it was without the cloth. He climbed onto the cloud, and fiddled with something.

The lights dimmed, to their night settings, and Lotor put something away. “Come here.” He touched Lance’s shoulder, and then guided him over to where he was. Once Lance was there, he pulled up a thin sheet. Tucking him in. Lotor was tucking him in.

Lance sighed, shifting so that he was using the prince’s chest as pillow. He curled up as close as he could to the prince, his eyes drifting shut.
Chapter End Notes

This is (of of now) the only smut scene. As of this moment in time, I do not plan to write additional smut scenes.

Thank you for your understanding in this. :)
Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: Lance had an interesting movie date with Lotor.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning(s): None

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

So, this fic is very Lance-centric, and I was kinda hoping that Lance would have reunited with the Paladins by Keith's birthday. Alas, the characters and the story had different plans. So in celebration of Keith's birthday, here's a bonus chapter on what's going on back with Team Voltron. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pidge sighed as she leaned back, watching as the program ran through the content she’d lifted from the Galra ship she’d hacked into.

Keith had told her about the rumors he’d heard, and while they did sound promising, she wasn’t banking too much on them. It just seemed way to convenient to finally hear something about their missing teammates after so long of not hearing anything. It just seemed too good to be true.

Like the saying said, 'if it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.'

But she trusted Keith and his instincts, and if they were saying to take stock in these rumors, then, well… she’d follow through.

It didn’t mean that she wasn’t going to continue the various projects that she had been working on, like trying to crack that communication device that Lance had. It was ruined beyond repair, and she’d initially declared it useless, but… she felt certain that she might be able to find out something from it.

Or maybe she just really missed Lance’s voice. Not that she’d ever admit that.

It’d taken Lance disappearing for her to realize the extent of how much she actually liked him and what he did for the team. Sure, he stole her headphones, and her phone, and the game they’d bought at that Space Mall… but he was there for her when she needed it.

Like, she hated to say it, but… Shiro’s absence – while felt – wasn’t as noticeable as Lance’s.

Shiro tended to be… separate from the others. The person he spent the most time with was Keith, and that was usually training. Other than that, he was often on his own in his room or with the Black Lion.
Lance’s absence on the other hand, well… it was hard to miss. The halls were too quiet, void of laughter or talking. There was no one taking her headphones or music player, or telling her to go to bed. The castle felt… empty, like he’d been filling it up all by himself, and now that he was gone, there was just a… void.

The program scanning Shiro’s face pinged, and she sighed, and although she already had an idea of what had matched, she still pulled it up on the slim off chance that she was wrong. She watched a short clip before dismissing it and continuing the scan. It was just another recording of Shiro’s time in the Gladiator matches before he returned to Earth.

Out of the three people she was searching for, Shiro returned the most pings. Turned out that lots of Galra had recordings of Shiro’s battles in the Gladiator matches. Shiro had been a popular champion. Who would have guessed?

Matt pinged a few times, but it was seldom anything new. Anytime the program pinged him, it was that same footage she’d already seen.

As of yet, Lance had not been pinged. It was as if he’d just vanished. Perhaps more soundly than Shiro.

She sighed again, and switched screens, checking the scan on the database on this ‘Prince Lotor’ person that the Blade of Marmora had told Keith about. There wasn’t much about him, as he seemed to keep mostly to himself.

There was a memo about him assuming the position of Emperor Pro Tem, so that at least checked out. But other than that, he was barely mentioned. It seemed he operated his own fraction of the Galra military, and Zarkon’s military was being given orders by that fraction.

There were some notes about his Generals, but nothing really concrete, and unfortunately, absolutely nothing about the location of this guy's central command.

It was disheartening.

Shiro pinged again, and she sighed, resisting the urge to beat her head against the table. She checked it out, and then continued the search as per usual.

This was all stupid. So very stupid. It shouldn’t be this hard to find people in the Universe when she had access to Galra stuff. The Galra were everywhere! So finding someone shouldn’t be this difficult.

No wonder the Blade of Marmora were able to slip under the radar for so long.

She spun around to another monitor, and attempted to work a bit more on Lance’s communication device.

She was almost positive that she’d figured out what the hard drive of the device was, and if she was right… Well, if she was right, then it was just a matter of breaking the encryption and seeing if the data on it had been corrupted or deleted or anything.

She’d only been working on it for a varga or two – being constantly interrupted by Shiro’s pings – before the doors slid open and Keith walked in.

“How’s it going?” He asked, heading over to her and leaning against her chair as he looked over her progress.
“It’s not.” She replied, narrowing her eyes. “What I thought was a hard drive wasn’t, and at this point, I’m not even thinking this is Galra. Their tech is so much easier to deal with than… this.” She huffed. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I love the new tech, but I’d like it a bit more if –”

“If it wasn’t keeping valuable needed intel from us.” Keith interrupted. “Yeah, I know.” He looked over to the photo scans, where Shiro once again pinged.

He backed off so Pidge could check it out. “It’s just Shiro… again.”

“Again?” Keith questioned, crossing his arms.

“His Gladiator battles are popular with the Galra.” She rolled her eyes. “I swear, recordings of his battles fill about a third of every battleship’s personal files.”

Keith hummed, frowning at the computer.

She’d only just started to spin back around when the computer pinged again. Pidge froze, her eyes wide. She’d programmed each person to return a specific ping, and while she was intimately familiar with Shiro’s, and knew Matt’s by heart… the one that had just played was new.

She unfroze and spun back around to the monitor, pulling up the program, and… She stared at the picture she’d used for Lance, and the video clip next to it. A match to Lance.

Finally.

“Is…” Keith began to ask, but his question trailed off. She felt his weight settle back against the top of the chair as he leaned in closer.

“Yeah.” She nodded. The curser felt slow as she moved it over to the clip, clicking it once for it to play.

The footage wasn’t shot by typical Galra security cameras. As a matter of fact, the footage seemed almost homemade.

The visual was shoddy, looking like something out of a camera flip phone from Earth. Lines ran across the screen, jumping and skipping. It was a miracle that her program had been able to pick up anything in this mess.

“I’m telling you, that’s…” The audio was almost more static than audio, and when it kicked in, it did so with a loud burst of feedback. Both Keith and Pidge jumped at it, although the audio faded out not even a tick later.

There was a sign that flashed in the video, a sandwich shop, and then… Keith gasped above her, and she couldn’t help to do the same.

Lance smiled at the Unilu manning the sandwich bar, giving him a patented Lance grin before laughing. The audio cut back in, playing some annoying shop jingle, but Lance’s laughter could clearly be heard mixed in with it. Lance backed away from the bar, tossing a two-fingered salute at the Unilu before turning away.

The clip ended, the screen going blank except for Lance’s smiling face in the picture. A pop up appeared asking if she wanted to continue the scan and disregard this content.

Keith moved faster than her, taking control of the mouse and replaying the clip. She blinked, tearing her gaze away from Lance – Holy Quiznak! Lance!!! – to look up at Keith.
He looked like a man in the desert who’d just spotted an oasis in the distance. She couldn’t think of anytime Keith had looked *this* serious beyond only a few other instances. His eyes were constantly moving, taking in everything in the video.

He replayed the video again, and this time she watched it again. Lance’s laughter echoed in her ears, and she could ignore that annoying jingle if it meant she could hear him once again.

“I was there.” Keith admitted after a moment. “I was at that sandwich bar.” The chair under his hands creaked, like his was gripping it too hard. His eyes were hard as he leaned forward. The jingle and Lance’s laughter played, over and over as he repeated the clip in that particular part.

Lance’s laughter would haunt her dreams tonight if she dared to sleep. Joining in with mashed up memories of Matt, her father, and Shiro. She made a mental note not to sleep unless she couldn’t help it.

Pidge bit her lip, tearing her gaze away from Lance’s face to look up at her teammate. “Keith.”

“That bartender looking me right in the face and said he’d never seen Lance.” Keith continued like he hadn’t even heard her. “Lance was at that Space Mall, and we didn’t find him, Pidge. What if… what if he’s still there?!”

She shook her head and took the mouse back from him, pressing ‘continue’ on the scan after saving the clip to her files. “We’ll find him, Keith.”

“We left him, Pidge!” Keith shouted. “We left him. We should have found him! While he was there, or if he’s still there.”

“I know.” She replied.

Honestly, that was one of her biggest fears with her father or Matt: that she’d leave the planet they were on without knowing it. At least Matt returned an occasional result in her scans… her father hadn’t even returned one.

The computer pinged Lance’s beep again, and both she and Keith looked at it in unison. The preview image for this clip looked more like a Galra security camera feed.

It was dark, like an alleyway of some sort. Whatever was happening was at the beginning middle of the alleyway, bit it was clear Lance was there.

She pressed play. Lance was standing in an alleyway, face to face with the muzzle of a Galra sentry weapon. Keith’s intake of air was sharp, but she watched grimly as Lance didn’t bother fighting or resisting whatever was happening.

Unlike the previous clip, there was no audio here.

The sentry seemed to ask Lance something, and Lance nodded. Not even a second later and the sentry swung his blaster at Lance’s head.

“Lance!” Keith cried out as Lance’s body crumpled into the guard’s arms.

“He can’t hear you Keith.” Pidge muttered quietly. She sniffed, and looked away. “This happened…” She pulled up the records and grimaced. “A while ago. Too long ago.”

“This confirms those rumors.” Keith growled. “This confirms it. We need… We need to get him back.”
Pidge pursed her lips, frowning slightly as she replayed the footage. If Lance truly had betrayed them for the Galra… then why were they treating Lance like this? Lance seemed complacent in the beginning, but she didn’t know what they were talking about, or what was going on. People’s lives could have been at stake.

And if there was anything Pidge knew for sure about Lance, it was that he tended to care too much, especially about strangers. Everyone always thought Hunk was the bleeding heart, and to some degree, he was. But no. Lance was the true bleeding heart, willing to even sacrifice himself for others.

The Mall had seemed so… weird when they’d been there. Coran had mentioned a ‘cold war’, and well… she was now willing to agree with Keith that Lance was apart of that.

Keith growled in frustration as Lance collapsed on screen again. He spun around and marched out of the room. Pidge didn’t bother watching him leave, and sighed, saving the clip and pressing ‘continue’ again. She watched the flashing clips and images for a moment before returning to the device, but Lance didn’t ping again.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone sees a mistake, please let me know.

Both my Beta and I read over it, but we also drove 3 hours, spent a couple hours at a theme park and then crashed hard when we got to the hotel.

Today is Day two of the Theme Park. We'll be there for about 12 hours, give or take, and then leaving the park to drive straight home (3 hour drive).

I'll work on some of the Tumblr Prompts when I wake up on Saturday. :)


Lance’s head was pounding as he woke.

He opened his eyes, and then winced at how bright the lights were. Veins of bright purple ran across his vision, which wasn’t helping anything. He hadn’t had his ability turn on while he was sleeping in forever, and he wondered what could have caused it.

He closed his eyes, and buried his face against the soft, but oddly firm, warmth of his pillow.

He wanted to sleep, really, he did, but there was something nudging at him from the back of his mind, preventing him from getting the sleep he wanted.

Maybe it was how comfortable he was? He hadn’t been this comfortable since he discovered he could sleep anyway he wanted at the Castle, including in the nude. Not that he did since attacks could happen at any time.

Not to mention that his mouth tasted weird, too sweet and kinda salty at the same time. Had he not brushed his teeth before going to bed? And why did his jaw hurt so much? He tried to recall.

He remembered dinner, and then Lotor trying to get him to drink his wine, and then… and then… memories suddenly exploded in Lance’s mind. They were hazy, as if he’d dreamed them instead, but he knew they were real.

He could distantly recall Lotor’s smooth voice, and his fingers in Lance’s mouth. He felt phantom
touches of Lotor’s hand on his body, and… Lance’s eyes shot open as he sat up. Lotor’s arm, which had been wrapped around him, slid to the bed. Lance held his breath as he watched Lotor stir, and then released a sigh of relief as the prince remained sleeping.

Quiznak.

Lance’s breathing turned labored as he quietly panicked.

The memories from last night kept playing on repeat in his mind. He hadn’t dreamed that. It was real, as evidenced by Lance’s nakedness, and the ache in his jaw that only came from giving a really good blow job, receiving a really good face fucking, or both.

Was that technically….Had he been? And if he had, who could he go to? No one. Lotor’s word was law here. Besides, Lance didn’t think that he’d been... After all, while Lance couldn’t remember consenting, but he couldn’t recall not consenting either.

As a matter of fact, Lance could very clearly recall enjoying it at some points. Lotor hadn’t done anything that Lance hadn’t liked.

And besides, Lance had thought that if Lotor had asked, he would have heavily considered. Perhaps the alcohol had just helped move the inevitable along. He knew that he was going to eventually end up with Lotor like this. He just hadn’t expected it so soon.

He hadn’t expected to give in so soon.

But, Lotor had been mostly tender in Lance’s hazy memories. He’d even tucked Lance into bed. And, most importantly, he hadn’t actually fucked Lance. He hadn’t taken advantage of Lance’s lapse in judgement and sanity to actually do anything more than a couple of lewd acts.

This was fine, said the dog sitting in a burning room. This was fine, said Lance sitting naked in Lotor’s bed.

Beside Lance, the prince stirred again. Lance looked at him, but all he could see was Lotor’s grin from the night before, and all he could taste… all he could taste was sweetness and salt, and oh that was gross! That was so gross!

Like, Lance liked giving oral. He liked receiving oral. He just liked oral in general, but that was… he’d… ugh. At least Lotor could have helped him brush his teeth, or given him a mouth mint, or given him some water, or something!

Like, he knew Lotor had it in him to do aftercare because Lance didn’t feel all crusty in places he didn’t want to be crusty. Which meant that someone cleaned him up, and the only one who could have done that was Lotor.

Lance took a deep breath, and tried to force himself to relax.

This was fine. Absolutely fine. Lance just got drunk off wine, that was all. And had climbed into Lotor’s lap, and had sucked him off, and ENOUGH. Lance had enough of those thoughts and those memories.

Lotor stirred again.

Lance stiffened, and stared at him, waiting and hoping that Lotor wouldn’t wake. He wasn’t ready to deal with this yet. He needed to come to terms with the fact that he’d done things with Lotor, and then he could face the prince.
Perhaps he could hide in the bathroom? No, no. That hadn’t worked last time for long, and Lance doubted it’d work for long this time either.

Lotor continued to stir, and with dread Lance realized that he was going to wake.

Quiznak. What to do, what to do, what to do? Lance’s mind was a whirlwind, and he felt torn, unable to decide what to do.

Own it.

His mind stopped at that thought, everything shutting down. Own it. That was what he’d been doing lately. And he was sitting on Lotor’s bed, completely naked, the morning after that.

What else was Lance going to do? Deny it? Get drunk and have this repeat over and over again? This outcome was inevitable. It was going to happen. Even if Lance kicked up a fuss now, it’d make no difference except prolong what was always going to happen.

Lance sighed heavily. He hated not having a choice sometimes. He laid back down, and cupped Lotor’s cheek carefully, then he leaned over and pressed his lips to Lotor’s.

Lotor was slow to respond, but returned the kiss. Lance kept the kiss slow and sweet, holding it for a moment before pulling away. The prince blinked wearily up at him, and Lance grinned.

“Up and at ‘em.” Lance chirped.

He patted Lotor’s cheek softly, almost patronizingly, before sitting back up and sliding off the other end of the bed. He walked over to the closet, the door sliding open and then pressed the button for the clothes to pass by Lance on their hanger conveyer belt.

Some of Lance’s clothes were from dates. Most were Druid cloaks and body suits. He was pretty sure today he didn’t have anything particularly planned. Maybe have a lunch with Corral if he was up to it. Or maybe he could swing by one of the Druid common areas.

Hmmm, yeah, he’d do that. He’d been wanting to talk with Xana or someone about some theories about quintessence and crystals. He knew Haggar had done some work into that, but Lance had found the recordings and reports of her work in that field to be lack luster.

The only reason Lance had been able to read Haggar’s research on the matter was because the research in question had been declared futile and useless. Lance begged to differ, to be honest. Anyways, his plan to see the Druids in mind, he pulled out one of the bodysuits, and the corresponding robes to wear.

“L…lance?” The prince sleepily slurred. He sat up, still blinking as he followed Lance’s movements across the room.

“Yeah?” Lance looked over his shoulder, and quirked an eyebrow at Lotor.

Lotor stared at Lance. The prince’s face was blank, but Lance understood a look of ‘what the quiznak’ when he saw one. So, the prince had expected Lance to freak out, and yet he’d done stuff anyways. Interesting. Way to show value of character there, Lotor.

Lotor didn’t respond and Lance turned back around, expecting him to maybe say something soon. He took the clothes from the closet, closing it, and put them on his couch. Once he finished with Lotor, he could go take a shower.
Lotor still hadn’t replied. Lance rolled his eyes. He’d throw the prince a bone. He spun back around to face the bed.

“Do you have any pain meds?” Lance asked after a moment. “My headache is killing me.” Because it still was, no matter how much Lance was trying to ignore it. “It’s probably from all the wine I had last night.”

He paused, looking Lotor over. The prince didn’t seem sheepish despite what he’d done. He probably didn’t feel that he’d done anything wrong, despite the fact that he’d expected Lance to be reacting differently.

Lotor still didn’t have a response, and Lance mentally sighed, exasperated. “Next time don’t let me drink so much. No one likes to wake up with a headache.” He gave Lotor a significant look, as if to say, ‘I know what you did.’

Lotor was still staring at Lance with the blank face. Alright, time to ramp up the ante for getting Lotor to respond.

Lance turned back around gathering back up the clothes and taking them to the bathroom. He deposited them on one of the benches in there before standing in the door way and leaning against it. He watched Lotor for a moment, who was still just kinda staring at Lance blankly.

Lance was fully aware that he was standing, completely naked, against the bathroom door. He crossed his arms, more so to show he was upset than to hide his body. He was unashamed of his body. Lotor looked him over, his gaze slowly dragging from Lance’s face down his body before going back up.

Lance rolled his eyes again. He’d had it with this silence treatment.

“Fine, don’t speak.” Lance snapped. “But next time you want my mouth on your cock,” Lotor reacted to that, his whole-body flinching. He opened his mouth to speak, probably to drop silver excuses that Lance didn’t want to hear right now. “Then try asking instead of getting me drunk. Okay? Okay. Thank you.”

Lotor opened his mouth to speak, but Lance cut him off, holding up his finger. “Maybe then you’d be getting an invite to the shower with me.” Lance turned around, and stepped through the door, hitting the lock switch as it shut.

Lance enjoyed his shower, taking as long as he wanted. He didn’t respond when Lotor knocked on the door, although it could have been Sonali. He spent as long as he felt he needed to rub the violation he’d been dealt off his skin.

Honestly, no amount of time was long enough to do that. But, it’d given Lance enough time to help collect his thoughts.

As much as he was… perturbed by Lotor’s actions the night before, he needed to let it go. Thanks to his stupid comment he’d made before getting in the shower, Lotor now thought that Lance would be open to sucking him off.

Which he was, in a way. Lance already had, and if he didn’t want Lotor getting him drunk every time, then he’d have to just start offering it. It was that simple. If he didn’t want to force Lotor to use drastic measures, then Lance needed to be more… accommodating.

Which evidently meant using his mouth for more things than just talking.
Lance brushed his teeth about four or more times once he was out of the shower. He knew it was his imagination, but he swore he could still taste the sticky sweetness of Lotor in his mouth, and he was not interested in that reminder right now.

Lance threw on his Druid wear, feeling mildly better now that he was in clothes, and opened the door.

To be honest, he’d hoped that Lotor wouldn’t be there. He’d hoped that Lotor had sheepishly crawled off to his harem, and would avoid Lance, especially since Lance had made it very clear that he knew what Lotor had done.

Lotor was not gone. Instead he was lounging on the couch, looking as unruffled as he had this morning. He stood when he heard Lance come in, and gestured to the table.

Lance eyed the table, narrowing his eyes at the breakfast spread on it.

“We don’t usually eat breakfast together.” Lotor winced at those words, but it happened so quick Lance barely caught it.

“I thought it may help your headache.” Lotor’s smile looked tense. Good. Let him worry about whether he’d fucked things up with Lance or not.

Lance eyed the tray again, this time being more critical, and ah, yep, there it was. A small napkin with the requested painkillers. Huh, so Lotor was listening to him this morning.

“After your silence this morning, I didn’t think you’d speak.” Lance crossed the room, and took the pills, chasing them with a glass of water which had already been poured. He eyed Lotor, who’s silver mouth seemed to have been broken again.

“I…”

“Wasn’t expecting me to remember? Or were you expecting me to freak out?” Lance interrupted. He pulled out a chair and sat down, crossing his legs.

He debated heavily on scolding Lotor about consent. Lance hadn’t given any, but even if he had, consent under the influence was dubious at best. The only reason Lance wasn’t scolding him was because it wouldn’t matter. Who was he to scold a prince? Besides, it wouldn’t stop Lotor from doing it again, and again, and again, until Lance was miserable.

The only way Lance could see them both being ‘happy’ would be to just ingrain into Lotor’s mind that Lance was willing even if he wasn’t really, and didn’t need to be ‘influenced’ into those kinds of acts.

After a moment of silence, Lotor walked over and took a seat at the table next to Lance. He cleared his throat. Lance didn’t say anything, but looked out at the spread. He paused, picking up an apple, or what the Galra equivalent was. He thought it might have been called a quig, or something like that.

He grinned to himself, as he knew these were particularly juicy, and grabbed a napkin as well. He looked over at Lotor and purposefully bit into it. The juices of the fruit gushed, dripping down off his chin onto the napkin. He let out a small noise of enjoyment, although he actually hated the sticky feeling.

Lotor shifted in his chair, his eyes stuck on Lance’s mouth when he moved the fruit away.
Lance wiped away the juice. While the fruit produced a lovely crunch when it was bit into, the flesh of the fruit was actually quite soft. Lance sucked on it for a moment before swallowing. Lotor shifted again.

Lance rinsed and repeated his actions until the fruit was gone, and then slowly licked his fingers, sucking each one. He moaned around his fingers, being purposely sensual as he cleaned his hand of the sticky juice. He didn’t look away from Lotor as he did so, and in fact, arched his eyebrow as if to ask if Lotor had a problem.

Lotor finally adverted his eyes after another shifting. Good. Let him be uncomfortable.

“What’s wrong?” Lance asked after cleaning his mouth with the napkin. “You didn’t have a problem with this last night.”

“You’re an insufferable tease.” Lotor replied tersely. Lance shrugged, and surveyed the table to see if there was anything else he could use to further make Lotor uncomfortable.

“So, I’ve been told.” Lance replied. “It’s one of my winning qualities.” He flashed Lotor a smile, and reached across the table to grab another fruit. At the movement Lotor looked up from his plate, only to immediately look back down when he saw what Lance was reaching for.

Lance grabbed a Galra form of a banana, and peeled it slowly and carefully. Then he looked up to Lotor, and nudged his chair with his foot to get his attention. Lotor looked up slowly.

“Intoxicate me for that again, and this is what’ll happen.” Lance informed him before taking a sizable bite out of the fruit. Lotor visibly and physically flinched, his face twisting as he stared at Lance. Lance chewed the banana and swallowed. He put the half-finished banana down on his plate, and stood.

“I wanted to do some things with the Druids today. If you need me, you know where to find me.” Lance headed for the door, and pulled up the hood as he exited.

Sonali half turned, almost entering the room before they realized that it was Lance who left first, not Lotor.

They looked at the closing doors, and then at Lance, who was already half way down the hall, before catching up with him. He knew they had questions but thankfully, they couldn’t ask them in the halls. Good, Lance wasn’t in the mood to answer anyways.

Sonali stopped following him outside of the doors which led to the Druid’s common area. Lance was able to scan his hand and be allowed access with no difficulty.

Most of the Druids on the ship – totaling three, not including Lance– were working on specific projects, so they weren’t usually in the common area. Today was no different, as there was only one Druid present, sitting on one of the couches, idly flipping through a book.

Perfect. She looked bored, which probably meant that her experiment, whatever it was, needed some time to process.

“Hey, Nik.” Lance called out to them.

Nik held up a hand, one finger extended. Lance waited patiently. Once they’d finished reading their line or their page, they flicked their hand. The floating book they’d been reading from snapped shut and then flew back onto the bookcase it’d come from.
Lance arched an eyebrow, as if to ask if she really needed to be that extra.

“Yes, Lance?” Nik’s voice was as smooth as her scales. They hadn’t quite yet started to flake, as she was still young, but older than Lance.

Her mentor was Petyr, a Druid not quite as old as Xana, nor as powerful. Both had red based quintessence, although, if Lance had a choice between Nik or Petyr, he’d prefer to speak with her.

Petyr was nice and all, but he had a habit of staring at Lance like he was some interesting experiment. Which Lance wasn’t.

“You got some time?”

“If you ask something I don’t have time for, I’ll let you know.” She replied.

“Cool. So, I was reading through Haggar’s research on quintessence, and I was wondering about what happened to the crystals that are drained entirely?”

Nik was very silent, and Lance got the feeling they were judging him. “The crystals die.” They replied after a moment, in the most basic ‘duh’ tone to ever exist. Lance rolled his eyes. He knew that, but he supposed she wasn’t understanding what he was asking.

“What if they were reintroduced to quintessence?” Lance clarified.

“It wouldn’t make a difference. The only thing that can create a crystal full of quintessence is a Balmera, since Project Crystal busted. We can only refine or drain that quintessence. Drained quintessence fuels non-imperative operations, as well as the majority of the universe. You know this?”

“Okay, but what if we could refill a crystal?” Lance elaborated, taking a seat across from Nik. Once again, Nik fell silent for a while.

“You can’t. High Priestess Haggar has deemed that research as useless and unlikely to progress the Empire. She’s moved on to project Robeast.” Ah yes, the bane of Lance’s existence while he’d been with Voltron. Ugh, he was so happy not to be dealing with that anymore.

The Voltron team was probably still dealing with the remains of that project, and perhaps once Lance would have cared. He didn’t anymore. They could all die and he’d be more upset at losing Blue than anything else.

Blue was his, after all.

“Yeah, yeah. The act of introducing refined quintessence and other outside stimuli to force a mutation. I know.” Lance waved his hand, as if to wave that away. “But I’m focusing on crystals, right now. Would it theoretically be possible to… inject… a dead crystal with an alternative quintessence source? Similar to the refinement process, except not actually refining the quintessence.”

“From my understandings, High Priestess Haggar was only able to inject quintessence into creatures for Project Robeast with the assistance of her disciples, of which, she is missing.” Nik paused there to look at Lance for that.

He shrugged. He hadn’t been with Allura and the Blade of Marmora when they took out the Druids of the Four Directions. “With assistance, it may be possible.” Nik continued.
Lance was quiet as he chewed over that. He didn’t want someone else’s assistance to just inject a crystal with a different form of quintessence. Haggar needed assistance because of the monumental project she’d taken on.

This was just crystals. Surely it wouldn’t be that hard to do what Lance was wanting.

“Quintessence can’t be just shoved into a crystal like a liquid into a bottle.” Petyr’s voice came from the doorway. “It was only through hard effect that we were able to create the usable form of quintessence that we have; and through exhausting work that High Priestess Haggar was able to create the Robeasts.”

Lance twisted around to give him a flat look.

“So, we can drain crystals, but not fill them; and we can fill creatures, but not drain them?” Lance asked. Both Druids froze, staring at Lance. “Has High Priestess Haggar looked into that?”

“The Kumar project deals with the draining of quintessence from lifeforms.” Petyr admitted after a moment. “But once drained, there is no ‘refilling’ something, Lance. Whether it be living or crystal.”

That was… actually kind of important. So that was the basis of Project Kumar. That explained so much! Like how the Kumar had been able to put Voltron out of commission for a short bit. That was something he needed to pass onto the resistance.

He wanted to ask further on Project Kumar, but he got the feeling that asking further about the project wouldn’t yield him answers. He needed to just move the conversation along.

“So, the only quintessence that could be found in a crystal is the refined quintessence, or the natural quintessence?” Lance asked.

“That is correct.”

Lance hummed, tapping his finger against his chin as he considered this information.

Nope. Even after a moment of consideration, it still didn’t make sense.

The robot arms that Lance had seen the empire use were powered by the corrupted quintessence, including Shiro’s arm. Shiro’s arm should have ran out of its quintessence ‘batteries’ by now unless they’d figured out a way to tie it into Shiro’s personal quintessence.

Which they were now saying was impossible. Then again, Shiro’s arm had been a one of kind prototype designed specifically by Haggar.

Huh. Maybe Lance could try to get into Shiro’s project file. If push came to shove, he was sure he could convince Lotor to get it for him, but that would require Lance knowing the project name. Which he didn’t.

Petyr cleared his throat, and Lance shook himself out of his thoughts. “How are your studies going?”

As if to answer him, Lance held up his hand, willing the quintessence in his body to manifest a sphere there. Petyr blinked, his mouth dropping open just the smallest amount.

Lance wasn’t going to say he took satisfaction from that, but he totally did.
“I’m getting there.” Lance replied, dismissing the sphere. “I’m still figuring things out. Xana thinks I may be worse at the speed and teleporting thing than him.” Lance shrugged. “But what I lack there, I more than make up for in manipulation.”

Neither of the Druids reacted, but Lance knew they were both unnerved. And why shouldn’t they be? Lance was the Prince’s favorite, and Xana’s student. He was progressing quicker than most thought possible.

He’d finally found his skill, and he was excelling. Hunk had engineering, Pidge her computers. Shiro was a leader, and Keith a fantastic fighter and pilot. With them, Lance couldn’t have even hoped to understand his potential. With the Galra, however, it was clear. He was meant to be a Druid.

It ran in his veins after all.

Besides, the more terrifying he was to them, the less likely they’d want to look into him and realize he was a traitor to the Empire, selling their secrets to the resistance for his life. For the good of the universe, really.

“Getting back on topic… do you know where I might find some dead crystals?”

Petyr shook his head, but Nik was still.

“The prince may be able to get you some, if you asked.” Nik replied after a moment. Petyr shot her a look, but Lance grinned.

“Thank you, Nik.” He nodded his head, stood, and then turned towards the doors. Petyr practically teleported out of the way. Lance paused, and looked back at them. “Have either of you seen Xana? I wanted to ask him some questions.”

Petyr didn’t look like he wanted to answer, but he stepped forward. “Last I saw him, he was down in the quintessence bay.”

“Thank you.” Lance nodded and turned back to the doors, exiting quickly. Lance paused as the doors shut, contemplating on where to go.

He still felt a bit irritated towards Lotor, so he turned towards the quintessence bay. He’d bother his mentor, and see if he had any suggestions.

Chapter End Notes

Catch me at my Tumblr if you want to talk. :)

Alternatively, I have a discord, but you’ll have to request that from me.
Refinement

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: Lance woke up the quintant after his movie 'date' with Lotor. He dealt with the aftermath before moving onto advance his personal agenda with the Druids.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning(s): None, I think. There's bad decisions towards the end, but that's about it.

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If he was honest, Lance didn’t actually care about trying to ‘refill’ crystals. Okay, so that wasn’t completely true. Lance did care about it, if only because he wanted to test some theories out on it.

First, he wanted to revisit his ideas about using other forms of quintessence in the crystals. Which started with first seeing if he could tap into his own quintessence to create a ‘blue’ crystal. Once he finished that, he would have hopefully figured out how to tap into his own quintessence instead of the corrupted shit. Which led him to his next point.

Lance wanted to see if he could manipulate his personal quintessence. Haggar’s research had been lacking on that topic, but that was probably because she wanted the Druids to use the corrupted quintessence.

The corrupted quintessence was a knock off black quintessence, and so far, all the abilities it had given to the Druids was based off that fact. Teleportation, the lightning abilities… those were all things mirrored to Black quintessence, and more importantly, abilities that the Black Lion could presumably do.

Lance already knew that having a different base quintessence could affect how those abilities manifested. That said, he couldn’t even begin to imagine what he could achieve if he could use his personal quintessence.

Although, it made sense that the Druids would use the corrupted quintessence instead of their own.

It helped keep them inline and obedient to the Empire. Also, the Emperor had been the Black Paladin once, which Lance was sure was why the corrupted quintessence had been made at all.

Still, only using the corrupted quintessence left so much room for potential.

What if he could eventually manipulate his own personal quintessence the way that they did the
corrupted? What if instead of lightning, he could use ice or water?

He could basically become a water bender from Avatar, if he wasn’t limited to only using the corrupted quintessence. And since he could use the corrupted quintessence, did that mean he could use other types of quintessence?

If he had a source of the other types… like say they were stored in a crystal… then could Lance tap into that and use that quintessence?

If so, then Lance could basically become the Avatar.

Which would be pretty bad ass. But, he had to start small, and work his way up to that, and the best place to start? Crystals.

And if this pet project of Lance’s happened to get him other places, like say on Project Robeast or another ‘big name’ project where he could get information to sell to the resistance, then that was just icing on the cake.

Alternatively, if this whole idea flopped and Lance unfortunately couldn’t become the Avatar, then he’d resume his original goal of attempting to create the Ice Bats from Zelda.

Either way, both goals started with quintessence and crystals. And there was no one better to ask about that than the best Druid on the ship: Xana.

Lance stayed quiet, watching Xana as he worked on refining the quintessence. There was no doubt that he was aware of Lance’s presence, but this work required concentration.

Once he finished, he looked over to Lance, tilting his head forward as a greeting. Lance returned the same, and approached.

“You don’t usually come here.” Xana stated.

Lance shrugged. He usually didn’t have a need to. Plus, seeing all the quintessence in the jars made Lance feel weird. That was life energy from now dead planets and things. It might as well as been dead energy, now.

Although, it always interested Lance that when all the quintessence was grouped together, the colors blurred and blended into a shade of not quite baby blue, but not quite pale green either. Pure quintessence was weird like that, and then when refined the first time, it became yellow… and then after a second time, purple.

But, he wasn’t here for that. Not today.

“I wanted to talk to you about some stuff.” Lance replied.

“Stuff?” Xana’s face was hidden by his mask, but there was definite curiosity to his tone. If Lance could have seen his face, he probably would have been trying to arch a brow.

“Besides my mother, were there any other Blue based Druids?” At Lance’s question, Xana shook his head.

“The most common in our ranks is Red, although occasionally a Yellow or a Green show up. Your mother was a rarity.” Xana answered after a moment. “Why do you ask?”

“Oh, no reason.” Lance smiled thinly under his hood, not that Xana could see it. “Anyways, I was
wondering about Crystals.”

Call him paranoid, but he’d heard of other Druids stealing each other’s projects and ideas. Lance wasn’t keen on giving Xana credit for his project should he be proven correct.

“Crystals?” Xana repeated. “What would you want to know about them?”

“Well, pure quintessence is found in Balmera Crystals. We refine it into the yellow fuel-like quintessence used by most of the universe, and then refine it either inside the crystal itself or outside in its liquid form to make the quintessence we use.”

As Lance spoke, Xana nodded.

“But what if we could have a base color crystal?” Lance continued. Xana stopped nodding.

“High Priestess Haggar has deemed that research as folly.”

Lance shrugged. “Maybe, but it’ll at least help me further manipulate and become familiar with my quintessence.”

Xana hummed, clearly thinking something over. “So, you want to practice what, exactly?”

“Well, first, I want to try to bring a dead crystal back to life.” And once he could do that, then he could work on injecting it not with the corrupted quintessence, but with his own.

“If you wish to waste your time on this, then I cannot stop you.” Xana shrugged. “But then again, you haven’t been given a project yet. This could be good practice for you.”

Well, that was good, not that Lance needed his permission. But, it would make things easier.

“So… Can I get some dead crystals to play with?”

Xana nodded. “I’ll get some, if you wouldn’t mind taking over here. I know we’ve gone over quintessence refinement, so this would be a perfect chance to practice.”

Lance eyed the large crystal that was currently being used for the refinement, and scrunched up his nose. “Should I start with something, IDK, smaller?”

“Nonsense. You’ve been progressing so well, I fear that wouldn’t even challenge you.” Xana was probably grinning under his mask. Ugh, he just wanted to get out of work. Lance sighed and reluctantly nodded. “Excellent. I’ll stay here through the first batch. I’ll be sure to have some dead crystals for you by morning tomorrow.”

Lance groaned, but switched places with Xana. He held out his hands, and took a deep breath to center himself, and then started the work.

Corrupting quintessence was a lot like being lost in the static. To some degree, Lance was acutely aware of everything going on around him, but to another degree, it was all distant. Xana was right, however, Lance didn’t need to practice on anything smaller.

The door slid open, but the lack of alarm from Xana and the general flow of quintessence assured Lance that all was fine. He continued as he was.

“He’s a natural.” Petyr’s voice brushed against the edge of Lance’s concentration, but it wasn’t demanding anything from Lance.

“So, it would seem.” Xana replied. Lance was aware of him moving, circling around the room,
careful to avoid the range of the sphere of quintessence and its arcs of energy.

Petyr was quiet for a moment. “Would you like to me to stay and keep watch? High Priestess Haggar called and was requesting your presence.”

The sphere faulted for a moment as Lance’s concentration broke to think for a moment of what Haggar could have wanted.

“Focus, Lance!” Xana snapped. “Concentration is key.” The sphere reformed, and the process continued. Xana turned to Petyr. “Do you think you could handle that?” Xana asked, referring to Lance.

“I don’t think you have much other choice.” Petyr replied. “She’s very interested in your ‘project’.”

Once again, Lance’s concentration slipped. However, he was able to quickly regain it without further incident or scolding. Xana tutted, but didn’t say anything to Lance about it.

“Very well.” Xana replied to Petyr. A few ticks later, the doors slid open again, and Lance was left with Petyr. Thankfully, for the rest of Lance’s task, Petyr did nothing to further distract Lance.

The thing about quintessence was that it had a really shitty side effect of basically drugging someone. It was intense on the body and mind, which Lance supposed made sense considering it was life itself.

The other Druids had a home field advantage of tolerance from years of training and messing with quintessence. Lance had the whole Paladin of Voltron thing going for him, but that was it. So, suffice to say, finishing felt like a drug high.

Everything was in too much clarity. His head swam with smoky static, but felt clearer than ever. He swayed as he stepped away, blinking as Petyr steadied him. He blinked as the other Druid studied him and then snorted, looking away.

“Talent does not equal endurance.” Petyr informed Lance quietly. “You’ve progressed so far without working on that. Presumably since as a Yellow base, Xana’s endurance is hard to test.”

Lance nodded slowly, waiting for the high to abide. “Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind.” Lance replied after a long moment.

“You’ve been at it for most of the day. I would suggest returning to your quarters and getting some food and rest.” Petyr pulled away, and watched Lance for a moment to make sure he truly didn’t need further support.

Lance nodded again, and slowly turned, heading for the doors. “I’ll do that.” He called over his shoulder.

He could feel Sonali’s concerned gaze on him as he walked back to the room, and sighed as they followed him inside. Lotor must have been out and about.

“I suppose if I say I don’t want to talk, you won’t listen?” Lance asked, sitting down on the edge of the bed before mentally saying ‘quiznak it’ and flopping back.

“That is correct.” Sonali confirmed. “I’m worried for you.”

“There’s nothing to be worried about.” Lance replied, staring dully up at the ceiling. His whole-body low key ached, and he was heavily debating if he wanted to try to take a shower or a bath.
Not to mention, there was still that irritating under the skin itch that occasionally arose when he was messing with quintessence. Usually Lotor could soothe that itch, but he wasn’t around currently. And even if he was, Lance wasn’t sure he’d want to spend all that much time with him.

“Lance.” Sonali huffed. “You’re losing yourself. I’ve been watching you slowly be chiseled away.”

Lance sat up, glaring at Sonali. “I’ve been loyal to the resistance!” Lance hissed. “I haven’t betrayed you or them.”

Sonali took a step back, holding up their hands in the universal sign of ‘peace’ and ‘calm down’.

“I’m not doubting that you have, Lance.” They tried to calm him down. “As a matter of fact, I don’t think you ever will without just cause.”

“But?” Lance prompted, because there was no way that was the end of it.

“But there is no doubt that you are not the same as when you came.” Sonali continued. Lance snorted. “When was the last time you used a… what do you call it? A me-me?”

Lance rolled his eyes, not bothering to correct their horribly wrong pronunciation. Besides, Lance had meme’d internally just that morning. So, they could shut their quiznak.

“People change.” Lance replied. “People adapt. They change to better suit their surroundings or they die. I’m doing what I have to do.”

“You were scared of losing yourself, and you are.” Sonali countered. “Are you controlling the corruption, Lance? Or is it controlling you?”

Lance glared at Sonali. “I’m in control of it.” He tilted his head up, locking his jaw as he’d often seen Shiro do when he was sticking to his guns.

Sonali was quiet, meeting Lance’s look dead on for a moment before turning away.

“If you say so.” They muttered. “I’ll go order some food for you. The Prince won’t be back till much later, so you have free reign until then.” Sonali paused. “Also, Xana added some private practice time to your schedule for tomorrow, as well as ‘quintessence refinement’ in two quintants.”

“Thank you.” Lance’s voice was softer. He sighed, and shook his head. “I’m going to go take a bath, let me know when the food is here, I’ll go over some stuff I learned today with you then.”

Sonali nodded, and with that, Lance slid off the bed and into the bathroom. About two vargas later saw Lance eating his food after explaining to Sonali about what he’d learned from Project Kumar.

Once finished with his meal, Lance stood, slightly swaying as he considered his options. He eyed the couch, his longtime bed in this room. It was as comfortable as a couch could be, and wasn’t bad. He had a pillow, and a blanket that he could sleep with.

Or… there was the bed.

Lance eyed the bed. He’d slept in it only a few times, most of which were not strictly by his choice. It was a good bed, if not a bit too tall for him. Sleeping in the bed willingly would probably push a point across to Lotor, although Lance didn’t want to make that point.

Yet, if he wanted to avoid another mess like last night, then it was unavoidable. He had to make
that point.

“Oh, Lance.” Sonali whispered as Lance dredged his way over to the bed. Lance ignored them.

His choice was made. His choice had always been made. Lotor had just allowed Lance the luxury of thinking he had one.

The bed was as soft as it’d always been, feeling like a cloud as he climbed in. The sheets were smooth and light against him, barely catching on the clothes Lance wore to bed.

“Dim the lights.” He half asked, half demanded of Sonali, and then buried his face into the pillow. He took a deep breath. The thought that the pillows smelled like Lotor was his last coherent thought as sleep overtook him.

At least until a few vargas later, when something soft and light tickled his nose. There was warmth touching his temple, which pulled away as Lance scrunched his nose. He whined as he turned his face into the pillow. A warm chuckle responded above him, and then the tickling sensation was gone.

Lance slowly blinked a few times before opening his eyes. The lights in the room were still dim, but Lance could still recognize Lotor.

“I didn’t mean to wake you.” Lotor whispered. He was sitting on the bed next to where Lance was laying. He reached down, and stroked Lance’s hair, his hand sliding down to Lance’s cheek and then to stroke one of his scales.

Lotor’s emotions swam into Lance’s sleep hazed mind. While the sliminess of possession and obsession was still prevalent, Lance could feel a definite current of apology and fondness. Lance chose to focus on Lotor’s fondness, and sighed, snuggling into the bed.

Lotor chuckled again, and removed his hand. He stood, and then tucked Lance back in, ensuring he was covered. Faintly, Lance could hear the noises of Lotor getting ready for bed.

He was just drifting back off when Lotor returned, and was woken again, this time by the bed dipping as Lotor climbed in. He waited for the moment when Lotor would press up against him, or drape an arm around him, or try to spoon him or something.

But nothing happened. Lance sighed, a sleepy smile on his face as he drifted back off to sleep.

The first thing Lance registered upon waking was that his pillow had been once again replaced with something soft yet rather firm. The second thing he noticed was that all he could smell was lilacs and sunflowers.

Lance didn’t need to be a rocket scientist to put two and two together and get Lotor. He sighed, stretching out his body as best he could without disturbing the prince. Like before, there was an arm wrapped around him, securely holding him to Lotor.

The hand that arm belonged to was resting on his hip, and when Lance stretched, the thumb slipped under his shirt to stroke gently at Lance’s skin.

“Morning.” Lotor whispered.

Lance blinked as he looked up at the very much awake prince. Well, so much for not bothering Lotor. He yawned, hiding his face in Lotor’s body. Once done, he laid his head back down on Lotor’s chest, idly listening to the quiet thump of his heart.
He should probably be concerned about using Lotor as a human pillow, but he was warm, and comfortable. Besides, the hand lazily rubbing tiny circles into his hip felt nice. Lance could have purred. 

“I see you’re still not quite awake.” Lotor commented. Lance glanced up to give him a blank look. “Or you’re still upset at me.” Lotor quickly amended.

Lance snorted quietly.

Lance could remember last night, although it was vague and somewhat hazy. Lotor had been the perfect gentleman. He hadn’t asked anything of Lance, nor had he forced anything on him. But as sweet as that had been, it took more than that to return to Lance’s good side.

Although this perfectly sweet morning was quickly adding on brownie points.

Quiznak, Lance loved moments like this. Now, if only he was on a beach, with the sea breeze coming through an open window, and the sun warming his back… then this would be perfect.

Lotor’s free hand came up to stroke Lance’s hair for a tick before running through it. Lance hummed, relaxing further at the soothing motions.

“Beautiful.” Lotor breathed.

Lance wasn’t sure he was meant to hear that. Lance wasn’t even sure Lotor meant to say it. Still, the word filled Lance with warmth blossoming out from his chest.

Lance didn’t know how long they stayed there. Long enough for Lance to start to doze back off before Lotor’s tablet beeped with his usual wake up alarm.

One of these days, Lance was going to take the tablet and throw it against the wall.

Lotor sighed, his hands stilling as the tablet beeped. He was gentle as he slid out from under Lance, careful not to jostle Lance too much. Lance echoed Lotor’s sigh, and turned over, sprawling out on the bed, trying to soak up the remaining warmth of Lotor’s body before it faded.

Undoubtedly, Lotor had left to take his morning shower. Part of Lance was mildly offended that he hadn’t been asked to join in, but another part of him was just slightly relieved. Lotor still wasn’t forcing him into anything.

But how much longer until he was?

How much longer did Lance have to be miffed before Lotor expected him to be over it? How much longer did Lance have until Lotor was trying some other way to get Lance to give him what he wanted?

Lance didn’t know, and that was what spurred him into action.

Lance slid out of the bed, stretched languidly before slowly sauntering over to the bathroom. The door wasn’t locked, which Lance figured was pretty much an invitation if he saw one.

The door slid open, and Lance was hit with a wave of steam. The shower was running, and Lotor was standing under its spray, his back to Lance, water running down his face, and body. Clouds of steam drifted by, temporarily hiding parts of Lotor’s body from sight.

Subconsciously, Lance licked his lips, his gaze sliding down Lotor’s body before traveling back up
to the prince’s face. Lotor was looking at him from over his shoulder, and when he saw he had Lance’s attention, quirked an eyebrow as if to say, ‘enjoying the view?’.

Lance replied with an eyebrow quirk of his own. “You’re the only one allowed to look?” He asked, teasingly.

Lotor laughed. “Not at all.” He paused, grinning at Lance. “But if you wanted to look closer, you’re allowed.”

Lance matched his grin, and stepped into the room, stripping out of his clothes. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Chapter End Notes

As a heads up: There maybe a week or two in November where I may not be updating this fic. I have a lot going on in November, which may knock my schedule off it's tracks temporarily. Right now, it is looking like it'll affect me most the last week to two weeks of November (Nov 26-Dec 2).

My parents are in the long slow process of moving to Florida, and it'll all come to a head in November. So mother had been requesting my presence more and more before she leaves. Which is taking away from my writing time.

Additionally, I'll be babysitting my 3 year niece while my sister is down in Florida helping my parents move... so that will also cut into my time.

I'm hoping that this doesn't happen, but, as a warning, this could happen. I'll keep people updated on a Tumblr.
Control

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance 'refined' quintessence into the corrupted quintessence that the Empire uses. He had a conversation with Sonali about whether or not he was loosing himself, and in the end, made some very questionable decisions.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Manipulation, More Questionable Decisions, Foul Language/Cursing, Referenced/Mentioned Explicit Content

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were a thousand thoughts screaming at Lance as he stepped into the shower with Lotor.

The most prominent of them being ‘what the quiznak?!’ regarding his own actions. However, he swallowed those thoughts down, and shoved them to the back of his mind.

Besides, Lotor was really good looking, and he’d already shown to Lance that he didn’t just chase after his own pleasure, and was willing to take care of Lance too. The fuzzy memories Lance had of that night was enough evidence to support that. And to top things off, he’d even provided some basic after care.

Lotor could have been much worse. He could have just used Lance, and tossed him off to the side. He could have taken further advantage of Lance’s intoxicated state instead of the mild way that he had. He could have left Lance on the floor, covered in their mixed fluids.

But he hadn’t. Lance was lucky that Lotor wasn’t like that… that he cared for Lance.

Lotor’s gaze moved up and down Lance’s body as he joined him in the shower, but surprisingly, the prince made no movements towards touching Lance. Well, if Lotor wasn’t going to instigate anything, neither was Lance. He’d made the first move already by joining Lotor in the shower. It was Lotor’s turn now.

The shower passed without incident, and Lance wasn’t sure how to feel about that. Part of him felt disappointed and somewhat let down. His stomach dropped as Lotor exited the shower, wrapped himself up in a towel, and left the bathroom.

Was there something wrong with Lance? Did Lotor not like him anymore?

No. No, that couldn’t be it. After all, there was no way that Lance could have imagined the heat in the prince’s gaze yesterday when he’d eaten the apple, or today, when Lance first entered the
shower.

So, what had caused this new behavior in the prince? Lance sighed as he exited the shower, wrapping a towel around himself before exiting into the main room to change.

He didn’t look at Lotor, but he swore he could feel the prince’s eyes on him as he dressed. Once finished, he joined Lotor at the table, where another breakfast spread was laid out. Twice in a row, must be Lance’s lucky movement.

Lance’s plate seemed to have been premade, with all of his favorites. Lance raised an eyebrow, and the prince adverted his gaze.

Interesting.

If Lance had displeased the prince like he’d been thinking, then Lotor wouldn’t have done this. He wouldn’t be acting this way. Lance’s gaze fell upon an apple on his plate, and realization dawned on him.

Lotor was still under the impression that Lance was mad at him. Even after Lance joined him in the shower. That was cute. Lance took a seat, and together they quietly ate their breakfast.

“Did I pass the test?” Lotor asked once he’d finished his plate.

Lance hummed, sucking on his spoon as he debated answers in his mind. “Test?” He finally asked. He put the spoon down, and bridged his hands, resting his head on them.

“That’s what the whole shower thing was, wasn’t it?” Lotor asked, leaning forward. “A test to tempt me?”

“If that’s what you wanted to believe, then sure, I guess you passed.” Lance paused. “What did you think the test was for?”

Lotor was silent for a long moment as he considered his own words. “To test my control, and your forgiveness. I don’t feel I’ve sufficiently earned it yet.”

Well, neither did Lance. He’d just gotten in the shower because he didn’t know how long he was allowed to be miffed by what Lotor had done. But, Lotor was showing him that he was allowed to be miffed. He was allowed be annoyed at the prince. He had a choice still, in a way.

Lance hummed again. “So, what’cha gonna do to earn it?” He asked.

“I was thinking, I could take you to dinner tonight?” Lotor requested, his tone somewhat hesitant. “If that’s fine with you?”

Lance leaned back, dropping his hands to the table as he considered Lotor. As far as he could tell, the prince seemed sincere about wanting to earn Lance’s forgiveness. It was touching, and sweet. And Lotor was such a gentleman.

Lance had practically given him permission to molest him in the shower, and Lotor had done nothing. Lance could throw him a bone.

“That’d be nice.” Lance replied after a few moments. Lotor smiled, relief settling into his features. He leaned forward and took one of Lance’s hands, and pressed a warm kiss to the knuckles.

“I look forward to it.” Lotor murmured, looking up to meet Lance’s gaze.
Lance felt his face heat up, and looked away, ignoring Lotor’s responding chuckles. Lotor dropped his hand, and pulled away, standing up and heading for the door. “I’ll be back later.” He promised before he left.

Lance nodded, and once he was sure Lotor was gone, moved his plate so he could drop his head onto the table.

“You have private practice with Xana in about a varga.” Sonali informed him quietly from the door. “And I believe Princess Corral has requested that you have lunch with her either today or tomorrow.”

Lance turned his head so his cheek was pressed against the table and stared blankly at Sonali, who was scrolling through their tablet.

“Oh! And you have another date with the Prince, I see.” They paused, and looked up at Lance. “You don’t need to do this to yourself, you know.”

Lance laughed. “Do what? I’m enjoying myself.” His momma had always told him that if he told a lie enough times, it’d come true. She must have been telling the truth since he couldn’t tell if he’d just told Sonali a lie anymore.

Sure, he had his problems with Lotor, but everyone had problems with people occasionally. For the most part Lotor was loving, attentive, and very attractive. He’d never done anything to Lance that he didn’t like.

Mentally, he had to refrain from the urge to squirm, that whole body itch resurfacing for a moment before dying back down.

He stood, unable to stay sitting for much longer, and tossed on his Druid Robes. “I’m gonna go ahead and get to the training now.” He informed Sonali.

He pulled up his hood and bowed his head, hiding his face as he walked through the halls. It was moments like these that Lance wished he had a Druid mask. However, as he was still a noob, he had not yet been given one.

Lance headed for the practice room he usually shared with Xana. The door slid open with a quiet hiss, and Lance would have just walked into the main part of the room if he hadn’t heard Petyr’s voice saying something interesting.

“I can’t believe that you’re indulging him like this.”

Lance paused mid step, and then took a step back so he was hidden in the door’s alcove.

“If it keeps him occupied and sated, then yes.” Xana replied. “This is a pointless endeavor, and one that is sure to keep him content.”

They had to be talking about Lance’s dead crystal project. Which meant that they were talking about Lance.

“You went too far. You've created a monster.”

Petyr thought Lance was a monster? That was rich, and kinda funny. But why did he think that?

Was it because of the thing Lance had done yesterday? He’d only been trying to scare him a little. It wasn’t Lance’s fault that Petyr was intimidated by Lance’s rapid progress.
“I did no such thing.” Xana denied. Lance let out a mental sigh of relief. At least Xana had his back.

“You’ve succumbed to trying to tire him out with the refinement, and entertaining him with futile projects. If it wasn’t for the prince’s influence on him, I don’t think you’d be able to control him anymore. He’s a loose cannon, much like his mother.”

Control him? Xana never tried to control him, only teach him. He was Lance’s mentor, his teacher, and his friend. And what was that line about his mother? And Lotor’s influence on him?

“I’ll admit, the Blue Quintessence was proving to be more difficult to chisel and mold than I had hoped, but there is no denying the progress that I, and he, have made. The prince, in particular, is very pleased.”

Lance furrowed his eyebrows, trying to understand the words that he was hearing. Of course, Xana was molding him… that’s what happened when someone taught another person. They molded their skills, and helped them grow as a person.

Lance’s advancements must have been what they were talking about. After all, Lotor was pleased with Lance’s progress.

“The prince is the only one who could control him anymore, and most of the time he’s content to let him be. I know the signs, Xana. He treats…”

Lance shook his head. He didn’t want to hear anymore. He pressed his hand against the scanner, opening the door again, and very loudly taking a step in. The conversation immediately went quiet.

“Hey, Xana?” Lance called out, as he exited out of the alcove. “Hope you don’t mind me stopping in early.”

Xana smiled tightly, although it didn’t reach his eyes. Petyr stood off to the side, staring at Lance the way he usually did. Lance’s stomach twisted, and while he didn’t regret interrupting the conversation, he couldn’t help but to wonder what else Petyr would have said.

“Of course not, Lance. You are always welcome here.” Xana replied, although his tone was lacking the warmth those words generally required.

Petyr shifted, and then inclined his head. “I have my own projects to see to. Thank you for the talk, Xana.” He brushed past Lance on his exit.

Lance half turned, and watched him leave before turning back to Xana. “What’s his problem?”

Xana chuckled mirthlessly and shook his head. “I have those crystals you asked for.” He redirected. He gestured to behind him, where a small collection of dull gray crystals sat. “Have at them.”

Lance didn’t even remember to give his thanks as he bee-lined to them, sinking down onto his knees to look them over better. Most were the size of Lance’s hand, although there were a few outliers. There were a couple which were very small and narrow, about the size of one of Lance’s fingers.

Those, Lance made the mental note to pocket later. As for the hand sized ones, he looked each one over, picking them up and examining them.

Whenever people talked about using Crystals on Earth, they talked a lot about finding one that
‘called’ to the person, and Lance was looking for that now. Although, to be honest, he wasn’t quite sure what that all meant.

“Is there something you’re looking for?” Xana asked after a few moments of Lance picking up various crystals and putting them back down.

“I’ll know it when I find it.” Lance replied. He’d narrowed his choices down to two crystals, and then shrugged, deciding to take them both. “I want these two.” He announced.

“Is there a reason?” Xana asked.

“They feel right.” Lance picked them both up, after swiping the smaller crystals and pocketing them. He carried them over to the pillows and put them down in front of the one he’d claimed as his before sitting down criss-cross.

He stared at the crystals, trying to think of the best way to try to ‘reinfuse’ them with quintessence. Obviously, he only wanted to try one for now, and if he succeeded, then he could move onto the second.

If Xana didn’t like Lance’s vague answer then he didn’t let that show, and instead took a seat not far from Lance. He was watching Lance, and Lance tilted his head, looking at him from under his hood.

“Yes?”

“I just thought it was time for you to get your mask. Outside of a few skills, you seem to have progressed quite nicely.”

Lance felt like he couldn’t breathe. Getting one’s mask was a huge thing. It meant that the Druid had truly become a Druid instead of just a trainee.

“Are you sure?”

“There’s little more I can teach you.” Xana commented. “You’ve been a quick study, and I’m impressed. But, if you ever needed guidance or assistance, know that I will be there for you.” From out of his robes, Xana pulled out one of the masks that the Druids wore, and handed it over to Lance.

“That means a lot to me.” Lance accepted the mask and looked down, running his fingers over it.

“Normally Haggar would present this, but, she’s been a bit tied up with our emperor.” Xana explained. Lance’s mouth tightened to a thin line at the reminder of Zarkon. If it was up to Lance, then Lotor would be their emperor now, not Zarkon.

“That’s fine. I’d rather it was you, to be honest.” Lance looked up and offered a smile. “It means more coming from you then Hagger. Thank you, Xana.”

“No, thank you for being my pupil. Never before have I had the pleasure of teaching someone like you. While I would like to teach you more, I feel that I’ve reached the end of what I can do with you. It’s up to you now to forge your own path.”

Lance nodded.

“But, if you ever need me to reinforce some of my trainings, I won’t hesitate to assist. Even pros need to take remedial classes every so often.” Xana added after a moment.
Lance laughed, and shook his head. “Not me. I’m gonna be the very best. Just you see.”

“I expect great things from you, Lance.” Xana stood, and nodded at the crystals. “I’ll leave you to this, but remember, if you ever feel like you’re slipping, or you need a little help, don’t hesitate to seek me out.”

Lance rolled his eyes. “Of course.”

Xana nodded, and Lance watched him take his leave before turning back to the crystals and sighing.

He pulled up a sphere of quintessence, wincing at the energy that it pulled. Refining the quintessence the day before had been like doing an exercise on a seldom worked out muscle, and it hurt to hold the sphere for long.

Perhaps Petyr had been right about Lance needing to work on endurance. Well, no better time to start then now.

He held the sphere up to the crystal, and readied himself for a long day. After all, the Balmeras infused their crystals through long-term exposure to their latent quintessence. Perhaps it was the same for this.

The only problem was that Lance couldn’t provide a constant source of quintessence for decaphoeb. That just wasn’t viable for what he was needing to do. He’d try this in the meantime, and mediate while he did so to see if he could think of anything else he could do.

He shifted his position, taking his chosen crystal and dropping it onto his lap. With both hands, he pulled up the corrupted quintessence and held it there, barely touching the crystal. He closed his eyes, and let himself drop.

Lance opened his eyes to a gray slate sky. The ocean was quiet, and had been for a while, ever since it’d been buried under the muck and oil that was the corruption.

He probably should have been worried about it, but Blue worried about it enough for the two of them.

Speaking of Blue… Lance turned his head to look at her. She was trying to make her way over to him, but was half submerged in the quietly bubbling goo that’d become Lance’s astral plane.

After an unknown amount of time – it worked differently in the Astral Planes – Blue made her way to Lance. Her nose bumped against Lance’s hand, and for a moment, she swept him up and away into her memories and thoughts.

They were in their hangar, looking down at Keith as he talked about trying to find Lance. They were out in space listening to Coran’s voice in their head and wanting the fight over as soon as possible so he could leave. They were in their hangar again, watching as Allura and Keith spoke about mythical bonds.

They were in their hangar, listening to Coran try to plead with them, begging them to let him in and help. Through strained bonds with the others, Green cursed, screaming in pain. Of the bonds, the tie to Red was the strongest. She asked them for assistance, screaming as she too took a hit. They allowed Coran entrance.

They were in the hangar, watching Allura and Coran.
“I don’t understand!” Allura huffed, shaking her head. “I just cleansed the Blue Lion less than a quintant ago.”

“Well, if Keith’s theory is correct, then it’s possible she won’t remain cleansed until we fix the root of the problem.” Coran replied. He was playing with his mustache between his fingers, which usually meant he was trying to think of something.

They were in a battle. Nothing was going right. Coran was in their head, shouting. They weren’t listening, and they turned on Red, slashing at her with their claws.

“Coran!” Keith’s voice echoed through the connection. “Watch it!”

“She’s fighting my control.” Coran replied. They could feel him trying to control them, but he should know better.

They were back in the hangar, roaring at Allura. She stood, unbothered by their threats. She reached out, and touched their paw, and they surged forward, meeting her quintessence with their own.

“Bitch.” They snarled at her, and she gasped, her eyes wide in horror. But there was a disconnect. Where Lance was speaking, Blue was pleading, asking for help.

Like metal hitting metal, sparks flew.

Lance opened his eyes back in reality as Blue roared in the back of his mind. His hands were shaking, and sweat was literally running down his face. His body burned, but not like he’d been in a fire, but like he’d been outside for too long. Like a freezer burn.

He couldn’t breathe, the air in his chest frozen.

He inhaled despite that, and then lunged forward, nearly sick to his stomach as it twisted. The crystal he’d been using rolled to the floor, but he didn’t care as he fell to his hands and knees, dry heaving.

Once he was done, he sat back on his heels, and took several slow deep breaths. For a couple of doboshs, he sat there until he was sure he was fine, and then he stood. He picked up his crystals and his mask before heading back to his room.

His mind was a flurry of thoughts as he tried to process what had just happened. His hands were still shaking, even as he tried to hide that in the folds of his robes.

“Lance?” Sonali called out, but Lance brushed past them, heading immediately into the bathroom and locking the door. “Lance?” They called out again, before apparently letting the matter drop.

Lance’s grip on the counter was so tight that his knuckles were turning white. Agitated quintessence energy surged through him, offering a brief respite as he distracted himself with trying to calm it back down.

There was too much going on for him to worry much about everything, including what he’d just heard. He had a date with Lotor later, after all, and he needed at least a varga in the bathroom to calm down after all of this.

Sonali was waiting for him when Lance exited out of the bathroom. They were tapping along on their tablet, and didn’t bother to look up when Lance exited, presumably because they knew Lance would be naked.
Lance dressed in some of his nicer date clothes, and only then did they look up from the tablet. “Looks like your dinner with Lotor is in the Gardens again.” They commented. “It’s been a while since your last date there.”

“When is it?”

“I’d advise that we leave now. You spent a long time in practice and in the bathroom. Princess Corral was still wanting a lunch, so I scheduled it for tomorrow, by the way.”

“Great, thank you.” Lance left the room, unbothered by the groups of Galra walking out in the halls. Thanks to the necklace that he wore, most recognized him as being their prince’s. While most of the rest of the empire didn’t seem to have much respect of Lotor – or at least, they didn’t the last Lance had known – most of the Galra here respected and adored Lotor.

And why shouldn’t they? Lotor was a better leader than his father. He listened to them, and wasn’t constantly berating them or instilling fear into their hearts. Lotor inspired loyalty. He promoted his people.

Lotor helped people grow, like he’d helped Lance.

In any case, people saw the necklace that he wore and instantly recognized him as belong to their prince. Which meant they didn’t bother Lance out of respect to Lotor.

Lance entered the Garden, smiling at the beauty of it all. He started off towards the Gazebo, having come here often enough with Lotor to know that the dinner would be there.

“You look lovely.” Lotor greeted Lance as he turned the corner. Lance slowed to a stop and smiled up at Lotor, already feeling more at ease in his presence.

The shower had helped to wash away some of the stress Lance felt from his experience with Blue, but seeing Lotor was like an elixir.

“Not too bad yourself.” Lance replied as Lotor took his hand, dropping to his knee to kiss Lance’s knuckles. Lance laughed and shook his head. Playfully he tugged on Lotor’s hand, attempting to pull him up to his feet. “Oh, enough of that, you.”

Lotor used the momentum to stand up and step closer to Lance, pulling him into a hug. Lance wrapped his arms around him, and sighed, turning his face so he was resting his cheek against Lotor’s chest. He sighed, relaxing into Lotor’s hold.

For as tough as things could be with Lotor, there was no denying that these moments were worth everything. Lotor was kind, tender, loving. He was a great leader to his people. Lotor was perfect.

Lance might actually love him. Sure, there were kinks to work out – like the whole getting Lance drunk thing – but so long as Lance didn’t step out of line, so long as Lance took care of Lotor, then it wouldn’t be a problem.

Lance had brought what had happened upon himself. If he’d been more… open? available? willing? then Lotor wouldn’t have resorted to such measures. Lance should have taken care of his prince sooner.

Especially since Lotor was being so perfect now. He was a balm to the sore that’d been his day so far. Lotor was just what Lance needed.

“Rough day?” Lotor asked.
Lance hummed slowly. “You could say that.” He looked up to Lotor. “But I’m looking forward to this.”

Lotor grinned, and the itch that had been lowkey under Lance’s skin all day faded some. He leaned down and kissed Lance. Lance reached up, wrapping his arms around Lotor’s shoulders and neck. He played with Lotor’s hair as he languidly kissed him back.

When he needed air, they broke away, and Lance grinned up at him. Or he was until Lotor literally swept him off his feet, ducking down to pick him up bridal style.

“Lotor!” Lance laughed, tightening his grip on the prince. “Put me down!” Lance demanded, laughter escaping between every other word.

“Nope.” Lotor grinned at him, and popped his ‘p’ as he said the word. If Lance were able to, he would have brushed away a tear. Lotor was learning from him, how precious! “You deserve this. Relax.”

Lance rolled his eyes, grinning like a loon. “Fine.” He shook his head slowly. “You spoil me.”

“I believe that’s already been established, pet.”

Lance rolled his eyes again, and resigned himself to being carried. Although, it was totally cool that Lotor could carry him like this. He rested his head against the prince’s shoulder, and relaxed.

The walk to the gazebo was quiet, but it was a comfortable silence. It was the type of silence that grandparents had during breakfasts before they’d fully woken up, or that of two friends sitting in the same room working on their own things. It was an enjoyable silence; the type Lance didn’t mind all that much.

Lance was almost sad to be put down when they reached the gazebo, but he was happy to be back on his own two feet. He gave Lotor a small peck on the cheek, and smiled as Lotor pulled out Lance’s chair for him.

Dinner was the usual affair as it’d always been, but instead of returning to their room like usual, Lotor pulled out a box from seemingly nowhere. Lance blinked at the box, déjà vu of the first time this had happened hitting him like a train.

Unlike last time, however, he wasn’t going to burst into tears. He wasn’t going to be the mess that he’d been last time. He’d come to accept that this was his life. He was a Druid of the Empire, a spy for the resistance… and Lotor’s pet.

He was fine with this. He’d accepted this. There were worst people he could be stuck with, and he could actually probably grow to love Lotor; he already thought that he might.

Then again, could what he felt for Lotor really be anything like love? Especially when he was so hesitant to sleep with Lotor? Maybe he was so hesitant because he was betraying Lotor by being a spy.

No, he couldn’t think of that now. Not at a moment like this. He’d leave his personal crises for later.

“I hope you’d accept this as a peace offering.” Lotor’s hand grazed Lance’s as he handed over the box.

Like the necklace, it was a small plain black box, although unlike the necklace, this box was more
Lance opened it and inhaled sharply as he looked down in it. Very carefully, Lance lifted the bracelet out of the box to get a better look at it.

Like the necklace, the bracelet was comprised of the same dark metal and glittering quintessence jewels. He wasn’t an expert on jewelry, but he was pretty sure the style of the bracelet was called a bangle as there was no clasp, and instead a seamless band of metal.

Delicate swirls and designs in the metal occasionally had nail sized jewels in them, and occasionally, the swirls made up the Galra emblem.

“You can’t buy my forgiveness, Lotor.” Despite Lance’s words, he slid the bracelet on.

He moved his hand around, shaking it slightly to see how the bracelet would react, or if it’d fall off. Based on how tight it’d been to put it on, Lance was fairly certain that the only way it was coming off was if he was trying to remove it.

Sufficiently pleased, Lance examined it again, a stupid smile stuck on his face as he brushed his fingers over the designs.

“Can’t I?” Lotor replied. “You seem to like it.”

“It’s very beautiful.” Lance shrugged before looking up at Lotor from his lashes. “I tend to like pretty things.”

“Are you calling me pretty?” Lotor purred. He leaned forward, and was watching Lance, not that Lance minded Lotor’s gaze on him.

“I don’t know, am I?” Lance teased. “I mean, you’re not bad looking.”

Lotor laughed, leaning back as he shook his head. “Not bad looking?” Lotor repeated, quirking an eyebrow. He was still shaking his head. “I remember a time where you once called me handsome.”

“Mmm, definitely above average. Not so sure about handsome anymore.” Lance continued to tease.

“Oh, this just gets worse and worse.” Lotor sighed. “I just can’t win with you, can I?”

“Nope.” Lance popped the ‘p’.

Lotor shook his head, a fond smile on his face. “No matter, but I suppose then that you forgive me?”

Lance weighed his possible answers carefully, and then grinned, leaning forward and resting his chin on his hand.

“…If I say no, would you take the bracelet back?”

“Of course not.” Lotor replied instantly. “I would never take back anything I’ve given to you.”

Lance laughed. He hadn’t expected Lotor to take such offense to the question. “Then yes. I suppose I forgive you.”

Lotor’s expression froze, and he blinked at Lance. “…That was a test, wasn’t it?” He asked.

“Maybe.” Lance replied. At Lotor’s miffed expression Lance giggled. “But if it was, you passed.”

Lotor’s responding sigh of relief was with his whole body.
“Good. I don’t care much for your ire. I prefer you happy, and smiling. You look beautiful when you smile.”

“Just when I smile?” Lance asked, teasingly.

“All the time.” Lotor quickly amended. “You’re beautiful all the time.”

“How about when I’m shifted into a Galra form?” Lance had to ask. He knew that Lotor didn’t care for the form, but he wanted to know what he’d say and how he’d respond. “Am I still beautiful then?”

“Because it’s you, yes.” Lotor sighed, scrunching up his nose. “But there are definitely more pleasing and beautiful forms you could take. Like your natural one, you have no reason to hide from me.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere.” Lance laughed.

“Why would I want to go anywhere when you’re right here?” Lotor countered. Wow, okay, Mr. Smooth-Operator. What could Lance say to that? He flushed, looking down and away from Lotor. Even when he wasn’t looking at Lotor, he could still feel the prince’s intense gaze on him.

A sentry showed up, excusing Lance from having to reply. Part of him was thankful, but another part of him wasn’t.

Their dessert was brought out by a sentry not even a few ticks later. Lance was happy for the further distraction. Even better, it was a light fluffy cake like dessert which was often served with fruit syrups, slices, and whipped cream.

Lance could be down to torture Lotor a little with those things. It was the least the prince deserved for rendering him speechless before.

Perhaps it was Lance projecting his own thirst upon Lotor, but by the time dessert was finished, Lotor’s gaze was heated anytime he looked at Lance. Now, that last part was important because about half way through, he’d stopped looking at Lance because he realized he’d been staring.

Of course, any time he glanced back up at Lance, Lance was sure to lick his lips or a cream filled spoon, or suck on a piece of fruit; which inevitably would cause Lotor to stare again for a moment before looking back down.

“See something you like?” Lance asked after the fifth time of catching him staring.

“I thought we were past the tests?” Lotor’s voice sounded slightly strained. It was good to know that he could affect the prince as strongly as Lotor could affect him.

“Who said this was a test?” Lance half sang out. “Maybe I just like watching you squirm.”

“Is that so?” To his credit, Lotor was very calm and smooth in his delivery of the line. Lotor was even smirking as he spoke, quirking an eyebrow like he didn’t care about what Lance said. Hmm, perhaps Lance had to try harder to ruffle his feathers.

Lance hummed an affirmative around a spoonful of dessert. The prickle under his skin seemed to be worsening, but it was still ignorable.

“Keep testing me like this and I don’t think I’ll be the one squirming.”
Lance pulled the now clean spoon out of his mouth. “Is that a threat?” Lance asked, dropping the spoon onto the plate with a quiet clatter. He leaned forward, resting his cheek on his hand again, as he gave Lotor an obvious look over. “Or a promise?”

Lotor inhaled sharply, the pupils of his eyes dilating as the heat in his gaze grew. Oh. So, the prince liked that, huh? Well, that was fine, Lance was rather enjoying how the Prince was looking at him.

“It can be any way you want to take it.” Lotor replied after a moment.

“So, this is about what I want?” Lance mused.

Lotor scoffed. “When have I ever denied you your desires? If you want something, all you have to do is ask.”

Oh, look at Lotor being a gentleman. He was making damn sure that Lance couldn’t get upset at him for ‘tricking’ him or anything. He was waiting or Lance to make a move, to basically spell out what he wanted so there’d be no doubts later.

Smart man.

Plus, seeing Lotor restrain himself like this was pretty hot. Like, it was so obvious that Lotor was interested – and that alone was super hot – but then he was holding himself back for Lance’s comfort. Like… Damn.

Lance hummed and gave Lotor another look over.

In his chest, his heart felt ready to explode. He felt kind of sick, but it wasn’t the bad type of sick. More like the type of sick a person felt before getting on a roller coaster. It was excitement, but also anxiety. He felt out of his element.

“All I have to do is ask, huh?” Lance repeated. Lotor nodded, and Lance smiled slyly at him. “Then… I suppose…” Lance was purposely dragging out his words, watching Lotor’s expressions. “…that I can ask for…” Lance trailed off.

“Yes?” Lotor prompted, perhaps a bit too quickly. “Ask for…?”

Lance took a deep breath. There was no turning back. Not really. Not when he’d strung Lotor along out like this. He wasn’t sure he wanted to turn back anyways. He was too invested, and that itch under his skin had been steadily getting worse the more he’d teased Lotor. Good thing he knew how to fix it now.

Lance smiled and bit his lip lightly, worrying it between his teeth. Lotor’s eyes immediately snapped to the movement, and Lance saw him hard swallow.

“Well, for some…” Lance barely dipped the tip of his finger into some left-over cream of his dessert. He watched Lotor’s gaze as it dropped to his hand, and then followed Lance’s finger up to his mouth as he pressed his finger against his slightly parted lips as if he were kissing it. “…Us time.” Lance finished.
For those who celebrate it: Happy Halloween! I hope everyone is safe this Halloween. Remember, don't blow out your pumpkins before midnight, stay in your costume, and don't forget to leave out some treats.

If you celebrate another Holiday, then I wish you a pleasant experience and hope that you remain safe. :)

**For anyone wondering if the next chapter is smut... Smut does occur, but before the next chapter. It'll be heavily referenced, but I did not write it out.**
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance overheard an interesting conversation between Xana and Petry before he was given a chance to attempt one of his ‘projects’. While attempting the project, Lance connected with Blue and was shaken from the experience.

He returned to Lotor's quarters to calm down in the bathroom before his date with Lotor. The date was in the gardens, and Lotor gave Lance another piece of Quintessence Jewelry: a bracelet this time.

Keith stood in the doorway, watching as Allura, once again, cleansed Blue. There was no doubt that there was a problem now, just as there was no doubt in Keith’s mind the cause was Lance.

Unfortunately, finding further information was… difficult.

They didn’t have the capability to actually take down a Galra battleship at their current time, and while Pidge was fantastic, there was only so much she could do. She’d been running herself into the ground with the multiple projects they had going on.

And it wasn’t like she could just stop since her projects had already returned something. It wasn’t much, but it was able to at least confirm for Keith that those rumors he’d heard from the Blade of Marmora were at the very least possible.

Not that it helped much since no one seemed to know where Lotor’s favored ship was, let alone how to get someone onto it.

The only good news lately was that the amount of Robeasts being sent out seemed to have decreased drastically. However, for every bit of good news, there was bad news to follow it.

They were still down two paladins, and therefore, still unable to form Voltron. Which meant they were just leaving Robeasts in their wake unchecked.

Keith frowned as he pulled out the smallish tablet that Pidge had given him and pulled up the star charts. He looked over them, or more specifically, at the colored dots on the star chart indicating the Robeasts they’d left behind.
He was about to shift the chart around when he faltered, feeling off all of a sudden. He furrowed his eyebrows, and stiffened. The feeling crept over him, like he’d walked through spiderwebs, and they were settling into his skin.

It was almost unnoticeable, and had he not been used to mental sensations from Red, he might not have noticed it at all.

Red rumbled inquisitively, having caught the same thing Keith did. The sensation occurred again, and this time Keith was able to more accurately define it a waver in the bonds between them all. Red growled lowly, tugging forth memories of Shiro, Zarkon, the Black Lion, and how their bond worked.

He wasn’t given time to question her further before Allura screamed. He dropped the tablet at the noise, his eyes widening as he took in the image before him.

The quintessence energy that Allura had been using during the ritual had changed to the sickly purple-pink that the Galra used. It was sparking, flashing bright lightening that reminded Keith a bit too much of the Druids he’d encountered.

Blue snarled at Allura, and there was no doubt in his mind that he was about to witness something horrible unless he did something. He didn’t even care that he was stepping on the broken remnants of the tablet as he lunged forward, grabbing Allura around the waist and yanking her backwards, away from Blue.

He twisted as they fell backwards, moving to cage Allura in between him and the floor as quintessence exploded out from Blue. Static crackled in his ear as it passed over him, and he felt like he’d stuck a fork into a plug outlet. He couldn’t imagine what this would have felt like if he hadn’t been wearing his Paladin armor.

He didn’t see what happened, but he felt it. He felt Blue shudder and then just collapse, falling to the floor. Keith sat up and rolled off Allura, before turning to stare at the downed Blue Lion. Her eyes weren’t quite dull, but they were far from fully lit.

“What was that?” Keith demanded. “That’s never happened before.”

Allura stared up at the lion, her jaw set in a way that worried Keith. Her looking like that never meant anything good for anyone.

“Keith.” She looked from Blue to him. “The plan you and the others have been doing, the one you think I don’t know about… how successful has it been?”

Keith blinked at her. In all honestly, he wasn’t surprised that Allura knew about what he’d been doing with Pidge. Unfortunately, he didn’t have much success to report to her.

“Not so well.” He admitted after a moment. “Pidge thinks that if she can get onto a ship with Druids that it’d have the information that we need.”

Allura nodded.

“I do not know the specifics of what has led you to this, but, it has come to my attention that perhaps I should stock more faith in the Paladins.”

Wow. If Lance was here, Keith was sure he’d be making a comment about how much that must have hurt her to admit. Or maybe he wouldn’t. Lance was difficult for Keith to understand at times. Maybe that was just Keith’s natural ‘salty-ness’.
Keith remained silent, and Allura frowned, looking down at her lap before standing. She offered her hand, and he accepted her help to stand.

“I hope you’ll brief me later, but do you trust whatever has led you to these choices?”

Keith thought of the video clips he saw with Pidge of Lance at the Space Mall. He thought of Lance’s body crumpling in that alleyway. He thought of the rumors that he’d heard, and Slav’s advice of following his instincts.

“I do.” Keith nodded.

Allura nodded again. “Very well.” Once more she looked at the crumpled form of the Blue Lion. “It’s time to bring Lance home. Thank you, Blue, for showing me. I do believe I can help with that.”

“Allura?” Allura turned on her heel, and marched for the doors. Keith chased after her. “You aren’t going to try to cleanse Blue?”

“There’s no point with the hold Lance and Blue have on each other.” Well, Allura just about confirmed Keith’s suspicions that it was Lance that’d caused the change. “If we want this to end, we need to find Lance and cleanse him.” Allura continued.

“You think you can do that?”

“There is no thinking about it, Keith. It is imperative that we recover Lance. I cannot allow a Lion of Voltron to be poisoned against us like this.”

Of course, she only cared about Lance because it was hindering Voltron. He should have known better than get his hopes up for a change with her.

Allura entered the bridge, Keith following behind her. “You two!” She barked out at the Blade of Marmora members who were there. “The closest Galra ship with both the Blade and Druids, where is it?”

The two looked at each other before Myklar spoke. “In orbit around Planet Demos.”

Keith noticed Slav was standing off to the side, which was fairly unusual. Usually Slav didn’t come up to the bridge for no reason… unless he wanted to see how something was playing out in this reality. The realization hit Keith like a brick in the face, and immediately he tried to follow the creature’s gaze.

Something uncomfortable settled into Keith’s stomach when he reached the ‘end’. Slav was staring at either Pidge or Hunk, and the expression on his face was not promising anything good.

“Coran, set a course. Pidge and Hunk, get ready. You two are about to infiltrate a Galra ship. Hunk, you’ll be keeping Pidge safe while on the Ship. Keith, if they are caught, you’ll need to be a distraction and their back up.”

Everyone stared at her, surprised. Well, almost everyone. Slav remained staring at either Pidge or Hunk; and Keith looked at Allura with a tinge of horror. Oh no…

He couldn’t let something happen to Pidge or Hunk. They’d already lost Shiro, and Lance. They couldn’t lose one of them too. It’d be too much. The team wouldn’t be able to take it, as a matter of fact, the Team wouldn’t make it. Two people hardly qualified as a team.
But it was too late to do or say anything. Once Allura was set on something, there was little that could dissuade her.

While she’d stated before that they needed to find Lance, all of her attempts in doing so were lackluster at best. She definitely put more effort and energy into replacing Paladins rather than finding the existing ones.

However, now she was showcasing nothing but pure determination to find Lance. Presumably because she’d finally accepted that Blue was not going to give him up so easily. If she wanted Voltron, then she’d have to recover the team, not create a new one.

Allura turned back to the Blade of Marmora people. “If one of the Paladins is caught, can we rely on the Blade of Marmora to get them out?”

Slav looked away, and left the room, slinking away without a single word spoken. That sinking feeling in Keith’s stomach grew worse.

“Of course.” Azur answered this time.

“Good.” She nodded. “Then let’s get one of our Paladins back.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope everyone enjoyed their Halloween, if you celebrate it. If not, then I hope you enjoyed your holiday/ are still enjoying your holiday.

You’ll be getting ANOTHER bonus chapter on the 6th. :)
Lunch

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Team Voltron decided that it was time to act on the information that they had to try to get more information.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Referenced/Mentioned Sexually Explicit Acts

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on *Tumblr*. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance yawned, and nuzzled into the pillow – unfortunately not Lotor’s chest – that he’d claimed once Lotor had left and Lance had finished with his shower.

There were few things better in the world than flopping onto a nice clean bed after a nice long relaxing shower and bath.

Although, he was pretty sure that he needed to get up soon. He had a lunch with Coral at some point, and most of his morning had been taken up by Lotor. Not that Lance really blamed him, as Lance was just as equally guilty of wanting to resume their previous night’s activities.

Besides, Lotor was off doing something for or at Galra Command and wouldn’t be back for a couple quintants at the soonest. How could Lance blame him for wanting to spend as much time with Lance before he had to leave?

It wasn’t like Lotor had much choice in whether or not to go. He needed to speak with High Priestess Haggar, and she was refusing to speak with him unless it was in person at Galra Command.

In any case, regarding what happened last night and this morning, Lance had no regrets.

Actually, wait, scratch that. His only regret was *not* sleeping with Lotor sooner. The man was fantastic in bed. 10 out of 10, would recommend. Would fuck again.

There was some pain, but most of his body’s aches were pleasant. In any case, it wasn’t anything that a few drops of quintessence wouldn’t fix. A glass of wine – or two, depending on how white girl wasted he wanted to get – during his lunch, and he’d be fine.

Besides, he was pretty sure there was quintessence in some of the lube that Lotor had used, which had definitely helped things along in terms of dealing with pain down there.

Quintessence was a beautiful healing agent and Lance loved it.
He sighed, stretching out one more time before rolling over and sliding out the bed. Languidly, he walked over to the closet and flicked through his options before deciding on exactly what he wanted, and carrying it to the bathroom, where he tossed it on the bench in there.

He yawned as turned to the mirror, and for the umpteenth time that quintant admired the lovely marks Lotor had left on him. Man, who could have guessed that Lance had such a thing for Lotor’s sharp little kitty fangs biting him and marking him up?

Guess he was a furry. Oh well, there were worse things to be.

And, if being a furry was the price to pay for Lotor’s attention like that, then Lance was willing to pay that price as many times as it was needed.

Man, Lance had issues. Lotor hadn’t even been gone a whole quintant and Lance was already thirsting back after him. Maybe it was the whole ‘honeymoon’ thing since they were in that stage of their ‘relationship’; where everything was sexy and fun and beautiful.

He kind of hoped this stage never went away. He loved this happy high he was feeling right now.

He freshened himself back up and put on his clothes, heading back out to the main room.

He picked up his tablet and idly scrolled through the ‘texts’ loaded on it, and then after a moment, pulled up the database to scroll through that.

If he wanted to get into any recent Druid files, he’d need to go to a terminal in the Druid areas, which was a shame. But, he did have some older Druid files stored here. He pulled back up the ‘text’ he’d bookmarked with Haggar’s research.

There had to be some way to infuse the crystals without needing up to five Druids, or long-term quintessence exposure. He tapped his finger against the holographic glass of the tablet as he tried to think of a way to achieve what he needed.

There were ways to ‘introduce’ quintessence to a living source. Submersion, injection, inhaling, drinking, eating, etc. Lotor drank almost a glass of quintessence infused wine once a day. Sometimes if he drank more a day before or something, then he’d skip, but for the most part he was fairly consistent.

It was only when someone was introduced to too much quintessence that problems started occurring. Like, mutations… or in Lance’s case, his Altean heritage showing up. Thankfully, as a child of Druids, and a Druid himself, Lance already had a moderate resistance to quintessence, and it was only growing.

But, he couldn’t introduce quintessence into a crystal like that.

Crystals didn’t eat, drink, or breath. He could try submersion, but that was basically the same as just letting the crystal soak up latent quintessence exposure; and it wouldn’t be easy to get the amounts of concentrated quintessence he’d need for that.

Lance sighed, flopping back against the couch. He needed something else to think about. He looked down at his nails and paused, tilting his head. The last manicure he’d done was a while ago with Corral, and if he was going to lunch with her, then he should probably do another.

Lance had only a few stress relief methods, like braiding hair – something Corral was adamant he would never do for her – or giving himself a manicure. It was a way to relax; and maybe a break thinking from the quintessence nonsense would help him out.
He jumped over the back of the couch, and headed to the bathroom. “Hey Sonali,” He called out. “Let me know when I should probably head off for my lunch with Corral.”

“No, I was planning on letting you miss the lunch and deal with her royal bitchiness.” Sonali crossed their arms, as they probably looked at him flatly.

“Thanks, Sonali! Love you!” Lance blew them a kiss and then ducked into the bathroom. He hummed his song to himself as he got the items needed, and started his manicure.

Thankfully, Lotor seemed to be as vain as Lance in some respects, so he had everything Lance could ever want. Face creams, hair products, nail stuff. It was beautiful compared to where he’d been last, where his only source of facial products had been expired food goo.

Gross.

It would have been better to have another person helping him, but unfortunately, Lance didn’t have that luxury. Sonali would probably rather bite his head off than help, and besides which, it wasn’t like Lance couldn’t do it on his own.

Back at the Galaxy Garrison, he used to manicure his nails every time he stressed about a test. A few times, Hunk had even allowed Lance to give him a manicure. Ah, the simpler days. He actually kind of missed Hunk.

Hunk’s only crimes had been not taking his side and talking about Lance behind his back. If given the chance and time, Lance probably would have forgiven him.

It was hard to stay mad at Hunk, especially since he was pretty sure that all he would have needed to do was sniffle, maybe even blink away some tears, and the big guy woulda been trying to make Lance some garlic knots.

Man, Lance would kill for some garlic knots. His ultimate comfort food, not that he needed them right now. He was pretty comfortable right where he was.

He had… friends… here.

Lotor’s generals weren’t horrible. He liked Ezor certainly more than he liked Acxa, Zethrid, or Narti. That wasn’t to say that he didn’t like the others, because he did. He just spent the most amount of time with Ezor.

Sonali was… okay. They had a horrible habit lately of nagging him about choices he’d made and battles he’d chosen to lose. He knew they were just worried, but, he wished they’d lay off a bit. They weren’t his mom, and he didn’t appreciate them trying to be.

He didn’t spend much time with the Druids outside of Xana, so he didn’t really speak much with Nik or Petyr. So, that left Corral on his list of people that he could talk to that he tentatively considered friends. Corral was just… a Mean Girl™, but even Corral was Lance’s… friend.

They totally had the frienemy thing going on, okay?

And Lotor… well, Lotor was amazing. And Lance just wasn’t talking about their relationship either. Thanks to Lotor, Lance was practically living in the lap of luxury.

He had a prince doting on him, giving him beautiful jewelry. He lived with said prince, and got to use and enjoy all the benefits of such. He was a powerful Druid – although he had his drawbacks, like his stamina and endurance. But he was working on that.
Why would he ever want to leave?

“Your lunch with Corral is in the gardens.” Sonali informed him quietly from the doorway, and Lance shrugged. Guess that was their way of telling him that it was time to go. He looked over his nails, checking them over a last time before nodding to himself.

Perfect.

Their trek to the Gardens was quiet, and Lance headed straight for the gazebo as soon as he entered. It was the most likely spot for any activity.

“You’re late.” Corral huffed, standing and coming over to welcome Lance. He plastered on a smile and accepted her hug, kissing her on both cheeks as was customary for her culture for when friends met.

“My apologies, I was… preoccupied.” Lance replied, ducking his head slightly as he pulled away and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Mnhmm, preoccupied, huh?” Corral rolled her eyes before pointedly looking at the marks on Lance’s neck above the necklace. “He’s good in bed, isn’t he?”

“Corral!” Lance flushed.

“Oh, in your primitive culture do they not talk about that sort of thing?” She asked, resting her hand on her hip as she arched an eyebrow. “Shame.”

She spun around, a mini slow tornado of swooping glitter and sheer, and sauntered over to the table. Lance followed behind.

“You know, I’m glad I was wrong about you.” She informed him as she took her seat.

“Oh?” Lance raised an eyebrow. “You’re wrong about many things, care to elaborate?”

“Rude.” She splayed out her fingers as she pressed her hand to her chest. The perfect picture of ‘offended’. Lance shrugged, not fighting her on her accusation. He was kind of rude, after all. But, it was the truth, and sometimes the truth hurt.

“I meant about you breaking, you heathen.” She continued when she realized that Lance wasn’t going to take her bait.

“Hey, hey, hey!” Lance protested. “Just because I’m from a pre-warp planet doesn’t mean I’m a heathen.” Lance paused, and grinned. “And I’ll have you know that I can’t break as I’m very flexible.”

Corral rolled her eyes, scoffing at him. “Oh, so you’re allowed to talk about it.” She muttered. “Your culture is weird.”

“Says you.” Lance grinned. Corral rolled her eyes again.

She grabbed a grape and popped it in her mouth, chewing on it as she gave Lance a flat level look. Lance laughed, and poured himself a glass of wine, taking a small sip. He got white girl wasted way too easily, so he probably couldn’t do more than a glass before he’d get tipsy… then again, it could have been the quintessence in it.

There were reasons people intentionally introduced quintessence to themselves, and it had nothing
to do with the intent of mutating. Some people genuinely like the high quintessence helped produce.

“Wait a moment,” Coral leaned across the table and tugged on Lance’s sleeve, grinning when she revealed the bracelet. “Look at you!” She cooed. “A necklace and a bracelet… what’s next?”

“Corral! I’m not with him for the jewelry!” Lance replied, scandalized, before laughing and continuing. “But I think he’s planning on giving me some earrings next.” Lance winked, and she laughed.

“Dangles, hoops, or studs?” Corral asked after a moment. “Ooo, you’d look good in some cuffs.”

Cuffs? Like the earrings that went in the upper part of the ear? Hmm, yeah. He could see it. Lance shrugged.

“I honestly don’t have any clue. I wasn’t even expecting the bracelet.” He sighed. “Like I expected something, you know, cuz he was-”

“…hinting at it.” They both spoke at the same time.

“Oh my, he does it with you too? Where he’s all like ‘How do you feel about…’” She trailed off as Lance broke out into laughter at her mimicry of Lotor.

“YES!” Lance cried. “I’m all like ‘this ruins the surprise’, but I can’t really say that, ya know?”

Corral shook her head. “I know! I’m all like, you can talk the masses into circles, but you can’t even keep gifts a secret!” She sighed dramatically. “I just don’t know what to do with him.”

Lance shook his head, and was going to reply, but something caught his attention. He paused, putting his glass down as he looked to the path entrance, his eyes narrowing as Xana stepped into view.

“Lance?” Out of the corner of his eye, Lance saw Corral raised her eyebrow, looking the other Druid over.

“What do you want?” Corral sneered, scrunching her nose up at Lance’s mentor. Lance sighed quietly, resting his hand on her arm to ‘calm’ her.

“I understand you’re having your lunch, but I need your assistance with something time sensitive for the empire.” Xana ignored Corral, and then gestured towards the exit.

Lance hummed, narrowing his eyes. What could Xana need Lance’s specific assistance on that was time sensitive? He wasn’t part of any major projects, he wasn’t important – except to Lotor. He was still, in some ways, just a newbie.

Lance tapped his finger against the table for a moment as he ran through possibilities in his head before he stood up, and turned to Corral.

“Corral, would-”

“Go ahead. The needs of the empire come before my own.” She interrupted. She leaned forward stealing his glass of Kanki and taking a sip of it. “I expect you to make this up to me, though.” She smiled around the glass. “Maybe we can talk.”

And by ‘talk’ she meant gossiping about Lance’s ‘adventures’ with Lotor. Which, if she wanted
the juicy details she could go bark up another tree. He didn’t particularly like sharing his ‘love’ life, and he wasn’t indulging Corral just because she was bored.

Lance snorted, and rolled his eyes. “As if.” He threw back at her as he walked to Xana.

“So, what was so important that you interrupted my lunch?” Lance asked once they were away from Corral.

“Something that I believe you will be very interested in.” Xana replied. “Tell me, Lance, how do you feel about seeing one of your old teammates again?”

Chapter End Notes

This was a bit of a shorter chapter, but... you got a bonus to kinda make up for it?

PLUS, you'll be getting a Bonus on Monday... and Monday's Chapter is something I think a lot of you have been looking forward to although it may not be what you wanted or expected.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance attended a lunch with Corral and was interrupted by Xana asking him how he felt about meeting back up with one of his old team mates.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** None, I think.

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith had known from Slav’s initial reaction to Allura’s plan that things would go south, but he’d had no way of knowing just how south things could go until they were already there.

Everything had been going fine, at first. Pidge was downloading everything on the ship – after all she wasn’t just trying to find their missing Paladins, but her family as well. It was hard to say when things went wrong exactly.

The only definite was that everything went wrong after Pidge tried to download the Druid files.

Unfortunately, with how things were, he didn’t have much of a chance to understand what had happened. Keith was away from his team and attempting to distract the Galra battleship with his presence, forcing the Galra to attack him instead of his teammates in the belly of the ship.

Which would have been considerably easier had he another person to assist him. If they had their sharpshooter, or their team leader with them, then things might have ended differently. Heck just another person piloting a Lion would have helped.

One Lion by itself wasn’t enough to take on a Galra battleship and its fleet; even with the added assistance from the Castle.

It was too risky for Coran to try to pilot Blue. Despite Allura’s near constant purifications of her, the Lion seemed to just become more and more agitated as the days went on. Now that they knew the Blue Lion was being corrupted, there was just too much of a risk to involve her in anything like this.

In the end, team Voltron had to cut their losses with the battle, not that Keith had truly known that at the time.

Communication had been frantic, which wouldn't have been too terrible if things had been going smoothly. As it were, however, nothing was going right. Red was in pain, and she was tired, much like Keith was. But nothing could have prepared him for when the green lion opened up in the
Castle and revealed only one Paladin.

Keith had lost another person. It was just him and Pidge now. Some Defenders of the Universe they were. They'd already lost three of their number, and two Paladins weren't enough.

Keith felt numb as Pidge threw herself onto Keith, wrapping her arms around him like she could prevent him from disappearing as the others had. He wasn't a hugging type of person, but he returned the gesture.

She was hugging him like he was going to leave her too. He knew the feeling. First Shiro. Then Lance. Now Hunk was missing. Who was next? Who else would the universe toss away?

Pidge had already lost so much. Her father, her brother, Shiro, Lance, Hunk. Would he be next? Or would she be next?

For as long as Keith had known Pidge – which admittedly hadn’t been too long – he hadn’t known her to cry. Yet now he had the feeling she was. His biggest clue had been her sniffles. “It’s all my fault.” She muttered.

“Pidge, no.” Keith didn’t usually do gentle either, but for Pidge, he could make an exception. He normally didn’t do hugs either, but once again, for Pidge…

After all she’d lost, Keith could afford some discomfort to give her comfort. Especially since he didn’t know the circumstances that had led to Hunk being captured and Pidge returning alone. Had hunk sacrificed himself for her? Keith could only guess based off of intermediate transmissions that he’d been able to catch during battle.

“We’ll get him back, Pidge.” Keith promised. “We’ll get them all back.”

Keith wasn’t planning on leaving anyone out in space. Not Shiro and certainly not Lance. He didn’t really know the Holts, but he wasn’t going to leave them out here either if he could help it.

“I should have been more careful, I should have…”

“You can’t live in ‘should haves’.” Keith interrupted. “We can only live with what happened and move on, hopefully towards a solution.” He took a breath and tried to steady himself. Steady his own racing heart and racing thoughts.

He still didn’t know what had happened, but it was clear that somehow, Hunk had been captured. Well, they’d sort of planned for this, right? He rubbed Pidge’s back, and sighed, using all of his self-control not to run to the bridge and demand what had happened.

Pidge needed him, and if he wanted any chance of getting the others back, then he’d need her help. He couldn’t do it alone.

Red rumbled in the back of his mind, purring at his thoughts. She was pleased with how he was growing, although he still had more to learn. She was also trying to comfort him; to tell him that everything would be fine.

“Allura planned for this, Pidge. The Blade of Marmora will take care of Hunk, alright?” He pulled back and wiped away her tears. She sniffled before batting his hands away and wiping her face off on her sleeve.

“I’ll go through the data I got then.” Her voice warbled, but Keith wasn’t going to point it out.
She turned to her workstation in Green’s hangar, which Keith supposed was her way of telling him to leave. She probably wanted some time to come to terms with what had happened. While he didn’t blame her, he wasn’t sure if being alone was what she really needed right now.

But… she’d basically dismissed him, and Keith didn’t do the whole comforting thing well. Or at least he felt like he didn’t.

“Let me know if you find anything.” Keith requested.

He headed for the door, and took exactly one step out before the doors shut behind him. He sighed and crossed his arms, glaring down at the creature in his way.

“She won’t find anything.” Slav informed him. “She almost never does. There’s usually only about a 2% of her getting the information that you need.”

Keith’s fists clenched, his dull nails biting into the flesh of his palms. His hands shook with the restraint of punching Slav. It was a good thing his arms were crossed so that he couldn’t act on that desire.

‘Patience yields focus’, He mentally muttered to himself.

“And why,” Keith grit out, “Didn’t you tell us this sooner?”

“If I did, then you would have been on your own, and then you’d fail. Hunk had a 99% chance of getting caught.” Slav shrugged. “I like living, and I want this to be the reality where I continue to do so.”

He skittered around Keith, forcing him to take a couple steps away. Slav opened the door and turned to Keith. “I’ll take care of her. You’re needed elsewhere.” He added before he continued through to Green’s hangar.

Well, that was… not really reassuring. Keith sighed, dropping his head. Why couldn’t things be simple or easy?

Red prodded at him, reminding him of Slav’s words. He was needed elsewhere. Probably the bridge, he’d best get there and see what was up.

“Allura?” Keith called out once he was on the bridge.

She turned to look at him, her lips pressed firmly in a thin line. At a distance, she seemed fine. But, when he walked closer, it was clear that she was as equally distressed as everyone else by this failure.

Probably best not to mention Slav’s words to her then. Especially since she’d been the one to make the call to send in Pidge and Hunk.

For the umpteenth time that day, Keith sighed.

Shiro would have been better than him for all of this. Shiro would have known what to do. He would have been able to fix this whole mess. Shiro wouldn’t have allowed for any of this to happen in the first place.

But Shiro wasn’t here. Keith was.

Shiro had left Keith in charge. And what a wonderful job he was doing. He’d already lost two
people and left a mini army of robeasts scattered out in the universe.

But, like he told Pidge, he couldn’t focus on ‘should have’s or ‘what if’s. He needed to focus on how he was going to fix all of this. He needed to fix all of this. He needed to find out about Hunk, and then find Lance… and then get Shiro.

“The Blade of Marmora will take care of him, Allura.” Keith assured her. Because he needed to believe in something. He needed her to believe in something, because he was pretty sure that she didn't believe in them. He rested his hand on her shoulder, and squeezed, smiling at her.

“No one blames you.” He informed her quietly. “And you prepared for this. The Blade of Marmora will take care of it,” Keith assured her.

Coran looked up from his console and nodded. “As a matter of fact, we just got a transmission.”

Allura nodded and stepped away from Keith. She raised her head, and took a deep breath. “What is it?” She asked.

“One moment, the system’s decoding it.” Coran informed them. Keith smiled and nudged her, as if to say ‘see?’ She returned a half smile, but he’d take what he could get.

“Oh dear.” Both Keith and Allura’s attention jumped back to Coran. “It appears Hunk has been set to be transferred to another ship. The Blade are recommended letting the transfer happen for now. They’re insisting that he’s safe in their hands.”

The first thing Keith wanted to do was protest. He wanted to protest and say that the Blade needed to bring Hunk back now. But he didn’t need to as Allura stepped in to do that for him.

“Hunk needs to be returned immediately.” She demanded. Coran nodded and went to type the reply.

Slav had said that Keith was needed elsewhere. If the bridge was elsewhere, then why was he here? He wasn’t needed. They had everything under control. He was missing something.

What was he missing? There was something here. Some reason Slav had sent him here. What was it?

“Wait.” Keith stepped forward. The sound of the typing ceased as Coran paused, turning to look at Keith with knitted brows. Allura turned to stare at him, her gaze boring holes into his body like she couldn’t believe Keith was questioning her order to Coran.

Keith couldn’t figure it out. Slav said he was needed here, but why? Allura, while distressed, didn’t seem to want nor need his comfort. For all intents and purposes, everything seemed to be under control here. So why was he needed? What did Slav want from him?

Slav had been telling him to trust his instincts. If he wanted the best outcome, he needed to trust his intuition. And it was telling him that there was something more in this scene then what he was seeing.

He was needed here. Why? What could he do? What could he say? What could he… ask? Whatever it was, it’d need to be fast. He couldn’t imagine they’d wait long before transfer...

“Where is Hunk being transferred?” Keith asked. Both Coran and Allura blinked at him. “Where is he going?”
Coran turned back to his console. All was silent for a couple of moments while Coran typed a reply and waited for not only the response but also the decoding of said response.

“By the Ancients,” Coran muttered. “Prince Lotor’s Central Command.” He answered Keith.

Prince Lotor’s Central Command.

Where the rumors about the prince’s new pet project were from. Where the Blades had been trying to get into for years. Exactly where the Voltron team needed to go. It was as if fate was smiling down on them, giving them this opportunity if they’d take it.

And they would take it. They wouldn’t get another chance, not like this.

Pidge almost never grabbed important information in this scenario, but Hunk was almost always captured. Keith was needed here. Slav had been trying to tell him about this from the get go.

If Keith hadn’t been here, Allura would have demanded Hunk’s return. In how many realities did his concern for Pidge basically condemn the rest of the team? How many realities did Keith not realize the question to ask, and instead demand that the Blade bring Hunk back? How many times did Keith inadvertently doom the Voltron team in this one moment?

No. He couldn’t focus on that. He needed to focus on this reality, and the fact that he’d caught this opportunity. He dipped his head, and looked at Coran. “Leave Hunk with the Blade.” Keith demanded.

“Allura shouted his name. He turned to her, and shook his head.

“He’s going exactly where we want to go. The Blade will most likely be going with him.” He reasoned. “We won’t get an opportunity like this again.”

“But the information Pidge downloaded….” Allura started.

“Is useless.” Pidge interrupted from the doorway. “When I failed to get the Druid files, it corrupted everything.”

Ah. And that was why Slav had given him clues. If Slav had said nothing, then Keith would have just believed that Pidge had gotten information. They would have demanded Hunk back, and everything would have failed.

It would have been nice for Slav to just tell him things, but if Slav believed this to be the better way, then no matter how annoying it was… Keith would follow along.

“I got Hunk captured for nothing.” Pidge slowly walked over to her console and slumped down in the seat.

“No.” Keith shook his head. “We might not have gotten any information from there, but, we know where Hunk’s going.” Keith informed her. “And he’s going exactly where we need to go. We’ll get him back. We’ll get everyone back.”

Chapter End Notes

So everyone that called Hunk being captured, Congratulations, you were right!
Now, for the real fun. >:3

Seriously. You guys are gonna love today's 'real' chapter.... you all might want to pay attention to the trigger warnings for the chapter.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Hunk was captured while Team Voltron was attempting to find out more information. Thanks to Keith figuring out Slav's cryptic advice, they discovered that Hunk was being transferred to Prince Lotor's Central Command.

**Please read the warnings for this Chapter, thank you.**

**Lance stared at the empty cells.**

Lotor didn’t usually have much use for prisoners for long, so these cells seldom saw use, but today they would be.

In less than a Varga, Hunk would be in one of them. In less than a Varga, Lance would be joined by Hunk. Xana wanted to see if Lance could perhaps trick Hunk into talking to him. Into spilling secrets.

His stomach twisted, and thoughtlessly, Lance’s hand rose to play with the jewel of the necklace. Sonali caught the movement and cleared their throat. They’d never approved of Lance wearing the jewelry but had agreed that there was little choice in the matter.

Lance’s hand dropped, and he crossed his arms under the robe sleeves, spinning the bracelet around his arm with his thumb, running over the jewels on it.

He felt too full of energy. He felt like a child, being told to go to bed the night before a major exciting event. He couldn’t stop fidgeting, and playing with his jewelry gave his fingers something to do.

“You don’t have to do this.” Sonali repeated their words from what felt like so long ago.

Lance would have responded, but Xana walked into the hallway, carrying a set of prisoner clothes. Lance accepted the bundle, a tangle pit of emotions sinking into his stomach. He felt… nervous,
anxious, sick, tired, excited… just a mess of feelings. He licked his lips, and looked down at the bundle.

“He’ll be here soon, right?” Lance asked. Xana titled his head forward in an affirmative. “Then I guess I better change.”

Xana held up a hand, stopping Lance in his tracks. “Your jewelry.”

Right. It’d be noticeable in the prisoner clothes, and prisoners didn’t wear jewelry as pretty as this. Yet, for some reason, the thought of being without either his necklace or his bracelet made him feel sick. They were his. Lotor had given them to him.

They were a sign that he belonged. That Lotor owned him.

They needed to be removed, but he didn’t… he didn’t want them gone. “I…”

“You’ll get them back after a quintant. If this fails, then at least we tried. If this succeeds, then by the time a quintant is over, you’ll have your jewelry back.” Xana rested a hand on Lance’s shoulder. “I’m not taking it away from you. At least, not forever.”

Lance nodded, and Xana took that as permission.

He slipped behind Lance, and did something. The necklace sagged and then was pulled away. At the same time, Lance removed his bracelet. Thankfully, he hadn’t been wearing it for that long, so he didn’t immediately notice it’s disappearance, but he did notice the necklace’s.

Lance choked on nothing. His neck felt too light, too bare. He felt… naked. He wanted his necklace back. No, he needed it back.

No. No. He was fine. He didn’t need it. He hadn’t even wanted it in the first place. He was fine. He was fine. He was not fine.

“Let’s get this over with.” Despite how he was feeling his words were fairly steady. He was proud of himself for that. He went into a separate room and changed into the prisoner clothes. Then he shifted, taking on his human form.

He couldn’t recall the last time he’d taken it. It felt wrong. It felt foreign. He felt like the Lance that he’d been before he’d been rescued by Lotor. He felt like the Lance that was useless and unable to do anything. He felt like…

“A failure.” He muttered.

He looked into a mirror that was in the room for exactly the purpose of his shift. He watched his reflection follow his movements as he touched the now blank space where his scales should have been.

He was going to be sick.

Why did he feel so nervous? So anxious? Why was he so scared? Lance was a Druid. He was safe. He was one of Lotor’s favored. There was nothing for Lance to be concerned about. There was nothing that Hunk could do to him here.

It wasn’t like Lance was scared of Hunk, was he?

No. That was silly. Hunk wouldn’t hurt him. Except he had. He’d hurt Lance when he’d talked
about Lance’s uselessness behind his back with Pidge. When he hadn’t defended Lance. When he hadn’t spoken up for him.

“Lance?” Xana knocked on the door before it slid open. The Druid was quiet as he looked over Lance, and Lance shivered. Xana shook his head and entered the room. “We shouldn’t be putting you back with one of your abusers.” Xana muttered, approaching Lance before pulling him into a hug.

Lance froze at the motion. The only people who touched him like this was Lotor and occasionally Ezor. Corral only hugged him as a greeting. But, it wasn’t like Lance could push Xana away, especially since the Druid was Lance’s mentor and kinda like his uncle.

Lance patted him awkwardly on the back. “It’s okay, Xana. For the empire,” For Lotor, Lance mentally amended, “I’ll do what needs to be done. Vrepit Sa.”

Xana half chuckled and then pulled away after a moment. He cupped Lance’s face, his thumbs stroking the place where Lance’s scales should have been. Lance flinched, but nothing happened. The scales were hidden, and Lance couldn’t feel anything.

“Vrepit Sa.” Xana echoed back at him.

“Besides. I… I can do this.” Lance took a deep breath and nodded to himself. “I just need to make Hunk talk to me, right?”

He felt like he was going to be sick. He felt like he was going to faint. He felt like he was going to fall out of his skin because his bones were rattling so hard.

Wasn’t this a moment that he’d been waiting for? The moment to see his previous team? Except, he’d been hoping to flaunt in their faces his new power, his new strengths, his new… usefulness. Perhaps that was his problem. He didn’t want to meet Hunk again in a prisoner cell.

He’d rather meet Hunk and the rest of the team on a battlefield. Where it was unexpected, and Lance could take latent rage out on them. Not that Druids tended to see battle that often.

Lance wanted to scream, but that wasn’t an option. He pulled away from Xana and looked back in the mirror.

“I still don’t look much like a prisoner.” Lance muttered. Lance watched Xana’s reflection nod for a tick before he looked down at his hand. He pulled quintessence to his hand, and watched through his other vision as the purple ran through his veins to pool in his hand.

“I’ve been trying to think of ways-“ Xana started to explain.

The quintessence he’d pulled to his hand burned. Lance looked up to meet his reflection’s gaze. His hand twitched, and he braced himself as he lifted his hand, shifting his nails into Galra claws before digging them into his shoulder and pulling down, clawing through the cloth and ripping into his skin.

“Lance!” Xana shouted. He reached out and grabbed Lance’s hand, preventing him from further hurting himself.

Glowing purple oozed out of the wound. Lance watched the wound in the mirror. Some part of him was impressed. This was the first time he’d actually succeeded in inflicting a wound like that before.
Everything felt surreal. He didn’t even notice it. He knew it was painful, but it was like there was a disconnect somewhere. Where he knew should be pain from the quintessence, he felt only a tingle of the burn. This cut, this tear, this wound… it wasn’t on him.

It was on his reflection. It was on this ‘human’ Lance. This failure. This useless piece of trash. He twisted his hand out of Xana’s hold, and snarled at him. “Punch me.” Xana hesitated, staring at Lance. “The only way we’re going to fool him is to have things be as realistic as possible.” Lance explained.

“Lance.” Xana shook his head.

“Like I said, Xana. Whatever’s needed.” Lance replied. “He won’t believe it otherwise.”

Lance kept returning to that excuse, but some small part of him wasn’t convinced. Some small part of him thought that he deserved this. He wanted this. He wanted to be attacked. He wanted to be hurt. He deserved it. After everything he’d done.

His hand rose to his neck, and found nothing there. He wanted his necklace back.

“Besides, any injuries I receive can be fixed with quintessence.” Lance continued to argue.

“Very well.” Xana finally conceded before he threw a right hook strong enough to knock Lance off his feet.

Pain blossomed on Lance’s jaw, and he spat out blood. “Your prisoner clothes should hide your body, so no further injuries are needed.” Xana informed him. Lance shook his head.

“If you can’t finish the job, then have Sonali or one of the sentries come and do it.” Lance demanded.

“I don’t approve of this self-destructive behavior, Lance.” Xana shook his head. “There’s no need to hurt yourself further for them.”

“I don’t care.” Lance replied. “Finish the job, or I will find someone who will.” He started to try to stand, but suddenly Xana’s foot was in his stomach. He was kicked against the wall, before Xana grabbed his head and yanked him to his knees.

Xana’s knee met Lance’s face, and once again, pain blossomed as he felt his nose crack. Well, quintessence should fix that…. Hopefully. But, it’d definitely help sell their idea to Hunk.

Xana yanked on his hair again, pulling him up to his feet before shoving Lance against the wall. There was a burn of quintessence against his neck, where Xana dug his claws in, although Lance could tell he was trying to be careful not to damage Lance too much.

The hand in his hair loosened its grip, and then petted him briefly before Xana stepped away. “Do not ask me to do that again.” The Druid demanded. Lance nodded.

He felt… better, in a way. Some of that energy from before was gone now that he had the beautiful distraction of pain. He shook as he followed Xana out to the cells. Sonali was nowhere to be seen, which was probably for the best. He didn’t want them to see him like this.

Quizznak, no matter how much he wanted Lotor right now – because he did, he wanted one of Lotor’s reassuring smiles, he wanted one of his kisses, he wanted one of his hugs – he didn’t want the prince to see him now either.
He practically dropped onto the floor in his cell. The cool metal of the ship felt fantastic against his back, and his wounded body. The lights in the cell blurred as his vision doubled. He closed his eyes.

“-ance? Lan… ud…..you?” Lance’s mind distantly filtered in noises. He opened his eyes, blinking at the glowing lights of the ship. He was on Lotor’s ship, and he’d probably passed out as a physical reaction to the pain he knew he had to be in.

“Lance?” Hunk’s voice was coming from his right, the cell next to him. Right. They’d done that on purpose. Lance was supposed to get information. The world around him spun as he sat up.

Purple flared into his vision, alongside something painfully bright yellow. His hand rose to his head, and he winced, closing his eyes. His body swayed.

“Lance!”

Lance blinked his eyes open. The world wasn’t as bright, and looked up into Hunk’s concerned gaze. Lance’s hand slid from his head to his neck. He scratched where the necklace should have been. Xana had his necklace. He needed to pay attention to Hunk.

He shook his head, and forced himself to ignore the nausea that the action created. “H-h..unk?” Lance’s voice was hoarse from when Xana had squeezed.

“Lance, thank goodness! We’ve been looking everywhere for you!” Hunk cried out.

Well, nothing cleared up Lance’s head better than that. Looking everywhere for him? HA! Don’t make him laugh. They never cared for him. He bet they just wanted him because he was still connected to Blue.

Well tough luck. He was in a better place now, with people who actually cared about him!

“Like, you have no idea, we’ve been checking all these Galra ships, and we went to some planets, and what have they done to you? Are you alright? Where are we?”

“Well no one wants to be.” Lance replied. He coughed, spitting up dark brownish red into his hand. He rotated his jaw. When he’d told Xana to punch him, he hadn’t meant in his face. If any of his teeth were ruined, Lance was going to be so pissed.

Hunk didn’t seem to like Lance’s response because he whimpered. Lance turned to him, and reached out, trying to touch him through the bars. Hunk grabbed his hand, and squeezed. He looked Lance over, and sniffled.

“I’m here buddy.” He reassured Lance, squeezing his hand again. “Are we gonna be put in the arena?”

“As if we’d be so lucky.” Lance muttered, leaning against the cell. He closed his eyes, and suddenly Hunk’s hand was against his cheek. Lance instantly flinched, pulling away from the bars and Hunk’s hands.

He didn’t like people who weren’t Lotor touching his face like that. It was rude as hell to touch there without permission. Even though his scales were hidden and didn’t work while hidden, he didn’t like it.

“Shh, Lance, I just wanted to check your injuries. It’s okay.” Hunk tried to sooth. Lance shook his head.
“Don’t touch me there.” Lance muttered. “I don’t like my face being touched.” Lance curled up in a ball, wincing at the pain.

“I gotcha buddy.” At Hunk’s words, Lance’s head snapped up. Buddy. How could Hunk still call him that when he’d abandoned Lance?

“If you’re here… are you guys finally going to rescue me?” Lance asked. “I don’t want to be here anymore.” Tears ran down Lance’s face. He didn’t know if they were real, or caused by the pain, or what.

He felt sick again. How could Hunk be acting like nothing happened? How could Hunk just… not care? Didn’t he know what Lance had been through? Didn’t he know how badly he’d hurt Lance?

He could feel the heat as quintessence pooled in his hand, reacting to his emotions. The world swirled and spun around Lance as he tried to swallow everything down. He wanted to scream, he wanted to cry. This wasn’t right. Nothing was right. It was driving him insane.

He managed to dismiss the quintessence before his hands reached his neck. There was no warmth. No secure weight there. No jewel to play with.

“What have they done to you?” Hunk questioned. Lance pressed his body against the bars, trying to reach out for Lance. “What have they done to you?”

“I… I don’t know.” Lance sobbed. His hands fell. There was no necklace for him to play with. No reassuring warmth of quintessence reminding him that he was wanted. That he was needed. That he was useful.

What if all this time had just been an illusion? A hallucination?

No. No. It hadn’t. Lotar had been real. And Lance was letting him down. Lance was failing. His body stiffened at the thought. He didn’t move, not even to blink or breath. He was failing. He was in a failure’s form now, but that shouldn’t change who he was.

Just because he looked like the failure didn’t mean Lance was one. He was successful. He was a successful Druid, and a successful spy for the resistance, and he could do this.

“Lance?” Hunk questioned. Lance released the breath he was holding and looked over at him. “Are… are you… I mean you’re obviously not okay, but are you… okay?”

“I’ll be okay when I’m back at the castle with Blue.” Lance replied. “You guys are going to rescue me, right?” Lance crawled back to the bars and sat on his heels staring at Hunk like a kicked puppy. “Don’t abandon me again.”

“Don’t worry, Buddy. We’ll get you out of here.” Hunk assured him. Lance really wished he’d stop calling him ‘buddy’. He wasn’t Hunk’s buddy, he wasn’t his friend. All Hunk was to him right now was a little oyster that needed to be cracked open for the pearl of information he held. “We planned for this just in case.”

“What?” Lance furrowed his eyebrows. “Planned for what? Please tell me you have an idea of how to escape. Have you guys found Shiro yet? What’s been happening?”

It was easier to think when he wasn’t moving. The world didn’t spin as much. Errant thoughts didn’t run as crazily through his mind. He could focus more, not that he needed to focus. The world keep blurring and then sharpening.
His heart felt like it was beating too quickly. How long had it been since he’d been put here with Hunk? A varga? More? Lance wasn’t going to last a full quintant. He was going to go crazy. But, he needed information. He needed information, and Hunk would give it to him.

Why couldn’t they just interrogate Hunk like normal? Why hadn’t the Druids just used their typical methods? Was it because Hunk was yellow? Yellow was harder to ‘crack’? Lance didn’t know.

Or maybe this was a test for Lance.

Lance quiznaked hated tests.

“Keith,” Lance flinched at the same. He couldn’t help it. Just Hunk mentioning Keith brought up memories that Lance would rather stay forgotten. “And Allura have a plan.” Hunk continued as if he didn’t even notice Lance’s flinch.

He didn’t answer any of Lance’s other questions.

“What is it?” Lance asked. “How did you get caught?”

Hunk shifted, seeming to chew over his words. “I don’t want to say too much. What if they hear us?” Hunk whispered.

“They?” Lance laughed bitterly. “They? The Galra? They don’t listen in here… they don’t like to hear the screams.” He pitched his voice lower at the last word. Hunk shivered with his whole body.

“I don’t know, man.” Hunk shook his head. “I don’t want to risk not getting you out of here.”

As admirable as that was, Lance needed Hunk to talk. The sooner he talked, the sooner Lance could leave, and the sooner he’d be back in his nice warm bed, and in Lotor’s arms. A wave of nausea passed over him.

In the back of his mind, he could hear Blue’s roar.

He hadn’t heard Blue like that in a long time. He mentally reached out for her, and then Hunk’s hand was in his face, reaching for him. Lance flailed backwards, smacking Hunk’s hands away.

“Don’t touch my face.” Lance hissed. “Why do people always want to touch my face?” He questioned. “Always fucking touching me.” He could hear Hunk apologizing, but the words swam in his mind, not making any sense. “Just stop. Just stop. Just stop. I don’t want to feel it!”

“LANCE!” Hunk shouted.

Lance fell silent, and stared down at his hands. When had he become such a basket case? What was wrong with him? He was better than this. If this was anyone else other than Hunk, then Lance would be fine. He’d be fine. He would have been able to act perfectly without a hitch.

Lance wanted to reach through the bars and… and what? He wanted to wrap his hands around Hunk’s neck and squeeze and squeeze, and squeeze. He wanted to reach through the bars and wrap his arms around him and sob into his shoulder. He wanted…

He wanted out of here.

“Take a deep breath, man, okay? I’m not going to touch your face, I swear.” Hunk had both of his
hands out, patting the air in the ‘calm down’ motion.

“If you want to help me, you’ll get me out of here.” Lance snapped.

“I don’t know when that’ll be, Lance.” Hunk shook his head. “You know how the Mar… how Keith’s acquaintances are.” Hunk shrugged.

Mar… Keith’s acquaintances? Oh! The Marmorites. Heh. There weren’t any here. Lotor’s screening process was usually too good for them to get past. If Hunk was relying on them, then he’d put his faith in the wrong people.

“There aren’t any here. If they were, they would have gotten me out by now!” Lance growled. “You don’t understand. We need to get out of here, Hunk.”

Hunk’s lack of physical reaction to his statement was interesting. Hunk knew something. He knew something interesting, something that Lance wanted to know. He needed to know. If he got just the right bit of information, then maybe the Druids would come and take him back.

He wanted Lotor. He wanted the peace of his routines. He wanted to be away from Hunk, unless it was to hurt him. To peel him apart, layer by layer and see what made his mind tick. Lance would have had the information by now if the Druids hadn’t wanted him to do this instead.

This was sick, and upsetting, and he was failing.

“Then I guess we’re waiting for Keith and Allura.” Hunk replied. He was watching Lance carefully, and had stopped reaching for him. As a matter of fact, Hunk was hugging himself, his arms folded tight against his chest.

“Allura? She’s the one who abandoned me! I waited more than a movement in Blue, Hunk. No one came for me!”

“Lance. I don’t know what else to tell you.” Hunk shook his head. “Keith and Allura will find us, and they’ll make sure to get you out of here.”

Lance scoffed.

“Keith won’t let her leave you.” Hunk tried to assure him. Lance shook his head.

“What were you doing when you got caught?” Lance asked. “Why didn’t they help you?”

“We were looking for you.” Hunk replied quietly. “And I’d rather not talk about that.”

Lance laughed bitterly. “Congrats. You found me, and now you’re stuck here with me. We’re going to die here, Hunk.”

“I don’t know what you want from me Lance! All we can do is wait!” Hunk hugged himself tighter. “And before you ask, I don’t know how long!”

Lance glared at Hunk, before crawling over to one of the corners of the cell and curling up in a ball there. Fine then. He’d wait and see when either Keith and Allura, or the Marmorites would be coming to rescue Hunk.

Maybe they could rescue him too, he wasn’t in his right state of mind.

Then he could be pulled out of this test by the Druids. Hopefully, he’d passed. He was pretty sure he hadn’t, but that could have been his crippling self-doubt.
He didn’t know how long they sat there together in silence. Lance was pressing his face into his knees. They were just waiting, waiting to see who would come to rescue Hunk. Lance’s money was on no one. Or perhaps they’d once again wait until he was gone.

They’d abandon him again.

Perhaps the Druids had abandoned him as well. He’d upset Xana and Lotor. And they were leaving him. Except, he couldn’t see Lotor leaving him. Lotor wouldn’t do that. He was Lotor’s favored, his pet, his…

He was Lotor’s replacement for Corral. And who was to say that Lotor hadn’t found a replacement for Lance yet? After all, Lance had finally given him what he wanted. And now Lance was being kicked to the curb.

Quintessence burned through his veins. He could see it when he switched to his other vision, not that he was trying to. Hunk was blindingly bright compared to someone like Xana. But watching the purple run through him was something to pass the time.

He reached up to grab his necklace once, and his fingers came away bloody from how often he’d scratched there looking for it. He wasn’t wearing his necklace. He wasn’t wearing anything that could bring him comfort.

“Lance?” Lance looked up at Hunk’s alarmed tone, blinking at the Druid mask watching him from beyond the cell.

Lance shook his head. “No.” He muttered.

No, he hadn’t gotten any information. Nothing except that either the Blade of Marmora, or Keith and Allura would be rescuing Hunk. Which wasn’t really much help considering Lance was sure neither would be able to rescue Hunk.

Lance switched back to his other vision. Against the bright yellow of Hunk, Xana’s gold was almost hidden. There was something almost threatening about it when Lance was in this state. Flashes of memories of shining teeth and broken promises about it not hurting drifted in his mind.

His hands went to his head, and he curled up tighter. He didn’t want that pain again.

“Leave him alone!” Hunk screamed. The door to Lance’s cell slid open, and Lance heard the footsteps of the sentries enter.

Red, and red and green. He didn’t know the one, but he’d recognize that inverted watermelon anywhere. Sonali.

Sonali’s hand gripped his shoulder, and together with the other sentry, pulled him up to his feet.

“I can’t do this.” Lance muttered, repeating the words louder and louder as he chanted them. “No.” Was intermittently mixed out.

“I said, leave him alone!” Hunk yelled. He tried to grab Sonali through the bars, but they moved out of his way. Lance was dragged down the hallway, until he was taken to the room where he’d changed his clothes in before.

“Leave the room.” Xana commanded Sonali and the other guard once they’d dropped Lance in the middle of the room. Lance automatically curled back up into a ball, and stared blankly up at Xana, muttering his litany of ‘I can’t do this’ and ‘no’.
He felt stuck and trapped. Like he was present and listening to everything, but he wasn’t understanding any of it. He couldn’t control himself, he was just… stuck.

“You exposed him to too much quintessence too fast.” Petyr stepped out of the darkness of the room as the guards left. He crouched down to look at Lance, but thankfully didn’t touch him. “Withdrawals this bad are…”

“Rare. Yes. If I’d known he’d react his badly…” Xana sighed and shook his head as he trailed off. “I should have known from the moment I’d taken the necklace off and he was acting strange.” Xana stepped closer, and shooed Petyr away.

“And yet you continued on anyways.” Petyr drawled as he backed away.

Xana ignored him and knelt down. He tapped Lance’s knee to get his attention. “Lance?” Xana’s voice was softer than Lance had ever heard it before.

“Careful. Lady Haggar had to have the prince present when he was like this during his initial conditioning.” Petyr advised. “He’s calmer with him present.”

“Well, the Prince isn’t here now, is he?” Xana replied, turning to glare at Petyr. “If he was, he wouldn’t have authorized this. And unless you want to be the one to tell him that we broke his pet, I suggest you let me fix him.”

Lance flinched at the tone that Xana was using. He flinched at the words, which didn’t make sense. What were they talking about? Had Lance passed or not? When was he getting his necklace back? He wanted Lotor nearby, nothing bad ever happened when Lotor was near.

“Lance,” Xana’s voice was soft again. “Lance, I need you to touch my scales, okay? Is that okay? Can you show me how you’re feeling?”

Petyr made a noise, and Xana turned his head to glare at him as if to say ‘what?’. “Why not just have him touch you?” Petyr asked.

“I don’t feel like being thrown across the room by him. I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but he has power, and I’ve already experienced that more times than I ever wanted to. He requires a delicate touch.” Xana explained before turning back to Lance, and once again adopting the softer tone. “Lance?”

Lance had no response. He didn’t want Xana near him. Anytime Xana was like this, it hurt, and it hurt, and it hurt. And he wouldn’t remember, and he didn’t want to remember anything anymore. He wanted Lotor. He wanted to be safe. He wanted to be back in his ignorance and happy.

“We’ve broken him. I told you we should have pulled him out sooner. The moment we saw his quintessence spark, we should have pulled him out.”


“You can’t be serious.” Petyr replied, but he was already handing Xana a glass. The glass glowed bright purple, the same purple as in Lance’s veins. He wanted to scream and crawl away. He wanted it out of him.

Instead, he uncurred some when Xana brought the glass closer. He allowed the Druid to pull Lance towards him. He curled around Lance, practically cradling him.
“It’s too diluted to do anything.” Petyr muttered.

“It’ll be enough for him.” Xana replied. “I’ve noticed he’s like his mother… he’s a sponge for quintessence. As much as he can manipulate it, just a little bit can manipulate him.”

When he finished speaking, Xana hummed, the song familiar and comforting to Lance. Xana pressed the glass to Lance’s lips, slowly and carefully pouring it into his mouth before coaxing Lance to drink it. Almost instantly, some of the wounds that he’d been inflicted with started to heal.

“That’s it.” Xana cooed.

He pulled away the glass, and put it down on the floor. “Now, let’s see what damage you’ve wrought upon yourself and your conditioning.” Xana took one of Lance’s hands, and pressed it against one of his scales.

His other hand went to Lance’s head, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the bright purple flare of the quintessence. Lance whimpered, and closed his eyes as static filled his head.

Chapter End Notes

Right, now that that's out of the ways, let's move onto something HAPPY: Mirenige from Tumblr showed me their awesome picture of Druid Lance! Check it out HERE! :D

Also, aren't you all happy I didn't give you this last Wednesday????
Hunk would never forget the first time he ever saw Lance. Then again, it was hard to even imagine forgetting Lance, and Hunk had marveled over the fact that Keith had been able to.

After all, even at the Galaxy Garrison, Lance had been a spot of brightness in that otherwise dull place. He was a spark of laughter in an otherwise strict environment. A break in the boring monotony that was Galaxy Garrison life.

Lance had been the person to break Hunk out of his shell by dragging him out on his wild unauthorized ‘bonding’ activities. He’d been the one to try to spice up Hunk’s bland vanilla life.

It was easy to say that to some degree, Hunk loved Lance. Perhaps it wasn’t romantic or sexual, but it was love none-the-less. Hearing Lance’s shouts as he was dragged off and then hearing his screams later might as well as been a knife being stabbed and twisted into Hunk’s heart.

He’d fought the Marmorites trying to rescue him so hard that they’d been forced to knock him out to rescue him. He hadn’t wanted to leave without Lance, no matter how weird or strange things seemed to be.

Manicured nails or not, Lance’s screams were real. Hunk couldn’t just let his best friend suffer like that.

Except he had. He’d had no choice. He’d been unconscious until he woke up on a shuttle ship, having passed through several Blade of Marmora’s hands before finally being on his way to the Castle. Nothing about any of this sat right with Hunk, but it was too late to change it.

“If we find the Blue Paladin, we’ll do our best to rescue him.” One Marmorite had promised him, but…

But what if they couldn’t find Lance? What if they couldn’t rescue him? What if Hunk escaping had only made things worse?
These thoughts kept plaguing him through his reunion with the others and the following team meeting. Keith, he knew, had noticed something. There was no way that he hadn’t given how the Red Paladin’s gaze had yet to leave Hunk through the entire meeting. It was kind of freaky if Hunk was being completely honest.

Hunk thought that he finally could understand some of Lance’s complaints about the guy, especially since Lance was certainly right about Keith’s glare having a ‘feeling’ to it.

Allura finished up a recording from Kolivan, the words of which Hunk had missed completely. How could he listen to Kolivan and congratulations when all he could hear was Lance in his head? His screams, his shouts, his tears.

It’d all been too weird. Too real to be fake, but too strange to be real. Nothing was adding up. ‘Two plus two’ was supposed to equal ‘four’, so why was Hunk getting ‘five’?

He stared at Lance’s spot on the couch, twisting his hands in his lap. He wanted to imagine a happy smiling Lance there, but all he could see was…

Hollow eyes and a bitter smile. Lance scratching at his throat until his finger’s turned red. Curling up into a ball, or freaking out whenever Hunk tried to touch him, especially around the face.

“Don’t touch my face. Why do people always want to touch my face? Always fucking touching me. Just stop. Just stop. Just stop. I don’t want to feel it!”

Feel what, Hunk wondered. What did Lance not want to feel? What had they done to him?

“I… I don’t know.” Lance had sobbed when Hunk had asked him that very question.

Hunk crossed his arms, slightly curling in on himself. He heard Allura say his name, but her words were completely lost on him, so he nodded, and muttered a quiet, “Yeah.”

“Allura?” Allura’s called his name again, although it was Pidge who was suddenly touching his shoulder.

He flinched, shying away from the touch at first. In his mind, he saw Lance flinching, his eyes wide and glistening with unshed tears. Lance’s hands scratched at his throat, and he was shouting, no… he was screaming.

Hunk felt sick to his stomach. What had they done to Lance? How could they have done it to him, whatever it was?

Hunk bit his lip, and looked down away from where Lance should be.

He needed to tell the team. He needed to warn them so that they didn’t experience what he did. Or if they did, they were more prepared to deal with it.

“I…” He hesitated. He looked up and made the mistake of meeting Keith’s gaze. The guy was intense; he could see why Lance had been into him for so long, not that he was Hunk’s type. “I saw Lance.”

Instantly, the atmosphere in the room changed. Keith crossed his arms, his fists curling into balls before he gripped his upper arms tight enough that Hunk could see his knuckles turn white under his gloves. Keith’s intense look worsened, becoming a glare which burned holes into Hunk’s soul. He could feel Keith’s judgement all the way from across the room.
Hunk had to look away.

He heard more than saw Pidge’s reaction. She gasped, and then scrambled, coming closer to him. He didn’t see or hear Allura’s reaction until a few seconds later when she was the first to break the silence.

“Well, that settles the rumors of a Paladin being caught.” Her words sounded tense and stiff.

“Pidge and I could have told you that!” Keith snapped.

Hunk bit his lip, choosing not to comment on how Keith and Pidge had been keeping things from him, from Allura, from the rest of the whole team and Castle. Not that there were many people there.

Then again, once Keith had told Allura and Hunk about the rumors – but not that they’d confirmed them – he supposed that to some degree they’d all expected either Lance or Shiro to be there.

He meant, it just made… sense? Like, it made sense in the same way that smelling snow or rain made sense. It was just something that clicked like an ‘aha’ moment or a ‘I shoulda known’ thing.

Still, he could relate with Allura on how it was irksome that Keith and Pidge hadn’t told anyone about this. He understood that Keith was new to leadership, but this was just unacceptable. Especially since if he’d known, then it would have been some sort of warning.

He supposed what was happening with Blue should have been warning enough, but… it hadn’t prepared him for what he’d seen. Lance’s eyes once more flashed in his mind, and Hunk fought the urge to flinch at the mental picture.

“Next time please keep us informed.” Allura’s words were tense and tight. “Although good job on your theory being correct.”

Ha. Which of Keith’s theories hadn’t been correct lately? The Red Paladin hated Lance, and yet he was doing more than Hunk to get him back. Hunk shook his head, curling into a ball at the thoughts of how he’d failed Lance.

Keith had been correct about Lance not being in Blue. He was correct about Lance being involved with Blue’s aggression. And now he was correct about Lance being in that… that place. Quiznak, Hunk wished Keith had been wrong.

He wished Lance had been living it up on some nice beach somewhere, enjoying his life. Not… not…

“Why isn’t he here?” Pidge’s question was exactly that, a question, but Hunk heard it as a demand. He flinched as she continued. “You saw him, and you didn’t bring him back?”

Hunk shifted, uncomfortable with her questions. It wasn’t like he hadn’t tried. He’d tried to stop them from dragging Lance out. He’d tried to fight the Marmorites and demand that they save Lance too. He tried.

But trying hadn’t been good enough.

“I…” Hunk wanted to say all that, but he couldn’t.

“Don’t abandon me again.” Lance’s words haunted him, mostly because he’d done exactly that, although he still wasn’t sure what Lance meant by ‘again’. They hadn’t abandoned him… he’d left.
But then again, maybe he had abandoned Lance. He hadn’t done anything when the other’s... during that fight. He hadn’t done anything.

Hunk should have done something. He shouldn’t have left Lance then, and he definitely shouldn’t have left Lance now. He clenched his hands and then released them.

“You what, Hunk?” Keith’s voice was sharper than the swords and knives that he seemed to collect like dust on antiques. It was sharp enough for Hunk to momentarily meet his gaze, although he instantly regretted it.

Fire burned in Keith’s eyes, and Hunk immediate adverted his gaze, looking anywhere else but there.

“I tried.” Hunk finally managed to get out. “The Blades said they’d look for him... but.... Lance was...” Hunk trailed off for a moment before finding the words to continue. “They couldn’t find him.”

Allura took a seat next to Hunk and rested her hand on Hunk’s other shoulder. “Could you tell us what happened?”

Her tone was softer, gentler, than what she’d used on Keith, but it still left no room for argument. It was worded as a request, but he knew it really wasn’t. He couldn’t decline it.

And it wasn’t like it wasn’t reasonable. It was something Hunk needed to tell them about. But...

Every time Hunk opened his mouth to speak, all he could see and hear was Lance in that place. Those screams echoed in his mind, forever playing in the background of his mind.

“I... I don’t know.” Hunk mirrored Lance’s words as he shook his head. “Things didn’t seem... right, ya know? Like, most of the cells were empty, so why would they put me next to.... And he didn’t look... I mean...” Hunk threw up his hands, unable to convey properly what he was trying to say.

He could recall with crystal clarity the bruise on Lance’s jaw, how it was blossoming under the red purple light of the Galra ship. He could recall the glowing wound, which looked so painful, yet Lance seldom reacted to.

He could also recall how healthy Lance looked. His hair was nice, if not a bit mused. His nails were manicured, and recently so. He didn’t smell or stink, and he was a decent healthy weight. Despite the obvious mental strain Lance was under, there were no bags under his eyes. He’d been sleeping well.

But there was no faking that mental breakdown that Hunk had witnessed. There was no faking that look in his eyes when he slapped Hunk’s hand away and screamed at him not to touch his face.

Too real to be fake. Too strange to be real.

“How did he look?” Keith jumped on Hunk’s words. “Was he alright?”

Ha. ‘Alright’ would be the absolute last word Hunk would use to describe how Lance was. Well, physically, he was sort of alright? He was... healthy? Well taken care of despite being tortured. It was just all so very...

“I don’t know, man. Contradicting, I guess.” Hunk answered after a moment. He was still trying to process through it all himself.
Pidge made a noise of confusion. “What do you mean by that?”

Hunk opened his mouth, and then shut it. He thought of Lance, both as how he’d known him and how he’d last seen him.

“Like… I don’t know… he was beaten and bruised, and he had one of those glow-y wounds that Shiro had, ya know? But he… he didn’t look like a prisoner if you actually looked him over. His nails were manicured, and trust me, I know manicures.”

He laughed hollowly, recalling all the times Lance would either give himself or give Hunk a manicure. It was one of Lance’s stress relievers.

“Lance used to do them all the time whenever he was stressed. He even gave me a few. And he wasn’t thin enough. He was a healthy weight, and there weren’t bags under his eyes, and he just…”

Hunk trailed off, putting his head in his hands.

Lance’s screams echoed in his head, and he wished they’d stop. He didn’t want to hear them anymore.

“I can’t get the sounds of his screams out of my head.” Hunk admitted after a moment.

Again, the atmosphere in the room shifted at Hunk’s words. Silence followed them as everyone took their time to process exactly what he’d said. Hunk didn’t blame them. He hadn’t meant to drop a bomb like that on them.

“What happened?” Pidge was the first to break the silence. Funny, he had expected Keith to do that.

“I don’t know.” Hunk didn’t mean to shout, but he did. He threw his hands down. “I don’t know! Some terrifying alien with a terrifying mask – I hope it was a mask – came and Lance freaked out, I mean, he was freaking out before, but now it was like 100 times worse, and he just kept shouting ‘no’ and ‘I can’t’ and then he was being dragged away, and I couldn’t do anything, and then Lance started screaming, and screaming, and screaming, and then it stopped, and…”

Hunk ran out of words, panting quietly as his mind raced. He took a deep breath and continued.

“Physically, besides the bruises and the cut and stuff… he was fine. Mentally…” Hunk sighed. As much as he didn’t want to go into this, he needed to. “He was… manic. Frantic. He kept… he kept asking when we were going to rescue him.”

Keith audibly sucked in some air at that. Hunk didn’t blame him. He hadn’t known how to react when Lance had started asking about it and talking about being ‘abandoned’.

“This doesn’t make sense.” Pidge muttered, readjusting her glasses. “Why would the Galra give him a manicure and take care of him? Unless he was only recently captured, but that doesn’t match up with anything.”

Hunk shrugged. He didn’t know. It didn’t make sense to him, but all he knew was that mentally, Lance wasn’t as fine as he was physically there.

“It doesn’t matter.” Allura replied to Pidge. “The Galra are poisoning the Blue Lion through Lance, and that cannot be allowed to continue.” Of course, she only cared about the Blue Lion. That was all she had ever cared about since Lance had left.

When they got Lance back, her toxic behavior towards him wasn’t going to make anything better.
As a matter of fact, Hunk had nonexistent money on it hurting things.

“I’ll be getting in contact with Kolivan to find out when his operatives will be able to return Lance.” Allura announced as she stood.

Hunk looked up at her, shaking his head. “They couldn’t find him.” He argued.

“So, we’ll go there ourselves.” Keith replied.

Hunk shook his head again. That wasn’t a better plan.

“With only three functioning Lions?” Hunk asked. “We’ll be murdered, Keith. Or worse, we’ll be thrown in a cell next to… I talked with the Blades when I was rescued. This Lotor guy is bad news.”

“I’ll ask Kolivan to give us what he knows about this ‘Lotor’.” Allura paused, looking to Keith. “Keith, we need to speak after this.” The look she gave Keith was hard, and Hunk mentally winced. He did not envy Keith, or the chewing out he was probably about to get about withholding information.

After a moment of silence, Allura turned back to Hunk. “We’ll be stealthy.” She suggested.

Beside Hunk, Pidge laughed dryly.

“Oh, because that worked so well last time.” Pidge argued. “I’m with Hunk. As much as I want to get Lance back, if we go storming in there, nothing good will happen.”

“So, what?” Keith growled. “We just wait? Lance is being tortured, Pidge!”

“You don’t think I know that?” Pidge replied almost a second following Keith’s outburst. “I just don’t think we should jump straight in. Things aren’t making sense with Lance. What if it’s a trap?” Pidge shook her head. “With only three Lions, we can’t do much!”

“We’ve successfully completed missions with less Lions.” Keith argued. “Hunk and I took on a Weblum with only Yellow!”

“I just don’t think it’s a good idea to dive in without knowing more!” Pidge argued back. “We knew what we were dealing with, to some degree, during those missions. This is us attacking Lotor’s Central Command. You can’t seriously be suggesting this, Keith.”

Hunk couldn’t take this anymore.

“I’m the one who heard him, Keith.” Hunk interjected. Keith and Pidge both fell quiet at Hunk’s words. “I want to get him out just as much as you, but rushing in isn’t going to help him.”

Allura cleared her throat in the silence that followed Hunk’s words. “Then we wait for the Blade of Marmora to give us something.” She announced. “Whether it be an opening, information, or even Lance himself, if they can manage it.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope everyone has a good weekend!
And for everyone who hoped that Lance would be completely reunited with Team Voltron... I'm sorry. Not yet.
It was hard to explain the state that Lance found himself in. His memories were colliding with each other, and what he could recall was foggy and hazy, like a distant dream. He was conscious, but not.

His eyes were open, his body alive, but his mind was muddled with static. He’d been in a state similar to this before, possibly. Quintessence tended to do this to a person. It was hard to think like this. It was hard to experience anything like this.

It was like every time he blinked, he saw and witnessed something different.

“Once the fight goes out, he’s not that hard to manage.” Lance knew that he knew the Druid who commented, but the name wouldn’t come to mind. It floated in the colorful haze of quintessence. Maybe it started with a ‘Y’? Or was it an ‘X’?

“You think you can fix him?” Odd, Lance knew this Druid too, but like the first, his name escaped Lance, except unlike the first, no letters came to mind.

The first Druid frowned, the faint purple glow of quintessence fading as he was distracted by the other’s words. “As I’ve said, if you let me work. I have todo some repair, and then he will be like new.”

Lance blinked.

“You’re doing so well,” A Druid cooed as more of the sticky sweet liquid was poured into Lance’s mouth. Lance’s tongue was coated with it, and it pooled thickly, sliding down his throat into his veins and burning through him.

He coughed, choking on the syrup of quintessence, and the Druid shushed him. “I am almost done.” He promised.
Lance blinked.

There was the sound of a sliding door and the beeps to accommodate it. A hooded masked Druid looked over him and the Druid holding him. Lance was reaching up, his hand held against flaky scales by the other’s grasp.

He should have been concerned about that, but all he could feel was the warm apathy of static quintessence. It crackled in his ears, and burned through his veins, filling the voids in his body, replacing blood and marrow and bone.

“You might want to hurry. I just received news that the Prince returned considerably earlier than scheduled.” The masked Druid informed the unmasked one.

Something about what he said flooded Lance with fuzzy fluctuating emotions which broke through the static like whales breaching the surf.

The Druid who was holding Lance looked up at the other Druid’s words, although he was careful not to let Lance’s hand fall. His face twisted into a snarl. “Quiznak.”

Lance blinked.

“I did not authorize this!” Lotor – Lance would recognize his voice anywhere – snarled from somewhere Lance could not see.

A pretty pink alien with blue green eyes appeared in his vision. She studied him for a moment, her eyes widening as Lance flinched at Lotor’s tone. She looked over her shoulder for a tick before looking back down at Lance and pursing her lips.

She felt familiar, but he couldn’t place her. He knew her from somewhere, and he knew that she was… safe. Yes, that was a good word for her. Safe. Not as safe as Lotor, but still safe.

“You’re scaring him.” She called out. She smiled, and Lance was relieved to see it was kind. “Don’t worry. We’ve got you. Lotor doesn’t like people messing with his things without permission.”

“He’s not mentally present, Ezor.” A different feminine voice spoke, sounding both annoyed and exasperated. “He won’t be for a while. Go give him to his guard and then investigate the prison…”

Lance blinked.

A hand carded through Lance’s hair as Sonali spoke. “…wish I was an alchemist, you know? Then maybe I could-”

“You did what you could. I mean? You contacted Price L’Oréal about it, right? And he stepped in. Lance’ll be fine.” Lance could faintly hear Matt’s response as he interrupted Sonali. He sounded distant and small, like his voice was coming from a communicator.

Sonali replied in a noncommittal hum and Matt continued. “Thank him for the info he gave us about that prisoner ship near the Karthulian System, will you? We saved about twenty prisoners thanks to that intel.”

Sonali hummed quietly. “Will do.” They replied after a moment.

“And see if he can get any more information on the Robeasts. They’re really starting to get annoying.” Matt added just before an alarm resounded through the device they were using.
“Quiznak, look Sonali, I've got to go. There’s a problem with that space straggl-”

Lance blinked.

He watched a hologram of crystals floating. Chimes and instruments echoed through his head and in the room. It took him a moment, but he realized that someone was humming along to it. It was Lance’s song, and he’d recognize the voice humming it anywhere.

Just like he’d recognize the hand carding through his hair anywhere.

He still felt dazed and hazy, but there was a change. A shift. He felt… anchored. He felt warm and fuzzy and safe. There was still static at the edge of his mind, in his memories and thoughts, but physically he was content.

Lance blinked, and he didn’t go anywhere. That was… pleasant. Good. That was… good.

Slowly he strung his thoughts together, feeling like he’d been disassembled and then reassembled again. Perhaps he had been. Quintessence could do that to a person, although, the last thing he really remembered was the lunch with Corral.

As much as he wanted to just slip back into sleep, he had priorities. He needed to find out where he was, and what happened. Obviously, he was with Lotor, so he had to be somewhere safe.

Maybe he’d over exerted himself in training again? Or while working on his crystal project?

Whatever. The sooner he found out, the sooner he could take a nap. He was exhausted. But… it was so comfortable where he was. And the music was so relaxing. His eyes almost threatened to shut as he laid there, trying to find the motivation and will to do anything except lie there limply.

“I still can’t believe Haggar pulled that.” A bright bubbly voice complained from somewhere. Lance didn’t recognize the voice, except he did. It was very vaguely familiar in the aspect that he’d heard it a lot.

He blinked again, and it took Lance a moment to place where he was, but he realized the hologram was playing from a device on Lotor’s nightstand.

“He’s been out for nearly a quintant!” The voice continued. The name was on the tip of Lance’s tongue. It started with an ‘E’… and he knew her.

“This takes time, Ezor.” Another feminine voice replied.

Ezor! He knew Ezor. She was… she was Lotor’s general. The colorful one. And the person who just spoke was another of Lotor’s generals. She liked spy and kid movies and didn’t care much for explosions.

Their presence paired with Lotor’s hand and voice meant he was definitely safe. He was safe and sound and he could rest. Lance sighed and felt himself relax. Tension he didn’t know he had leaving his body as his eyes slipped shut. The hand in his hair stilled, and the humming stopped.

“Lotor?” Ezor immediately asked. “Everything okay?” Hearing the name confirmed the hummer’s identity, which he’d already known. But hearing a confirmation helped to remove any lingering nonexistent doubt.

He was so tired. Why was he so tired? It felt like he’d just woken up. He wished Lotor would continue to touch him. He felt better with Lotor.
His thoughts were fragmenting again, but Lance refused to allow that. He clung onto them like a shy child clung to their mother.

“I believe so.” Just hearing Lotor’s voice filled Lance with a rush of relief. It was like he’d been a dehydrated man and someone had given him water. It was one thing for a confirmation through Lotor’s name, but hearing Lotor’s voice was a balm to a burn Lance hadn’t known he’d had.

“Acxa, could you hand me the light?” Lotor commanded.

There was the sound of shuffling, and then a hand was on his cheek. A finger brushed along his cheek bone, and Lance felt the tingle of a connection before the hand was removed.

That was feedback from his scales, so, he wasn’t in his human form anymore. Wait… why had he been in his human form? He’d been at lunch with Corral and then… and then…

“Lance, could you open your eyes for me?” Lotor asked as he stroked Lance’s cheek, distracting him from his thoughts. For once, Lance wished that Lotor would touch his scales. He liked the feeling. His own feelings felt… raw.

Which probably wasn’t helped by his exhaustion.

Regardless of how Lance felt, his prince had asked him something, and who was Lance to deny him.

Slowly Lance opened his eyes. His vision blurred before sharpening, and the first thing he saw was Lotor’s smile. There was an unusual emotion swimming in his eyes but when he granted Lance’s silent wish and brushed over Lance’s scales, Lance could identify it. Concern. The prince was concerned for him.

Lance would have asked about it, but a bright light was shined into his eyes before he could. Lance winced.

“Shh, I know, I know.” Lotor soothed. The light was taken away, and Lance tried to blink the spots away before giving up and closing his eyes, turning his face into Lotor’s hand and letting out a quiet whimper.

“His pupils are responding again.” It took Lance a moment to recognize that as Acxa’s voice. She’d been the one talking to Ezor in the beginning too. “He seems to be more physically present now.”

“That’s promising, right?” Ezor asked.

Lotor’s hands ran over Lance, stoking his hair or brushing against his cheeks. At one point, the hand in his hair slide down to his neck, massaging above where his necklace was. It must have been returned to him. Lance was glad for that.

“Physically, yes.” Acxa replied. “Mentally, it’s hard to say. For as much as we use it, quintessence is a dangerous substance. Those with addictions quickly deteriorate mentally while on it and coming off it.”

Part of Lance was curious about why Lotor wasn’t joining in the conversation, but then again, Lotor tended to be an observer with them. Besides, he was probably distracted with petting Lance, and Lance wasn’t going to complain about that.

Although, he was worried about what Acxa was talking about with ‘addictions’. He wasn’t addicted to anything, least of all quintessence.
“Is it cuz he used to pilot a kitty that he’s been good so far, then?” Ezor asked. “That’s so cool.”

“We can only theorize what effects being a Paladin of Voltron has upon a person and their response to quintessence, but yes. That is the… current theory.” Acxa paused hesitated as she spoke, almost as if she was omitting something from her statement.

Not that it mattered what she was omitting. She mentioned Voltron, and a flash of a memory appeared in Lance’s mind of Hunk sitting in a cell reaching out.

That was right. Lance had been pulled out of his lunch with Corral for an experiment with Hunk. They’d finally caught one of the Paladins and Xana had wanted Lance to try to use their previous friendship and… and…

There was the sound of a door sliding open distracting Lance from his thoughts and pulling him back to the present. The conversation in the room died.

“Have you located the traitors?” Lotor asked.

Traitors. Traitors… Was Lotor talking about Sonali or… no! He remembered! Hunk said that that the Blade of Marmora or the Voltron team was going to rescue them. And then…

Lance knew he lost his cool, but the more he tried to think on it, the more hazy and foggy the memories became. He didn’t know how he’d ended up in Lotor’s room with the prince and his generals. He thought Xana might have been involved. Vaguely he could recall the sound of Lotor shouting.

Which was odd because Lotor didn’t usually shout. The angrier he got, the quieter he became. He only really shouted when he was surprised, and even then, he was quick to regain control of himself.

He could worry and wonder about that later. Lotor was asking about traitors which meant either he’d discovered Sonali or… Or Hunk had been rescued as he said he would be. And if Hunk was rescued, and Lance was in Lotor’s room then…then that meant…

That meant…

Lance had been abandoned by the Voltron team again.

Well, quiznak them! He didn’t need them!

He was working with a different resistance now to bring down the Galra empire. He was working with Lotor, who would provide a better Empire. He wasn’t Zarkon, he was better. Voltron wasn’t needed; not by the universe, and certainly not by Lance.

“There’s a few missing personnel from the attendance logs, but everyone who’s here seems to check out for now.” Lance would recognize the low growly pitch of Zethrid anywhere. “If there are any left on the ship, then they’re hiding away like cowards.”

That sounded like the Blade of Marmora.

Lance hadn’t really planned on doing anything with them if he’d come across them. Which was really a favor to them considering that if he wanted to, he could really fuck their shit up. He knew where their base was, he knew roughly how their bases were made and hidden, and most importantly, he knew how to find members.
But no, Lance had been content to leave them be. They hadn’t done anything to him to warrant him messing with them and, although their very existence annoyed Lotor, they hadn’t threatened either himself or Lotor.

The Blade of Marmora’s main priority seemed to be just Zarkon and dismantling Zarkon’s empire, and Lance could respect that. After all, if Zarkon was still emperor, then Lance would have been thrown in the Gladiator rings, or been used as a Druid experiment, or both. Lance didn’t blame them for wanting to take down Zarkon; even his own son didn’t like him.

But now they’d made things personal with Lance, and that was something Lance couldn’t just ignore. They’d taken Hunk away from him, and they’d even had the audacity to leave Lance behind.

…

Not that Lance wanted to leave. No. Just the thought made his chest tighten, like someone had buried him in sand which was crushing his lungs. His hands were shaking, or perhaps it was his whole body, and his mouth felt dry like someone had shoved cotton in it.

No. He didn’t want to leave. He was happy here. He was happy with Lotor. He was safe, warm, content, and most importantly, wanted here. Why would he ever want to leave?

And he might have been able to show that to Hunk. Or at the very least, dissuade Hunk from continuing on with the stupidity that was Voltron. Despite all that’d been said and done, Hunk was still his friend, sort of.

Except, Hunk had truly left him this time. And that was something Lance couldn’t ignore either. He’d deal with the Blade of Marmora first, and then when he came across the Voltron crew, he wouldn’t go easy on any of them.

“How was this not caught?” Lotor’s voice was a low growl, jerking Lance back to the present.

He shivered and not even a tick later there was the soft warmth of a blanket draped over him. For a moment he was confused about the source of it before he blinked up to see Acxa nod at him.

“Narti’s doing her thing.” Zethrid answered. “But there’s only so much she can do, and you said I’m not allowed to threaten to shoot the crew anymore.”

“We’d use the Druids but…” Ezor chimed in.

“We don’t think it appropriate at this time.” Acxa finished. “Given the circumstances of recent events.”

Lance took a moment to orient himself and see exactly where he was. He was in Prince Lotor’s bed, using the prince’s lap as a pillow. He blinked up at the ceiling – his favorite lightning effects was on, how sweet – and then moved, slowly sitting up.

If he hadn’t known it was all in his head, he would have thought that the room was suddenly on a carousel, spinning around. Lance blinked the dizziness away, not that it did much help.

He felt like a kid, spinning around on his mom’s office chair until he threw up. He could taste the bitterness of bile in the back of his throat, could feel what felt like his cheeks being shrunken, like his mouth was suddenly too small.

He swallowed thickly, forcing himself to not be sick. He was fine. He was fine. He was with Lotor.
and his Generals. He was safe here. He was fine.

“Lance,” Lotor chided quietly. “You should rest more.” Lotor was right, Lance should rest more. Already he could feel exhaustion creeping up on him, but the longer he waited to tell Lotor about the blades, the more of a chance the traitors had to escape. And after they took Hunk away, he wasn’t going to allow them that opportunity.

“… A blade.” Lance sighed, leaning bodily against Lotor. The prince immediately moved to best accommodate him, wrapping an arm around Lance to help steady him.

Ezor’s mouth slacked, making a small ‘o’ shape, likely because she hadn’t expected him to speak. Which made sense based off what he’d heard about him ‘responding physically now’. Acxa’s smile had fallen and was replaced with one of her calculating cold looks.

“A blade?” Acxa repeated. Her hand rose to her mouth as she knitted her eyebrows in thought. “Most of the sentries and guards wouldn’t have a blade…” She mused aloud.

“Ahhh. That would make sense.” Ezor added in. “I mean, they’re called the Blade of Marmora.” She grinned, resting her hand on her hip. “No brainer, right?”

Lance wasn’t sure how they hadn’t known about the blades to begin with. It was like Ezor said, no brainer. Besides, that one spy was caught. Then again, Haggar was probably distracted with Voltron kicking Zarkon’s ass, and it just slipped her mind.

Or she was purposely keeping it from Lotor for some reason. Hm, things to think on later when he wasn’t so exhausted.

Acxa hummed, still deep in thought about something.

Ezor rolled her eyes and leaned over to pat Lance twice on his head. “Thanks for the info.” She praised.

Any normal time Lance would have tried to bite her hand for such a patronizing display of affection, but he was too tired to protest it now. So long as she remembered to stay away from his face, more accurately his scales, then he was fine.

He didn’t like people other than Lotor touching him there, and even then, he didn’t particularly care for it unless it was one of the rare moments where he liked it.

Lance allowed the petting for a moment before he turned his head away. She beamed at him and patted his head before spinning around to face the other generals.

“So,” Ezor dragged out the vowel of the word in a singsongy way, “We’re gonna go through everyone’s stuff?” She arched an eyebrow. “That’s gonna take some time to do.”

“It’d be faster if I could just jettison the crew out to space. We can get a new one.” Zethrid offered.

“And risk more infiltrators?” Lotor returned. “I think not.”

It might have been the exhaustion speaking, but Lance’s brain automatically changed Lotor’s statement to ‘I think the fuck not’.

Lance sighed to conceal a yawn. His head dropped against Lotor’s shoulder, and on a whim, he nosed Lotor’s jawline in a soft nuzzle.
He told himself he’d just be resting his eyes, but that was just a lie people told themselves when they needed sleep but didn’t want it. He heard the others respond to Lotor, although their words were fuzzy, like he was listening to them with cotton in his ears.

By the time Lotor replied, Lance felt the response more than he heard it. Lotor’s voice was a quiet rumble, remind him of velvet and honey like usual. The smallest smile curled at Lance’s lips and once again he sighed.

He’d done what he’d needed to do. He’d done as Xana had asked, and furthermore, he’d told the Generals and Lotor how to best find the Marmorites. Now it was up to them to use that information. It was all out of his hands. Lance could rest now, like Lotor had wanted him to.

Chapter End Notes

As a Friendly Reminder, I will not be posting the Week of Nov 26 - Dec 2. As a warning, this may overflow into one additional week, but that is all.

This is not to punish you guys or anything, but more so because once I go on that break, I’ll have literally no more chapters for you guys. The updates will have caught up to me, and while I understand the wait is a pain, I would rather have you guys wait then provide sub-standard quality content.

I do want to thank you all for your wonderful reviews! Seriously, each review, even ones that are just smiley faces, just brightens up my entire day. So thank you everyone! :)

Also, PrussianRobust drew Lance from Lilac Sweet! You can find it HERE!
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance recovered from his 'time' with Hunk and Xana. During this, he revealed some information about the Blade of Marmora.

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**Trigger Warning(s):** Slapping, Argument

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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For as much faith as she appeared to have in these humans, Allura did not expect much of them. She never had. These humans would not have been her first choice, or even her second choice, as Paladins. She'd only chosen them as they’d been the only options available to her at the time.

It was a hurtful truth, but then again, painful described most unspoken truths.

The only reason these Humans had survived as long as they had was by the grace of luck. It was only a matter of time before things were falling apart like they were.

These humans were no Paladins. They lacked the teamwork, the relationships between them, everything. Compared to the images of the Paladins in her memories, these humans paled considerable in comparison.

They were argumentative, loud, and disobedient. And now, Keith – the worst of them, although that may have been his Galra genes showing through – was holding back information.

Which, she’d admit, she had to some degree allowed. But that didn’t excuse his behavior as of late. Keith had been nothing short of a pain in her side lately, always up on the Bridge disturbing her work, asking on her progress. It was a shame that they had lost Shiro, truly it was; but they didn’t need him – or Lance – anymore. They were just… temporary Paladins. Placeholders.

Yet Keith kept pushing and pushing. Always trying to find any sign of his missing ‘teammates’.

And then he conspired with Pidge to endanger them all by remotely hacking Galra ships. She’d allowed it under Coran’s advice, but, she just didn’t understand. They could try to find Shiro – and Lance – after she located two new proper Paladins.

If only the Lions would cooperate with her.

Everyone depended on her. The universe depended on her. But it just seemed like nothing wanted to work out for her. She just couldn’t understand why. Why couldn’t Keith, or the Lions, understand that she was trying to help universe? That she needed to help the universe.
She was only trying to do what was best, what was needed. She couldn’t just stand idly by watching as this team fell apart, time and time again. Sure, there were moments when they were great, when they seemed to be the Paladins that they needed to be.

But more often than not, these Humans weren’t. Allura didn’t think that Keith and Lance could even stand being within five feet of each other before breaking into a fight, and Shiro, as great of a leader as he was, tended to play favorites with Keith and Pidge. Not to mention, Hunk tended to gravitate to either Pidge or Lance.

In any case, this lull in activity – beyond the Robeasts plaguing them – paired with the missing Humans was the perfect opportunity to locate true proper Paladins of Voltron. The people who could truly come together and form a team that could push Voltron to its full potential.

The people that these humans clearly were not.

Yet Blue was attached to Lance for reasons beyond Allura, and Black might as well as been a sculpture. A memorial to the failure that this ‘team’ was.

Keith was the acting leader now, something she was tolerating. It certainly wasn’t helping his case that he’d been keeping information from the team. His tunnel vision on finding Lance wasn’t appreciated either, and there was no better time to bring it up than now.

“You wouldn’t have listened!” Keith cut into her thoughts with a shouted growl. His eyes flashed as he took a step forward, threatening her presence and authority. Allura took another breath, pulling herself up and squaring her shoulders to look him down. “You never do!”

“I do what is best for Voltron.” She replied, hoping to appeal to his sense of logic. Honestly, there were times when she got on perfectly with Keith, and then there were times where he was like this. Shiro would have been best for this situation instead of her, but, she’d do what she had to.

Keith laughed, shaking his head. “Best for Voltron.” He repeated. “Like any of your choices have ever been what was best for Voltron.”

She bristled at his words, pressing her lips into a thin line. “Oh? I suppose you have a specific incident in mind.” She prompted.

“Youre going to have to do better than that.” Keith hissed out.

Lance. Of course, this was about Lance. She sighed sharply through her nose. She’d had this conversation with Keith before, and there was no reason to rehash it. They were all to blame for what had happened, Lance included. She would not take the blame for that.

“This is not about him, Keith.” She tried to steer him back on track. “This is about you, and your behavior.”
“No.” Keith argued. “This is about you, and how you never listen!” Keith shouted. “I’ve been saying that we need to find Lance since this all started. I’ve been saying that we should have tried to talk to him before he disappeared.”

She had tried to talk to Lance! She had tried, and he had run away like the guilty coward that he was.

“Everyone agrees but you, Princess.” Keith sneered out her title, like it was an insult rather than a sign of respect for her ranking.

“Lance,” Allura ground out, “was spying on us for the Galra.” Honestly, how many more times would she need to point that out? How many more times would she need to point out how Lance’s actions had put all of them at risk? “The only reason I’m allowing him back on this castle is for Voltron.”

“And that’s the problem!” Keith shouted as he threw his hands up. “That’s all it ever is with you. Altea this, Galra that, Voltron everything! There is more to us than Voltron, Allura. I thought you understood that!”

She understood that these were not the proper Paladins of Voltron. Why would Red willingly chose a hybrid of its Jailers, one of the race that killed her father if not because there was no other option? Keith was nothing like her father, like a true Paladin of the Red Lion.

“Meaningless words from one who kept information from us.” Allura replied, trying yet again to pull Keith on track for the conversation she’d had planned.

She could not let these Humans know of her lack of faith in them. It would only make things worse.

“Like you didn’t keep information from us.” Keith rebuffed. “The Black Bayard was lost with its original Paladin, huh? Might have been nice to know that Zarkon was said Paladin before you know, he kicked our asses when we were trying to save you.”

Allura did not flinch, even as Keith brought up one of her worst regrets and used it against her. How was she to know that Zarkon still held the Black Bayard? How was she to know that the Humans would try to rescue her? She was not to blame there.

“And why did we need to save you again? Oh right, because you wouldn’t listen when you were told to stay on the castle. And when we met the Blade of Marmora, you tried to stop us every step of the way.”

She was just trying to protect them! Nothing about the Blade of Marmora screamed friendly to them. Each and every one of the situations where they’d encountered them seemed like a trap. She could not be blamed for being cautious.

“You refused to listen to us when we said they might be good. You think that just because you’re a princess that you’re entitled to do whatever you want. Or that we have to listen to you. Well I have news for you: we don’t.”

She’d had enough.

She’d had enough of this. Keith was not her father or her advisor. He did not get to criticize her choices like a parent scolding their young. Just because he held her father’s position did not give him power over her, nor did it give him the right to blame her for the things he was holding against her.
Her hand smarted where it’d made contact with the side of his face, but at least it’d gotten him to stop talking.

“Don’t you dare presume that you can lecture or command me.” She snapped at him. “You are not my father, nor are you my advisor.”

Keith’s mouth – which had opened in shock from her action – snapped shut. He stared at her for a few ticks before speaking again. “It’s no wonder Voltron won’t listen to you.” Allura inhaled deeply at his comment, and was fully prepared to defend herself when he continued. “‘If you aren’t going to listen to anyone but yourself then why should anyone listen to you?’

Air escaped out of her mouth in a quiet ‘whoosh’ as he pushed past her, heading for the door. She turned around and froze at the sight of Pidge standing there, peeking over the doorframe where Keith had stopped.

He looked over his shoulder at her and frowned. “I don’t blame Lance or Shiro for leaving. At this rate, I might just leave too.”

Then he turned back away and stalked out the door. Allura watched him leave, and it was only afterwards that she realized her hands were shaking. Her throat felt like someone had their hands around it, and was squeezing. The pressure getting increasingly worse as she stared at the closed-door Keith had departed through.

“Are you alright?” Pidge asked a moment later.

Allura swallowed thickly. “I’m fine.” She snapped as she turned away. She attempted to exit through another door, but it slid open before she was anywhere near it.

“Princess?”

“What?” She snapped again, looking up to glare at… Coran. His mustache twitched as he looked her over. “What?” She repeated, softer this time.

“The Blade of Marmora have reached back out to us.” He informed her quietly.

She inhaled deeply, holding it for a tick before releasing. Of course, they had. “What news do they bring us?”

“The operatives still on the ship have not yet located Lance. They are being hunt down, so they need to lie low for a while.” He paused as if debating to continue. “We have a location of where the ship was and a way to track it, if we decide to try an attack.”

Well, Keith would love that, wouldn’t he? “We have decided that that is not in Voltron’s best interests, Coran.”

“I understand.” He nodded. “But the Blade of Marmora believe that Lotor’s stay on the ship will be a swift one. He is expected at Galra Command for a movement at least. Kollivan believes that this window of time would be your best opportunity if you were to try anything.”

“He would leave his ship knowing there are Blade of Marmora members on it?” Allura questioned.

“He could believe that they left with Hunk. Most of them did, losing their cover in the process.” He paused. “There are Druids on board. Kollivan advised extreme caution due to them. He was unable to say how many there were.”
Allura nodded.

“If we could find out when exactly Lotor leaves, we could infiltrate the ship. At the very least, I
could try to hack it.” Pidge – Allura had almost forgotten she was still in the room – pipped up.

“No.” Allura shook her head. “It’s too dangerous.”

If they lost a Lion, then that was it. It’d be the end of the Universe. Voltron was the last hope of
the free Universe. She could not allow Voltron to fall into Galra hands again.

“But what about Lance!” Pidge asked.

And there was the problem: Lance.

If Allura was unable to convince the Blue Lion to let Lance go then he would continue to corrupt
the Blue Lion. He would turn her – and Voltron – against them. If they did not rescue Lance, then
Voltron might as well as been already lost.

She pursed her lips and exhaled sharply through her nose. Why couldn’t anything ever be easy? Why
would nothing work in her favor? She was trying to help the universe, so why was it fighting
against her so strongly?

Her father had said that ruling was difficult, but she hadn’t expected it to be like this. She didn’t
even rule anything anymore!

“We wait, Pidge.” She spoke to Pidge but she was looking at Coran. “Until the Blade can tell us
when Lotor will be leaving.”

“Or we can just go to the coordinates and track them and wait to see when Lotor leaves.” Pidge
argued.

“There is no way we could be certain which ship Lotor would be on. We do not know the full
situation, and I will not risk more lives because of that.” Allura took a deep breath and continued
out the door, ignoring Coran who side stepped to let her pass.

“What happened?” She heard Coran ask as the door shut. She didn’t care to find out how Pidge
would explain.

Chapter End Notes

Now before you all decide that you want to Murder Allura, remember, this is Season 1/2 Allura, not the Allura we see now (although she still irks me sometimes too).

I based this characterization off of a couple different things with Allura. The most
primary being how Allura can only doesn’t always listen to the Paladins (case in Point,
S1E2, S1E4, S1E10, S2E8, S3E4...). Also, she didn't always believe in the Paladins,
she even says as much on her Vlog. Now, Allura has fixed some of this in Season 3
and 4, now that the Blue Lion has kicked some sense and humility into her. But this
Allura hasn't had that yet.

This Allura is still the 'I only just got over Keith being Galra' Allura. She hasn't
bonded with the Paladins through the Voltron Bond. She hasn't bonded with Lions.
This Allura most certainly hasn't spent much time with the Paladins outside of Paladin stuff (in which she only sees chaos and disagreements) She doesn't know the team like we do.
Lance sighed, nuzzling into the warmth of Lotor’s body.

The prince’s hand was stroking up and down his back along his spine, which would have been just great had the asshole not decided to extend his claws out too. Which was totally unfair because Lance knew that Lotor knew that Lance loved the feel of them, and that the sensation made him arch and press closer.

Some part of him was annoyed by this – no matter how much Lance liked it. After all, didn’t Lotor know that Lance required his beauty sleep? But another part of him preened at the attention. That part clawed at Lance, like a dog scratching at a door, begging to be let out. Or in this case, receive Lotor’s undivided attention.

He endured the sensation for a few moments before it finally grew to be too much, and shifted to look up at Lotor. He glared half-heartedly as the prince ran his claws once again down Lance’s spine. Lotor grinned, the smile was all gleaming teeth, and then shifted to kiss the top of Lance’s head.

“Feeling better?” He asked, his hand pausing.

Lance hummed as he considered the question.

After some rest, he did feel a lot better. His head still hurt, but it was a manageable hurt. Nothing some painkillers wouldn’t take care of. His body ached, but like the headache, it was manageable. Quiznaking quintessence.

He knew quintessence was involved somewhere, the symptoms of a shitty training day were too obvious, not to mention the words he could vaguely recall Acxa saying something about it.

He hated the stupid fuzzy film of his memories and the still persistent haze in his mind.

Instead of answering he buried his face into Lotor’s chest and sighed. Lotor chuckled, and resumed
petting him. Lance practically melted into Lotor, letting out a long drawn out sigh of contentment. Man, this was life.

Although…. It was irritating that he couldn’t remember. But then again, it was an occupational hazard, one he’d unfortunately come accustomed to.

It was a hazard of playing with quintessence, and with his lack of tolerance and resistance to it, he was more susceptible to some of its mind-altering affects. And he’d known that before, but why was it just now bothering him like this?

Whatever. If he didn’t remember, it was because he didn’t want to remember. Besides, if he was with Lotor, then whatever had happened was fine now. Lance was safe with Lotor.

Then again… No one could say that Lance wasn’t curious. And while curiosity killed the cat, satisfaction brought it back.

“What happened?” Lance asked after a moment. His voice was slurred with sleep, and half interrupted with a yawn.

“He speaks!” Lotor teased, but there was a definite current of relief to his tone. Lance laughed, half hiding his face in the covers. “No,” Lotor half growled. His arms went around Lance and he half picked Lance up.

Lotor twisted, shifting them until Lance was trapped underneath him. “No place to hide now.” Lotor teased. Lance laughed and leaned up to kiss the prince, pressing his lips against Lotor’s before licking them to indicate he wanted a deeper kiss. Lotor indulged him for a tick before Lance was pushed back down to the mattress.

“You haven’t answered my question.” Lotor said. “How are you feeling?”

Lance hummed, biting on his bottom lip gently as he considered the question. The haze that he usually felt after first waking was still present. His memories of the night before still foggy. He felt tired, but not in the physical sense.

More like a mentally drained feeling. Like he’d been mucking around with quintessence too much. There were things that he knew. Like, he knew that last night something had happened, something… bad? Or important, but he couldn’t think of what it was.

It was like there were little flashes that he could recall. Things like Acxa’s voice or the feel of Lotor touching him.

Oh well, it was truly important, then he’d remember as time passed. Or, Lotor would tell him.

He grinned up at Lotor, reaching up to tuck some of Lotor’s hair behind his ear, not that did much when the prince was looming over him like he was.

“Dazed.” Lance supplied. Because that was the truth. “Confused.” Lance added on after a moment, because that was also the truth. “I don’t remember much of yester-quintant.” He watched Lotor’s face carefully after his admission.

Darkness flashed in Lotor’s eyes. He wasn’t happy about something, but Lance didn’t get the feeling that it was directed at him. Whatever had happened yesterday, Lotor wasn’t happy about it. Which meant Lance couldn’t be mad at him.

Good.
Lance didn’t want to be mad at Lotor, especially since Lotor was always so good to Lance. He leaned up and kissed Lotor again, wrapping his arms around him. Lotor indulged him for a moment before breaking the kiss off and once again pressing Lance down.

Lance whined, his dull nails scratching at Lotor’s shoulders. “Needy.” Lance whimpered that reply, because that too was true.

He hadn’t felt the itch under his skin be this bad for a while. He just wanted Lotor’s attention. He wanted to be pet, he wanted to be kissed, to be touched. He just wanted Lotor. He would have been happy just sitting in Lotor’s lap all day.

Maybe he could suggest that? Would the prince indulge him? It’d be a nice gift. Lance had been a good boy lately, hadn’t he? He deserved something nice.

“Really? I couldn’t tell.” Lotor replied, dipping down to kiss Lance.

Lance instantly melted, a breathy noise escaping him as Lotor broke off the kiss to slide down to Lance’s neck. Lotor nibbled there above the necklace, reminding Lance of how much he loved Lotor’s little kitten teeth.

His teeth worried Lance’s skin, and Lance groaned, tilting his head to give the prince further access. Yes. This was what he wanted. He wanted to be marked up, he wanted to be owned. He wanted proof that he belonged to Lotor.

Lotor pulled back, and Lance could have cried.

“Shh,” Lotor soothed. “It’s alright.” Lance’s stomach flipped at the words, and he swore he could hear an echo of someone else saying them.

Lotor pulled away further, rolling away and Lance sat up in the prince’s absence. He immediately regretted the action as the world spun around him. A spike of pain ran through his head. His stomach flipped again, and Lance thought he was going to be sick.

Lotor’s hand was instantly cupping his cheek, his forehead pressed against Lance’s. “It’s okay.” Lotor whispered. “It’s okay.”

The feel-good mood of before was suddenly gone, replaced by crippling anxiety. His heart was beating too quickly, and he couldn’t breathe. Yet he knew he was breathing because he was sucking in air, greedily breathing it in like he was drowning.

What was wrong with him? Why was he doing this?

He tried to ask, but the words were caught in his throat, blocking his airway, and choking him.

Lotor pulled him into his lap and held him, cradling Lance as he rocked slowly. Lance’s head went to Lotor’s shoulder, resting his chin there. Lance’s hands were shaking, and he blinked unshed tears out of his eyes.

It took Lance nearly a half a varga to calm back down, and that was only probably because of how tight Lotor was holding him and the comforting touches he was being given.

He clung to Lotor. His hands were still shaking, but he could breathe again. His heart wasn’t as frantic. He was fine. Really, he was. He hadn’t freaked out like he had before, in the very beginning.
He wasn’t crying or panicking anymore. He was fine, right? Right.

“What happened?” Lance asked.

Whatever had happened must have been bad if just Lotor moving away had produced such a strong reaction. And it had to have been Lotor moving away. That was the only thing Lance could think of that could have triggered that.

“Something that won’t happen again.” Lotor replied firmly.

Lance sniffled. That didn’t answer his question. As if reading his mind, Lotor sighed, and elaborated.

“Xana had hoped that you’d be able to get information out of one of your old teammates faster than he could have with proper methods. Haggar authorized it.”

“It didn’t go well for me, did it?” Lance asked, although he already knew the answer. If it had gone well, then Lance wouldn’t be having the issues he was having currently.

Lotor’s silence was all the response Lance needed.

Lance sighed.

Lotor echoed his sigh, and continued to run his hands up and down Lance’s back, occasionally coming up to card through his hair and scratch at his scalp – without the claws. The attention felt good, and after only a couple doboshs of it, Lance felt himself melting and relaxing again.

“You… responded badly to some things your friend said, and then it only became worse when he escaped.” Lotor’s words were slow and careful, as if he was afraid of setting Lance off again.

“I don’t want to leave.” Lance whispered, clinging tighter to Lotor. He could feel a spike of panic rising before it was quickly soothed away.

“Of course not.” Lotor cooed quietly. “But you blamed yourself for his escape, and you were hurt he didn’t even try to save you.” Lotor explained.

None of this explained the plaguing exhaustion, or the memory loss. But besides that, this did make sense. Lance would be furious if Hunk escaped and didn’t even try to rescue Lance. He was furious. Now that Lotor was talking about it, Lance could recall this.

The Blade of Marmora. It must have been them. No! It was them! Lance could recall talking to Lotor and the generals about it.

“Did you find your traitors?” Lance asked after a moment. Lotor paused, and then chuckled.

“Of course, you’d remember that.” Lotor muttered. “We’re still searching the crew, but it seems that they escaped with the Yellow Paladin.”

No. That didn’t make sense. Why would they leave with Hunk? It would make sense for there to be more onboard, which he supposed was why Lotor was searching the crew.

So Lotor thought there may be more.

The only thing hindering them now was the sheer amount of people that they were going to have to vet and go through. And if Lance’s hazy memories were right, then they were doing this without the assistance of a Druid.
That was going to take some time.

The idea of traitors on his ship must have been eating Lotor alive. The idea of Blade of Marmora members on the ship was eating Lance alive. Fury burned through veins at the idea of them. He had no qualms with their desire to take down Zarkon’s empire.

But they’d taken Hunk away, and left him.

Not that he wanted to leave, but that wasn’t the point. Lance had been abandoned, again, by the Voltron team.

Rage rushed through his body. Rage at the Voltron team for leaving him again. Rage at Blade of Marmora for helping Hunk escape. Rage at Haggar for subjecting him to whatever torture he’d been put through; and by extension, some rage at Xana too for going along with it. Although, he supposed that the other Druid hadn’t had much of a choice.

However, as angry as he was, the people he wanted to take his fury out on the most weren’t here anymore, thanks to the Blades of Marmora.

“It’s okay, pet.” Lance didn’t notice he was trembling until Lotor was petting him, cooing quietly in his ear. “They won’t hurt you.”

It wasn’t okay. Nothing about this was okay, but fine. He could accept that Lotor was just trying to comfort him. Besides, Lance knew that they wouldn’t hurt him. Not anymore. He wasn’t going to be playing a role anymore, he wasn’t going to be holding back.

If they came at him, then he’d take care of them. Almost as if responding to the thought, Lance could feel the crackle of quintessence under his skin in his hands, begging to be unleashed.

“I want to help.” Lance said. “I want to help find the traitors.”

Lotor pulled away to smile at him. “I appreciate that, but you’re in no condition right now. The others have it under control.”

Lance huffed and looked away, pouting slightly. But he supposed Lotor was right. He couldn’t exactly do much with his current attachment to Lotor.

Not that he didn’t mind being so attached to Lotor, but… it kind of put a crimp in both of their plans for the day. Well, he didn’t know Lotor’s plans, but he was sure it wasn’t coddling Lance.

As a matter of fact, the last thing Lance could definitely remember with Lotor was that he’d left for an important meeting at Galra Command. Unless Lance had been out of things for longer than he was thinking, then Lotor must have turned around midflight to come back for Lance.

He wouldn’t lie: the thought made Lance feel all warm and fuzzy.

“For now, why don’t you rest with me? I’ll be departing again once they give the all clear, and I’d prefer to spend as much of that time with you as I can.” Lotor continued.

Lance sighed, his shoulders slumping as he leaned forward and pressed his lips against Lotor’s. “Fine.” He sighed after a tick when he’d pulled away from the kiss.

“Thank you.”
Friendly reminder: Next week is the last week I will update before I take my break. **I WILL BE UPDATING NEXT WEEK**

Friendly reminder: Next week is Lancelot Week! I don’t promise content for everyday, but I plan to post some stuff (Separate from this fic) for the event. :)

Chapter End Notes
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance was comforted by Lotor after his ordeal with Hunk, the Druids, and Quintessence withdrawal.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Misgendering, Referenced/Mentioned Electrocution

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

Quintessence crackled under Lance’s skin, hot and potent. He could feel it prickle under his skin. He could faintly taste the almost metallic hints of it. He could hear the static crackle and pop in his ears, sounding like an old radio that needed to be tuned into a station. He could even smell it, like a faint odor before a storm.

The amount he had concentrated was enough that he didn’t even need to switch to his other vision to see it anymore.

The corrupted quintessence wasn’t what he wanted to play with right now, but it wasn’t like he had a lot of options. Petyr had said that the best way to build up his stamina with quintessence was to just keep playing with it, and so that was what Lance was going to do.

He twisted it around his hand, admiring how it sparkled as he transferred it from one hand to another.

It wasn’t like he had many other options that he could be doing right now. He’d given up on attempting to infuse the small Balmerian crystal he carried around for the day. He wasn’t getting anywhere with it, and all he was doing was frustrating himself.

It didn’t help that he couldn’t focus. He’d been having issues ever since Hunk had escaped.

His Astral Plane wasn’t even a place he could retreat to for help focusing anymore. The plains of ice were cracked and brittle, the ocean dangerous and dark – more willing to suck him up and drown him than before.

Occasionally, he could feel the cool chill of Blue’s call or hear the quiet echo of her roar in a rush of blood or the static of the quintessence. He’d heavily considered answering her, but he hadn’t. It wasn’t like he had a concrete reason for ignoring her. He just… was.

He just didn’t want to see her right now.

The quintessence sparked, sending tiny shocks through Lance’s hand and up his arm, circling
around the bracelet Lotor had given him. He smiled fondly at it, stretching the quintessence out into thin tiny chains and then twisting them around the bracelet in delicate lace-like loops.

Technically, Lance shouldn’t be doing this. He was still ‘recovering’ from the other quintant, but Lotor was a worry wart. Lance knew his limits, and playing with quintessence like this wasn’t anywhere near them.

And once again, it wasn’t like Lance had anything else to do. He’d tried meditating, he’d tried his stupid crystal project, and Lotor was busy with making sure there were no Blade of Marmora members left on the ship.

Never mind that Lance could probably help with that if only he were allowed to.

He rolled his eyes, and with a roll of his hand pulled the quintessence back away from the bracelet to form it into a ball he could toss up and down.

“If that explodes, I’m blaming you.” Sonali muttered from the doorway.

“If it explodes,” Lance looked over at them, “then we’ll both be dead.” He cheerfully informed them before dispelling the ball.

“You ought to be careful playing with that then.” Sonali complained, crossing their arms. “I wouldn’t recommend doing anything with quintessence after what happened.”

“Oh yeah?” Lance asked. “And what did happen, exactly?”

“You cracked. That’s what happened.” Sonali replied. Lance flinched at their blunt tone and way of putting things.

“I’m fine now.” He hissed, narrowing his eyes. So, he’d cracked. Anyone would have cracked under the pressure Lance had been under. Unless they thought that Lance was in danger of betraying the Resistance… in which case, Lance would have to dissuade them from that idea.

Lance rather liked living. It helped that he actually liked Sonali to some degree too.

“Are you?” Sonali asked. “You were asking Lotor to let you help in hunting down the Blade of Marmora on the ship.” They pointed out, which, to be fair, was a valid point. Except…

“If I really meant it, then I’d give Lotor the location of their headquarters.” Lance argued. Which wasn’t really a point in his favor considering he’d been heavily debating giving that information over. The only reason he hadn’t was because they’d probably moved the moment they found out that he was with the Galra.

He refused to send Lotor on a wild goose chase like that. Not that Sonali had to know why he hadn’t shared that information.

“And I suppose you know who they are?” Lance asked. At the thought of the possible – and more than likely – Blade of Marmora members on the ship, he could feel the quintessence once again spark at his fingertips.

“No.” They replied shortly. “I don’t, nor do I care to. Their motto of ‘Knowledge or Death’ has never sat well with me. It’s why they lose so many members.”

“It’s no different from the Galra cry of ‘Victory or Death’.” Lance shrugged. “‘Vrepit Sa’, right?”
“Never say that again. It looked as wrong as it sounded.”

Lance rolled his eyes, and flopped back on the couch. He tapped into quintessence and levitated the crystal, picking it up and tossing it to himself. He’d told himself no more, but… he was bored, and there was only so much else he could do.

“It’s disturbing how good you are at that.” Sonali said.

“You’re just jelly.” Lance replied. He looked over the crystal, something he’d done a thousand times now. He could see the crystal clearly even when he closed his eyes. He knew exactly where the stress fractures were, where the crystal broke off with a jagged edge.

He could feel the quintessence trying to connect with the crystal, but there just wasn’t anything in it for the quintessence to resonate with. He pulled the quintessence up, pulling it back into visible view. He watched for a moment as it sparked and arced, connecting to the bracelet.

The idea came to him almost immediately, and he mentally kicked himself for not thinking of it earlier. He watched as the tiny crystals in the bracelet lit up at the connection, but more importantly… he could feel that. Except it wasn’t strong enough. He couldn’t accurately feel it. They were too small. He needed something more similar in size to the crystal he was messing with.

He raised his hand to his necklace, moving to touch the gem there to compare its size, and the quintessence pooled in his hand jumped, sparking out to the gem on his necklace and resonating.

Lance might have shut his eyes, or maybe they’d stayed open. All he knew was that one moment he was on the couch and the next he was falling through the air, twisting and turning until all he could see was the dark ocean below him. Blue’s roar echoed in his ears as he hit the water.

Lance gasped as he sat up, his hand clutched so tightly around the necklace he could feel it leaving imprints in his skin. Quintessence sparked and crackled around his hand and necklace.

“Lance?!” Sonali was at his side, hands reached out as if to touch him but hesitating.

His whole body shook, and he felt like no matter how many breaths of air he took, his lungs were full of that sticky dark ocean.

“Right. Not doing that again.”

“I told you playing with it was dangerous!” Sonali hissed. “If you get hurt, Lotor will kill me.”

Lance blinked, staring down at his hands as he dropped them from the necklace. His hands were shaking, but he didn’t feel any quintessence pooled in them.

“That was weird.” He muttered, flexing his hands. The crystal had fallen to his lap, and he picked it back up. He examined it for a moment before pulling back up the quintessence.

“Quiznak! Warn someone, will you?” Sonali hissed as they threw themselves back away from him.

He closed his eyes, focusing on what he was feeling and… he opened his eyes, a smile tugging at the corner of his lips. It was small, but the quintessence resonated. Now if he could just bounce the quintessence off each other, then he could amplify the quintessence and it could grow.

He’d succeeded in the impossible… at the minor cost of slight electrocution from quintessence. Now, if only he could figure out how to do that again without the electrocution that’d just be A+. Not that the electrocution had been bad. It certain didn’t seem to impair anything. It’d just been a
little… shocking.

Ha. He cracked himself up sometimes.

“You’re acting kinda weird, Lance.”

Lance looked up at Sonali. His smile grew until it was a full-fledged grin. “I just figured something out, it’s no big deal.”

Except it was a big deal. If he could figure out more specifics on this, then they might not have to farm Balmeras to get the quintessence and the crystals. They could grow their own crystals. Project Crystal, except with old ‘dead’ crystals instead of turning someone into a portable Balmera.

He’d bring this up to the other Druids, but until he had a better hand on this and knew more about what he’d done, or even how to do it again, then he was going to keep this under wraps.

“If… you say so.”

The door beeped, and before Lance could blink Sonali was standing and saluting. “Prince Lotor.” Sonali inclined their head before moving to take their station up outside the door.

Lotor watched them go before shaking his head and quirking an eyebrow at Lance. “Someone seems happy.” He commented.

“Why wouldn’t I be? You’re back.” Lance replied. His smile softened as Lotor approached him, and he leaned up as Lotor leaned down to meet the princess with a kiss. “How goes your hunt?” Lance asked as he pulled away.

“Well. We found one operative, and so far, that seems to be the only one.” Lotor circled around the couch to take a seat at his armchair.

“That’s promising. Especially since you have to go soon, right?” Lance asked. “You have that meeting with Haggar about the Robeasts.”

“Indeed. And with the ‘no warp’ zone around my father’s ship, it’ll make the journey even longer.” Lotor sighed.

“Is she still refusing your calls?” Lance put the crystal piece that he’d been working on – the one that was no longer dead – down on the table.

“Yes. She’s refusing to listen to me unless I come.” Lotor sighed. “I wish she would stop trying to manage me. She is my father’s advisor, not mine.”

Lance stared at Lotor for a moment before mirroring Lotor’s sigh and standing up. He made his way over to the prince, taking a seat on the armrest of Lotor’s chair and starting to massage his shoulders.

“You won’t have to put up with it forever.” Lance tried to reassure him, working the knots out the best he could in the position he was in. It wasn’t working out well for him, but it was letting him touch Lotor a lot, and he was sure the prince didn’t mind. Lance certainly didn’t mind.

“It won’t be long before you’re Emperor, and she and Zarkon are things of the past.” Lance reminded him.

“Are you sure I can’t convince you to come with me?” Lotor asked. “Your presence would be a
welcome distraction.”

Lance laughed. “And that is exactly why I can’t come, my prince. You’ll need to be on your game to deal with Haggar.” Lance realized what he said the moment the words had left his lips.

He had two immediate knee jerk reactions. The first was some weird sort of warmth that curled in his chest, filling him with embarrassment over the Freudian slip. The other was considerably less pleasant. His stomach twisted, the taste of bile spilling into his mouth at how he’d referred to Lotor.

Even Lotor had caught the slip. He inhaled deeply, and he tensed under Lance’s hands. Right. Lance needed to distract him before he could ask about that. “Besides, I need to stay here.” Lance continued without missing a beat.

Lotor was silent for a tick before seemingly accepting everything and moving on to Lance’s addition. “Oh? Care to enlighten me as to why?” Lotor asked.

Lance hummed, sliding his hands over Lotor’s shoulder to wrap around his chest while Lance rested his head on Lotor’s shoulder. “It’s a secret.” He whispered into Lotor’s ear. “Besides, absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

Lance looked up as the door beeped. He sat up, narrowing his eyes at Acxa as she walked in. Something felt off, but he couldn’t quite place it. Acxa met his gaze evenly for a few ticks before her gaze flickered to Lotor.

He sat up, releasing Lotor from his hold, but remaining sitting on Lotor’s armrest. He watched Acxa as she walked forward until she was a few steps away.

“Prince Lotor,” She saluted him before holding out a chip to him. “Here are the final results of my investigation.”

Lance pressed his lips into a thin line. Final results meant Lotor would be leaving soon. The thought filled him with both despair and elation. He felt like a piece of rope, caught in a horrid game of tug-of-war between his thoughts and feelings. Like there was some odd disconnect inside of him.

He planned to go to Xana about that, preferably before Lotor left. He had an idea that it’d been caused by the incident a couple quintants ago, and he wanted to make sure that it wasn’t a problem.

Movement out of the corner of Lance’s eyes took his attention. Lance looked over Lotor’s desk. Nothing looked disturbed, but there’d been something that had caught his attention. Except there was nothing over there. On a whim, he switched to the quintessence vision, and frowned.

“Ezor.” He called out, interrupting Lotor and Acxa’s quiet conversation about the results. “Stop snooping through our prince’s stuff.”

Ezor melted into view, her eyes wide as she stared at Lance. “What gave me away? I was so careful!” She whined.

“Ezor.” Lotor took command of the conversation. “I take it you’ve finished looking through the Bridge Officers’ rooms?”

“Yeah.” She sighed. “Nothing interesting there. Unless you count Private Glauc’s girlfriend – which I didn’t know he had – blaming Bridge Officer Sonali for him leaving, and leaving her nasty
notes. Or the affairs of bridge officers’ Bmuth and Kynia. They finally broke up.”

Lance blinked at Ezor. Somehow, despite all that information the only thing that had stuck out to him was that Sonali was a chick.

…

He was such an asshole. He’d been misgendering her this entire time! Man, Pidge was going to… do nothing because he was never going to see Pidge again. And if he did, it’d be from the other side of the battle field.

Why did that thought suddenly hurt so much? Was it because she looked so much like Matt, who he actually liked? Or because he knew that her death would hurt Matt?

“Ezor, now isn’t the time for gossip.” Lotor sighed. “If you’ve finished, then I suppose you have your final report?”

“Err… well, about that.”

Lotor sighed, closing his eyes for a few ticks. “I highly suggest that you get that done then.” He growled out a few ticks later.

“Right away!” She chirped before turning invisible and fleeing from the room. The only real clue to her leaving was the door opening and closing on its own.

Lotor shook his head at her. “Acxa, you’re dismissed.”

“Thank you, sir.” Acxa saluted again, because she was the only General who actually did things by the book, and turned away.

“Looks like you’re going to have your hands full.” Lance commented. He ran his hands through Lotor’s hair and after a moment decided to braid it.

“Just a tad.” Lotor sighed. “I’d love to leave one of them here, but I’ll be needing all of them to assist with cleaning up the Robeasts should Haggar refuse, and coming back here to pick someone up would take too much time.”

“Its fine. I can hold down the fort on my own.” Lance would have shrugged, but Lotor wouldn’t have seen it. Besides, he was braiding his hair. “I’ll miss you while you’re gone.”


Lance laughed. “I was hoping you had.” He teased, finishing up the braid. He had nothing to tie it with, so it wouldn’t stay long, but… it had given him something to do.

“Care to share?”

“Well, sharing is caring.” Lance mused. “But no. Not when I don’t know for sure if I’ll have that surprise for you. It all depends on whether our suspicions are correct or not.”

“You plan to get me a Blade?” Lotor asked. He shifted, twisting around so he could pick Lance up off the armrest and pull him into his lap. Lance squeaked, and he squirmed for a tick before realizing that it’d increase the chance of Lotor dropping him.

“Maybe.” Lance half sung, once he was comfortably situated on Lotor’s lap. “Like I said, it all depends.”
“Promise me you’ll be careful.” Lotor nuzzled against Lance’s jawline. “They’ve killed Druids in the past.”

“I’ll be so careful a picture of me will show up next to the definition.” Lance promised.

“Is that so?” Lotor asked. “I’d still feel better if you had someone else with you.”

“I’ll take Xana.” Lance replied.

Lotor’s eyes narrowed and his lips flattened into a thin tiny line. Lance knew that Lotor was upset at the other Druids, but he didn’t know exactly what had set him off beyond the fact that whatever it was, it had happened around the time Hunk escaped.

Lance’s current theory was that it had something to do with the unorthodox ‘interrogation’ Xana had attempted on Hunk, where he’d used Lance to try to get information.

“Relax.” Lance muttered. “There’s no point to needlessly stress yourself before your journey.”

Lotor sighed. “You’re right.”

Chapter End Notes

I will be updating on Wednesday. AFTER Wednesday, I will not be updating on Lilac Sweet for a Week or two. This is because I have officially caught up to the updates with the content I’ve stockpiled.

I haven’t had much time to write for Lilac Sweet due to my parents moving to another state. I’m renting the house they were living in out from them, and so I’ve had to be dealing with assisting with the move. Things have been hectic lately, and after this week they should calm down enough for me to be able to write and get my stockpile built back up.

I will be continuing to post for Lancelot Week with any content that I have stockpiled for the event.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance made some progress on his Druid Projects by drawing out some quintessence and injecting it into the dead crystal.

Lotor received the final results of the General's investigations, which meant that he was going to have to leave soon to Galra Central Command to speak with Haggar.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Bad Flirting, Emotional Manipulation

**Posting Early Today because I probably won't be able to post until 11PM EST if I don't post now.**

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Lanc sighed, leaning his head back as he looked over to Corral.

She was pouting, irritated because Lance was on Lotor’s bed and she was on the couch. She narrowed her eyes when she noticed him looking, and Lance offered a big toothy grin in response. She hmphed, crossing her arms. Her pout intensified, not that it had any effect on Lance.

In his hands, he was playing with a physical manifestation of quintessence energy. He was tossing the ball side to side without watching, only relying on his ability to sense quintessence to catch it.

Anytime Corral threatened to come over and knock him off the bed, the ball crackled and sizzled, sending off tiny sparks in her direction. Perhaps it was unfair, but it was the perfect deterrent since she didn’t want to try to take him on. She’d already commented on how ‘unfair’ he was being, but did he look like he cared?

The door to the bathroom opened with a quiet ‘whoosh’. Neither Lance nor Corral broke their staring match to look, as they both knew who it was standing there. There was a quiet sigh which almost had Lance looking over.

“What am I going to do with the two of you?” Lotor asked quietly.

“Call us beautiful.” Lance blinked, and he cursed himself, his grin falling into a frown. Corral’s lips curled upwards in a painted self-assured smirk at her victory.

“Treat us well.” Corral added.

“Spoil us rotten.” Lance suggested. He dismissed the ball of quintessence as he rolled over onto his stomach, propping his head up with his hands and kicking the air.

“Ooo, I like the sound of that, maybe some more jewelry?”
“Another bracelet might be nice.” Lance hummed, contemplating. “Or a pair of earrings. I’d look on point with some earrings.”

“You would.” Corral agreed. “But some new clothes would be nice too. I would love a new scarf.” Lance snorted, eyeing her current scarf before rolling his eyes.

“You wear clothes?” Instead of pointing out anything about her current scarf, Lance opted to tease her. She pouted, sticking her bottom lip out the way Lance taught her. He winked and shot her some finger guns.

“Enough.” Lotor interrupted them. He looked between them and shook his head. “I regret ever allowing you two to meet.”

Lance rolled his eyes, and he saw Corral doing the same at her place across the room. Please, like Lotor had anything to do with Lance and Corral meeting. She’d gotten bored and wanted to pick a cat fight with Lotor’s new toy, and instead had found Lance.

Lotor sighed quietly again. “I suppose Lance was the one to steal my clothes and towels from the bathroom?” Lotor asked.

See, if Lance wanted to be the perfect picture of innocence, then he would have looked at the ceiling and muttered a soft quiet ‘no, of course not’. But then he’d miss the show that he’d worked so hard to get. He grinned, looking too much like the cat that got the canary as he finally looked over at the fruits of his labor.

It was kinda unfair, Lance mused, how attractive Lotor looked no matter what. Even when annoyed and water literally dripping from his hair and down his body to form a puddle on the floor. Lance’s eyes traced his entire body, and when they finally came back to Lotor’s face, the prince arched an eyebrow as if to say ‘really?’.

Lance only grinned, and the grin grew wider when Lotor turned and stared at the closet. Across the room, Corral giggled.

Lotor raised a hand, pinching the bridge of his nose and taking a deep breath before turning back to face Lance and Corral. “Would I be correct in assuming the gold scarf jamming the closet door would be Corral’s doing?”

Lance and Corral exchanged looks. “Maybe.” Lance sung out a moment later.

“We got bored.” Corral replied. She slumped against the couch, tossing her arms over the top of it and spreading her fingers. “Lance has already painted my nails today,” She shook her hand as if to emphasis that. “And styled my hair.”

“Corral gave me a manicure and updated me on the latest gossip. Did you know Bokar thought he could pull off a yellow suit? Like, no, Sweaty, not with Sephiroth silver hair.” The reference would go over most of their heads, but that was fine. They were all used to Lance referencing things like that. Corral thought it was both adorable and horrible at the same time.

“It did look horrendous.” Corral scrunched up her nose at the memory. “At least you didn’t see it.”

“And,” Lotor called out getting both of their attention again. “All of that led up to this.” He gestured at his body, still dripping water on the floor and then at the closet, “how?”

Corral bit her lip lightly, looking down at the couch cushions. “It was Lance’s idea.”
“The scarf was all you, sister. I just thought it’d be funny for to have no clothes or towel once he finished his shower. Since you know, he was rude and didn’t invite either of us.”

Lotor sighed yet again. “I am going to go back into the bathroom. When I exit, my closet had best be fixed.” Lotor’s tone wasn’t harsh, per say, but there was a measure of threatening promise in his words. Enough that the moment he exited both Lance and Corral scrambled to fix the closet.

Thankfully, it wasn’t difficult to fix. Although Corral’s scarf was definitely ruined. She sighed, before discarding it. “It wasn’t one of my favorites anyways.” She muttered.

“You did it.” Lance replied.

The door whooshed open again, and Lotor exited the bathroom, his hair pulled up into a high messy damp bun. Corral scrunched up her nose again, and Lance made a sound akin to a dog dying.

“I can’t.” Corral sighed, shaking her head. “I just can’t with you, right now.” Corral walked up to Lotor, kissing him on the cheek and patted the other one as she pulled away. “Safe travels, my prince.” She smiled and turned to Lance. “Fix him, please.” She half whispered as she passed him on her way back to her rooms.

“Like I’d let him go anywhere looking like that.” Lance replied in the same half whisper. While Lotor could pull off a bun like no one’s business, and how he looked was… acceptable for in the room; it just wasn’t socially acceptable. Besides, he’d ruin his hair if he left it like that.

“I heard that.” Lotor complained once she was gone. Lance gave him a look.

“She wouldn’t have said that if you hadn’t done… that… with your hair. Seriously, how it stays so nice is beyond me.” Lance rested his hand on his hip and shook his head.

He headed over to the bed, pulling back the blankets and sheets to reveal the towels. Lance tossed one at Lotor, and then tossed him his clothes which had been folded under the towels.

“Get dry and come back here. I’ll braid your hair afterwards.” Lotor considered Lance’s words for a few ticks before nodding his head in agreement.

“Thank you.” Lotor replied as he disappeared back into the bathroom. A few doboshes later, he exited and made his way over to the couch, taking a seat so that Lance could better braid his hair. “You know,” Lotor started as Lance began to braid his hair. “If I didn’t know any better, I would say you were trying to make me late.”

Lance half snorted, half scoffed and rolled his eyes. He wasn’t trying to make Lotor late. That was such a silly thought, like, why would Lance try to make Lotor late?

…

Okay, so he was totally trying to make Lotor late. But in his defense, Corral had helped.

“Maybe we were.” Lance replied. He finished Lotor’s hair and tied it off. “Do you have to go?” Lance asked as he played with the end of Lotor’s braid.

He didn’t know why he’d asked. He knew the answer. Lotor needed to talk to Haggar to try to stop the Robeasts running rampant in the Empire, and Haggar wouldn’t talk to Lotor unless he showed up physically. Which meant that yes, Lotor had to go.
“You could always come with me.” Lotor counter offered, despite knowing that Lance would decline it. There was no way he didn’t know Lance would decline it when Lance had declined every other offer Lotor had made.

Lance laughed, and tugged on Lotor’s braid so he’d lean his head back. The kiss was messy and more than a bit uncomfortable due to the positions, but Lance didn’t mind.

“Come back safely, you hear? The Empire will be lost without it’s true Emperor.” Lance whispered as he broke the kiss.

“Keep talking words like that and I don’t think I’ll be able to leave you.” Lotor replied, reaching up to caress Lance’s cheek.

The doors to the rest of the ship beeped before sliding open, and Lotor’s generals entered the room. Zethrid made a noise the moment her eyes fell on them, sounding almost like she was gagging. Ezor rolled her eyes, while Acxa was the only one to properly salute.

“Prince Lotor.” She muttered, lowering her gaze.

“No wonder we’re running late.” Ezor sighed as she rested her hand on her hip. “You two are…”


Lance frowned, pulling away from Lotor and hopping off the couch. “There’s nothing wrong with giving our Prince a warm send off.” Lance replied hotly, crossing his arms.

“Oh, I’m sure it was warm alright.” Ezor quipped.

“Ezor.” Lotor scolded. He stood and adjusted his uniform before turning to Lance. “I’ll see you soon.”

It was the closest to a real good bye that Lance would get out of Lotor so Lance just nodded sharply and watched as Lotor turned away. His Generals parted for Lotor as he walked past them to the exit, and in unison they turned to follow him.

“Acxa.” Lance called out. She half turned to look back at him, arching an eyebrow. “Bring everyone back safely.” Had he not known her well and had she not known him well, then his words could have been taken the completely wrong way. As it was however, she understood exactly what he was saying.

Her expression softened, and she smiled at Lance. “Of course.” She nodded, and turned to follow the rest of the Generals.

The door slid shut and Lance sighed, feeling as empty and lost as the first time Lotor had left. Hopefully this time nothing crazy would happen like it had last time. The last thing he needed, or wanted, was to cause Lotor to have to turn back for him again.

He stared at the door for a good few doboshes before Sonali slipped in. They – sorry, she – half smiled at him.

“Please don’t electrocute yourself again while Prince Lotor is away.” She requested playfully, referencing the event yester-quintant where Lance had sparked quintessence back into his test crystal.

Lance frowned, pulling the crystal out of his pocket. The spark he’d felt in it yester-quintant had
already faded, and it was like he hadn’t done anything to it at all. He tossed the crystal up, catching it a tick later and repocketing it.

“I won’t.” Lance promised.

He grabbed his Druid mask off the table and looked down at it. His stomach twisted at the idea of what he was about to do, but whether it was from excitement or anxiety he couldn’t tell. “I’ve got a different project I’ll be working on today.” He informed Sonali.

“Plan on sharing?”

“Matt wanted more information on Project Robeast, right? You can let him know that Lotor plans to take care of the ones scattered across the Galaxy. That’s where he’s off to now.”

Sonali tilted her head. “Really?” She asked. “Huh. I mean, I did hear that those things were causing issues for the trading ships.”

“Exactly.” Lance nodded.

“Alright. Matt will be happy to hear about that. He’s been complaining non-stop about them. But that still doesn’t say what you’ll be doing.”

Lance smiled thinly, pulling the mask on as he headed for the door. “Don’t worry about it.” He told her. “I just need to check on some things with Xana.”

Like how to best locate and capture a Blade of Marmora member. Lotor may have believed that the one operative that they’d found was it, but Lance knew better. They were like cockroaches. Hard to kill, annoying, and where there was one, there were always more.

“That only makes me worry more.” Sonali muttered.

Lance paused, remembering Lotor and Sonali’s joint wariness of Xana. It was touching that they were worried about Lance, but they really shouldn’t be. He was a big boy, he could handle himself.

“Don’t. Petyr and Nik should be away planet side to do something for their projects, and I’m pretty sure that I’m better than Xana in quintessence manipulation. If he tries anything I don’t like, then I’ll take care of it.”

Xana had more experience and endurance than Lance, but that was alright. Lance felt that he more than made up for that in sheer capability alone. As long as a fight between him and Xana didn’t last long, then Lance would have the upper hand.

Sonali and Lotor had nothing to worry about with Xana.

“Let’s go.” He motioned for Sonali to follow along as he headed out the door.

Chapter End Notes

This is the LAST Update for a week or two. This is due to several different reasons which I have outlined numerous times these past couple weeks.

UPDATE: Due to events and emergencies that have occurred during my 'break' which
prevented me from writing, I will not be posting until Dec 18. I apologize for this delay. For the most up to date information and news, I highly suggest that you keep an eye on my Tumblr.

Happy Holidays!
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lotor finally left on his journey to Zarkon's Central Command. The journey would take several quintants to complete, leaving Lance on his own for a short while.

Lotor needed to leave due to High Priestess Haggar requesting his presence at Zarkon's Central Command if he wished to speak to her.

Lance planned to take the time away from Lotor as an opportunity to prove himself by locating the Blade of Marmora member that Lance low-key suspected to still be on the ship.

**This Chapter is not Beta'd**

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Mental Manipulation, Emotional Manipulation, Referenced/Mentioned Substance Use (quintessence)

**WARNING** This is Unbeta'd. Ghost was out of state visiting family and was unable to read over and beta this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Four quintants.

It’d been four quintants since Lotor had left. Four quintants of troubled sleepless nights, four quintants of roaming the halls. Four quintants of failed attempts at nearly everything.

Four very long, troubling quintants.

Lance felt like it’d been longer. He felt like the quintants were dragging on, longer and longer. When Lotor was here, Lance could at least distract himself from contradicting thoughts and feelings. When Lotor was here, everything was better.

Talking nightly to Lotor through a communicator helped some, but it wasn’t the same. It didn’t settle that incessant itch under his skin the same way that Lotor’s physical presence did.

His lack of progress with either of his two projects didn’t help anything either. The crystal remained as dead as when he’d first obtained it, and while he knew a way he could bring it back, he hadn’t sunken down to electrocuting himself again to make it happen.

His other project of catching a Blade of Marmora member was also falling through. He knew another existed on the ship. They’d made the mistake of leaving a data chip behind in one of the data transmission rooms.
With every tick, Lance felt like he was being torn apart – by his own impatience, his feelings, his thoughts… everything. He felt unsettled in a way he hadn’t in a long time, and even his Astral Plane displayed his turbulent mental state.

Something was very wrong, but he couldn’t place what it was. Trying to figure it out led to painful headaches, and sleepless nights. Whatever it was bothering him, it laid just barely out of his reach.

Lance wanted to scream, he wanted to cry, he wanted… he didn’t know.

He’d already planned on going to Xana, and his current feelings only reinforced that idea. He’d been meaning to talk to Xana about what had happened with Hunk and everything else. Yet every time he tried to bring it up, Xana would circumvent the conversation, or something would happen that required Xana’s attention.

It was like Xana didn’t want to talk about what had happened.

Which was fine and all – except it wasn’t because Lance needed help. He didn’t know what was wrong with himself. He didn’t know how to settle his mind, and any attempts at meditation only showed him how turbulent his mind had become.

On the third quintant, he’d gone to Xana under the guise of missing Lotor. While it wasn’t a lie, it certainly wasn’t the whole truth either. Xana’s advice there had been useless. He recommended that Lance distracted himself from his loneliness with quintessence, study, and training. Like he didn’t already do enough of that as it were.

“It’ll help you with your endurance, as well as distract you from his absence.” Xana had claimed.

Ha. Yeah, okay. Sure.

If Lance wanted a distraction from Lotor’s absence, there were plenty of other options, ranging from his little project with the crystal to hunting for Blade of Marmora members. None of that helped settle the raging storm inside of Lance, which only seemed to grow larger the longer Lance let it sit.

He needed to settle it before it finished tearing him apart.

But… Xana had yet to steer Lance wrong. If Xana thought a distraction would help, then Lance would certainly try… by throwing himself into his projects with reckless abandon.

The data chip that he’d found yielded no helpful information as to the identity of the traitor; although it did give Lance an insight into the knowledge that the Blade of Marmora had.

They knew Lotor was no longer on the ship, although they didn’t know why he’d left or for how long. They had also reported that some of the Druids were off the ship, although they didn’t know how many, and they also incorrectly assumed that no one was looking for them anymore.

Fools.

Well, let them think that. The less they thought they were being hunted, the more relaxed they’d be and the more mistakes they’d make… like leaving the chip behind.

Although, Lance had his own handicaps in this hunt. His own conflicting feelings were just one of Lance’s problems. Sonali had been another.

Ever since Hunk’s escape, she’d been more… attached to Lance. Anytime she was present, and
they were alone, she was talking to him, asking him questions he didn’t want to answer. Her questions weren’t even pertinent to the resistance she and Matt were a part of, and frankly, were none of her business.

Instead of being helpful or anything, she’d taken to questioning him about his choices and thoughts. She asked about his past, paying special attention to his time on Earth and bringing up things he’d rather forget. Or things that it seemed he had already forgotten.

Her questions blurred into one continuous question of his past. A question he should have known the answer to, but didn’t.

“What did your grandmother sound like? What was your brother’s favorite color? You said you had pets, what were their names?”

Lance didn’t know, and he wished she’d stop shoving that into his face.

It was a relief when he finally managed to convince her to let him roam without her as a chaperone. He still had to deal with her when he returned to Lotor’s rooms, but at least he didn’t have her judging him and his choices all over the ship.

So, maybe Xana was onto something when he suggested a distraction. There was something soothing about walking the dark corridors of the ship. What had once seemed creepy to Lance was now a comfort. A minor one, but still a comfort.

Beyond the footsteps of the guard and the sentries, the only noises in the hallway was the quiet steady hum of the ship and the nearly silent crackle of quintessence. Sometimes, Lance switched to his other vision just to watch the glowing veins of quintessence that ran through the ship.

He used to hate being alone, and although he still did, there was definitely something calming about these walks. Perhaps it was due to the low, quiet drone of the quintessence?

In any case, it was curious to Lance how many little alcoves and nooks he could just slip away and hide in there were. He’d known this as a Paladin, so this shouldn’t have taken him by surprise now, but it did. No wonder the Blade of Marmora was so hard to catch. The basic design of the ships helped them rather than the crew.

When Lotor returned, this security flaw would be one of the first things Lance would tell him about. After he gave the prince a warm welcome, of course.

Today, he was hiding in one such hidden place; a small alcove where he could watch for someone to return for the chip that had been left behind. To keep himself busy so he didn’t go insane from the waiting, he was playing with the small crystal, trying to revitalize it without shocking himself.

He tried to remember how it’d felt sparking quintessence in it before, but he couldn’t quite recall how it felt – beyond shocking – and all his attempts to recreate it had come so close but had ultimately failed.

Lance sighed, tossing the crystal up before catching it and curling his hand into a fist around it. If he could just… what? Electrocute himself again? He quietly snorted to himself.

Oh yeah, sure, that sounded like a great idea. Sonali would have a heart attack if he didn’t return to Lotor’s quarters tonight, and then she’d have another if she found him here with a fried brain.

He closed his eyes, trying to relax and just feel the crystal and how it his quintessence tried to connect to it. All he needed to do was to spark it again. Just a tiny little spark. That’s all he needed.
That’s all he wanted. If he could just get that…

He sighed, letting his head drop back against the wall he was leaning against. This sucked. This whole situation sucked.

Lotor was gone, and so were his Generals. Corral just wanted to talk about sex. Xana was acting weird, and had been ever since Hunk’s escape. There were Blade of Marmora on the ship – but trying to find them was like trying to find a needle in a haystack, and the best way to find those was to get stabbed.

And the only way he’d found to make progress on his project was to electrocute himself with quintessence energy. This all sucked.

Waiting sucked. Waiting for anything sucked, but it especially sucked now. He had to wait for Lotor to return, he had to wait for this stupid Blade of Marmora person, he needed to wait for everything.

He hated waiting. Especially when he didn’t have anything to do to help pass the time. He’d read over all the reports and research on his tablet. And sure, he could keep trying to do this thing with the crystal, but…

It was frustrating. He should have grabbed some new stuff to look over before he came here. Lance sighed, and pocketed his crystal before checking to ensure the coast was clear. Seeing that it was, he departed the alcove and headed back to the Druid Quarters.

He could grab some new research to go over while he waited for this Blade of Marmora person to show up and reclaim their chip.

The door the Druid Quarters slid open with a quiet electronic beep, and Lance sighed, looking at the empty place where Nik usually sat. Since Petyr and Nik were planet-side running some experiments and Xana almost never used this common area, it’d just been Lance here the past couple of days. More loneliness.

He ignored the scrolls and tablets in the room, going over to the terminal to scroll through the research stored there. And there was a lot of research stored there. The oldest of which dated back from thousands of deca-phoebs ago and was by a Druid named Honerva.

Lotor almost always recommended her work, and with good reason too.

Her work was the starting foundation and basis for just about everything. Presumably because she was the first to work on quintessence like this until Haggar took over as High Priestess. Some part of Lance wondered if Haggar had killed Honerva, since Honerva’s name vanished as soon as Haggar’s name stated appearing.

It was a shame. Lance liked reading her work over Haggar’s, and had Honerva not been replaced by Haggar, Lance could have seen the Empire ending up very differently. Perhaps that was why Lotor preferred her work as well. He wanted what was best for the Empire, and it was clear that Haggar and Lotor had very different ideas of what that meant.

But Honerva’s work wasn’t what Lance was looking for right now. As interesting and informative as it was, it wasn’t exactly current. Nor was it something that the resistance was particularly interested in learning about.

Lance looked through the list of Projects and research documents, pausing at specific projects of particular note, like Kuron, Komar, and Robeast. He could try to open those projects, but without
the proper authorization, then there was little he could see.

He sighed and continued down the list, pausing at a new project: Fidelite. Lance pulled up the details on it, fully expecting it to belong to Haggar – new projects were a dime a dozen for her – but no. Xana was assigned to this particular project, but Petyr was the last person who’d accessed it.

Huh. Was this the project Haggar had contacted Xana about? Lance selected the file and was about to click the option to open it when the door to the Druid Quarters opened. Lance looked over, tilting his head in slightly confusion as Xana entered.

“Here you are.”

“Here I am.” Lance returned, turning away from the console to face Xana. “What’s up? Didja need me for something?”

“Indeed.” Xana inclined his head. “I was thinking of what you had asked of me.”

“Yeah?” Lance rested his hand on his hip for a moment before switching to crossing his arms. “You told me to distract myself with quintessence.” It took all of Lance’s willpower not to roll his eyes. He wasn’t hiding behind his mask – although he had it on him for when he’d be in the halls.

“I did.” Xana agreed. “And yet here I find you, looking into research.” There was an amused lit to his tone as he spoke, and Lance chuckled.

“You know me. I want to know more, about everything.” Lance paused. “Speaking of, what’s Project Fidelite? It says you’re assigned to it, but Petyr was the last one in it.”

“It’s a personal project of mine.” Xana replied, walking towards Lance. “It’s of no concern to you.”

Well, that was rude. Lance crossed his arms and quirked an eyebrow. “With what?” Lance asked.

Xana paused for a heartbeat as he considered the question. “It has to do with quintessence efficiency. I wouldn’t worry about it, Lance.”

Some part of Lance’s brain seemed to go ‘ding’ at that response. His first thought was that ‘I wouldn’t worry about it’ or ‘don’t worry about it’ was almost always a prelude to something that should be worried about. Also, that saying something like that was something that all the bad guys said in movies, especially if it was to a ‘friend’ who didn’t know about the person being a bad guy.


Xana sighed. “A weapon. One I cannot go into the details of per High Priestess Haggar’s orders.” Well, there was little Lance could argue there. Especially without Lotor. Xana’s hand touched Lance’s shoulder and he gently guided Lance away from the console. “Come, I want to show you something.”

“What?” Lance asked, slipping his mask back on since they were heading out into the ship.

“The ships main crystal. One of your father’s duties was to protect the main crystal of the ship he was on. That job included maintaining it and ensuring that it did not fracture or break.” Xana explained as he guided Lance through the ship.

“But that’s your job here.” Lance furrowed his eyebrows, not that Xana could see behind the mask. “It’s your duty to watch over that crystal to ensure the protection and safety of everyone onboard. If
The castle ship only had the one crystal, but Galra ships were set up a bit differently. At any given time, there were at least three crystals on board. One to power main systems, one to act as a temporary back up and run secondary systems, and then another to work as yet another back up if needed, as well as a refining tool.

In any case, if the main crystal failed, there would be problems. The secondary crystals weren’t designed to withstand the energy consumption of the ship for long without failing themselves. Theoretically, they would last just long enough to either get the crew to safety, or get the ship to some place where the main crystal could be replaced.

“We only have a short amount of time to restore it before we lose all critical system and the ship goes dark. Yes.” Xana inclined his head. “But your father often said that being near the crystal would calm him whenever he was feeling restless.”

“So, you’re thinking it’ll help me out?” Lance was skeptical about how being near the main crystal would calm him down. It made sense why it’d calm his father down. If he was near it then he knew it was safe. Kinda like how people who get anxious about leaving their hairdryer on/plugged in are advised to take it with them. But Lance wasn’t like that. That wasn’t his problem.

His problem was something else entirely. Something more than that. It was... a problem with himself something else, Lance was sure of that.

“I am.” Xana agreed, stopping in front of the door to the main crystal chamber.

Unlike what one would expect, the door didn’t look any different from any other door on the ship. Presumably that was done as a defense mechanism so that any intruders couldn’t find it easily without a map or insider knowledge. Xana placed his hand on the door sensor, opening the door and gesturing for Lance to enter the chamber.

Quintessence energy surged around him, normally invisible to the eye, but very visible to Lance’s ‘vision’ of quintessence. It swirled around him, subtly and lightly poking and prodding, guiding him closer to the crystal.

“Lance.”

Lance didn’t hear Xana, moving forward until the palm of his hand was pressed flat against one of the planes of the crystal. The crystal was so warm and inviting under his hand. He could feel the currents of quintessence which ran through the crystal. It was like his necklace or his bracelet but... bigger.

He smiled, feeling quintessence arc off the crystal to intertwine with his hand like a strange handshake. The quintessence resonated with him, surging up once more to swirl around him, through him.

“Lance!”

The quintessence crackled, it’s static filling Lance’s ears and vision. All he could see was the purple and black of the crystal in front of him, and the swirling potent quintessence inside of it. Despite his hand being pressed firmly against the crystal, he had the feeling that he could just reach out and touch it.

He wanted to touch it. He needed to touch it. It pulled at him, beaoning him, reaching for him. Lance closed his eyes, the brightness of the quintessence too much for them. But even behind
closed lids, he could still see it. Swirling, dancing, flowing. It invited him to fly with it. It reached for him, and Lance reached for it back until he reached too far and fell.

The static of quintessence rung with Blue’s roar.

Lance opened his eyes. Lance opened his eyes, and he saw. He saw the Bridge of the ship and all the soldiers working there. Except, he didn’t see them like he was standing there. No, he saw them as quintessence colored outlines of themselves.

With barely a thought, he was in the gardens, observing the plants which drew in quintessence from the ship to grow. He swam in the currents of the waterfall. He was in his bedroom, watching Sonali as she looked through the tablets. He was in a data transmission room, watching as someone removed the data chip that Lance had left. He made a special mental note of their quintessence color.

He was everywhere and nowhere at once. He saw everything and nothing at once. He could see the flow of power. He could travel along it, soaring through the quintessence in the veins of the ship. He would have followed the traitor if he hadn’t felt a significant draw of power.

Lance flowed with power, curious as to the cause of the draw. There was no need for the weapons or shields. They hadn’t engaged hyperdrive. The only other thing that could have caused a power draw like that would have to be bay doors opening.

Except the Bridge wasn’t reporting any bay doors being open.

Lance followed the draw to the Cargo Hold, a place he knew existed but had never visited before. What may have been invisible to sensors or cameras, Lance could see. And what he saw was green so blinding and large, it could only be one thing: The Green Lion.

In his head, the Blue Lion roared once more.

Lance stumbled back, feeling like he’d just been tackled by a professional football player and had the wind knocked out of him. He fell back against a body, and a gold face filled his vision. Purple and black swam behind the gold.

“Lance!”

Electricity crackled, static echoed in his ears and behind his eyes. He felt like how he always imagined the energizer bunny had felt after being ‘energized’ in its commercials. He blinked a few times until his vision was clear of the quintessence overlay of his other vision.

A white bone mask stared down at him, and for a moment his heart stopped beating. But then his mind kick-started itself into gear and the fear melted into a wave of confusion.

“Xana?”

Much like a parent upon discovering their child was safe after doing something dangerous, Xana looked Lance over. “Thank the Empire.” He whispered in a quiet sigh of relief. And much like those parents that Lance had just compared him to, after ensuring the safety of the child, next came the scolding. “What were you thinking?!”

“I wasn’t.” Lance replied, pushing himself away from Xana and stumbling as the world spun and warped around him. He fell against a wall and spun around so his back was to it and he was looking at the central pillar crystal.
“Clearly.” Xana growled. “You don’t have the endurance to do anything with this crystal, let alone to even think to attempt to manipulate it!”

That wasn’t what happened. That was… no. He hadn’t tried to manipulate it. It had manipulated him. The realization should have made him ill. It should have turned his stomach, and he should have been bothered by it. But instead all he felt was fascination.

It’d taken him and shown him things. Things like… like, the Blade of Marmora member he was hunting and… and…

Static crackled as Lance curled his hands into fists. The image of the Green Lion landing in the cargo hold fresh in his mind. “I don’t have time for this. I need to go to the Cargo Hold now.” Lance brushed past Xana, ignoring the static shock that occurred when they touched.

“Lance! Lance, come back here!” Lance heard Xana say. “Just like quiznaking Kivrah, I swear.”

Lance ignored him, focusing instead on the near perfect map of the ship in his head. Anytime he was lost, quintessence swam into his vision, and he compared the veins of the ship to the map. The flow of the quintessence was another map, guiding him to the Cargo Bay and the source of the energy draw.

Xana trailed behind him, looming unnecessarily. This was not Xana’s battle. This was not for him. This was Lance’s concern, Lance’s battle, Lance’s chance.

One of the doors to the Cargo Hold slide open at Lance’s request, and he slipped inside. The cargo hold was quiet and dark, but that didn’t matter to Lance.

There was this draw that he could feel inside him, tugging him forward. Guiding him to where he needed to go. Not that he needed that when he could see the pinpoints of the other’s quintessence. The bright yellow of Hunk, the brilliant green of Pidge, and the…

“Are you sure we haven’t been detected?”

And the overbearing red of Keith. Quintessence crackled in Lance’s hand, and without a thought, he let it lose.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, so those who follow my Tumblr will already be aware: but I’ve had some difficulty this month with just about everything.

First my dryer stopped heating. This was due to a short in the wall socket which actually caused the wall socket to start to melt inside of itself. Then my vacuumed stopped working. Finally, my car's battery decided it was done with life and went out in a spectacular way that cost me 700 dollars. In addition, I have a coolant leak. Sarcasm Yay. (Possibly gas leaking water heater was the car, for those who heard about that.)

On top of that, my parents were having me go on scavenger hunts in the house to locate items that they’d forgotten or left behind to mail out to them.

And finally, on top of that, I inherited my mom's wrapping skills. Mom is now about 3
states away. So guess who gets asked to do all the wrapping now? This week alone, I have wrapped OVER 50 gifts.

Also, I got a sinus problem. Literally I was fine one day, and then the next I couldn't breath, couldn't talk, and it felt like someone was stabbing nails in my ears. I'm better now thanks to being heavily medicated. *Sarcastic* Yay.

TLDR; I had no time to write because crap luck, family, and more family.

Due to this... I don't have much new content written, and thus I will be changing the Update Schedule.

I will now be updating on MONDAY only, with the exception of some important dates listed below.

**Important Dates:**
- New Year's Day: Jan 1 -- I will update on Wednesday, JAN 3, 2018.
- MY BIRTHDAY: Jan 21 -- This falls on a Sunday, but damn it, it's my birthday and I wanna mention it. Update date is up in the air and depends on how Monday goes.

I would like to thank each and everyone of you for being so supportive and understanding, especially these past trying weeks.

Special mention to StringyNachos, who provided this lovely art! Thank you!! <3
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance's plan to make sure the ship is free from BOM influence has been slow going. He's discovered a chip that confirms the presence of another BOM operative on the ship, but he was having difficulty locating the operative. Lance was frustrated at that failure, plus other 'failures' such as his 'project'.

Xana recommended a distraction, and took Lance to see the ship's main Crystal, citing that being in it's presence had always calmed Lance's father down. While there, Lance synced with the crystal and discovered that Team Voltron was boarding the ship. Lance went to confront them in the Cargo Hold, and Xana followed.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Brief Mention of Blood, Fighting

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

**This Chapter is not Beta'd**

Frustrating.

That was perhaps the best single word that Keith would use to describe everything right now; from his life, to the current situation.

Patience yielded virtue, but how much patience was needed? How long did Keith have to wait? He couldn’t just wait around for Shiro and Lance to show up. No, he had to do something, and he couldn’t understand why no one else seemed to understand this.

He could understand the other’s need and desire for caution, but waiting around wasn’t helping anybody or anything. Keith’s whole body itched with the need to do something. A sensation not helped by Red’s own frustration fueling his own and running through his veins, urging him forward.

But there was nowhere to more forward to. Nowhere to go. Nothing to do. Keith was stuck. Everyone was stuck.

They couldn’t do anything about the Robeasts because they couldn’t form Voltron. They couldn’t form Voltron because they were missing Paladins. They were missing Paladins because they couldn’t retrieve the missing Paladins, and they couldn’t retrieve them because they couldn’t form Voltron.
It was one giant circle of frustrations, which they could help partially resolve if they did something now.

They had information. They had an opportunity. There was still at least one operative who had escaped detection on Lotor’s ship. Lotor was gone, and Kolivan expected him to be gone for a few days at the minimum due to the travel time it took to get to Zarkon’s Central Command.

There was no better time to strike than now.

“We still don’t have confirmation on Lance’s continued presence on the ship.” Allura had reasoned when Keith had brought all this up. Since their… fight… relations between them had been tense, but they’d managed to remain civil. At the very least, she wasn’t treating him as she had when they first discovered he was Galra.

Her argument was reasonable, Keith could give her that. But, right now, all they were doing was floating around in space, doing nothing. What did they really have to lose by just trying? They had an opportunity now, and they needed to take it.

Slav had told him to trust his instincts, and they were saying to go.

It’d taken him a day, but eventually he was able to get Pidge to agree with him. He didn’t know what exactly had been the tipping point for her, but now she seemed to be all on board with Keith for infiltrating Lotor’s ship. She still wanted everyone to be safe, but she agreed that now was likely the best opportunity they were going to get to bring Lance back quickly and safely.

“I just want him back.” Hunk had confided to them in private, and honestly, Keith understood. They all wanted Lance back. He wanted the team back together. He wanted everything back to how it had been, although he knew that was impossible now.

And perhaps that was for the better. He was better now, perhaps he wasn’t what he needed to be, but he was better. He’d show that to Lance. He’d show that to the team, and the first part in that was bringing the team back together.

Hunk was still uncertain about everything regarding Lotor’s ship. His intuition was just as good as Keith’s sometimes, and if the big guy thought something was off, then something was probably off. But they would be going into the ship know that something was off. Maybe not what exactly, but they’d at least be prepared for something.

“This is our best chance.” Keith argued with Allura. “We know Lotor, his generals, and some Druids are no longer on the ship. We know the ship’s defenses, and its location. What more do you want?”

Allura closed her eyes for a moment and took a breath before reopening them. “Confirmation, Keith. I will not risk the Voltron Lions for a chance.”

“We risk the Lions every time we answer a distress call.” Pidge argued. “Besides, even if Lance isn’t on the ship anymore, then we can at least hack the system to find out where he’s going or get more information about this Prince Lotor guy, or what’s going on.”

Keith nodded at Pidge, silently thanking her for backing him up. He crossed his arms and looked back to Allura.

Allura pursed her lips before turning them downward in a deep frown. Her gaze was constantly shifting between Keith and Pidge, as if she was gauging how sincere and dedicated they were.
“Hunk,” She finally spoke, looking over at the person she’d named. He jumped at the sound of his name, looking up from where he’d been staring down at the floor. “Do you too agree with them?”

Keith held his breath. He’d tried talking to Hunk, and while they could both agree that Lance needed to come back… Hunk had been on the fence about returning to that ship. Keith didn’t know if it was due to what he’d seen, or if he was afraid of what he’d find. Regardless, Keith needed him to agree now.

“I… We need Lance back.” Hunk replied. “Something wasn’t right there… He wasn’t right, but… we need him back. You’ve said so yourself.”

Keith didn’t give himself a chance to sigh in relief. It was too soon for that. Allura sighed, and turned away from Hunk to look back at Keith.

Keith’s head dropped as he glared her down, silently daring her to argue against the three of them. They were the ones with the stronger connection to the Lions, and if she declined them, there was nothing stopping them from going to their lions and getting Lance back themselves if they had to.

Red was a reassuring presence in him, still pushing him, pressing him forward. Yet, she was also backing him, reminding him that she stood with him. If he chose to leave the castle, she would not allow him to leave in anything other than herself or another Lion.

“We can take the Green Lion. With the information, we’ve been given, I’m positive that I can cloak us from the ship’s sensors. I know the codes to get into the Cargo Bay, which according to the information we have, should be empty of personal or sentries. We can do this.” Pidge pressed further, bringing up the plan that they’d all discussed before coming to Allura.

“If all goes to plan, we find Lance and leave. If not, then we obtain valuable information.” Keith reasoned.

“This endeavor is pointless.” Allura crossed her arms. “Any information that we find could be easily obtained by the operative already stationed there. They have not confirmed Lance’s presence, and until they do, I will not allow this mission.”

Red growled, unpleased with the tone she was taking with Keith, with all of them. It didn’t matter if she ‘allowed’ the mission or not. Keith was going to go, with or without her ‘permission’. He was just going through all this nonsense so Shiro wouldn’t chew him out as much later.

“They don’t have my hacking skills.” Pidge started to argue. But it didn’t matter, Keith could see that Allura wasn’t going to agree no matter what argument or reasoning they provided.

“Fine.” Keith interrupted. Out of the corner of his eye he saw both Pidge and Hunk turn to him. But they weren’t his focus. His focus was on Allura. She seemed startled for a moment before smiling, ducking her head a little.

“Thank you, Keith. I kn-”

“Here’s your options, Princess,” Keith interrupted her. He didn’t care about what she had to say, because she was wrong. If she thought that he was just going to bow to her and give up, then clearly, she didn’t know him. Her ‘thanks’ was not deserved because she would not be thanking him once he finished speaking.

“You can help us out or not. If you help us, we’ll have a better chance, but if you don’t… It doesn’t matter because we will be doing this regardless of your answer.”
Pidge and Hunk’s protests were immediately silenced as soon as Keith gave Allura the ultimatum of helping them or not. Allura’s smile fell, and the words she was about to say deserted her in a whoosh of air.

The tension in the room hung so thick and heavily that Keith was pretty sure he could cut it with his knife or bayard, but he would not be taking back his words. He was making the right call. He could feel it in his entire being, and Red agreed with him 100%.

“Princess,” Coran was the first to break the silence, stepping forward and reaching out to Allura as if to touch her shoulder or upper arm before withdrawing. His moustache twitched, and he crossed his arms behind his back, falling into his natural parade-rest stance he normally took.

Allura half turned to look at him. Keith couldn’t see her face, but he could hear in her voice the realization that she’d come to. “You think I should let this happen, Coran?”

“I think that the Paladins have all presented reasonable arguments, and that perhaps, it may be best to let them do this.”

“I…” Allura sighed, bowing her head. She turned back to Keith and the others. “I still don’t think this is a good idea, but, fine. Walk me through your plan once more.”

“So, it’s really simple…” Pidge sprung forward, already pulling up the map of the ship that they’d obtained from the Blade of Marmora member inside. Hunk was quick to also jump up, adding some input to the plan as well.

It’d taken what had felt like forever, but they were finally making progress. They were finally moving. They were finally doing something.

They were going to find Lance.

It didn’t take long for them to locate Lotor’s ship. They’d been low-key sort of following it from a distance since they first discovered its location.

It’d only been a few days at most before they were ready to make a move on the ship, which by most accounts wasn’t that long. Yet to Keith, the time had dragged on. To him, it felt as if minutes had become hours, hours into days, and the days into weeks.

Yet when Lotor’s ship was finally close, all he felt was a sick sense of trepidation. The castle was hidden from the main ship, so that was in their favor, and the Green Lion had no difficulty in reaching, and with Pidge’s help, entering the ship undetected.

The Castle of Lions was a bit of a distance away, but he could still feel Red. She growled in the back of his mind, issuing a warning to him. She pounced on his sudden unease, and shoved it in his face. It fell over him like a cascade of icy water, and the image of Blue growling flashed behind his eyes.

Lance.

Lance was here. He was sure of it. Red was sure of it. She was sure that Blue’s chosen was here. Keith just had to find him. He wouldn’t be leaving without Lance, no matter what Allura or any of the others said. This was the closest they’d been to finding Lance, and Keith wasn’t going to let this slip past him easily.

They were quiet as they exited out of the Green Lion. The only illumination in the room was from the purplish light running in veins way up above in the ceiling, and the off white yellowish glow
from Green’s eyes.

His instincts screamed at him as a shiver went down his spine. The hair on the back of his neck and on his arms stood on end. Something wasn’t right. He scanned the darkness surrounding them, trying to let his eyes adjust to the low lighting in the spacious room.

He couldn’t see anything but large cargo crates, but he couldn’t shake that feeling of wrongness. He felt like they were being watched. Like there were creatures in the darkness, just barely out of reach of his vision, circling around, waiting to pounce.

“Are you sure we haven’t been detected?” Keith asked Pidge, summoning his bayard.

He felt more comfortable with it in his hands. No. Not more comfortable. More prepared, vigilant, ready. Once more he scanned the area, ignoring the offended look that Pidge aimed his way. It was only due to his constant vigilance that he was able to react as quickly as he did.

The only warning the Paladins received was the crackle of static and the bright light from a web of purple lightning. Keith recognized that, and Red roared in his head as he pulled out his Marmora blade of block most of the attack.

Druids.

Quiznak. He hated Druids.

The Blade of Marmora had warned that they existed on the ship, but most of them were off currently. It was just their luck that there were Druids in the Cargo Hold when they decided to come in. Why were they here anyways?

Understandably, Hunk screamed. This was Hunk’s, and Pidge’s, first encounter with them. And to be fair, Keith had barely kept himself from screaming when he’d first fought one. Then again, his line of thoughts at the time had been an endless string of curses.

“What are those?!” Pidge demanded. Keith surveyed the battle ground. If there was one thing he knew about Druids, it was that to win, one needed to use their environment against them.

“Scary mask thing!” Hunk shrieked.

Hunk pulled out his own Bayard and shot at where the Druid was, except the Druid wasn’t there anymore. An opportunity was an opportunity, and Keith grabbed it. He reached out, grabbing Pidge by the collar of her Paladin armor and dragged her away behind a crate.

It wasn’t that he didn’t think she could handle or take care of herself. It was more because he needed her to do something that she was specialized to do. He didn’t need her distracted by the fight.

“Backup won’t take long to respond. Prevent it.” He commanded her.

He didn’t bother to wait for her response before he was looking around the corner of the crate, trying to see the Druids in the darkness. He’d engage night vision in his helmet, but with how bright the Druid’s magic was, it’d blind him if he used it. He was sorta blind not using it, but he light of the Druid magic plus the light from Hunk’s Bayard was enough for him to see.

On the bright side, he always knew were Hunk was because of that light.

“Hunk, don’t shoot where it is, shoot will it’ll be!” Keith advised through the communicator.
He’d only fought these things twice. He’d barely survived the first encounter, and while he considered his second a success, he’d lost Thace and only won due to the element of surprise. He didn’t have that here. Worse, the only thing effective against these monsters seemed to be his Marmora blade.

Which meant that Pidge and Hunk were nothing more than distractions and liabilities. Damn it.

Keith ducked out from crates, narrowing missing another lightning bolt. So, there was more than one. He hoped that there were only two. With any luck, they might be able to survive against two Druids.

The biggest advantage these things had was homefield knowledge, and how fast they moved. They seemed to stick with the tried and true video game method of attack and dodge. Which meant they were constantly moving.

Quick things with basically one hit kills were the reason Keith didn’t play video games. Those types of enemies frustrated him too much and had resulted in one too many controllers being broken. The only consolation with those enemies was that they were usually squishy and vulnerable. Which, as far as he knew, these things weren’t. Unless they were attacked with his Marmora blade.

Good thing he happened to have one. Last he knew, being hit by the Marmora blade was basically a one-hit kill unless it just grazed the Druid or something.

“There’s more than one!” Hunk shouted, confirming what Keith had already suspected.

Keith growled to himself, dodging another attack. “Stay split up! If there’s only two, they can’t go after three targets!”

“What’s going on!” Allura demanded through the helmet.

Keith would have answered, but he was too busy dodge rolling another attack and barely blocking the immediate follow up. The Druids he’d fought before had tended to fight more close range, but the one that was currently targeting him was… different. This one tended to fight more at a distance, almost like it was sniping him with it’s attacks.

“Scary mask things!” Hunk answered Allura before Keith could.

“Druids.” Keith corrected. “Seems to be two of them. Pidge, I need an update.” Keith managed to ask before having to dodge yet another blast from the Druid. Damn it, if it’d just come closer, then Keith could probably kill it, or whatever it was that happened when these things interacted with his blade.

“Working on locking the doors down. We should be good to go, but our presence has definitely been noted.” Pidge replied. “No reinforcements yet.”

“I’m calling you back.” Allura announced.

“No.” Keith growled. “We can do this!” The frustration he felt leaked out as he responded to Allura.

“Then I’m coming over there!” Keith tuned out the noise from the helmet as Coran interrupted Allura and they started fighting. He didn’t have the time, patience, or capacity to care about them right now. Not when his team was under attack from Druids, and he needed to focus.

He didn’t dare throw his knife without knowing for sure that he’d hit the Druid, so he was stuck
luring it away from the others.

“Done!” Pidge’s proclamation was a relief, as Keith needed her and Hunk to keep the other Druid busy, so he could take care of the one targeting him. Once that one was down, the fight would become three against one, and significantly more in the team’s favor.

The once the Druids were down, they could talk about what to do from here forward. He wasn’t leaving without Lance or information on Lance’s location.

“Pidge, go help Hunk!”

“Roger.”

Keith grunted as an attack grazed him. His armor took the brunt of the electrical attack, but it still threw him off balance. He stumbled, and moved into the stumble, which just barely saved him from another blast. If he hadn’t been wearing a helmet, he might have gotten a haircut from it.

Fighting Druids was already frustrating, but this Druid took it to another level. It didn’t take him long to decide that this was the most annoying Druid he’d encountered yet. It wasn’t fighting like other Druids. It didn’t move as fast, and its teleportation was… shaky at best. But it was damn near perfect in guessing what Keith was going to do.

That was the only reason he hadn’t been able to attack it yet. The Druid always seemed to know what Keith was going to do before he did it. The first time he’d fought a Druid, it’d been like this. But this Druid just seemed more personal, despite the distance it kept. Almost like the Druid knew…

It was almost like the Druid knew him and his fighting style, personally.

No. No, it wasn’t possible. But it made so much sense. It answered and explained a lot while opening the door for a ton more questions. The chief of which being ‘How?’.

The realization froze Keith for only a tick, but only a tick was all the Druid needed. He didn’t even see him until it blasted Keith, sending him summersaulting through the air until he landed on the floor in front of the green Lion.

Pidge and Hunk were immediately at his side, backs to him, facing out at the darkness of the cargo bay.

Something dark was smeared on Pidge’s cheek, just below where the visor ended, dripping down to her armor. Although Keith knew it was probably was, he hoped it wasn’t blood. Hunk seemed to be faring better, but he was heavily favoring his right leg. Both of their armor was smudged with black scorch marks, meaning they’d been taking hits from their target.

“How do we beat these things?” Pidge’s voice was shrill and the only indication of her growing panic.

Keith stood back up, and looked at the two masked hooded figures that appeared in smoke. His gut tugged at the realization that he’d come to during the battle, and he could taste bile at the back of his throat.

Hunk’s questions of what they had done to Lance rose in his own mind. Doubt swirled around his realization like the dark clouds the Druids had just appeared from, yet… Keith knew he was right. His gaze fell upon one of them, and despite there being no visual clue to prove his assumption, he knew that was the one he’d been dealing with. That it was…
Keith adjusted his grip on his bayard and lowered his head to glower. In response, the Druids formed those glowing balls in their hands and prepared to strike. Keith moved first, rushing past Pidge and Hunk towards his target.

“Keith!” Pidge and Hunk called out in unison.

“Take out yours.” Keith bit out. “I’ll take care of Lance.”

Perhaps if they weren’t engaged in battle the others would want explanations or proof, but as it were, they were engaged in battle. He heard gasps and responses through the communication link in his helmet, but he didn’t have the luxury of focusing on that.

If this truly was Lance, then he needed to focus now more than ever. This was a target he couldn’t kill or vanish or whatever. This was someone he needed to save. Which meant he had to change up his strategy a bit.

The only bright side to this hellish situation was that he knew who he was dealing with now. He’d spared with Lance before. He could win this fight.

New freaky Druid powers or not, he knew Lance. That meant that he had an edge now, no matter how small it was.

They continued the dance from before, with dodging and attacking. Both trying to get in a hit to incapacitate the other. Lance threw a lightning blast and dodged, and Keith threw his bayard since he knew that wouldn’t damage Lance as much.

His aim was true, and the bayard connected with the ugly mask. Keith held his breath, hoping it’d be enough to knock the mask off. Although he was positive that Lance was the Druid, the real confirmation would be seeing his face. That was the proof that he needed. The truth he absolutely needed to make sure he’d made the right call.

The mask cracked, but it wasn’t knocked off. The Druid dodged away from Keith, and shot out another lightning ball, forcing Keith to dodge in return.

He looked around for where his bayard had landed, and cursed when he saw the edge of it peaking over from the tops of some crates. He’d have to go higher, which meant there’d be less places for him to hide from. But he needed his bayard.

He climbed up, barely dodging another attack from Lance. Lance appeared on top of his bayard, and kicked it off.

“Quiznak!” Keith cursed again.

Keith jumped down from where he’d been scaling the crates, and raced to the bayard. That was when he heard something he never wanted to hear again: Pidge scream.

Keith changed direction, running back to his team just in time to see Pidge be thrown against a crate and fall to the floor. The Druid that had thrown here was distracted by Hunk, and Keith pulled out his Marmora knife again and let it fly just as electricity hit him from behind.

Chapter End Notes
I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday, and I hope everyone had a wonderful New Year's eve/day.

I'll be updating on Jan 3 due to the holiday.

I apologize for this chapter not being beta'd. Ghost's been preoccupied lately, and has been unable to beta.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Team Voltron finally started to make some real progress towards regaining one of their lost teammates. They infiltrated Lotor's ship, however, not long afterwards, they were attacked by two Druids.

**UNBETA'D**

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Minor Character Death, Badly Written Fight Scenes, Fighting in General, Astral Plane, Referenced/Mentioning Drowning

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

How dare they?

After abandoning him numerous times, now they invaded the ship? Now, they came back. It didn’t matter to Lance if they were here for him or not, although he doubted it. He only thanked the stars and ancients that he was there to witness their return. That he was there to make them regret leaving him behind.

Besides which, they had no right to be here. They had no right to stand on Lotor’s ship, let alone look at it. They had no right to defile Lotor’s ship with their presence, unless they were prisoners. Or test subjects for the Druids.

The Paladins of Voltron, all of which were carriers for the ‘purest’ type of their quintessence base. Just having one of them would be an undeniable help towards research in differences between different bases, especially for Lance and his research in injecting different quintessence types into crystals.

It was a surprise to him at first that the Druids hadn’t taken advantage of him, and used him for similar research. Then again, he had the favoritism of Prince Lotor, and that, Lance suspected, was what saved him from that fate.

Not that it mattered anymore. Lance wasn’t one of the Paladins. He was a Druid, an agent of the Empire. Besides, it wasn’t like the Paladins would know who he was.

There was safety and peace in the anonymity of his mask and Druid robes. He wanted them to know who he was, but only after he made them regret ever stepping foot here.

In the beginning, most of his targeting had been on Keith. Keith seemed to be the leader, and from
prior experience with the team, Lance knew that once the leader was taken away, the rest of the team would crumble. Strategically, it was a sound choice.

Perhaps he should have focused on Pidge, as he was sure she was probably preventing reinforcements. But the sentries and guards were irritating on a good day, and honestly? Lance didn’t think he and Xana needed reinforcements.

Keith split off from Hunk and Pidge. For a moment, Lance debated helping Xana out with them, but… Xana wouldn’t have any problems wiping the floor with them, and leaving Keith unattended just seemed to be asking for trouble.

Lance could keep Keith busy while Xana disposed of those traitors, and then… and then he and Xana would give Keith what was coming to him.

Keith was quick and agile, which was to be expected given his quintessence base. Yet it didn’t matter how skilled Keith was at dodging and avoiding Lance’s attacks.

Lance had the advantage. He had new abilities, new skills. Keith was the same as always: boring, easy to predict, unchanged. The cat and mouse game that he played with Keith was amusing to Lance, and he grinned under his mask.

The static of the quintessence he manipulated sung to him as he formed it into a sphere and lobbed it at Keith, forcing him to dodge and dance to Lance’s desires. Any of Keith’s attempts at an attack were destined to fail. After all, all he could do was throw his swords, and really, Lance could avoid those so easily.

And then where did that leave Keith? Lance could have laughed.

That was the problem with weapons. They could be lost so easily. It was a shame Keith wasn’t like Lance. That he couldn’t just pull power from himself and the crystals and weaponize the quintessence inside.

The only drawback with this was how much energy it consumed. Lance wasn’t like Xana. He wasn’t built for endurance. He didn’t have the stamina for a drawn-out battle yet, and he could feel that fact. No matter how much he enjoyed this game with Keith, it was time to bring it to an end. He could either return to Xana… or try to take care of Keith himself.

It was a tempting thought, killing Keith himself. He’d enjoy watching the light and quintessence fade from Keith under Lance’s power. It was the least the Red Paladin deserved.

He planted his foot on the bayard Keith had thrown at him, and grinned. The sticky ball of quintessence was sparkling in his hand from all the power he’d put into it. He watched in amusement as Keith’s face shifted from determination to horror, and laughed to himself as he kicked the bayard off the crate.

It clattered noisily as it fell and bounced on the ground, before skidding to a halt some distance away from Keith.

Predictably, Keith jumped down and raced to his bayard. It was the perfect bait and Keith feel for it hook, line, and sinker. Lance lobbed the quintessence, grinning gleefully only for that glee to fade to horror as Keith spun around on his heel at Pidge’s scream, narrowing missing the bolt.

Quiznak.

As tired as he was, he forced himself through his quintessence, reappearing down on the floor and...
trying to chase after Keith. He wasn’t too terribly worried, after all, Xana would be able to take care of himself, and Keith was weaponless. But Lance didn’t want to take too much of a chance.

Then Lance saw Keith pull out that stupid Marmora dagger.

Quiznak.

He hadn’t even thought about that. He hadn’t seen it on Keith’s person, and Keith hadn’t used it against himself, but now that Lance thought about it, he could vaguely recall it being present in the beginning of the battle.

He surged forward, desperately trying to reach Keith before he could reach Xana and the other Paladins. Time seemed to slow down to a crawl as Lance watched the blade leave Keith’s hand just a tick before Lance slammed his quintessence into Keith from behind.

He didn’t know much about those blades, but he knew enough to know that it was dangerous to Druids; to him and Xana.

“Xana!” He called out, but it was too little too late.

Keith’s aim with guns was miserable. It was horrendous. It was laughably terrible. Keith’s aim with knives, daggers, swords, and other bladed weapons? At a specific distance, he could nearly put Lance to shame with his accuracy.

The moment the blade had left Keith’s hand, Lance had known it wouldn’t miss its mark, but that didn’t make seeing the blade sheathed itself in Xana’s back any easier. The older Druid dropped Hunk, arching his back as the blade sunk into him like a hot knife in butter. Quintessence arced out, crackling along his body as it distorted and twisted before being… sucked into the knife.

Holy Crow. What the Cheese?

The knife seemed to linger in the air for a tick before falling to the ground with a clatter, not a trace of the quintessence, or the person, it’d absorbed in sight, even with Lance’s other vision.

Xana was just… gone. His mentor, his teacher… his last link to his real family. Gone.

Lance felt frozen, staring at the spot where Xana used to be. Where he should have been. There was a dull roar in his ears, a noise he’d come to recognize as quintessence, but there was something more. He was screaming as the quintessence inside of him exploded from the sheer emotions ripping through him.

He grabbed Keith, who fought back, elbowing Lance in the face before grabbing onto the edge of his mask and twisting his entire body around, successfully pulling it off. Perhaps earlier, Lance would have cared, but now he didn’t. Instead he used the motion and momentum to shove Keith against a crate.

Quintessence sparked between his fingers as he pressed his hands against Keith’s neck and squeezed. The mask in Keith’s hands clattered to the ground as his hands went to Lance’s. Lance grit his teeth and tightened his grip, letting more quintessence pool in his hands and burn Keith.

Electricity hit him, and he looked down at Pidge’s bayard which had wrapped itself around him. His gaze traveled along the cord to the source. Pidge was staring at him with wide, but hard, eyes. She said something, but whatever she was lost on Lance. Her voice wasn’t loud enough to counter the static of quintessence.
He snarled, manipulating quintessence into a ball to throw at her. She triggered her bayard again as she dodged his attack. Lance ignored it. He’d been electrocuted worse by quintessence, and her bayard was nothing to him. He grabbed the cord to the bayard, and forced his quintessence to run along it. The sounds of her screams broke through the static, and he relished in being the cause of them.

He became aware of Hunk too late, and the last thing he saw was the barrel of Hunk’s bayard as Hunk swung it at Lance’s face.

Lance blinked, expecting to be hit, and he supposed he must have been since he was suddenly looking out at his Astral Plane. Warm sticky static washed up against his legs. A cool breeze blew past his face. There was this steady quiet grinding rumble which grew louder and louder before it shattered with a loud sudden cracking noise.

A sheet of ice roared as it slid down the icy cliff before hitting the water with an almost thundering boom. Blue’s own roar echoed with it.

Lance winced at the noise and turned away from the dangerously large wave that had been created, knowing that there was nothing he could do about it. It’d either hit him or it wouldn’t. In the distance, up on the icy beach, Blue stared at him from where she was laying down, half buried in the ice of the beach like an icy sphinx.

The black sludge of the ocean streaked her body, leaving long dragging trails of what looked like Lance’s handprints along the once blue plating. Her mouth was closed, but corruption dripped out of it, falling to the beach and forming a slick puddle under her head.

Lance’s heart ached to see her like this, and his mouth fell open with horror just as the wave hit him from behind and thrust him forward, sending him cartwheeling through the water. He slammed into something cold and hard, and clung onto it as the ocean tried to pull him back out.

The need for air burned in Lance’s chest, and he gasped against his will, breathing in the thick syrupy goo of the corruption. It was heavy in his mouth, tasting sweet like Kanki or Seksi fruit. It clotted his lungs; and when the water finally receded, Lance was left on his hands and knees between Blue’s paws, coughing and gagging.

“We cannot continue.” Lance hadn’t heard Blue’s voice since she’d claimed him as hers, and given herself to him, but there was no mistaking the voice he heard. Although she sounded different than how she had then.

Her voice sounded rougher. More like the grind of a breaking glacier, and the waves during a storm as they battered the shore. She sounded tired, a feeling Lance could feel echoed in his bones.

Lance spat out the dark ocean, but no matter how much he spat it out, he could still taste and feel it in his mouth. Although it tasted sweet, it felt like he’d poured rotten slimy eggs into his mouth. A trail of the corruption connected his mouth to the small puddle of it that he’d already spat up on the beach. A bubble traveled the length of it, slowly moving down.

He broke that string, wiping his mouth with a coated hand, smearing his already covered face. He could feel it dripping into his eyes, and off his hair, breaking off in stringy lines like melted cheese.

“We cannot continue.” Blue repeated, and Lance looked up at her.

Her words sent spikes of fear and panic into his heart which froze the blood within. “Don’t leave me.” Lance’s words felt small and insignificant. As small and as insignificant as he was physically
to her. Physically, Blue didn’t move, but he got the impression that she was looking at him.

His eyes burned with ice which spilled out as he blinked. He could feel the flakes of ice getting caught in his eyelashes, and hardening and cracking as it flowed down his face.

“My Paladin.” Her tone wasn’t softer by any means, but it was quieter… gentler. “We cannot continue.”

“What does that mean?” Lance asked, sitting up until he was sitting back on his heels to look up at her. “What can’t we continue? Tell me, please!”

Although Blue didn’t breathe, she seemed to sigh. Or perhaps it was just a well-timed breeze. There was another low rumble starting up, another piece of ice preparing to fall into the water. Lance was quiet as he stared up at her, and she was quiet as she stared out at the black ocean behind Lance.

“You said you wouldn’t leave me.” Lance said after a few moments passed and Blue had not yet answered him. “You said I was yours, and you were mine! You promised!” His voice shook as he spoke.

Finally, Blue moved, although it was only to open her mouth. A waterfall of black water gushed out of her, falling onto Lance and recoating him in it. He sputtered as he tried to wipe it off, but all he did was smear it around.

There was the roar of the ice sliding down the cliff, and then the crash as it hit the water. Lance winced at the noise. Blue’s body shuddered, and she dropped her head, mostly blocking Lance from the impact of the wave from the falling ice.

Water seeped in from around her, and Lance was still recoated in the thick oily slick from the ocean, although he appreciated her taking the impact for him.

“We cannot continue.” Blue cried quietly.

She was saying ‘we’. Which could have meant a variety of things. She could have been breaking up with him, or she could have been calling out to him for help. Help for the both of them.

He didn’t know, and that realization hit Lance like the wave that Blue had blocked would have. Lance reached out, to touch Blue, to comfort her. Corruption was still pooling inside, and Lance got the feeling that it wouldn’t be draining out. He’d drown here, with Blue. He closed his eyes, and rested his head against her metal.

“I’m so sorry.” He whispered. He was sorry that he didn’t understand. He was sorry that they were in this situation. He was sorry that even if he wanted to, he couldn’t have let Blue go.

The wave washed over them both.

Lance was familiar with the dark and the cold. The Galra preferred darkness, and well…. Lance had to be familiar with the cold considering his connection to Blue and how his Astral Plane manifested.

He was cold now. Cold enough that his thoughts felt sluggish, and his blood was frozen in his veins. But this was nothing new. The quintessence the Galra prefer was a warm, staticky mess; but he was too connected to Blue to be bothered by the cold. No matter how little interaction he has with Blue now-a-days. He was used to the cold.
His eyes were closed, and he was standing up. He’s experienced this before, more than once, although he couldn’t recall when. Huh, funny… ‘when’. For some reason, he was reminded of ‘clock parties’ or ‘time parties’ or something along those lines.

His memory was frozen over, locked away under a thick blanket of frost, although it was slowly fading away. His ears popped, and he realized that he could heat the muffled sounds of someone talking.

“-sing. His genetic and biological structure is the exact same as before he left.”

“‘When you … eliminated the impossible, …ever remains, … must be the truth.’ Sherlock Hol… If this is a clone, then it’s a perfect clone. … means that Lance was … before he ….”

Someone new was talking, but their voice was more distant. The words faded in and out of his mind like a radio trying to tune into a short station. He felt like he might have been able to recognize them, if only they were louder, or clearer.

“That doesn’t make sense!” Another voice protested. This voice was louder, more boisterous and clearer. His mind still felt frozen and sluggish, and the only thing he could think of in regard to the identity of the voice was ‘sunshine’. “Why would Lance hide that from Allura and Coran?”

Lance… that was him. These people were talking about him. Rude. That was rude. Once he was out of this cold, he’d tell them that too.

“He probably didn’t know. I didn’t know I was Galra, and there’s more differences between them and humans than Alteans and humans!” Yet another voice, this one sounded the closest. The frost in his mind was thawing, but all he could think of was purple and red for the new voice. Although, that didn’t sound right. Purple and red…

He mentioned Galra, which might have been where Lance was getting purple. They were purple, and usually had a red base.

“Then how did he get to Earth? I thought the Alteans died out ten thousand years ago, sorry Coran, so I just... I don’t understand how this happened.” ‘Sunshine’ argued. For reminding Lance of sunshine, he certainly didn’t sound too cheery now.

“I don’t know! I don’t know how I ended up on Earth, but that doesn’t change the fact that I’m not completely human. Alteans can hide easier, maybe they hid from the Galra on Earth? I don’t know!” The closest voice replied.

“If he didn’t …ain why he never spoke to Allura or Coran about…nder how many other …met that might have been ….didn’t kno…."

There was a change around him. At first, he couldn’t say for sure what it was. All he knew was that there was a change. Then the air moved around him. The darkness on the other side of his lids was banished, and even without opening his eyes, he knew it was bright. Warmth hit his face.

“I’m just saying-“

There were gasps and noises of surprise from the voices he’d heard. For a moment, Lance stood. He was reliant on whatever support structure he’d had before, the support structure that was now gone. His stomach flipped as he ‘fell’, his body slumping forwards towards the brightness.

Someone caught him. Warm and bright red behind the lids of his eyes. Arms were wrapped loosely around him, giving Lance a feeling of contentment, warmth, and safety, despite the cold
hardness that he’d fallen against.

He breathed out, excelling the frozen air that had been trapped in his lungs, and breathing in fresh warm air. There was a sterilized clean smell to the person that didn’t smell like it belonged. He blinked, squinting as the bright light hit his eyes.

He looked up, blinking until he was able to see the person who’d caught him. Things clicked into place into his mind like puzzle pieces, letting him identify the voices that he’d heard before. Lance would recognize that mullet anywhere.

“Keith?”

Chapter End Notes

Hey Guys! Hope you had a great holiday! I hoped it was better than mine at any rate!

It’s snowing here, which would be awesome except last time it snowed and I drove, I had to shell out 2K to repair my car because she slid and went over a curb and that messed my turbo up. Soooo... good luck to me driving home.

I tried to read over this a couple of times, but I was distracted by my boss, Ghost, the snow, and watching my coworker ATTEMPT to get up a hill a couple of times.

It took a while, but my coworker managed to escape and is now safely at home.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance fought with Keith and the others on Lotor's ship. Upon seeing Keith kill his mentor, Lance went into a rage and attacked Team Voltron. Hunk managed to knock Lance out. Lance visited his astral plane and had a conversation with Blue before waking up.

**Unbeta'd.**

**There was a mistake last chapter with the Last Conversation. The entire conversation was incorrect. I have edited the chapter, and added in "New Content Updated Here" before the new content. Everything else in the chapter is the same. The conversation in the previous chapter will take place in this chapter.**

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Bad fighting; Referenced/Mentioned Minor Character Death; Denial; Incorrect use of the word 'crazy' which alludes to ableism

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

As a head's up, we're going to be experiencing more chapters outside of Lance's POV. For example, this chapter is from Hunk's POV.

Hunk sighed as he looked at the frosted over cryopod where Lance was being held. It had the benefit of allowing them to scan him for injuries while also keeping him contained, just in case he was still crazy and murderous. Not that Hunk wanted to think that of Lance, but… there was no denying what had happened.

Even without Keith spending some time in a cryopod being healed, it was impossible to deny what had happened. The question now was what had happened? What had happened to turn his friendly lovable dork of a friend into… that?

“I still think he’s a clone.” Hunk muttered, hugging himself.

A clone was so far one of the best theories Hunk had come up with. It was the only thing that could possibly make sense, and he’d rather believe this ‘Lance’ was a clone than to think that his friend would purposely try to hurt them.

“Some clone.” Pidge’s reply was distracted and distant as she poured over data with Coran. Her fingers were flying across screens almost as quickly as her eyes were scanning the data displayed there. “The genetic material matches up so far, but there’s key physical differences.”
She was, of course, referring to the blue scales under ‘Lance’s’ eyes… and his pointed ears, and the ability he had to ‘shift’ his form so he was taller and more Galra like. Like how he’d been before Hunk had knocked him out.

“I don’t know. Maybe they had some spare Altean DNA or something that they used to create the clone.” Hunk replied.

Coran’s murmured “Not likely,” was ignored.

“If Lance was here, he’d love this.” Hunk sighed as he hugged himself tighter.

“He is here.” Keith snapped, nodding his head to the cryopod he was leaning against. The moment he’d left his own cryopod, he’d been asking about Lance. Not that they had much to tell him.

They didn’t know anything more about why Lance had attacked them like he had. They didn’t know why he suddenly looked the way he did, or had the freaky scary powers that he had. Pidge and Coran had been pouring over data from Lance’s previous experiences in the Cryopods and comparing it to current data, but so far, they hadn’t found anything. Allura still hadn’t been down to see them, something about navigating the ship far away where the Galra would have difficulty finding them.

That was probably for the better, all things considered.

There was literally nothing new, so Keith leaned back against the cryopod and crossed his arms. A telling sign that he was settling in for the ‘long haul’.

“I’m telling you buddy, that’s not Lance. Lance would never try to hurt us!”

“Try?” Pidge scoffed. “I think he was putting a bit more effort into it than ‘try’. Keith was in a cryopod, Hunk.” She adverted her gaze from the screens and data long enough to give Hunk a look before returning to her previous task. “Besides, we’ve found nothing that would indicate that the Galra have the capability for clone technology. Just think about it, if they could, then they’d be having Clone Wars™.”

That was… a fair and valid point, Hunk supposed. But if that were the case, and it really was Lance inside the Cryopod, then that meant…

“I think our findings are conclusive enough: clone or not, the person in the cryopod is Lance.” Coran interjected.

“That can’t be Lance. He wasn’t… like this before! He’s not Altean.” Hunk shook his head. “And the probability of Lance being part Altean, like Keith’s part Galra is just…”

“The odds of us all hitting planets after being flung out into space?” Pidge interrupted. “Or the odds of all of us happening to pilot the Lions of Voltron and having attended the Garrison?” She sighed, closing the data screens. “I’m not saying he’s not a clone, I’m saying it’s highly improbably. And… even if he is a clone…”

“Then he was Altean before he went missing.” Coran finished. “His genetic and biological structure is the exact same as before he left.”

“When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.’ Sherlock Holmes. If this is a clone, then it’s a perfect clone. Which means that Lance was Altean before he left.”
“That doesn’t make sense!” Hunk protested. “Why would Lance hide that from Allura and Coran?”

“He probably didn’t know. I didn’t know I was Galra, and there’s more differences between them and humans than Alteans and humans!” Keith argued.

“Then how did he get to Earth? I thought the Alteans died out ten thousand years ago, sorry Coran, so I just... I don’t understand how this happened.”

“I don’t know! I don’t know how I ended up on Earth, but that doesn’t change the fact that I’m not completely human. Alteans can hide easier, maybe they hid from the Galra on Earth? I don’t know!”

“If he didn’t know, that would explain why he never spoke to Allura or Coran about this. I wonder how many other Aliens we’ve met that might have been Alteans who didn’t know.” Pidge mused.

“I’m just saying-“ Hunk cut himself off with a noise akin to a combination of a gasp and a shriek as he stared at Lance’s cryopod. The cryopod in question was starting to open, the ‘glass’ potion of it dissolving away into a plume of steamy mist. They hadn’t released Lance, so why was the cryopod opening?! Had Lance somehow done that? Was this more of those freaky powers?

Whatever the answer, it didn’t stop him from being prepared. He summoned his bayard to his hand, and was relieved to see Pidge doing the same. What was not so relieving was Keith, who evidently hadn’t gotten the memo about being cautious.

Keith turned around, but instead of summoning his bayard, he stepped forward and caught Lance as he fell. Hunk held his breath, waiting for anything. Whether that anything was Lance attacking them, or something happier.

Part of Hunk wanted to shout at Keith and ask him what the quiznak he thought he was doing. Another part of him, however, just wanted to run over there and pick Lance up and hug him.

“Keith?” Lance’s voice sounded so small, and real, and there.

The tenseness eased out of Hunk at the softness of Lance’s voice. Keith’s name hadn’t been spoken with maliciousness or ill-intent. It had just been a verification of Keith catching him. It was almost enough for Hunk to lower his bayard.

For a moment, Hunk could almost pretend that nothing had changed. He could pretend that they’d just finished some difficult mission and that Lance had never left. It was so tempting to just think that. But it was wrong.

It was wrong of Hunk to want to pretend that nothing had changed. Because things had changed. Lance had left. Lance had tried to kill them. Lance hadn’t been in the cryopod because he’d just finished some difficult mission.

No, he was in the cryopod because Hunk had slammed his cannon into his head after Pidge had electrocuted him twice. He was in the cryopod because he was dangerous, both to them and himself. He was in the cryopod so Coran could do scans to see what the Galra had done to him.

He was glad he hadn’t lowered his bayard as only a few ticks later, Hunk was painfully reminded that his wasn’t Lance as he knew him. Lance’s body tensed, and purple sparks appeared between his fingers, running across them.

“Murderer!” Hunk heard Lance shout, but the words didn’t connect in his head.
Despite having his bayard at the ready, despite how cautious he’d felt… he wasn’t ready. He wasn’t prepared when Lance shouted and threw Keith across the room with that freaky lightning from before. Keith’s body sailed through the air and slammed into Coran, knocking them both to the floor.

While Hunk was frozen, Pidge was prepared and ready. Her bayard shot out, but Lance spun around, forming a shield from the lightning and then throwing a ball of it at Pidge. Her eyes widened, but now she was the frozen one, stuck staring at the on-coming electric ball like a deer in headlights.

Hunk activated his shield and threw himself in front of Pidge, grunting as the lightning hit. He braced against the attack, only lowering his shield when the lightning vanished, and Keith shouted.

“Lance! Stop this!” Lance was not keen on listening to Keith, and instead promptly hit him with a barrage of attacks that Keith only just barely managed to block. “Lance!”

Pidge shot forward from behind Hunk. Her bayard already in motion in an attempt to wrap it around Lance. It was deflected with a burst of light and the crackle of lightning, but she was nothing if not persistent.

Hunk didn’t understand why Keith wasn’t using his own bayard. He’d redressed in the Paladin armor after exiting the Cryopod, and Hunk had made sure to grab Keith’s bayard before they’d left that quiznaking Galra ship.

Seriously? In this situation, Keith and Pidge had the only useable bayards. Hunk could try to use his, but in such close quarters, it was better suited to as a bludgeon instead of a cannon. If he tried to use it for it’s designed purpose, then he’d risk damaging the ship, or one of his team mates, or something.

“Pidge, stop! He’s scared!” Keith shouted. Her response was lost the crackle of the lightning Lance was using, but it didn’t matter. Hunk was pretty sure she was saying the same thing that he was thinking. He’d called Keith a ‘murderer’. That didn’t equate ‘scared’. That meant it was still crazy murderous Lance, instead of their friend.

That wouldn’t stop him from trying to reach out to his friend though.

“We don’t want to hurt you, Lance!” Hunk shouted as he raised his shield to block an area of effect lightning attack. If this wasn’t such a serious fight, he would have made a joke about needing ground-type Pokémon. Real Lance would have appreciated that.

“Shoulda thought about that before you left me!” Lance literally snarled, spittle flying from his mouth. His hands were glowing from all the electricity that sparked and circled around him. His eyes were alight with the lightning too.

It was both terrifying and beautiful at the same time, and he understood why Pidge had become a deer for those few ticks. Lance’s attack struck him squarely in the chest, knocking the wind out of him and forcing him to take a couple steps back.

His gaze flickered to his other teammates: to Pidge, favoring her right leg, and glaring at Lance; to Keith, and glowing purple wound on his side; to Coran, who was hiding behind one of the counters in the infirmary.

Alright. That was it. Sorry, not sorry, Lance. Hunk charged forward, and activated his bayard as he swung it. He saw Lance’s eyes widen, and Hunk was confident that this was the end of the fight.
His bayard never made contact. Lance’s form blurred before disintegrating into black smoke, which quickly dissipated into the air. His bayard never made contact because there wasn’t anything there anymore for it to make contact with.

“Behind you!” Pidge shouted too late. Hands were around his throat, tightening and digging sharp little edges into his skin. Heat buzzed against him, the crackle of the lightning frighteningly loud in his ears.

“I outta rip your throat out.” Lance’s words were barely audible as he hissed them into Hunk’s ear.

Hunk reacted on instinct, throwing himself backwards. He hit against a wall with a ‘oomph’, but didn’t have much more time to react as Lance materialized out of static smoke in front of Hunk like some kind of demon. His clawed hand was raised, ready to slash down and make good on the promise he’d just made.

It was funny. In everything Hunk had ever read or watched; a person’s life flashed before their eyes before they died. It didn’t happen for Hunk, even as he closed his eyes and tensed, waiting for the inevitable impact. For Lance to bring his glowing hand of death down upon him.

Yet, death didn’t come.

Instead, Lance shrieked, prompting Hunk to open his eyes. Keith and Pidge were on the other side of the room, blocked from reaching them by a web of purple lightning that served as a barrier. Coran was fairly useless in a fight, especially here. None of them could have saved his life.

Allura stood tall in front of Hunk, her staff at the ready in a defensive stance. A short distance from her stood Lance, where he’d been knocked back by her just seconds before. He opened his mouth to talk, to warn her of Lance’s abilities or to tell her that he was fast, but she was already moving. Allura sprung forward and, to Hunk’s shock, managed to hit Lance in the middle before he could vanish.

Fun fact about cars: newer ones were designed to crumple when hit, so that they could take the impact of the crash instead of passing it on to the driver and/or passengers. The way Lance crumpled when Allura’s staff hit him squarely in the gut reminded Hunk of that. Or a ragdoll. Either option worked.

Lance not only crumpled, but was thrown back at the force of Allura’s hit. Hunk winced as Lance’s head bounced against the wall. His body slid down to land in a heap on the floor. Allura stalked forward, performing what Hunk had heard Lance refer to as ‘The Murder Walk’ towards Lance.

The spiderweb of lightning across the room flickered for a second before it fell. Pidge rushed forward to Hunk’s side. “Are you alright?” She asked.

“I will be.” Hunk replied, stepping away from the wall and taking a deep breath. His neck stung where Lance’s claws had dug into his skin. He’d probably have to go in a cryopod to heal that.

He felt more confident and safe now that Allura was here. For all the team’s complaints about her, she was skilled combatant, and had been able to hit Lance when they had not. They were safe, for now. If anyone here could contain Lance, it was Allura.

But that didn’t mean the fight was over. He kept his gaze firmly on Lance.

Lance groaned, shaking his head just as Allura jabbed him in the chest with her staff. Hunk held his breath, hoping Lance wouldn’t put up more of a fight. Lance lifted his head, and Hunk saw Allura freeze.
He’d forgotten about that. Well, not really. It was kind of hard to forget the fact that his best friend was suddenly not human. But, in the heat of battle, it had slipped his mind that they hadn’t informed Allura about Lance yet.

Coran didn’t want to get her hopes up without him confirming anything. Which made sense, considering they had all believed Alteans to be extinct, minus Allura and Coran.

“You’re Altean?”

Whelp, too late to warn or say something now.

Hunk didn’t blame her for being shocked or confused. Heck, he’d screamed like a little kid when he’d first knocked Lance out and seen Lance’s skin literally shift from Galra purple to the familiar tan color, and to watch him shrink back down to his normal height.

It was disorienting to look at Lance, even after they brought Lance back. A fact which probably hadn’t been helped by the frosted materialized glass of the cryopod. Whenever Hunk looked at Lance, all he could focus on was the bright blue slashes of color under his eyes. Sometimes, his eyes even tricked him, and he thought it was just blue hair curling under Lance’s eyes.

The purple lightning Lance used to attack was a great distraction from his Altean features, so he didn’t blame Allura for only just now noticing. He supposed being a murderous lunatic who was trying to murder his friends was also a pretty good distraction.

Ugh, just the thought was enough to make Hunk feel sick. Like Lance was piloting and attempted to ‘thread the needle’ levels of feeling sick.

He’d kinda hoped that the cryopod would have ‘fixed’ Lance. It was a crack shot hope. This experience was the eye-opener he needed to see that. He hoped Allura wouldn’t go through something similar now.

Lance didn’t reply to Allura, and instead just glowered.

“How? I mean, we, Coran and I suspected that you may have had some sort of Altean heritage.” Hunk stared at Allura as she spoke, trying to wrap his head around what he was hearing. Allura and Coran had already suspected that Lance may have been Altean? Or at least, part Altean?

If that was the case, then why hadn’t Allura tried to get Lance back sooner? Or had she just not cared? Perhaps if Lance hadn’t ‘betrayed’ them, then she would have cared. But he hadn’t. Or maybe he had. Hunk didn’t know, and the current situation wasn’t helping him to understand.

If Allura had more to say, she didn’t get a chance to say it before Lance took her distraction as an opportunity. Crackling lightning burst out of him like a shockwave, throwing everything close to him back, including Allura.

Hunk grunted as he hit against the wall – again. Beside him, Pidge gasped. Across the room, Keith was thrown back against a cryopod. Coran was nowhere to be found, which was probably for the best. Allura landed in a sliding crouch in the middle of the room. A faint pink glow glimmered around her form as she stood and readied her staff.

Lance had stood in the aftermath of the shockwave. The weird purple stuff around Lance arced and crackled, giving him a faint purple glow, especially around his hands. Allura’s glow was fainter but no less harsh. A bright pink that immediately put Hunk at ease.
So, Lance had been right when he’d joked about the Alteans being magic space elves.

Lance moved first, throwing himself forward toward Allura. She moved to block, but Lance vanished and then reappeared behind her. She was prepared for that, and effortlessly twirled around to not only properly block Lance’s attack but also to push him back and counter attack.

Allura only fought offensively with her staff, as if she didn’t know how to offensively use the glowing pink that surrounded her. Lance fought with his claw like hands, and crackling ominous purple, using it offensively and defensively as needed.

Allura had the upper hand. She had a weapon, and wasn’t fresh from a cryopod. Already, Hunk could see Lance starting to slow down. He was tiring. An attack from Allura slipped past his defenses, and she didn’t hesitate to exploit his distraction from the attack. “Coran!” She shouted as she shoved Lance backwards.

Lance stumbled back a few steps, just in time for a small circular particle barrier to materialize around him. He shook his head and threw himself up against the particle barrier, scratching at it like he thought he could just claw his way out of it.

Lance’s face, distorted by the pattern of the particle barrier, twisted into a snarl. He screamed as a barrage of lightning hit the shield. Hunk held his breath, but the shield held. The noise of Lance’s scream cut off suddenly.

“That’s enough of that, I would think.” Coran commented from the control panel. “Trapping him in the quarantine barrier was a fantastic plan, princess.”

If Coran was hoping flattery would spare him from Allura’s irritation, then he was wrong. She whirled around from Lance, and glared at all the Paladins in the room before finally looking to Coran. “What. Happened?” She asked. Her tone was short and clipped.

“All the Druids use it.” Keith added.

Allura and Coran frowned, but it was Allura who replied. “I’m not sure.” She shook her head. “It felt similar to the corruption I’ve been cleansing from the Blue Lion. I can only assume that it is a form of corrupted quintessence. If I had a way to study it peacefully, I could confirm that.”

There was a flash of light from the quarantine barrier as Lance renewed his attack against it. Coran’s gaze shifted to it before returning to Allura’s. “I don’t believe that’s an option, princess.”

Allura sighed, and looked over the Paladins again, this time letting her gaze linger on each one. Hunk suspected that she was looking over their injuries. “Get healed, Paladins. We’ll discuss this at further length once you’re all refreshed.”

Chapter End Notes
Check out this wonderful art by ants-ant-eveywhere on Tumblr!
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Hunk and the rest of the team were successfully extracted from Lotor's ship and healed. The cryopod containing Lance released Lance, and for a moment, Hunk thought everything was fine before Lance attacked everyone.

Allura intervened before Lance could do any real injury to any of the Paladins, although a majority of the injuries were dealt to Keith and Hunk. Allura was stunned to find out that Lance was Altean, but pushed past that to trap Lance into a quarantine cell with Coran's assistance.

**Still Unbeta'd. Ghost is working on trying to catch up, but she's behind on some Zine stuff which has her a bit preoccupied.**

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## Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Mentioned/Referenced Drug Use, Mentioned/Referenced Withdrawals, Quintessence, A Bit of Violence, Emotional Manipulation, Evil Jewelry

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.tumblr.com). Thank you!

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Coran sighed, watching the quarantine barrier, or more precisely, who was captured within in. The barrage of attacks had finally started to simmer down, and while apart of him said to go get Allura so they could speak to Lance, another part of him said to wait.  

While he might have loved Allura dearly, it was clear to him that bringing her into things sometimes wasn't always the best decision. She was very much like her father in her headstrong and independent nature, and some could say that she was very… demanding on a person.  

The rift between her and the Paladins was caused by her unyielding nature, or so Coran suspected. He very much doubted that Lance, in his current state, would be of the mind to just open up to her.

In fact, Coran would hazard to guess that Lance would blame her for most, if not all, of his troubles. Nothing good would come from another confrontation between the two. Not currently, anyways. Not when the past two altercations had occurred and ended as they had.

Coran cared for Lance, perhaps more than he did for any other paladin. Coran had always related to the Green and Blue Paladins the most, but that may have been because his own quintessence was blue-green. By all rights, he should have bonded the most with Pidge, but… there had been something about Lance that had connected with Coran.

Perhaps their shared homesickness? Or perhaps it was just the nature of blue quintessence, like...
water drops coalescing into one larger drop.

Whatever Lance was using now, it wasn’t his natural quintessence, and Coran worried about that meant for Lance. Allura had feared him to be corrupted, and Lance had done nothing but prove that fear. Yet Coran believed that he could still be saved, that he could still be cleansed.

Coran had no choice but to believe that. If worse came to worse, and Lance could not cleansed, then Allura would see no other option than to take his life, physically severing the tie between Lance and the Blue Lion.

Yet Coran had faith for more reason that that. The Blue Lion had yet to sever the tie herself. If the Blue Lion had yet to release her hold on Lance, then clearly, she thought he could saved as well.

Lance’s body swayed as the purple lightning finally faded. He stumbled, falling to his knees and then to his hands. His whole body quivered, and Coran saw him curl his hands into a fist and then hit against the ground. It may have been sweat that dripped from his face, but Coran suspected it to be tears.

Coran’s heart went out to Lance.

Too many times in his life he had witnessed quintessence exhaustion. Allura’s mother had been particularly notorious with it, seeing as she always gave Balmeras more than needed. Alfor had driven himself to this point at least once while creating the Lions, and Allura… She’d suffered it when she’d walked in her mother’s footsteps to heal the Balmera.

Not to mention his dear friend… That had perhaps been the worst to witness.

Regardless of the cause, Coran had found that time was nearly the only cure beyond absorbing pure quintessence – a practice Coran advised against whenever possible. It was better to soak up the latent quintessence around a person and recover naturally.

The risk of quintessence addiction only grew the more one had contact with unfiltered or pure quintessence. While it was true that quintessence was the building blocks of life itself and existed in everything, too much exposure was dangerously toxic. To quote Hunk; ‘too much of anything isn’t good.’

Although he wasn’t sure how applicable that statement was here, considering Coran had heard him saying it in regard to Pidge’s cookie content.

He watched Lance for a couple ticks more to ensure he was fine, or as fine as he could be considering everything, before turning back to the collection of items that had been recovered from the Galra ship and Lance’s person.

He’d put aside his research into Lance’s DNA and ancestry for now. The results were almost always the same, and as far as he was concerned, the findings were conclusive: Lance was Altean.

However, the tests were of no assistance as to the ‘how’ of Lance’s existence. Hopefully these items would explain more; or, at the very least explain what had happened to Lance once he left.

The robes that Lance had been wearing reminded Coran of the funeral shrouds of Altea that they’d dress the honored deceased in. It wasn’t the mourning pink used to honor a warrior, but rather the darker colors meant to recognize a foreign dignitary or a dignified person, like an esteemed alchemist.

The mask was something entirely new to Coran, and he gingerly put the pieces away. Hopefully,
if and when Lance was in a better mood, he’d be willing to explain the mask’s importance.

Coran turned to the next item to examine, and felt his mustache twitch as he frowned. The jewelry was unusual, and spoke truths that Coran wasn’t sure he wanted to acknowledge yet. There was no denying their purpose.

Both the necklace and the bracelet were designed as claiming pieces. The clasps had been hard to remove, indicating both how long they’d been worn and that they weren’t meant to be removed to begin with.

The emblem on the necklace was a clear declaration of both intent and possession. Wearing the Galra emblem was essentially declaring one’s loyalties. Beyond that, the craftsmanship and design of the pieces made it very clear that these were intended as... courting gifts.

If Coran had to guess, he’d say that the bracelet was the first gift given it was less obtrusive and subtler in design. Yet the way that Lance grabbed at where a necklace would fall occasionally while attacking the barrier hinted that it was the necklace he was most familiar with.

Perhaps it’d been the necklace that came first? Regardless of when either item was received, they were obviously part of a set, as evidenced by the matching crystals incorporated through both pieces.

There were faint energy readings from the crystals, but they didn’t seem to be any different than the benign Balmera crystals used in most jewelry. Other than the faint purple coloration, Coran didn’t think anything of them.

There was no doubt in Coran’s mind that Lance had accepted the courting gifts. Honestly, Coran didn’t blame him. Lance had been captured, presumably tortured, and then Ancients knew what else. If accepting a courting gift from the Prince was all that was needed to end it, then, had he been in Lance’s situation, he would have accepted it too.

Unfortunately, he wasn’t sure how well the others would understand. Allura, he knew, was having difficulties with finding empathy with such heavy responsibilities weighing on her mind.

It was for that reason that he’d lied to her about the cryopod malfunctioning. Given her current relationship with Keith, informing her that he’d accidently released Lance by leaning against it was ill advised.

He wanted to think the best of her, as he did all his charges, but there was little doubt that she’d blame Keith and accuse him of intentionally releasing Lance.

Coran sighed, brushing a finger over the crystals in the bracelet before putting it down and moving onto the necklace.

He could understand Lance’s choices while on Lotor’s ship, but he wished that Lance hadn’t lost himself to the point of attacking his own team in the process. Although, he’d have to ask the team about the ‘murderer’ accusation that Lance had thrown at Keith.

There was importance in that, Coran thought. He glanced again at Lance and frowned. Lance had moved from his previous position, and was curled up with his back to one of the sides of the barrier, hugging his legs to his chest and resting his head on his knees.

There was little else that Coran wanted than to disengage the barrier and pull Lance into his arms and comfort him.
Coran sighed again, and turned off the silencing feature of the quarantine cell. “Lance?” He called out, putting the necklace down on the table and walking over to the barrier. “Lance?” He repeated, softer this time.

Lance showed no response to him. He didn’t even look at Coran, dully looking past him like he wasn’t even mentally present.

These paladins were so young, especially compared to the previous Paladins. They didn’t deserve this, none of them did. Yet there was nothing Coran could do about that. He could only be there for them. A duty he’d already failed once, on that fateful day that he’d entered Lance’s room.

It hurt to look at Lance. To look at Lance and know that he once used to be so vibrant and full of life. Lance was a painful reminder of Coran’s own failures; of how he yet again failed in his duties to the Paladins. It was at least partially his fault that Lance was like this now.

Perhaps, if he’d gone about breaking the subject of the communicator better, then things would have been different. He still didn’t know the full story on that either. There was so much Coran didn’t know, and that was one of his biggest regrets.

It may not have been the best time for it, but he felt the words that he was going to say were needed. If only to possibly get Lance to open up a little, to explain. Coran would repeat them as many times as needed if it’d bring back the Lance he’d come to know.

“I apologize. When I went in your room that day, I never expected any of this to be the outcome.” The only sign that Lance heard him was the slight tremble of Lance’s body, and the way he curled up ever so slightly tighter.

Coran’s lips pressed into a thin line. Perhaps his apology wasn’t what Lance needed now. Time to try another angle. If anything, no one could say that Coran wasn’t persistent.

“If you want to talk, I am always willing to listen.” Coran offered with a small smile. “I regret I wasn’t available to talk when you needed me before.”

He’d been so busy with other responsibilities, he’d let others go. This ship wasn’t designed to be run with such a tiny crew for such a long time. Perhaps… perhaps it was time he spoke with Allura about finding additional crew members to help?

As much as it pained him to admit it, he couldn’t continue to juggle his duties. Being Allura’s advisor, the Chief Mechanical Engineer and Helmsman of the castle, and the chef, trainer, and teacher to the Paladins as well as the Chief Medical Officer was perhaps a bit more than he could reasonably take on.

He’d do better, especially once he spoke with Allura about gaining some assistance. However, there was no better time than now to start. And no better person to start with than Lance.

If only he could get Lance to talk to him.

There were things that Lance said that didn’t quite match up to what Coran knew. Calling Keith a ‘murderer’, and then the comment he’d made to Hunk. It seemed Lance believed that the team had left Lance, instead of Lance leaving them.

Was it a form of memory alteration? Or was there more to the story than what Coran had seen? What answers would Lance provide to some of their most commonly asked questions?

Lance didn’t speak, which was to be expected. He could only imagine what all Lance had been
through in the last quintant alone: being on Lotor’s ship, fighting the team, waking up here, fighting the team again, and then being trapped in a quarantine cell. It was no wonder that Lance didn’t want to speak to him.

One of the cryopods beeped, alerting Coran that the inhabitant would be out shortly. He checked on the pod, noting that it was Pidge’s. He suspected as much. Her injuries hadn’t been as rough as Keith’s, or even Hunk’s.

Coran caught Pidge as she stumbled out, and patiently waited for her to recover from the sleep chamber knees before taking a step back to retrieve the storage box with her belonging in it. He fished around in it until he found her glasses, and handed them over.

“Coran?” She asked, rubbing at her eyes before putting on the glasses. Coran smiled, shaking his head fondly at the smallest Paladin. The glasses didn’t actually do anything for her vision, but he knew she usually felt better with them on. One day he’d find out why.

“Yes?” Coran said.

Pidge blinked up at him, and then peered around him. Her eyes widened at the sight of Lance, and she let out a quiet gasp. Coran could just see the cogs and gears starting to spin in her head at the mere image of Lance.

Memories usually were foggy when first exiting the cryopod. Had he more time, Coran would probably try to look into remedying that.

“Lance?” She asked.

“He’s here.” Coran looked over his shoulder at Lance and frowned. “Non-responsive, but here.” He sighed. “If you’d like to talk to him, you may.” Coran looked back at Pidge in time to see her bite her lip. Her eyes betrayed her internal debate, and Coran smiled again. There were days that Pidge reminded him so much of Alfor.

There were days she reminded him of Trigel too.

Each of the Paladins reminded him of his friends, even Zarkon, which he supposed was to be expected. The Lions mirrored quintessence after all, and that meant that these five were bound to be similar to the others in some regard.

Besides, Alfor was a rare case of duality where his outward quintessence had been green. It’d only made sense that Pidge would remind Coran of him. Pidge and Alfor were both researchers, even if Pidge’s curiosity reached deeper depths than Alfor’s.

Another pod beeped, and Coran patted Pidge on the shoulder before going to check on the beeping pod. By his mental calculations, this was probably Keith next.

Pidge didn’t need any further encouragement, and hurried to change before heading over to sit cross legged in front of Lance’s cell.

If Lance would not reach out to Coran, then maybe he would reach out to a fellow Paladin. Coran could only hope.

He checked on Keith’s vitals, and was ready to catch the Red Paladin when he fell out of the cryopod. He’d just finished helping Keith get steady when Pidge called out.

“Hey, Coran! I don’t think Lance is doing too good.”
“What do you mean, Number Five?” Coran called back. He checked Keith’s injury, ignoring the red paladin’s muttering of being ‘fine’. The injury looked to be fully healed, and Coran nodded. He stepped back and turned to Pidge, raising an eyebrow.

Pidge was pressed up against the barrier, staring at Lance. Coran looked to Keith and then back to the others. He pursed his lips, but after only a moment of deliberation, jogged over to Pidge. Keith was fine.

“He’s muttering something.” She said as he approached.

Coran stopped short of the barrier, staring down at the form of Lance.

Usually Lance reminded Coran of Blaytz. Both were loud, friendly flirts. Perhaps too trusting at times, but they always had good intentions and a good heart. But Lance didn’t remind Coran of Blaytz right now. No, right now Lance was reminding Coran of another dear friend.

For a moment, Coran wasn’t looking down at Lance, but instead at a beloved colleague and friend laying in her marriage bed. He was almost expecting to hear Zarkon’s voice as he asked for assistance, as he all but begged either him or Alfor, asking if they knew of some cure for his ailing wife.

Was this a curse to fall upon all Alteans who were courted by a royal member of the Galra Empire? Or just misfortune?

They hadn’t discovered a cure for Honerva. It was too late for her. The addiction to quintessence had whittled her down until there was almost nothing recognizable remaining. Lance on the other hand… there was a chance.

He hadn’t reached the same emaciated form as Honerva yet. The cryopod hadn’t registered any failures of his body. Although now that Coran thought about it, he did recall seeing a higher than usual quintessence content.

He’d just assumed it wasn’t something to be worried about, or that’d it’d been a byproduct of Lance’s time with the Galra. He was clearly wrong.

Yet, Coran had hope for Lance. Lance was younger, and while there were signs that Lance’s own addiction was strong, it hadn’t taken him like it had Honerva. Not yet. If Coran could just… wean Lance off the source of his addiction, then there was a chance, a hope, for recovery.

“Quiznak.”

But what to do? How to wean him off? If he left him there like that, quitting ‘cold turkey’ as he’d heard the other Paladins say… then there was an increased chance of Lance’s own death. His body had presumably become used to processing heavy contents of quintessence.

He needed to slow that down. Taper the addition down. Whittle it down instead of letting it whittle Lance down.

But how? Without purifying him, Coran couldn’t risk giving him the quintessence provided by the ship or basic Balmerian crystal. But Allura couldn’t purify him without first having a sample of the quintessence.

There was always the Blue Lion… but that’d be too high of a quintessence content for Coran to be comfortable with Lance dealing with currently. Allura could have used that as a sample, but… it was too large a sample, and it wasn’t like she could just cut off a small piece.
“Coran?” Keith asked from behind him, “Is everything alright?”

Nothing was alright.

Lance was going through quintessence withdrawal, and Coran had no idea of how to help him. He didn’t have access to the quintessence that the Galra used. If only they’d kept a piece of the crystal Sendak had used.

Quizznak.

“He keeps saying that it’s all his fault.” Pidge muttered. Her eyebrows furrowed and she pressed closer to the barrier like she wanted to touch Lance. “Lance?” Pidge called out to him. “What’s all your fault?”

Those words seemed to be the wrong ones to say.

Lance uncurled and lunged forward in one smooth fluid movement, lashing out at the barrier between him and Pidge with faint streaks of purple lightning. Understandably, Pidge fell back, staring at Lance with wide horrified eyes.

“It’s not my fault!” Lance snarled. “I did everything I could! It’s your fault! All of you! You left me! You left me, you left me.”

What had started as anger quickly dissipated and morphed into a breakdown. His body was still shaking, and while one hand was on the barrier, the other was scratching at the flimsy cryopod bodysuit around his upper chest and neck… like where a necklace would be.

This action wasn’t new, but it hit Coran like an angry weblum. He hadn’t thought the motion to be anything more than him missing his courting necklace… but what if it was more?

Coran spun around, his eyes falling immediately on the necklace that he’d left on the control panel. It’d only registered weak quintessence levels, but… he crossed the room in only a few steps.

“I’m going to drop the barrier.” Coran announced.

“What?!?” Both paladins shouted.

“No time to explain.” Coran replied as he grabbed the necklace and hit the time delay for the barrier dropping.

Coran reached the barrier the moment it dropped, and Lance immediately pounced on the opportunity. Another wave of weak lightning passed through. If Lance were at full strength, or even a fraction of the strength he’d had earlier, then it would have been a problem.

As it were, Lance was already facing quintessence exhaustion. Also, Coran had a high tolerance to quintessence thanks to his work on the Lions. He could handle a little buzz if it meant saving Lance.

Coran tasted metal on his tongue, and the air smelled of static and quintessence as the wave passed through him. He ignored it and dropped to his knees before Lance, dropping the necklace to pull off his gloves before he cupped Lance’s face.

Technically what he was about to do was a major taboo with most of Altean society.
But that society didn’t exist anymore.

Besides which, his family had always been keener on the ‘old’ ways. His own mother had done this to help settle his nightmares as a child. And when Allura had come to him crying in the middle of the night from the loss of her mother, there’d been no complaints when he soothed her worries the same way.

“It’s okay, it’s alright. Look at me, look at me.” Coran muttered. Lance’s eyes – still unseeing – went to Coran and for a single tick, it seemed that Lance was finally looking at him instead of through him. “May I?” He asked, gently brushing one of his thumbs over the scales to explain what he was asking for.

Not asking was as good as emotionally exploiting Lance, and Coran refused to do that.

He’d prefer Lance’s consent. If he didn’t consent, then Coran was in all rights as chief medical examiner to do it anyways to calm his patient, or to have one of the other paladins inject him with a sedative.

Coran hoped it didn’t come to that. For a heartbeat, Coran was afraid that Lance would make him force his hand. He didn’t want to, but he needed Lance to calm down.

Lance nodded.

Coran let out a sigh of relief as he gently brushed his thumbs over Lance’s scales again. He had to be careful with this. Using scales as a method of emotional manipulation was usually something only legally allowed by trained professionals. Coran was one such professional, but it’d been a long time.

There was chance this wouldn’t work.

After all, there was ten thousand deca-phoebs worth of evolutionary differences between them. But there was a chance that the Altean face scales still processed as empathy receptors. Lance’s acceptance indicated that it was still a thing.

Coran called upon his training as he tried to calm Lance down. Calming someone down with empathy like this was a tricky business. Every Altean perceived emotions felt through their scales differently, which was one of many reasons that usually only trained professionals were allowed to attempt this.

The last thing Coran wanted was for Lance to think that Coran was emotionally impressing himself upon him. Even if that was, in a way, what he was doing.

Out of the corner of his eye, he watched Keith come closer. Keith studied them for a moment before finally speaking. “What are you doing?”

“Calming him down.” Coran replied, gently alternating between which scale he was touching in a slow brushing cycle, like wiping away tears. He didn’t know Lance’s mental or emotional state enough to risk a longer connection.

Lance seemed sedate, for the most part. His body had gone mostly lax, and his eyes half lidded. The quintessence bursts had ceased. Coran let out a short sigh, and dropped his hands to pick up the necklace.

Almost immediately there was another burst of quintessence, causing Keith to hiss and jump back. Coran’s hands shook as he dropped the necklace again to once more calm Lance down. Good to
know that Lance recovered quickly from this. That meant he was used to people doing this to him.

Hunk’s comment about Lance not wanting people to touch his face suddenly made a lot more sense.

There was another short burst of quintessence, presumably caused by a flare up of Coran’s own anger at the Galra and how they’d treated Lance. Coran grit his teeth, ignored the burst, and made a mental note that Lance was super receptive. He’d have to keep that in mind just in case he needed to do this again in the future.

If he couldn’t take his hands off of Lance, then he’d need someone else to put the necklace back on. Keith was closest, as he hadn’t backed off beyond that initial jump back.

“Keith, could you put the necklace on him?”

“What?” Keith asked.

“What?” Keith asked.

“Put the necklace—”

“I heard you before.” Keith interrupted. “But why?” Despite his words, Keith did approach again, picking up the necklace like it was the last thing in the world that he wanted to touch.

“Not now, Keith.” Coran replied. Lance tensed, and Coran immediately pushed down his brief irritation at Keith and resumed soothing Lance. This would have been easier if Lance was touching his scales, but… he didn’t want to push too much.

“There you go, that’s it. It’s okay.”

A lot of things about this situation bothered Coran, and although he was trying to push it down, that anger kept bubbling back up. He couldn’t believe how the Galra had treated Lance. He was seeing the effects of them on Lance plain as day.

It bothered Coran how… docile Lance was during this. Beyond the couple of bursts, which Coran had mostly caused, Lance was surprisingly accepting of this. Not to mention how receptive he was, and how quickly he recovered.

Another burst of anger bubbled up, and Coran saw the exact moment that Lance registered it before he could quash the anger back down.

The fog in Lance’s eyes cleared, and the scent of static and quintessence was his only warning before a stronger wave of quintessence passed over him. Once more, the taste of metal filled his mouth, and Coran grimaced, fighting to keep himself calm and steady.

“It’s okay, Lance.” He soothed. Once again, the fog covered his eyes, and Coran breathed out a small prayer of thanks to the Ancients.

Keith hissed, having not expected the attack, although Coran took the brunt of it. He nearly dropped the necklace before finally doing as requested. The necklace fit perfectly, like it was made for Lance. It probably was, now that Coran thought about it. It did come from a prince.

Lance nearly melted into a puddle the moment the necklace was back on him. His eyes were still fogged, and half lidded, but his hand rose to clasp around the jewel. It was only then that Coran noticed that it was glowing brighter than before.

It took Coran just a tick to realize that it was reacting to Lance. Clever. Coran wasn’t an alchemist
by any means, but he knew that it took a great bit of quintessence manipulation to get a crystal to
bond to a person like that.

Then again, Lance would have been spending quite a bit of time with the crystal, considering how
difficult it was for Coran to remove it in the first place.

Hopefully the necklace would tide Lance over until Allura could analyze the bracelet and then
purify Lance. Now, for the hard part… getting away from Lance long enough for the particle
barrier to go back up.

Hopefully Lance would be distracted by the necklace long enough for Coran to clear the quarantine
zone.

“Pidge, when I pull my hands away, there’s a chance that we’ll have a couple of ticks before he’ll
try to attack again.” Coran called out.

“Okay?”

“I need you to be ready to put the barrier up once I pull away. Keith, go ahead and clear the area
now.”

Keith didn’t verbally respond, but Coran saw him back away.

“I’m ready.” Pidge informed Coran.

Coran nodded to himself, and took a deep breath. “We’ll be fine.” He muttered, to reassure
himself. “Alright. I’m going to pull away… now.”

Coran pulled his hands away, and scrambled backwards. The particle barrier went up only a few
heartbeats later. Coran observed Lance, noting how his trembling had ceased a little, and there
seemed to be more color back in his face.

Lance blinked, shaking his head, and then touching his scales before scowling at Coran. He stared
for a moment before he resumed his previous huddled position of before.

“Feeling better?” Coran asked. Lance looked up at him, his hand was still wrapped tightly against
the crystal.

“Quiznak you.” Lance returned, snarling.

Coran heaved a heavy sigh. He expected as much, but the fact Lance responded at all was
promising. With Keith’s assistance, he stood on shaky legs. He grabbed the bracelet and pocketed
it so he could give it to the princess.

Hopefully it’d be enough of a sample for her to figure out how to best cleanse Lance. Once that
was done, they could tackle his addiction. He just had to keep sight on the goals. One step at a
time, as Lance would normally say.

He checked on Hunk’s cryopod one more time before shaking his head. Still not done. He’d have
to have this conversation with the princess minus Hunk then. He turned to Pidge and Keith and
gestured to the door.

“Hunk will take some more time to be ready, but I think we need to speak with the princess.”
Soo... Coran's POV.

I bet you guys didn't see that coming, lol. I hope it's alright. It's my first time writing from his perspective, and I found it a bit challenging. The biggest problem I found was the utter lack of serious Coran in the series. Like, seriously, every time there's a Coran-centered anything, it's usually a joke. :/

Moving on, lol. I hope everyone is doing alright!

My birthday is on Sunday, the 21. I'm super excited! My sister is taking me out to Longhorn so I can have some prime rib! :) :D

My coworker is gonna, hopefully, take a look at my car and get that fully repaired that weekend too. I was told I might have an Oil Leak, so he's gonna take a look at it, soo.... finger crossed!
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Coran went through Lance's personal items that had been with him when he was brought to the Castle. He found the necklace and bracelet, and assumed them to be courting gifts. He realized Lance was suffering from quintessence addiction, and with Pidge and Keith's assistance, he was able to stave off some of the addiction with the necklace.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Allura

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com). Thank you!

**Unbeta'd**

There were thousands of other things that Allura could – should – have been doing.

There were courses to chart, Paladins to find, Galra to fight, planets to liberate, and a Castleship to maintenance. Yet instead of doing something productive, Allura found herself on the holodeck, staring at the hole in the star chart where Altea should have been.

No matter how long she traveled with these new Paladins, it still seemed like only yesterday when her father and the other Paladins of old were alive. It seemed like only yesterday that Altea still existed, beautifully whole and complete in the star charts.

In reality, Altea had been destroyed over ten thousand deca-phoebs ago, along with all of her people and culture, except Coran and the mice.

Or perhaps not.

She had long ago given up on the dream of finding out that some of her people, and some of her culture, had not only survived, but had persisted and lived through the deca-phoebs within the Galra Empire. Yet here she was, staring at the hole where Altea should have been and contemplating exactly what she’d already given up on.

She’d thought up thousands of explanations for the existence of Zarkon’s witch. Most of which denied the continued existence of any other Alteans. Just because two became three, didn’t mean that three would become more.

Yet it had.

Lance, against all odds and calculations, had been Altean. She and Coran had suspected that at the
very least he had a limited amount of Altean blood in him, but that had in no way, shape, or form prepared her for the proof of his full Altean existence.

Lance wasn’t from Altea. He couldn’t have been. For starters, he was way too young. Without the assistance of cryopods or anything else, there would have been no way that he could have lived for over ten thousand deca-phobes.

That meant he had Altean parents, which meant there were at least two other Alteans excluding him. Zarkon’s witch, Coran, Lance, herself, and Lance’s parents.

Seven.

If there were seven, then… as absurd as it sounded, then perhaps, maybe, there were others… that maybe there were more. Which led her to the next theory, one she hated to even consider.

Lance and the witch had both been discovered siding with the Galra. Was it possible that her people existed among the Galra? And if so, in what capacity? Had she, unknowingly, killed her own people? How many Altean innocents had she unknowingly slain?

But then again, could they really be considered her people when they sided with the Galra?

There was a chance that they did not know any better. Ten thousand deca-phoebs was a long time, and anything could have happened. Perhaps siding with the Galra was the only way her people could have survived.

In that case, could she really consider them traitors?

Lance’s betrayal had been both meaningful and personal. He had purposely betrayed her and Voltron. Regardless of his heritage, she could not easily forgive him.

But what about the other potential Alteans out there? Should she blame them for the choices they, or their ancestors, made even if those choices were the only reason her people existed today?

She took a deep breath and held it for a moment as she closed her eyes and imagined Altea in her mind. She imagined a new Altea, full of her people and culture. A hub of intergalactic peace and trading. So many possibilities. So much to consider.

She exhaled slowly as she opened her eyes and bowed her head.

No, she decided.

No, she shouldn’t, and wouldn’t, blame her people for their choices. They didn’t know there was another option: Voltron and her. She had been lost to them for the past ten thousand deca-phoebs, and they only did what was best to protect their people, and now… who knew what the Galra had told them.

She couldn’t blame them.

Who knew what type of work she’d need to put into getting them to trust her and leave the lies of the Galra to follow her lead. She could only imagine the workload before her, although she was quite certain that once she had Voltron again, it would much easier to win the trust of the people.

Of course, there were a few minor complications with Voltron. The first and foremost being the current ‘paladins’, and Lance.
Lance wasn’t the Blue Lion. She couldn’t just flush his system with an onslaught of fresh cleansed quintessence and hope for the best like she could the Blue Lion.

And with how… volatile Lance and his quintessence was, she didn’t dare attempt to purify him without first ensuring everyone’s safety through the means of testing a sample of the quintessence. Until Lance was cleansed, the Blue Lion couldn’t be truly washed away of the corruption.

Which meant either Lance needed to be cleansed, or she needed to collapse the bond between Lance and the Blue Lion.

If she couldn’t find a way to safely take care of Lance, then she’d have no choice but to collapse the bond. And the only way to do that was to kill Lance; something she was sure that the current ‘paladins’ would undoubtedly protest.

Keith had already threatened leaving once, and while she didn’t care if he stayed or left, she knew that he would take the Red Lion with him; and that was unacceptable.

Oh, if only her father were here. He would know exactly what to do.

“Ah, there you are, Princess.” Allura looked over to where the door was still sliding open to see Coran. He smiled at her. Pidge and Keith trailed quietly behind him.

“Coran.” She acknowledged him. “Shouldn’t you be watching over Lance?” She questioned not even a tick later. Coran didn’t pause as he made his way to her, but she saw his mustache twitch a bit.

“He won’t be able to break through the quarantine barrier, Princess. I am confident that there will be no problems with leaving him unattended for now.”

Breaking through the quarantine barrier wasn’t really Allura’s concern. Although, she supposed that it was fine for now. Her main concern was Keith, so his presence with Coran gave her some peace. Given how he’d been acting lately, she wouldn’t put it past him to release Lance, if only to spite her.

Or perhaps he wouldn’t. What was the human saying? Something about ‘twice bitten’? She couldn’t remember, and she made a mental note to ask Pidge or Hunk later.

“Very well. What news have you brought me?”

“I’ve finished analyzing the results from the tests I ran on Lance while in the Cryopod, and I can confirm that he is Altean.”

Allura closed her eyes and breathed out sharply through her nose. That confirmed it then. Beyond Lance, the witch, herself, and Coran, there were other Alteans out there. The news should have filled her with elation, especially given her musing earlier. Yet instead all she could feel was an impending sense of dread.

What if her people hated her and her father? What if they hated Altea? What if they didn’t want Allura? What if despite her people still continuing to exist, she and Coran were still alone?

She hid her shaking hands in the folds of her dress as she turned to fully face Coran.

“Is that all?”

“No. Besides suffering from quintessence exhaustion, I believe Lance is also inflected with… an
addiction."

Behind Coran, both Pidge and Keith reacted physically to the news. So, Coran had not shared that assumption with them prior to informing her, mostly likely to prevent him from having to repeat himself.

“How’s the news?”

“Addicted to what?”

There were only so many things that an Altean could become addicted to, and for Coran to say it so gravely, then that meant…

“Quintessence.” Allura replied flatly to Keith’s question. She studied Coran, trying to see if he was possibly joking. Not that this was a time for such. To her eternal dismay, he wasn’t.

“It would be a kindness to put him out of his misery now then.” Throwing quintessence addiction into the mix was too much. Too many variables, too many possibilities. Not to mention, the withdrawals. She’d heard stories about it, and she wouldn’t wish that fate on anyone, except perhaps Zarkon. All it promised was a painful, slow death.

She felt for the other Paladins, truly she did. She could think of no bigger wound to their collected pride than the knowledge that the companion they’d only just reunited with would soon leave them. Although, this did settle quite a few of Allura’s problems.

“With all respect, Princess, I believe we can still help Lance.” Coran pulled out a bracelet from his pocket and held it up. In the dim light of the holodeck, it sparkled like a hundred tiny purple stars. “I trust this will be a large enough sample.”

“Wait, so why did we-”

“Shush, Keith.”

Allura ignored the other paladins, and resisted the urge to bite her lip as she took the bracelet. Faintly, she could feel the quintessence in the tiny crystals. As far as she knew, this sample would be enough, but… that was only as far as she knew. And she did not know much.

Despite her father being an alchemist, Allura had not been trained in the alchemist arts.

Her father and mother had wanted to ensure her training in diplomacy and politics before moving onto extra-circulars such as an alchemy apprenticeship. Besides which, she had only barely reached the age where one could begin to learn the basics of alchemy when the war started.

Most of the alchemy that she performed was from an act of instinct. Unrefined, raw alchemy which would have made most of the teachers on Altea gasp with horror. A true alchemist wouldn’t have the difficulty she was having in cleansing the Blue Lion, or even Lance.

Although that addiction did complicate things. But…

Coran had faith in her, and he believed that Lance could still be saved.

“You believe we can still help him?” Allura repeated. Coran nodded. She was quiet for a moment, mulling over choices before she finally continued to speak. “I’ll see what I can do. I take this to mean that you have a plan on how to overcome the addiction once he is cleansed?”
It was imperative that they figure out how to deal with addiction. Lance was one known case, but who knew how many more of her people suffered from an addiction while with the Galra. Lance would provide a perfect opportunity for them to figure out how to combat that addiction.

“It’s a work in progress.” Coran’s reply wasn’t as reassuring as Allura would have liked. “But this is a chance we need to take, Princess.”

She knew that. She did. If not just for the Paladins, then for the potential other Alteans too.

Allura brushed her thumb over the crystals in the bracelet, and idly wondered how many times Lance had performed the same action. If she wasn’t mistaken, the bracelet looked to be something like courting gift. Something to ponder and question about later.

She knew why Coran felt this was something that absolutely needed to be done. Beyond the reasons she’d thought of before, there were more. Lance held information that they needed. Information on the Druids, on Lotor, on the Galra Empire in general. Perhaps he even held information of the Alteans within the empire.

She would do anything for her people.

“I know.” She replied quietly.

Keith inhaled, clearly ready to argue whatever point he may have had, and then immediately exhaled with a loud ‘whoosh’. He blinked at Allura, and then at Coran and then back at Allura. Had he not expected Allura to see reason? She knew she could be unreasonable, but she didn’t think that he thought that poorly of her.

Pidge stepped from where she’d been standing beside Keith.

“Soo… do either of you want to explain this whole addiction thing? Because unless I’m mistaken, I thought quintessence was like, our life source or something.”

Her question was spoken casually, but Allura could see the sharp glint to her eyes which stated that she was expecting a response.

“It is.” Allura replied. “Quintessence is life energy which we all encounter frequently through it’s more latent and natural forms, although it’s most easily accessed after being stored in a crystal. It can be distilled into other forms from the crystal, but it’s not usually recommended as dealing with high contents of quintessence usually creates something akin to an addiction.”

“Allura chimed in. “There’s nothing worse than watching someone you care about wither away like that.”

Allura frowned. She didn’t know the specifics of it, but she knew that the addiction was a newly found aliment, and that it had affected the Empress Consort of the Galra Empire. She’d briefly heard Coran and her father talking about it only a couple movements before Zarkon betrayed them and the Galra attacked.

“And you think Lance is addicted to it? Talk about adding new meaning to the phrase ‘addicted to life’.”

Keith frowned at Pidge’s response. “This is serious. You can’t just make jokes about this!”
“It’s what Lance would have done.” Pidge replied. “And it doesn’t sound like there’s much we can do to help, anyways.”

“There’s not.” Coran stated. “I’m hoping we’ve bought him some time with the necklace, but it won’t be long until that quintessence isn’t enough to sustain him.”

“What about the Blue Lion?” Keith suggested.

“Oh yes, let’s just hand him the biggest weapon he could possibly need to kill us all while he’s all coo-coo. That’s a fantastic choice. A+ leadership, Keith.”

Allura blinked, lost in the conversation between the two Paladins.

She wanted to ask about the necklace, but decided that now wasn’t the best time to do so. It was probably another possible courting gift, like the bracelet she needed to study. Cleansing Lance had now become even more of a priority than it had been before. Even worse, it seemed it’d become time sensitive too.

Ancients and stars, why couldn’t she just get a break? A chance to take a moment to collect herself and figure everything out. What she wouldn’t give for the guidance and assistance of her parents, or even a council.

She had Coran, but he already had so much on his shoulders, she couldn’t possibly add more. Perhaps if he would take her suggestion at acquiring a larger crew…

“I’m doing the best I can!” Keith replied to Pidge. His voice went up an octave as he spoke. “And at least I’m trying to help.”

“I’m afraid Pidge is right, Keith. Not only would the Blue Lion give him access to those higher amounts of quintessence, but he could very well use her against us. Until they are both purified of their corruption, and we can be sure of Lance’s allegiances, we cannot allow them to interact more than strictly needed.”

Keith’s jaw was set in a way that couldn’t have been comfortable. Allura had seen him take this look before, and while she never particularly liked it, it usually meant that he was agreeing to at least do as he was told.

“I’ll do my part,” Allura held up the bracelet, and held in a sigh. She did love sparkly things, but this was one sparkly thing she didn’t want. “So, I need you to do yours.”

“Oh yeah, and what’s that?” Keith asked, crossing his arms.

“Try to get through to Lance.” Coran replied before she could. “We won’t have the safety of a barrier during the cleansing. We need him less hostile.”

“Oh, and how are we supposed to do that? Just hold hands through the barrier and sing ‘kumbaya’?” Pidge asked, crossing her own arms and raising an eyebrow.

Allura faltered, pausing and looking to Coran to see if he knew the word that Pidge had just thrown at them. To her dismay, Coran seemed as equally lost, although he recovered more quickly.

“Do you think that’ll work?” Coran asked earnestly. Pidge groaned and rolled her eyes. The action was so exaggerated, she ended up moving her entire head around.

“No. It’s a… nevermind.” She waved once sharply in the air like she was batting the conversation
topic aside. “So, you want us to try to get Lance to be friendly again. Right. Okay, sure. We’ll get right on it.”

“Great!” Coran exclaimed.

Allura nodded, convinced that Coran had control of the situation. “Then I’ll be dismissing myself. Coran, I leave everything in your hands.” She trusted Coran to take care of anything major. “Let me know if anything changes.”

Besides, she had her own tasks to tend to. Time sensitive tasks that gave her no room to dally about. She needed an alchemy room, and while she knew of the existence of several within the castle, she didn’t know their whereabouts. She needed to find them, and then start on her work.

“Of course, Princess.” Coran replied.

She clutched the bracelet tightly as she exited the room, the tiny gems biting into the soft flesh of her palm. Her heart felt like it was beating too fast to be safe, although she knew it was a trick of her mind.

So much relied on her now. If she failed this… if she failed at this task, at cleansing Lance, then she not only risked losing him and all the information he held, but also the Blue Lion and possibly the rest of Voltron as well.

She needed this to work. She needed to be able to do this. For the good of the universe, for her people, for everything and everyone. She only prayed that for once, the stars aligned and granted her this.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for all the Unbeta’d work. Ghost is working on catching up. She was kind of preoccupied with her Zine work, and then with what happened to Neiko... :(

She's made some edits to older chapters that I need to go back and fix), but she's not quite up to speed yet.

In other news... Yesterday was my Birthday!!! :D :) :D I got some awesome gifts, including some fantastic art from Muffarino and Stingynachos. Check it out on my tumblr, or theirs!

I'll be posting a link once I get permission that I can share a link on here from the artists!

Thank you to everyone who gave me Birthday wishes and support! :D
Threat

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: A look into Allura's mind. She was debating on the existence of more Alteans, and if they were working with the Galra. In the end, she decided that it didn't matter if they were working with the Galra or not, especially if they were only doing that to survive.

Coran informed Allura about Lance's addiction to quintessence, and strongly suggested that they try to 'fix' him. She agreed, and used a quintessence sample Coran had brought her to try to see if she could.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Threats, Referenced/Mentioned Violence

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

**Unbeta'd**

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Keith hesitated outside the door to the infirmary. The doors closed behind Pidge and Coran, and Keith stared at the door. He took a deep breath, holding it for a moment before releasing it. His hand hovered by the pad to open the door, but he didn’t actually trigger it.

Not yet.

His hand slowly lowered, hovering in the air for a few heartbeats before it fell listlessly by his side.

It was funny, in a way; this whole situation. He exhaled sharply, bowing his head and half turning away. This whole situation was funny, fitting, and perhaps more than a bit sad.

For all the work and effort that he’d put into trying to find Lance and bring him back, Keith had never actually considered the consequences of Lance’s return. Now, here he was, with his goal obtained, and he just felt… lost and floundering.

He hadn’t really expected anything, but that in itself was a lie. Even if he’d never thought or admitted it, the truth was that he hadn’t expected anything to change. He’d just assumed that once Lance returned that everything would go back to the way it was.

But that wasn’t realistic, and if there was one thing Keith prided himself on, it was being realistic. Some had called him a pessimist, but he preferred to just consider himself favoring the realistic over the optimistic or the pessimistic.
So, perhaps, what he had expected was the end result that everything would return to the way it had been. Perhaps what he’d been really expecting was that they’d find Lance, he’d explain everything, and while there’d be some rough patches, they’d find Shiro and then everything would go back to normal.

Or a normal as it could be when everyone’s lives had literally been turned around, upside down, and inside out.

Not a single person, himself included, could have expected what happened on the day they left Earth, but he was certain none of them had ever expected anything that had happened. Being brought into space by a robot lion and joining in on a ten-thousand-year-old war?

Everything that had happened was the stuff of stories, not reality. Yet here he was, living it.

In any case, he’d expected nothing to change, and what he’d gotten was… crazy even by his standards.

He hadn’t expected Lance to be working for the Galra as a Druid. He hadn’t expected Lance to be so openly hostile to the team. Keith hadn’t expected Lance to be Altean either, although he supposed compared to everything else, it wasn’t that much of a shock.

After all, Keith, himself, wasn’t even entirely human. It wasn’t such a stretch to think that Lance wasn’t human at all. Sure, he could argue logistics and statistics all day, especially since the odds of the two Aliens on Earth both getting caught up in this adventure were probably along the lines of the chances of them hitting planets after being flung out of a wormhole.

Look at how the team had defied the odds there.

Every part of this adventure was crazy, and while Keith thought he might have become numb to the insanity surrounding him, he felt a longing to return to the simplicity of his desert shack.

That wasn’t an option; a fact Keith couldn’t have been more aware of than he already was. He’d seen how the government had treated Shiro when he returned. There was nothing to imagine for how they would treat the others.

Keith didn’t like to think of himself as a conspiracy theorist, but there was just no way that the Government would let them go peacefully.

Especially now that the team knew that Keith was part Galra and Lance… wasn’t human at all.

It was probably for the best that they didn’t return to Earth anyways. There was no need to further involve them in war they had nothing to do with. He doubted involving the Earth would even help. The Alteans were far more advanced, despite their technology being ten thousand years old, and it was basically on par with the Galra.

Besides, even if returning to Earth was an option, they couldn’t return Lance in his current state. No. The best place for Lance – for all of them, really – was right here on the Castleship.

Earth didn’t have the knowledge the Alteans had, and that was yet another reason they were better off here. Keith didn’t know much about quintessence. The only things he knew about it were that the Alteans studied it, it was described as being ‘life’, Lance was apparently addicted to a corrupt form of it, and that it was very important.

It was due to the addiction that Coran had instructed Keith to put that ugly stupid necklace back on Lance; a choice Keith still disagreed with.
If Lance needed quintessence, then wouldn’t reuniting Lance with the Blue Lion be a better option? He’d been shot down before when he suggested it, but he still felt like the Blue Lion was the best option they had for anything involving Lance. Plus, the Blue Lion had been cleansed recently. Surely some of that would carry over to Lance and make him better?

In any case, with the whole necklace thing, Keith just couldn’t see how that was a better option. A doctor didn’t give a poison victim poison to make them better. An alcoholic wasn’t given a drink to help them stop drinking. So why should they give the necklace back to Lance if it housed what he was addicted to? Wasn’t that just ‘feeding’ into the addiction?

It didn’t make sense to Keith, but Coran and Allura were the experts here. Although, he supposed if he really wanted a second opinion, he could always go ask Slav.

The scientist was annoying beyond words, but he usually had some decent advice, if anyone bothered to listen for it. Yet every time Keith had spoken to the little alien, he’d been told the same thing: to trust his instincts.

And what did his instincts say now? He felt surprisingly void and empty, but there was that unmistakable light tug guiding him to the infirmary door. At his back, he could feel the warmth of the Red Lion, promising her support should he need it.

He curled his hand so tightly that he felt his small nails bite into his palm, and only then did he relax his hand. He reached out and triggered the door.

The door opened, and Keith stepped forward just enough to stand on the threshold, and looked in. Coran was in the back, fessing with the Cryopods. It appeared he was preparing for Hunk’s exit.

Pidge was sitting on the floor, one of the Altean computers pulled onto her lap. Her fingers flew across the keyboard, faster than even Keith could keep up with. She didn’t even acknowledge Keith’s presence in the room.

Nearly a foot away from Pidge was the edge of the particle barrier separating Lance from the world. He seemed better, so perhaps Coran’s earlier decision to give Lance the necklace back wasn’t as stupid as Keith had assumed.

He was sitting crossed legged. One of his hands was touching his chest, probably where the gem of that ugly necklace was. His other hand was reached out, touching the barrier with his palm. Like Pidge, he didn’t acknowledge Keith’s presence.

At the sight of Lance, Keith balked once more.

Keith wasn’t known for being fearful or afraid. He was known to be rash and impulsive. He was the Red Paladin, and fear wasn’t in his vocabulary.

Except it was.

It was, and it looked like Lance holding him against a wall with glowing eyes and hands, threatening his life with looks and gestures. It was silly to be scared of a fellow Paladin, especially when he knew Lance was in no state to be a threat, and when he knew that he was safe as long as Lance stayed behind a particle barrier.

Yet the fear still held Keith back. Fear of Lance and… also fear of something more: of failing. Coran had trusted him and Pidge – and Hunk when he finished in the Cryopod – to try to talk to
Lance. To try to get Lance to open up and be less hostile with them so they could safely cleanse Lance.

Now that he was staring at the particle barrier holding Lance, Coran’s request floated in his head, echoing in his ears like a song he couldn’t forget.

It wasn’t often that Keith wanted to run away. Normally, he was running head first into danger, yet now, he wanted nothing more than to turn away and retreat. Red wasn’t physically there, but she might as well as been a physical force pushing him forward. She wouldn’t allow him to turn back, no matter how ridiculous Coran’s request seemed to be to him.

Try to get through to Lance. Try to get him to be less hostile. Right. Yeah, sure.

He and Lance had never been on the best of terms, what with Lance’s irrational and odd competition between them. Keith didn’t want to be Lance’s rival, but Lance hadn’t really given him any other choice. Not that he had fought against the role that much.

It’d been… fun to be Lance’s rival, even if there wasn’t any real competition between them. Now, given Lance’s current mindset, who knew what ‘rival’ had morphed into.

Not that that mattered. Why anyone thought Keith would be able to get through to Lance was beyond him. Lance didn’t even remember their bonding moment before all this nonsense started!

Even if Keith had a good relationship with Lance, there was no way that Keith would be able to make Lance any less hostile in his current state. Keith had killed Lance’s Druid partner; and if that wasn’t bad enough, Keith had done it in front of Lance. That kinda seemed to be a big deal considering Lance accused him of being a murderer right before he attempted and nearly succeeded in avenging said Druid Partner.

Keith moved to take a step back, but instead took a step forward, bringing him into the room.

Pidge still didn’t notice, but Lance did. Lance’s head snapped to the side to face Keith. Despite the distance between them, Keith could keenly feel the weight of Lance’s glare. It bore down upon him, feeling very much like someone had tipped a bucket of icy cold water on him.

Keith knew it wasn’t actually Lance doing anything to him. He couldn’t do anything while that barrier was up. Yet, for some reason, he just couldn’t move. He felt like he was just frozen there. Stuck.

Red rumbled, her heat flowing through him and thawing the sudden cold which locked his muscles. She nudged at him again, wrapping him up with herself like she was a heated blanket straight from the dryer.

He swallowed thickly and marched forward, ignoring the quiet whoosh of the doors as they closed behind him. He forced himself to ignore the feel of Lance’s gaze, focusing instead on Pidge as he approached. He stopped only a few steps away from her.

“I wonder if we could synthesis the quintessence Lance is addicted to.” Pidge muttered. “If only we could get another sample.”

Keith felt Lance’s gaze move off him, and it was only then that Keith moved his own gaze from Pidge to Lance. The barrier faintly distorted Lance’s features, but there was no denying that he was grinning sharply. Keith would almost hazard to say that the expression was less of a smile and a more of a baring of teeth.
“Lower this barrier, Pidge, and I’ll give you all the samples you want.” Lance crooned. Dark violet energy sparked as it circled around the hand pressed against the barrier.

Pidge scoffed. “Not a chance.” Her typing paused, presumably so she could look up and give Lance an unimpressed look as if to say ‘really? You really thought I’d fall for that?’

“Awh, c’mon Pidge. Do you really think I’d hurt you?” Lance’s smile turned strained.

“Yes. Yes, I do.”

Lance laughed. While it wasn’t actually different, it wasn’t the same laugh that Keith was familiar with. It wasn’t the happy noise that had echoed through the halls of the castle. This laugh sounded broken, reminding Keith of shattered glass.

“Alright. That was a stupid question.” Lance drummed his fingers against the barrier. Tap, tap, tap, tap. In quick succession. The noise changed with each repetition, and it was only then that Keith noticed the nails lengthening and sharpening into something similar to Galra claws.

Right. Lance was Altean, which meant he had limited shape-shifting capabilities.

“Fascinating.” Pidge breathed, and Keith looked down at her to see her leaning forward, eyes wide as she stared at the claws. Keith had no such impulse. He was already far more acquainted with those claws than he ever wanted to be.

Phantom pain from where they’d struck him before echoed for a second before Red brushed it away with a touch of warmth.

“Aren’t they?” Lance asked, he pulled his hand away from the barrier, and turned his hand so his palm was facing towards himself. “I could give you a personal demonstration of them, if you’d like?”

“I think we’ve had enough demonstration already.” Keith didn’t know what possessed him to speak. He crossed his arms over his chest and tried not to feel like he was hugging himself as Lance’s gaze immediately fell upon him.

“Keith.” Lance murmured. His voice wasn’t softer than when he spoke to Pidge, but it was lighter.

He shifted, moving so he was on his knees and closer to the barrier. He let go of the necklace to put both hands against the barrier. The blue of the barrier already cast Lance in shades of blue, darkening his eyes to the point they looked nearly black. Coupled with the claws, Lance didn’t even look like he could have once been human.

His eyes dropped to half lidded as he looked up at Keith. Lance smiled, giving Keith a sharper version of the smile he’d given Pidge not even a few moments ago.

“When I get out of here,” Lance paused, running one of his hands down the barrier. The barrier sparked where his claws scratched against it. “I’m going to enjoy ripping you limb from limb for what you did to Xana.”

His threat delivered, Lance let himself fall back so he was sitting on his heels, and then he shifted again, moving so he was sitting crossed legged again.

Keith’s breath felt like it froze in his lungs, and not even Red’s heat was enough to thaw it. His blood rushed in his ears, and he couldn’t swallow. Lance’s threat echoed in his ears, and not for
one second did Keith doubt it.

Xana must have been the Druid partner that Keith had killed. Quiznak, he knew what had happened with the Druid would make this all so much more difficult, be he hadn’t anticipated a threat like that.

Like Keith, Pidge seemed to be stunned into silence, only she recovered quicker. Perhaps because the threat wasn’t aimed at her. “Why?” She asked. “Why do you hate us so much? What did we do?”

Lance’s gaze slid from Keith to Pidge. He contemplated her for a moment, an expression akin to pity flashing on his face for a second before being covered by the mask of terrifying amusement he’d been showing them thus far.

“Oh, Pidge.” He sighed. “It’s not about what you did. Not anymore, not technically. It’s about what you didn’t do.” He leaned forward and smiled. It was gentler than his past smiles, and it wasn’t for the threat he’d just delivered, Keith might have thought this was the Lance from before. “Let me go, and I’ll go easy on you, I promise. I’ll even make it painless for you.”

Pidge flinched at Lance’s words, and Keith finally moved to step forward and half block her from Lance. Logically, he knew she was safe so long as Lance was behind the barrier, but he didn’t care.

“Don’t talk to her like that!” Keith shouted.

“Oh.” Lance blinked up at him. “And how are you going to stop me?” Lance asked. “Mute and ignore me like you usually do? You gonna treat me the same way you did Xana and use that fancy sword against me? Or are you gonna toss me back out into space? Abandon me again?”

Keith ignored Lance’s first comments, but the last bit he couldn’t let be. They didn’t abandon Lance. Lance had left them. Keith refused to be accused of a crime he’d never committed.

“No! We never abandoned you, Lance! Never!”

“Then why didn’t you come for me!?” Lance surged up with a roar. Dark blue – although Keith knew it was actually purple – electricity encircled Lance as he shouted, bouncing off the barrier before disappearing into the air. “I waited! I waited for you guys, and you never came for me!”

“Lance!” Coran’s voice was as sharp as a gunshot, startling all three. The lightning around Lance died down dramatically. “If you keep stressing yourself like that, you’ll kill yourself.”

Given how Lance had been reacting to them, Keith expected him to snap back ‘good, I’d rather die than stay here with you’ or something. But instead Lance’s whole body seemed to slump. He reached up and touched his necklace as the lightning disappeared completely.

“No come back?” Pidge prompted. Lance looked at her, narrowing his eyes.

“Not one I’d waste on you.” He said after a few moments. He pressed his back to the barrier, and pulled his knees up to his chest. “I’m done talking to you. None of you will understand.”

Keith frowned, kneeling down so he was more eye level with Lance. “Then help us understand. We want to help you.”

Lance scoffed, but he didn’t reply.
Keith sighed and looked away. It seemed like he wasn’t going to get anything more out of Lance now. But at least they’d gotten something from him.

Lance had waited for them when he’d been stranded. Lance had waited for them for days before he left. Keith already knew this, but for some reason, it only just now hit Keith that that was the reason Lance had been so convinced that they abandoned him.

Keith’s hand curled into a fist again as he fought the urge to try to talk to Lance more, to try to prove to Lance that they didn’t abandon him. The only reason he didn’t was because he knew that nothing he said right now would mean anything to Lance.

Lance wouldn’t listen to a single thing any of them said, especially if it came from Keith.

Keith stood up, and turned to look at Coran. Behind Coran, Hunk was leaning against the cryopod, looking between them all in silent shock. “I’m leaving.” Keith announced before turning away.

His presence wasn’t helping anything at all. If anything, Keith would hazard to say that it was making the situation worse.

“That’s right. Leave, Keith, it’s all you ever do anyways.” Lance called out as Keith passed the threshold of the room. His comments hurt, but Keith didn’t turn around or acknowledge them. He knew if he did, then he’d say things he’d regret again.

The doors slid shut behind him and for the first time in ages, Keith headed down to the training deck.

Chapter End Notes

Here’s the two birthday pics that I received for this fic! :3 :)

Link and Link!

Special thanks to Muffarino and Stingynachos for awesomeness! :) :D :3
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith went to speak with Lance to try to get him to open up and be less hostile. They all knew it wouldn't be something instant, but Keith still wasn't prepared for how hostile and threatening Lance was.

(This Chapter is Beta'd, but it was done at 4AM. There may still be mistakes. Please let me know if you find any. Thank you)

**Sorry this is so late. I had two Chapters written, but I couldn't figure out which one to post first, and so right before I fell asleep on 'Sunday' (Monday Morning), I came across the Idea of Merging the Two Chapters. I overslept, and couldn't do it before work... and then I got to work and started... and then I got some pretty crappy news which put me off writing for a good couple hours.

I really wanted to post this chapter tho, so... when I got home, I got to work on it. Hope you guys enjoy! :)

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Memories, Truths, Swear Words, Implied Unwanted Sexual Advances, Quintessence, Evil Jewelry, Implied and Referenced Substance Addiction and Abuse, Heavy Themes.

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

If left alone, darkness had a habit of festering. Especially if that darkness was inside one’s heart.

Even in the brightness of the Altean castle-ship, Lance could feel it. It being his own personal darkness, which festered inside him. It seemed darker despite the brightness of the infirmary. Or perhaps it was darker in spite of it. The darkest shadows were often a result of the brightest lights.

His particular darkness gnawed at the edges of his chest, fed by his own loneliness and despair.

He’d been abandoned again, and although it was exactly what Lance had wanted, the thought still stung. Well, it was and wasn’t what he wanted. He didn’t want to be alone, he didn’t want to be abandoned… but he didn’t want to be with the Voltron team. He didn’t want them to talk to him and try to ‘fix’ him.

There was nothing about him that needed to be fixed. Lotor had had taken care of everything. They had broken him, and Lotor had pieced him together, giving him everything that Lance could have ever wanted or needed.
The loneliness and despair he felt now wasn’t fixable by the Voltron team. They’d only make it worse. None of them would ever be able to fit into the void that Xana’s death and Lotor’s missing presence had created.

The only thing that Lance could hope for was a swift reunion with Lotor. Surely his prince would make Lance feel better, just as he always had. He would be able to sweep away the pain of losing Xana and wrap him up in a warm embrace of being wanted and needed.

Team Voltron couldn’t do that. The only thing they could do for Lance was break him down and hurt him. The events of the last quintant alone was proof enough of that.

The most important of those events – besides Lance’s capture – being Xana’s murder. Keith had killed him right before Lance’s eyes, and there had been nothing that Lance could have done to prevent it. All that Druid training, and he’d still failed the last of his true family.

And then he’d been shoved into this tiny quarantine barrier, where he’d been left like an animal on display at the zoo for the other Paladins. Pidge and Keith came to see him, to mock him. Pidge spoke about his ‘addiction’ and Keith offered to ‘help’ him.

Ha.

At least when Lotor had offered his assistance, he’d never left Lance to rot in a tiny cell. Instead, he’d taken Lance to his private rooms. He’d allowed Lance nice food, and a nice place to stay, and a nice bathroom to wipe the filth of life off himself.

Lotor had offered sanctuary. How could the Paladins of Voltron even hope to compare?

At least Coran had been nice enough to expand the barrier and dim the lights before he left. After Keith had stormed off, Pidge hadn’t taken too long to follow. It’d only been a matter of time before the others followed suite.

Keith wasn’t the only one who was always leaving. If it wasn’t Keith, leaving everyone behind and running ahead, then it was Pidge wanting to leave to search for her family. And if those two weren’t trying to leave, then Shiro was disappearing.

Honestly, it seemed that the only reliable member of the team was Hunk, but even he had wanted to leave Voltron in the beginning. Even Hunk had left Lance behind, before in the Galra ship, and now.

When Pidge called it a night, Hunk – who’d only just left his cryopod – had been more than happy to agree; practically skipping to the doors of the infirmary to escape being in the same room as Lance. Not that Lance really blamed him, Hunk had never had a strong heart. Not in the ways that mattered anyways.

He’d never be able to look at Lance again without remembering Lance trying to kill him, and really, Lance wouldn’t have it any other way. Hunk deserved it… they all did, for what they’d done to Lance. He hoped they all realized that, and he hoped that the guilt – if they had any – was eating them away from the inside out.

Not surprisingly, Coran had been the last to leave. He expanded the particle barrier out to one of the walls; where he explained there was a pull-out bed if Lance wanted to use it. Then he dimmed the lights and wished Lance a ‘good night’.

Ha.
Like Lance would be getting any sleep. Even dimmed, the lights were much too bright, especially when he was used to the dim darkness of Lotor’s ship. And if he somehow manage to ignore the brightness, he still wouldn’t be getting any sleep. Even on Lotor’s ship, he’d had issues sleeping the past few quintants.

Lance was far too used to the warmth of Lotor’s body against his, and the secure feeling of being wanted. Lotor was everything Lance could have wanted, and more. It was for that reason that Lance knew that only Lotor would be able to fill the void inside him. He just needed to wait for Lotor to come and do so.

It wouldn’t be long, by Lance’s estimation. Surely Lotor would have been informed of his capture by now, and if he hadn’t, then Lotor would be at least suspicious from Lance missing their nightly conversations.

Lotor was no doubt aware of Lance’s absence, although Lance didn’t expect to be rescued instantly. Lotor was restricted by the meeting with High Priestess Haggar, and the needs of the Empire. Lotor couldn’t just drop everything for Lance, no matter how nice it’d be.

It’d take time, but Lance was certain that Lotor – or at the very least, Lotor’s generals – would come save him.

However, no matter how certain Lance was of this, it didn’t make the wait any more pleasant. At least the Voltron crew had been nice enough to leave him his necklace as a comfort, although they’d stolen his bracelet. What they wanted with it was anyone’s guess.

Lance stroked the gem of the necklace, letting out a quiet sigh as the quintessence inside resonated with his own.

The resonating of the quintessence was calming, like a balm to a sunburn. If that sunburn was quintessence exhaustion. He’d pushed himself a bit too much there, and Coran hadn’t been wrong when he said that if Lance continued as he had, he’d exhaust his personal stores and likely die.

Lance was many things; a sharpshooter, a Druid, a lover, the consort to the Prince/future Emperor of the Galra Empire; but he was not suicidal.

Especially since he knew he only had to wait a bit before either a) an opportunity arose for him to escape, or b) Lotor found him and saved him. It’d be wise for him to save his strength for now.

He glanced at the wall where the pull-out bed was and wrinkled his nose at the thought of it. He’d rather pass his time meditating. At least it’d be somewhat productive, and it would give him a chance to take in everything that had happened and consider his options and choices.

The only problem was that mediation usually equaled relaxed, and right now, Lance was far too wired to relax. After everything that had happened, and where he was now, he just didn’t think relaxing was possible. But... he needed it to be.

If he kept stressing like this, then he wouldn’t be in any shape to take advantage of an opportunity when it came around. Not to mention he was only going to physically and mentally exhaust himself as well. No. He needed to relax, and he needed to meditate.

Lance took in a deep breath and then released it, stroking the jewel of the necklace with his thumb. Once again, he felt the quintessence resonate. A figurative light bulb went off above Lance’s head. Quintessence.

That was what Xana had always recommended to use to help one mediate. Lance had used it in the
very beginning, before he’d learned how to manipulate it. All he needed to do was let the quintessence help him mediate.

He focused on the flow of the quintessence, how it was bundled up inside the necklace, how it resonated with himself. He imagined the quintessence washing over him, washing through him. At the edge of his awareness, he felt *something* brush against him, hesitantly reaching out to him as if afraid of him snapping at it.

The presence was foreign at first, but then Lance recognized it and his spirits soared. The corner of his lips curled upwards as he, for all intents and purposes, opened himself up to Blue.

~

Allura frowned down at the quintessence gems.

It had taken her some effort, but she had removed them from the bracelet and had separated them out. Given the low quantity, the last thing she wanted was to ruin them all and forever remove any chances of restoring Lance to his former self.

So far, she had only been able to ‘cleanse’ one of the gems. It now shined with a pale turquoise light indicative of pure unaltered quintessence instead of the pale purple of the corruption.

To her shock, it had been resilient against her, resisting against new quintessence being introduced.

Even now, after several slight prods and the new color change, she could feel some resistance. She feared that she hadn’t managed to cleanse it at all, but rather had diluted the corruption by pouring in enough clean quintessence.

She didn’t know if in time, that corruption would infect the quintessence she’d added, and eventually cause the crystal to resume its corrupted state.

She didn’t know much about the corruption. She didn’t know how it functioned, or how it worked, or even if it *could* infect pure quintessence and corrupt it.

Which was certainly no help for Lance. She couldn’t just pour new quintessence into him and hope for the best. She couldn’t imagine it being good for him, or anyone really. There was just no guarantee that he’d survive anything like that.

And if he did, then who knew what state he’d be in afterwards.

Besides, without an amplifier, like a crystal, the ship, or a Balmera, Allura just didn’t have the quintessence stores to even attempt to flush the corruption out of Lance. She barely managed to cleanse Blue, and even that was severely taxing on her.

This all was just too dangerous.

It was almost enough for her to despair. She wanted to give up, but she knew she couldn’t. If she couldn’t fix Lance, then she would have no hope to repair the damage done to her people who served under the Galra. Not to mention the fact that if Lance died, she was fairly certain that the current Paladins would cause problems.

Regardless of her personal feelings about Lance, he was much too important for her to give up on. There was too much riding on her success. She couldn’t fail. Not now. Not on this.
Like with so much in her life, this was something Allura wasn’t allowed to fail. She wasn’t allowed to give up. She couldn’t, and thus, she wouldn’t.

She put the ‘cleansed’ gem off to the side, far away from the other crystals, so that it wouldn’t be ‘infected’ by them. She didn’t know if that was a thing, but she wasn’t going to take an unnecessary risk if she didn’t have to.

She picked up one of the other gems, holding it up to examine it better. She pursed her lips, wishing, not for the first time, that she’d been given some form of training in alchemy.

She sighed, putting the crystal down.

There was an annoying headache that wouldn’t cease, a dull low throb that told her that she’d been pushing herself too much lately. But what other choice did she have? She had to do this. For Lance, for her People, for the Universe.

The world swayed as she stepped away from the desk. Between her fight with Lance, and trying to figure out the mystery of the corruption, and cleansing the Blue Lion… Wait a tick.

That was an idea!

The Blue Lion was tied to Lance. If anyone would have an idea as to how to solve this, it would be the Lion affected. Or so Allura hoped. It was a long shot, but crazier things had happened before in the favor of these human Paladins.

Allura wasted no time on her way to the Blue Hangar, only to stop and hesitate outside the door. Coran had asked her not to visit without another person with her, but… Time was of the Essence. She didn’t have time to go and track down one of the others to accompany her here. Besides, she was certain that if she informed Blue of her intentions to help Lance, then perhaps the Blue Lion would not be as hostile.

And the Lion had been cleansed recently. Surely, that would help make things easier as well.

Allura nodded to herself, and without further delay, triggered the door and confidently stepped through. The Blue Lion had been sitting, dull and powerless until Allura stepped past the threshold. The moment Allura stepped through, the Blue Lion flickered to life, letting out a low growl.

Allura faltered, staring up at the lion. She had cleansed it recently, hadn’t she? Only a quintant or so ago? Maybe a little more than that?

The Blue Lion shouldn’t have been so… hostile, so… corrupted so soon.

Was it due to Lance’s close proximity? Was it possible that it was accelerating the corruption? If so, then what was to stop it from traveling across the Voltron Bond and corrupting the others? The mental timeline in Allura’s head was sped up.

Time truly was of the essence now.

She didn’t have the time to wait to cleanse the Blue Lion. She’d do it now, while she was here. If she wanted to ask the Lion’s assistance with Lance, then she would have to. She stepped forward, bolstered by the simple fact that this needed to be done.

She stared down the Lion and raised her voice. “I want to help Lance.” She announced. She
wanted to help Lance, she wanted to help her People… she wanted to help the Universe.

Please, she mentally prayed, let this at least go her way for once. Let things start to work for her, instead of always against her.

Her words echoed in the chamber, and for a heartbeat, it was the only noise. Then it fell silent, and silence reigned supreme. The words Allura had spoken were overshadowed by that silence and consumed, like they had never existed at all.

Yet they had existed. She had spoken them.

The Lion moved without warning to lean down and look at Allura; and it was only thanks to her familiarity with the Lions and her diplomatic training that Allura didn’t flinch. Instead Allura stepped forward, raising her hand up. The Blue Lion’s muzzle was cold against her hand, but her touch had been accepted.

It was always a bit of a startle to touch the Blue Lion and receive the cold instead of the warmth she’d come to expect from the Lions due to her many interactions with her father’s Lion. The Red Lion had always been so warm and welcoming, despite her temperamental nature.

She feared that if she were to touch the Red Lion now, she’d be scorched by the same heat which had once been a comfort. The Red Lion was no longer her father’s lion, just as the Blue Lion was no longer Blaytz’s.

The Lions had chosen new Paladins, and while Allura could disagree for as long as she wanted, it wouldn’t change anything. She may not agree with Lance being the Blue Paladin, as his betrayals against her and the team ran too deep for her to forgive now.

He had betrayed and abandoned the team, and then had returned corrupted and consumed with the idea of hurting them.

But no matter her feelings on Lance… her hands were tied. Her father had often advised her to change the things she could and to accept the things she couldn’t. Lance was no exception here. The Blue Lion had spoken, and the message had been painfully clear.

Lance was the Blue Paladin, regardless of Allura’s opinion. There was no changing it, only accepting it.

“I don’t agree with him as your Paladin.” She could feel the Lion’s ire at her words as she spoke, but this was something that needed to be said. “But he is your Paladin, and I understand you will not let him go.”

The Blue Lion rumbled quietly, not a purr or a growl, but just a low rumble of acknowledgement. Allura rolled her lips and considered her next words carefully.

“You may not have a choice, however, if things continue as they have.”

Once more, silence was cast over the hangar as Blue’s rumble cut off abruptly at Allura’s words. “I want to help him.” Allura reassured the Lion quickly. “But I need your assistance. May I help you, so that you may show me how to help him?”

At the end of her question, she took a deep breath and closed her eyes, leaning forward to press her forehead against the Lion. She shivered from the cold but didn’t move except to breath out slowly.

She pushed herself forward without physically moving, reaching out for the Blue Lion more than
just physically. The Blue Lion didn’t reach for her, but neither did they move away. They remained still against her as she poured fresh quintessence from herself.

Perhaps it was because she was tired, perhaps it was the exhaustion, but it felt like an eternity that she stood there, pouring quintessence and herself into the Blue Lion, trying to flush out the corruption. Her hands were shaking; no, her whole body was shaking from the amount of quintessence she poured into the Blue Lion to wash away the corruption, and yet it still wasn’t enough.

She felt a moment of doubt. If she were a proper alchemist, then she would have been able to pull the corruption out instead of just diluting and flushing it out. She would be able to properly help Lance too. Instead, she was here, asking the Blue Lion for assistance.

The Blue Lion rumbled, reassuring Allura. The cold Allura was pressed against started to seep into her, slowly at first before picking up speed. The cold wrapped itself around her body, leaving her frozen like she was trapped in a block of ice.

The cold washed over her, flooding her system. It knocked the air from her lungs, and made it hard to breath, like she was drowning in the cold.

She had reached out to the Blue Lion, and it seemed the Blue Lion was finally reaching back.

~

Lance’s hand fell from the necklace as Blue fell over him, settling around him like she’d never been gone. The connection between them wasn’t as extreme as the one in the Astral Plane. This one was more familiar and comfortable, yet bittersweet too.

Connecting with Blue again was like walking into a childhood home after years of being away. There was a sense of rightness inside of him, like he was where he finally needed to be. It soothed away the itch left by the void of Lotor’s absence, and the pain of the team’s abandonment.

Blue nudged him, sending a wave of emotion through the connection. Annoyance, elation, worry, hope, glee, sorrow. A melody of feelings, some flashing and disappearing in the flood of Blue too quick for Lance to properly catch.

She was annoyed at him. Annoyed that it had taken him this long to come back to her, that it had taken him this long to reach out to her. Yet she was elated, for he had reached out to her, and he was there. He was back.

Blue nudged him again, this time questioningly. Lance knew the question, and didn’t hesitate before agreeing, allowing Blue to drown him in herself.

He opened himself up further to Blue, gasping as he synced with her. He’d forgotten the sensation until just now, and for a tick, Lance nearly panicked. He didn’t, and so Blue dragged him deeper and deeper into the depths.

The deeper they went, the more they intertwined, until Lance couldn’t pull away even if he wanted to. Her was her, and she was him, and they were together, yet not. At the surface, there was a ripple on the water, the sensation of skimming fingers through the water’s surface.

Lance wanted to investigate, but Blue kept him in the depths, reassuring him that it was nothing. Particles of light drifted through the depths, falling from the surface and glittering in sun shafts that
twisted through the water.

This deep the sight shouldn’t have existed. Yet it did, and its existence mesmerized Lance. Everything seemed to sigh in relief, and Lance looked up to the surface, wondering yet again what was causing it.

Blue pulled him away, distracting him with memories. Memories of the team, of their triumphs and their failures – like the ill-fated cheerleader pyramid.

And then the memories grew less pleasant. Memories Lance didn’t want to remember flashed before him. Memories Lance wanted to deny existing, but here they were, undeniably real.

*The laughter of Druids.* Static. *Xana.*

He kicked out, pushing away and moving for the surface, but he couldn’t. Blue pulled him back down and dragged the memories out of the depths.

Lance needed to know, and she didn’t know if she’d ever have this opportunity again.

Opportunity for what? Lance didn’t know, he didn’t want to know, but it didn’t matter. Like a parent forcing their child to eat their vegetables, Lance was forced to stay, to watch the memories he’d rather forget.

“I wondered why Haggar took such a long time with you. It’s not often we get to experiment with someone with a blue base.”

The feel of Xana’s scales under his fingers, like peeling paint or papery tree bark.

“No matter, I’ll fix it. Don’t worry, you won’t remember a thing; I promise.”

No. No, no, no. Xana wouldn’t but he had. He had once, twice, too many times. Time and time again.

*Petyr’s voice.* A conversation between him and Xana that Lance wasn’t meant to hear. “You went too far. You’ve created a monster.”

No. Lance didn’t… Xana had just died, Lance didn’t want to know this. Blue didn’t care, and the memories continued, pouring through Lance like a dam had broken.

“She’s very interested in your project.”

Lance had wondered about that at the time, but… he didn’t… He didn’t know.

“Speaking of, what’s Project Fidelite? It says you’re assigned to it, but Petyr was the last one in it.”

Xana had pushed the subject away. He’d said it was a secret. High Preistess Haggar’s orders. It’d been him. He’d been Project Fidelite. No. No, Xana was family. He wouldn’t have hurt Lance. He wouldn’t have.

“Careful. Lady Haggar had to have the Prince present when he was like this during his initial conditioning. He’s calmer with him present.”

*Static,* a woman humming, a velvet honey voice.

“Well, the Prince isn’t here now, is he?”
Except Xana had. He’d hurt Lance so much, more than Lance knew, more than Lance thought possible. But the prince… Lotor, he hadn’t hurt Lance.

He felt Blue’s pity for a tick, and then he was washed over with a new wave of truths he didn’t want.

*Lance’s scales being touched. Why were Lance’s scales always being touched? So much touching. Unwanted.*

…Lance didn’t mind it when Lotor touched him. He liked it when Lotor touched him, he just didn’t like anyone else touching him.

*The slimy feel of possession and obsession.*

That was at first! Lance’s feelings changed as…

*The scents of Bsët, so heady and heavy, Lotor’s fingers in his mouth, Lance in his lap. Lotor touching him, petting him.*

“Such a good boy.”

He hadn’t done anything… then. He’d waited for Lance… for…

“Why don’t we have some fun?”

*The taste of Kanki. Lance denied him, and he kept pushing, more and more.*

Stop. Please, Blue. Just stop.

“That’s it, pet. Just like that.”

STOP!

Lance tumbled from the water onto his hands and knees. The harsh cold and sharpness of the ice stung against his palms. Black water washed up around him, clinging to him desperately. If he cared to listen, it had voices now, whispers barely heard above the wind.

The voices of a thousand doubts, reassurances, and manipulations. Xana, Petyr, Lotor, and even his own voice, lost in the sea of corruption that had festered inside him like some parasitic disease.

He hadn’t just drunk the Kool-Aid, he’d fucking drowned in it.

He’d been so blind, even with Sonali pointing it out to him. Even with Blue crying about it. He should have listened to them. He should have known better. He should have kept his wits about himself better. Maybe if he had, then he wouldn’t have ended up like this.

As if reacting to his thoughts, a wave of corruption washed over him, trying to pull him back into the ocean he’d been complacent in drowning in before. Well, no more.

He was done with that. With just letting the corruption toss him around and control him. He got up on one knee. The weight of his robes – soaked in corruption – was almost enough to send him back down to his hands and knees, especially once another wave crashed into him.

He didn’t topple; not at the first wave. He pushed himself up, and his foot hit a patch of slick ice. Lance didn’t falter, even as he hit the ground. He was already moving, pushing himself back up, standing up. His legs were shaky under the weight of his robe, under the weight of the corruption.
He couldn’t stay down. He couldn’t just let the corruption keep him down. He refused to be unknowingly used anymore. There’d be no avoiding being used, but he’d choose what he was used for. He wasn’t just somebody’s pet experiment.

He stood on the ice shelf and turned around to look out at the ocean. It was a dazzling glittering sea of black corruption, and the sight of it turned Lance’s stomach. Man, he’d really fucked up.

“We cannot continue.”

Clearly Blue agreed.

Lance’s heart thundered in his chest at Blue’s words. She’d spoken them before, but he hadn’t understood then. She was telling him the truth then, a truth he hadn’t wanted to hear. He hadn’t wanted to hear it until she held him down and forced him to hear it.

And while he could be mad at her… he was tired of being mad. He was tired of being sad, and he was tired of being tired. He needed a mental health day, but he knew that would never happen. Not while his Astral Plane looked like this.

In any case, he understood Blue’s words now.

He would always be hers, and she would always be his… but if he continued to let himself drown in his corruption, if he continued to be complacent, then he wouldn’t be him anymore. He’d be someone new, someone crafted by the Galra, and the Lance that was her’s would be dead.

They could not continue like that. Not with the distance between them. Not with the corruption corroding the connection between them. He’d become Blue’s Zarkon, and that… that was unacceptable.

There would be no escaping the corruption. Not entirely. Too much of it was in Lance, like a drop of black paint in a can of white. He was stained… but if he worked to clean it now, then that was all it would stay: a stain. A twisted scar from a horrible accident, serving only as a horrible reminder of his mistakes.

“I know.”

Lance was familiar with heavy. The robes and corruption were heavy. The truths Blue had shown him were heavy. Yet none of that weight compared to the words Lance spoke.

Ice collapsed from the cliff in the distance. Wind filled with ice hit him. It hurt, tearing away at him, but when it was over, he felt lighter. The robes had been shredded away, leaving him standing on the ice shelf in his normal attire.

Had he the energy, he would have made an Elsa joke.

“You know what must happen.”

Yes. Yes he did know. He needed to get this cleaned up. He couldn’t carry on with this mess. It’d be a lot for him to try to clean up on his own, but without new corruption pouring in as it had before, he should be able to handle it better now.

He just needed to get it manageable by the time Lotor or one of the Generals showed up. With this crap influencing him – no matter how little – who knew what choices he would make.

Of course, it’d be easier to clean this up if he had help, but… the chances of that were unlikely.
The only help he’d get was from Blue, and there was only so much that Blue could do. Especially when he’d burdened her so much already.

Even if he had help, it would take time and effort to fix this up. And the effects wouldn’t be immediate. Sometimes choices made in the Astral Plane carried over immediately, and sometimes they took time to show in the real world.

He had a funny sinking feeling that the cleaning of this place was something that’d take time to show. Especially considering he did have a bit of a problem with quintessence, something he could see now that Blue had sobered him up some.

He’d probably be a horrible person to his friends for a while yet, although he still felt they deserved it… to some degree… he knew that was the corruption talking. It would take him a while to be able to sort out the difference between what was him and what was the monster that he’d been made into.

He’d done enough damage to his friends.

They’d been sufficiently punished for how they’d treated him. He could see it now, in how they looked at him. If his absence had hit them like a knife to the side, then his return had been that knife being twisted.

There was already so much pain… and there’d be more yet to come. The sky was always darkest before the dawn, right?

There was a flicker of something out of the corner of his eye and he turned to see Blue; gleaming, and clean, and beautiful. Lance would have been surprised, if it wasn’t for who was standing next to her.

Briefly, Lance wondered how she had gotten here. But, she’d come here before. He’d felt her, touched her through Blue, and snarled at her. She wasn’t connected to Lance, but she was connected to Blue, and it was through Blue that she’d found her way here.

When this was all over – if this was ever over – he’d have to bring up the idea of Astral Planes being similar to ‘hearts’ from *Kingdom Hearts*, what with the connections and the bonds, and ‘representations of self’. Pidge, at the very least, would find the theory amusing.

Heavy emphasis on the ‘if’, at least for Lance.

Knowledge from Blue had filtered into Lance during the sync, and it was now that pieces of it came to mind. There was only so much that could be done, and to be honest, if he was standing in her shoes, he would have made the same choice.

It was one way to resolve this, he supposed. And, perhaps, the easiest. Blue growled, voicing her disagreement, but Lance paid her little mind. Instead, he addressed the other person in his Astral Plane.

~

Allura was thrust into the cold, spun around and twisted. There were voices in it, some louder and some quieter and some that made Allura’s skin crawl. She couldn’t hear the words, but in the distance, she could see something.
She reached for it, and found…

An icy cliff overlooking a black corrupted ocean. A storm in the distance, ever growing closer. The storm rumbled as purple lightning danced across the clouds.

“We cannot continue.”

A quiet voice, broken glass, no, broken ice washing up on a shore.

Ice cracked as it shattered, as sudden and loud as a crashing of a ship. There was the steady grind of it falling, and the thundering noise of it as it broke the water’s surface and collapsed into the ocean. The waves crashed against the ice, and splattered corruption with each collusion.

There were voices in the waves, too quiet to be heard. A low whisper almost lost to the wind.

“I know.”

A hooded person slipped on the sheet of ice. They stood as soon as they fell, refusing to stay down despite how heavy their robes must be. The wind caught on the robes which dissolved into a flurry of glittering black ice and revealing the person standing underneath.

He turned to face her.

He was wearing his normal attire. The familiar brown jacket, and what the humans called ‘jeans’, but his face was different. His gaze was softer, sadder, older, but there were more differences than that. His eyes had touches of orange in them, instead of being plain blue, and below them were glittering blue eye scales.

“You know what must happen.” The same shattered ice voice, just as quiet as before.

She didn’t expect so much sorrow when he smiled. Lance opened his mouth, and spoke.

“Are you here to kill me, Allura?”

“Allura?!”

Lance’s voice was overlaid with another person’s. Something wrapped itself around Allura, inside Allura, and tugged. The tug was more than just physical, it was spiritual. She flailed, not coming back to herself so much as being slammed back into herself.

“What were you thinking?!” Keith’s voice roared, but it couldn’t overpower the quiet tones of Lance’s voice echoing in her mind.

Chapter End Notes

I will not be able to post on Monday, 2-12-18.

My sister is attempting to sell her house so she can move into MY House which I'm renting from my Parents. I CANNOT move until my sister can take over the bills.

My sister has been informed that she won't sell her house unless it's empty, so she's been trying to push me into letting her move in. I said no, so... she decided to move in
without basically move in. That means her 2 dogs and cat is now at my house, along with basically All of her furniture. She's filled the Garage, one of the rooms upstairs, the Sunroom, and the Parlor... and she keeps bringing more.

Furthermore, she's constantly complaining about the house and things that *I* need to do to make it better for her. :/

Basically, I get up, I go to work, I deal with her texting me while at work. I come home, I pack up and empty rooms only for her to fill with junk later, and then go to bed around 6 AM. I wake up at 2PM, get ready for work, go to work... and the process repeats all over again.

I haven't had time to write. I haven't had time to do anything more than to waste my lunch crying on the phone to my dad about her. (I'd go to Mom since she's actually physically here, but she's made it quite clear that she stands with my sister on this).

I don't know when an update will happen. Ideally, Wednesday or Next Monday. Truthfully, I have no clue. I'll be keeping my Tumblr up to date if any one wants updates.

I apologize for this, and thank you for your support and patience.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet:* Lance and the Blue Lion reconnected. Blue showed Lance some truths that he hadn't wanted to accept, but in the end, there was no denying them.

Meanwhile, Allura was frustrated with her lack of training in Alchemy and lack of progress with 'curing' Lance. She attempted to reach out to the Blue Lion for assistance and found her corrupted.

Allura cleansed the Blue Lion at the same time Lance was with her, allowing Allura and Lance to meet - briefly - in Lance's Astral Plane before Allura was pulled away.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Shouting, Attempted Emotional Manipulation, Brief Reference/Mention of Death/Killing someone.

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com). Thank you!

Keith panted as he took down yet another training sentry. He had just a moment to wipe the beading sweat off his brow before another combatant was dropped into the chamber by the training sequence.

He sunk low, fatigue starting to burn into his muscles as they coiled. In quick movements, he advanced on the sentry, careful to avoid the remains of those he had already dispatched. Keith lost count of how many lay scattered by now, but he knew that it was less than it should have been. He was out of practice, and it showed, at least to him.

It'd been a while since his last real training segment, but that was no excuse for how out of practice he was. He was lucky his lapse in training hadn’t cost the team during their missions.

Red lingered in the back of his mind. Occasionally, she prodded at him, poking at his sore muscles or pointing out areas of improvement. However, for the most part, she was more than content to just laze about, idly watching.

Keith’s gut twisted as he rolled forward, narrowly dodging the sentry’s advance. The unsettling feeling of walking through spiderwebs clung to him, suddenly appearing from nowhere. Red perked up as the sensation hit and let out a deep warning growl.

Keith stumbled, jarred by the mental assault, right into the pummel of the sentry’s sword. A yelp tore through his throat as he tumbled along the floor. He managed to clamber back to his feet just in time to block the sentry’s following assault. Metal sparked between the blades as they clashed.
“End Training Sequence!” Keith grit out, pushing the sentry away as it deactivated. Cold spiderwebs prickled against his skin and the tremors of Red’s growl echoed through his body. “What’s going on?” He asked Red out loud.

Red’s response was almost overwhelming. She was concerned about something, and once more brought to his attention the bonds between him, her, and the Lions. Last time this had happened, Allura had been with Blue, and had he not been there…

His body moved automatically as he tore out of the training room. He bounced off the wall just outside and used it as a springboard to forward his momentum. Adrenaline replaced the fatigue, and it roared in his ears.

He skidded to the door, his hand slapping across the panel as he came to a stop. He was ready to move the moment the doors opened.

That plan was halted as an intense bright light spilled out of the door as it opened, forcing Keith to throw his hands up to shield himself.

It was a futile effort. The light seemed to burn through his entire body, reminiscent of the time he’d touched quintessence before. It was different from the burn of Red’s fire, which flowed through his veins. Her heat was at his back, a steady reassurance of her presence.

He could imagine her pacing in her own hangar; hating the confinement and inability to assist. She couldn’t be there – not easily and not without damaging the ship – so she just warned him to be careful. There were flickers of concern in her rumbles, and the fact she worried for him warmed Keith’s heart.

He pressed forward, into the light. It filled his vision until it was all there was, an endless expanse of impossibly white. It felt like he was being actively pushed back, but there was nothing that could be doing it except for the light.

With one last shove, Keith fell through, almost falling to his knees but catching himself before he could. He blinked, staring in awe and shock at the strange alternative Blue Hanger he found himself in. Everything was cast in a strange brilliant color which seemed to fluctuate between being green, blue, and white without actually changing at all. It pulsed slowly from its epicenter in the middle of the hangar, turning a harsh white at the edges where doors were.

The last time he’d seen anything like this, Allura had been healing the Balmera. Dread started to pool in Keith’s stomach, working its way up to rest in a knot in his throat. If he wasn’t mistaken, Allura had nearly died healing the Balmera.

While Keith had his faults with Allura, the last thing he wanted was for her to die.

The strange energy came up to about mid-calf, and was cool to the touch, unlike the burn of the white light he needed to pass to get here. It sloshed as he tried to run through it to reach Allura and the Blue Lion.

Keith didn’t know what separating Allura from the Blue Lion would cause, but he didn’t spare a second thought to try to figure it out. He just needed to make this all stop. As he finally reached Allura, he forced his arms around her and pulled.

Keith pulled and for a single heartbeat, ice flooded him. There was a quick flash of emotions and senses, which were gone in less than a blink of an eye. It reminded him of the time Lance and Blue had taken the hit meant for him and Red.
Keith continued to pull until the connection broke and Allura fell from the Blue Lion into Keith’s arms.

The light which had been cast over the entire hangar seemed to brighten before shattering and then racing back toward them. It passed through Keith as if he didn’t exist, leaving a lingering chill.

Red was trying to help, and although her fire filled his veins and body, it couldn’t shake the cold in his bones. It left Keith feeling forlorn and miserable, taking away his breath with the intensity of the emotions.

The light fully disappeared as Allura settled into his arms. If he hadn’t seen what happened with his own eyes, then he wouldn’t have believed that anything happened in the hangar at all. Allura’s eyes fluttered open.

“What were you thinking?!” He demanded. She could have died! She shouldn’t have been alone, not here, not with Blue and Lance as they were. What had she even been doing?!

Allura’s mouth fell open a little, and she stared at Keith blankly for barely a second before her eyes lit back up with awareness.

“Lance!” She shouted, pushing Keith away as she spun around. She broke from his grasp only to stumble a few steps away, allowing Keith to catch up to her. He grabbed her by the elbow, forcing her to turn back around to face him.

“What did you do?” He asked her instead. His previous question had been left unanswered. The possible answer of ‘Lance’ didn’t explain anything at all.

“Not now, Keith. I must see Lance.” Her words lacked her usual cadence, instead coming out in a rushed breath. She twisted her arm out of his grasp with a sharp movement and rushed out the door.

Keith followed behind her, irritably realizing that she wasn’t going to give him any answers without him following her.

Red mirrored his irritation as she continued to chase away the cold from whatever Allura had done. She had almost finished, and Keith made a mental note to thank her more personally later.

The doors to the medical bay opened slowly, perhaps too slowly based on Allura’s impatient huff. She marched into the room, having composed herself on the way there. Keith stepped in behind her, blinking at the dimmed lights, and the slightly bigger quarantine cell.

Coran must have done that, perhaps for Lance’s comfort. He wasn’t a prisoner after all, not really. Even if he was currently a murderous ball of hatred. Except, he wasn’t currently a murderous ball of hatred.

Lance was sitting cross-legged on the floor, with his head titled down towards his chest like he’d fallen asleep sitting up.

Keith approached quietly, ignoring Allura for the moment to examine Lance while he appeared to be at peace. He knelt down on the floor next to the barrier and tilted his head as he noticed the ever so faint glowing of the scales under Lance’s eyes. His mouth was barely open, and his breath escaped it in small little white puffs, like it was below freezing in the room.

He turned back to look at Allura and frowned. She had stopped not far from where Keith was,
staring down at Lance with wide eyes. One of her hands was raised to her chest, while the other was barely stretched out towards Lance.

“It was real.” She whispered so quietly that had there been any other noise in the bay, Keith might not have heard her. But he did. What was real? He looked back to Lance.

“Allura?” Keith questioned quietly as to not wake Lance.

It didn’t work, as Lance’s eye lids fluttered open, and he froze, looking at Allura.

They both stared at each other, and Keith felt that he was missing something. Something important. Allura stepped forward, lowering her hands and taking a deep breath to speak.

“Couldn’t kill me there, so you decided to do it here?” Lance cut her off, but it was Lance’s words that cut into Keith. He swiveled back around to face Allura, his own questions and demands on the tip of his tongue. Yet they fell silent when he saw her.

She seemed shaken. She had faltered, taking a step back instead of forward. She teetered, as if unsure whether she should approach and confront Lance, or to turn tail and run. It wasn’t like Allura to be like this. She tended to confront anything and everything.

It was one of the reasons she and Keith butted heads so much. They were both more stubborn and pig-headed than they probably should have been.

“No.” She whispered. “No. I wasn’t…”

“Wasn’t what?” Lance pressed. “The only way to force break my bond with Blue is to kill me, right? You need the Blue Lion, but not me.”

There was acid to more than just his tone. There was also this sense of certainty and truth to his words. Red had been silent since they entered the room, but now she brushed against Keith, quietly confirming Lance’s words.

The only way to forcibly break a Paladin’s bond with it’s Lion was for the Paladin to be killed.

“What the hell, Allura!?” Keith couldn’t stay silent, standing up and taking a half step as if he could block Lance better than the particle barrier separating him from the others. “You were going to kill Lance?”

She flinched back, her gaze falling on Keith before flickering to Lance behind him. “Look at me, not him!” Keith shouted.

“It was… a consideration,” She started. Keith couldn’t believe what he was hearing. A consideration? Killing Lance had never been on the table. It wasn’t an option, and yet she’d been considering it? They’d briefly spoken about killing Lance as mercy for his addiction, but she’d been persuaded from that thanks to Coran.

“No. No, it wasn’t.” Keith interrupted. “Killing Lance was never an option, and I guarantee that if you do, then you’ll be having more issues than just two out of commission Lions.” Keith wouldn’t stand for Lance dyeing just so Allura could have a new Blue Paladin, and he was willing to bet that neither would Hunk or Pidge.

No matter what Lance had done, no matter how much he had hurt them… he was part of the team; and Keith knew that the Lance that they all knew was somewhere inside this strange murderous one. They just had to find him.
“It was a consideration.” Allura repeated. “One that I decided was not necessary.”

“You didn’t need to decide that! It wasn’t a consideration at all!” Keith shook his head. How many times would he need to explain that to Allura before she finally got it through her head that she couldn’t kill Lance.

He wouldn’t allow it.

“You don’t want me dead, Keith?” Lance’s voice was quiet, but there was no missing it.

Keith looked over his shoulder at Lance. He was standing now, watching Keith with an unreadable look in his eyes. His head was tilted to the side, the way he normally did when he didn’t understand something. Like he could understand it better if he viewed it from another angle.

“No, I don’t.” Keith shook his head. “None of us do.”

“Even after all I’ve done?” Lance asked, his voice breaking halfway through. It might have been Keith’s imagination, but Lance’s eyes seemed shinier, brighter, and wider. His heart hurt with every beat.

“Keith.” Allura’s voice was a quiet warning. Lance’s gaze went to her, and he seemed to shrink in on himself.

“She wants to kill me, Keith. She’s already tried once tonight.”

“Do not listen to him, Keith!”

“Then what were you doing? You wouldn’t tell me.” Keith replied, looking back at Allura. She faltered, biting her bottom lip. Her eyebrows were furrowed, making little creases in her forehead.

“I…”

“Was trying to kill me!” Lance interrupted her, his voice rising with urgency. “And she was gonna try again.”

“No!” Allura shook her head furiously. “I was trying to help him!”

“Then why didn’t you say so earlier?” Keith asked. “I asked you twice.”

Allura shook her head again. “This isn’t supposed to be like this.” She muttered. “You are supposed to be...” She told Lance. “I... I thought you were...I thought I…”

“Thought what?” Lance asked. “That it wouldn’t be so difficult to kill me?”

“That is not true! Keith, you cannot trust him. Not here.”

If not here, then where? Then when? Keith’s head was spinning like a top, except there was no gradual slow down and stop. It just kept spinning and spinning and spinning, pushed along by Lance’s accusations and Allura’s denials.

Was he telling the truth? Was Allura? Who was right, and who was wrong? It was very possible that Lance was just feeding into an opportunity to cause chaos and destruction in the team. Lance had tried to kill him, that was true. Lance had turned against the team and had tried to kill them all.
Yet, he’d seen how focused Allura had been on just the idea of replacing Lance and getting a new Blue Paladin. Here was her chance. She wasn’t the type to just let an opportunity pass.

Who did he trust? What did he believe in?

Lance’s earlier threat echoed in his ears, as did all past arguments with Allura. He shut his eyes, his hands shaking.

He trusted his instincts, but he didn’t know what they were telling him here. If he believed Allura like he wanted to, then he’d lost whatever trust he may have gained with Lance by siding with him thus far. Trust they needed if they wanted Lance to be better.

But was it real? Probably not. Lance didn’t trust them. He wanted to destroy them right now. He wanted to hurt them and tear them apart from within.

“Allura.” Keith opened his eyes and met her gaze. “Were you trying to kill Lance?”

“No.” Her answer was the most Allura thing he’d seen from her yet through this whole encounter. There was so much conviction and honesty behind the answer, that he couldn’t help but to believe her. He nodded, and turned around, facing Lance now.

“Lance, did she try to kill you?” Keith asked.

“Yeah, she did.” Lance didn’t meet his eyes, not properly. Or maybe he did, but it was still… lacking. Keith’s stomach twisted and he frowned at the sensation.

He believed Allura.

“Allura.” He didn’t take his eyes off of Lance as he spoke, even if he was addressing the princess behind him. “Killing Lance is not an option.”

Lance’s eyes narrowed ever so slightly at Keith’s words. Doubtless, he was trying to figure out what was going to happen.

“I agree.” Allura’s voice was quiet, and Keith nodded.

“Good. Glad we can agree on something.”

“So, what? You’re just going to believe her until I don’t wake up?” Lance shook his head.

“I’m going to believe her until you stop lying to me.”

“She was trying to kill me!”

“I don’t know what she was trying to do, but she wasn’t trying to kill you. No one is going to hurt you here, Lance; no matter how much you want to hurt us.”

“I don’t believe you.” Lance finally spoke after a few moments of silence and staring down Keith. He turned away, slumping against one of the barriers and sliding until he was at the bottom.

“Given your past track history.”

“We never meant to hurt you.”

“Tell that to the nights I spent crying myself to sleep.” Lance crossed his arms and looked away.

“I’m done with you.”
Keith sighed, turning back around to find Allura suddenly closer than before. She smiled sadly at him, reaching out to touch his shoulder for a moment before letting her hand drop.

“We should talk.” She nodded to the door before pulling away and exiting. Keith sighed, glancing back at Lance – who was still looking away – before following after her.

Yes, they did need to talk. Keith needed to know what the hell had just happened, and he was going to get his answers. Allura hadn’t gone far, she was standing only a few steps away from the door.

Keith folded his arms as he approached, looking her over and noting the bags forming under her eyes, and the general stance of her body. She was tired and aching. She, like him, presumably just wished this night was over with.

“So, what were you doing?”

“I was trying to help him.” Allura repeated quietly. “Except, I know not how.” She played with the hem of her dress as she spoke, keeping her eyes downcast. Shame. She was ashamed of her failure, something Keith could relate to. “I thought that perhaps the Blue Lion would have an idea.”

He reached out, touching her upper arm and smiling at her when she looked up. She returned the smile briefly as he dropped his hand.

“So, what happened?”

“She needed to be cleansed again. The corruption was so much deeper this time, and I followed it until I found…” She trailed off, looking to the medical bay doors.

“Lance.”

Allura nodded. “I found Lance.” She confirmed. “He wasn’t like this there. We were not able to speak before you pulled me away, but he did ask if I was going to kill him. He seemed… resigned to that.”

“That’s what you meant by not here.” Keith mused.

“Exactly. He wasn’t as influenced by the corruption there, and I assumed that it would have carried over to his waking body. I… mistakenly believed him to be cleansed.”

“Obviously not.”

“Obviously not.” She agreed with a small nod. She crossed her arms and looked down. “I am not sure what to do, Keith.”

The last thing he expected to come from tonight was Allura – of all people – confiding in him her insecurities. He hummed noncommittedly, trying to think of a response he could give her. He didn’t know what to do either, which didn’t help any.

“Keep trying.” Keith replied after a moment of silence. “That’s all any of us can do. If what you saw is true, then Lance is still in there, somewhere. We just need to get him back.”

“And if we cannot?”

“We’ll burn that bridge when we get to it.”
Hey Guys! Sorry about all the breaks I've been taking with updating this fic. I'm trying to work on it when I can, but life doesn't always give you that.

As a Friendly Reminder, my fic is not Canon Compliant after Season 2. When Season 5 drops on Friday, I may pull certain aspects from the new material, but I will not be modifying my fic to make it Canon Compliant.

Thank you! :)

Here's some awesome art from Dhesia and an awesome sketch from 3esty! LINK and LINK.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith interrupted Allura's connection with the Blue Lion. She brought him to Lance, who accused her of trying to kill him. Keith sided with Allura, and came to an understand with her.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Manipulation, Referenced/Mentioned Death/Murder,

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Lance?” Allura’s voice was as soft as it was quiet.

Just as it had been the past couple of times she had attempted to talk with him since the night prior. She never got far before Coran came bursting through the doors, shouting out her title before whisking her away, admonishing her about being up and about when she should be resting.

Lance ignored her, just as he had the previous time, curling up tighter into a ball; hugging his knees so tightly that it was almost difficult to breath.

He didn’t want to talk to her, and just the idea made his stomach twist and threaten to upchuck the nonexistent contents of his stomach. He didn’t want to look at her, not when she had invaded his Astral Plane and kept him prisoner here.

There was no escape. Nothing to distract himself.

The fear of the crashing reality of his Astral Plane and Blue’s condescending truths kept him from meditating, and there was little else he could do in the quarantine cell except torment the others who came to visit him.

Allura was his latest visit, replacing Pidge. While Pidge had been mostly quiet, Allura hadn’t stopped pestering him about ‘what she did wrong’ and asking him why it ‘hadn’t worked’. Like he’d know.

Honestly, he was trying not to think about what she could mean by ‘it’. He didn’t want to think about it, especially since thinking about thinking about it made his head hurt like someone was taking icepicks to his brain.

There was nothing to do in the castle for him except to sit and think and listen, and honestly, if he had to continue to listen to her, he was going to go crazy. He could only imagine how he was
going to fare with Keith, especially given their fiasco the night before.

His memories from the Astral Plane were fuzzy, but he was almost certain that he could remember Allura wanting to kill him… or something. It was that ‘or something’ that got him in trouble with Keith… and in the end, Keith had chosen Allura over him.

Typical Keith behavior, really. He never took Lance’s side in anything.

He wondered if Keith was going to visit next or if it’d be Hunk. Some small part of him wanted it to be Hunk. He wanted to ask why he’d been left? Hunk was supposed to be his best friend, right? It’d been him, Hunk, and Pidge at the garrison… and Pidge had already visited.

Her visit had been fairly boring. The biggest thing with her was the tantalizing delicious knowledge he held about her brother. He’d almost spilled it just to make her react, but he hadn’t.

He didn’t want Pidge to meet back up with Matt for a variety of reasons, the chief of which being that he didn’t want to deal with Matt after all the Paladins of Voltron were killed. Voltron did not need to add the Resistance Matt was a member of to their list of alliances.

It was bad enough that the Blade of Marmora had allied themselves to Voltron.

Stupid Keith.

“Lance, please… Tell me how I can help you.” Allura’s voice was still so quiet, so unlike her.

Tell her how she could help him? Oh man, was she for real? Lance lifted his head off his knees and finally looked at her. She looked tired. The skin between her eyes and her scales was dark in color, and when she blinked, there was a glossy sheen to her eyelids.

Lance could relate. He was sure he didn’t look much better at the moment.

“You want to help me, Allura?” He asked, watching as her entire being seemed to brighten at him finally responding.

“Yes!” Allura’s response was instantaneous and had she been genuine – had this happened before now – then Lance would have been ecstatic.

“Really? You really want to help me?” Lance shifted, moving to lean towards the barrier closest to her, like he was a school kid about to tell her some secret in the school yard. She mirrored his actions, coming as close to him as she could while the barrier was up.

“Of course. I only want to help.” She confirmed. Lance grinned.

There were so many ways he could answer, the options tempting and glorious. “Then…” Let him out? Kill him? “Die.” He settled, the grin never leaving his face even as he spoke.

Allura’s hopeful expression shattered, and Lance’s heart oddly constricted at that. It didn’t give him as much joy or amusement as he had hoped it would. Allura’s shoulders slumped, no… her whole body slumped.

“What did they do to you?” She asked quietly, perhaps more to herself than to him.

“It’s not what they did.” Lance answered. “But what you all didn’t do. The empire wanted me, it made me strong. It gave me a purpose.” As if to further demonstrate, he pulled at his quintessence until he could form a tiny ball of it in the palm of his hand.
He didn’t keep it maintained for long, just a second or two for Allura to look at it. He sighed when he released it.

Just the effort left him exhausted. He’d spent too much trying to escape and fighting earlier. He could already feel the sweat from the effort on his skin, sticky against the too tight suit from the cryo-pods.

Allura shut her eyes and wavered, her body swaying slightly. She took a deep breath and released it. Only then did she re-open her eyes.

“If you don’t allow me to help you… you will die.”

“Isn’t that good for you?” Lance shrugged. “You’ll finally be able to properly replace me.”

Blue surged up in his mind at his words, worry flooding him so suddenly that he pushed her away before he could realize what he was doing. She whined, wounded at his treatment of her. Guilt instantly replaced the worry, and he reached out to her gently, cooing quietly to her in his mind.

Like a cat pressing up against its own as they slept, Blue leaned against him. A sturdy pressure in his mind, a reminder of her presence.

“The Blue Lion would never allow it, and neither will the current Paladins of Voltron.”

Lance scoffed at Allura’s words, rolling his eyes. Blue wouldn’t allow it, she’d just proven as much. The others, on the other hand, would probably be glad to be rid of him.

“They don’t want you dead. We’ve been looking for you!” Allura continued.

Oh yeah, sure. They’d been ‘looking for him’. It wasn’t like he’d been all that hard to find in the beginning. It wasn’t like Hunk had escaped the top-secret base without him. Lance scoffed again.

“Allura!” Coran’s voice was like a gunshot going off in a quiet place, starling both Allura and Lance. “You should be resting!”

Lance huffed, turning away as Coran marched into the room, set on returning Allura back to her quarters…. Set on leaving Lance, alone, again in the silence and emptiness of the medical bay.

Her protests fell upon deaf ears, and like all the times before, Coran successfully manhandled her out of the medical bay and into the hallway.

“No, I’ve made progress. He was talking to me!” Allura’s voice drifted from the hallway as the door shut and Lance scoffed again.

“Progress?” He muttered, his lips curling into a sneer. “As if.”

He didn’t have long to wait before the doors opened again. He looked up, expecting Keith but instead seeing the weary gaze of his former best friend. Hunk was cautious as he stepped into the room, like Lance could attack him from behind the barrier.

Lance grinned. “Well, well, well. Look who decided to come see lil’ol’me.”

Hunk twisted his hands, before he raised a hand up to wave.

“Hey.”

Lance frowned, not impressed with Hunk’s greeting or presence. His mind was flying with
thoughts and ideas on how to insult Hunk. There wasn’t much. Hunk was like a literal ray of sunshine, a cookie shaped like a friend.

Except for the times he wasn’t.

“I bet this brings back a whole buncha good memories, doesn’t it?” Lance threw out idly, looking down at his nails and wrinkling his nose at the state of them.


“What am I talking about?” Lance repeated, pressing one of his hands to his chest in the classic ‘offended’ look. “I’m talking about me being all caged up while you hold all the cards to my escape, of course.”

Hunk’s whole body seemed to falter, and Lance could see his ‘fight or flight’ response attempting to kick in. Hunk never did like confrontation much, and he was almost always on the side of ‘flight’.

Hunk shook his head. “That wasn’t… I didn’t want things to end like that. I asked for them to get you, but the Druids had dragged you off and…”

“Excuses, Excuses.” Lance interrupted. “If you really wanted me back, you would have found me sooner. No! If you really wanted me around here, then you should have stopped what was happening back then. You should have defended me from Pidge and everyone else.”

Hunk winced and let out a heavy sigh. “You’re right.”

“And… wait, what?” It was Lance’s turn to be momentarily blindsided, having not expecting Hunk’s agreement.

“You’re right.” Hunk repeated. “I should have sided with you, tried harder… I shouldn’t have left you. I’m sorry. But we have been looking for you. Keith refused to stop, even when Allura wanted him to.”

As far as apologies went – especially ones from Hunk – it sucked. It was an excuse masquerading as an apology. Worse, Hunk hadn’t even brought any apology foods with him.

Lance crossed his arms, narrowing his eyes.

“Apology not accepted.” Lance replied after a full minute of silence and realizing that Hunk was waiting on him. “You think you can just come in here without any apology food or flowers or gifts or anything and just say ‘sorry’ once and be done?” Lance seethed. “That’s an insult, both to me and our former friendship.”

Lotor at least knew how to apologize. Breakfast prepared for him, gifts, dates, and kind tender words. Not that Lotor had much to ever apologize for. He was damn near perfect. His hand went to his necklace and he held the gem, forcing himself to hold back his sigh at the thought of his emperor.

He missed Lotor, but hopefully he wouldn’t have to wait long until they could be reunited.

Hunk faltered again at Lance’s refusal of his apology, and this time Lance wasn’t surprised when Hunk nodded and agreed.
“You’re right. That was pretty shitty of me, huh?”

“You’re right. That was pretty shitty of me, huh?” Lance replied.

Honestly, now that he thought about it, it didn’t surprise him that Hunk had tried to apologize. Even if it had been so shitty. Hunk had always been a bit of a self-preservationist and he probably thought that if he apologized to Lance, then he’d be spared a painful death later – or maybe even spared death all together.

“Yeah.” Hunk was quiet for a moment, twisting his hands and playing with the floor with the tip of his shoe. “What did they do to you?”

“Sorry, man. About par for the course considering your latest track record.” Lance replied. Honestly, now that he thought about it, it didn’t surprise him that Hunk had tried to apologize. Even if it had been so shitty. Hunk had always been a bit of a self-preservationist and he probably thought that if he apologized to Lance, then he’d be spared a painful death later – or maybe even spared death all together.

“Yeah.” Hunk was quiet for a moment, twisting his hands and playing with the floor with the tip of his shoe. “What did they do to you?”

Again with that question? Lance’s ‘ugh’ was an audible moan, exaggerated by the heavy rolling of his eyes. He wasn’t even going to grace it with an answer, which was fortunate as Hunk seemed to take his ‘ugh’ as the answer it was and moved on.

“Why are you doing this? Why did you… hurt us?”

“Are you seriously asking me that?” Lance countered. “I mean seriously? First you guys hurt me, then you all accuse me of something I didn’t do, and then I was abandoned, and I mean you technically abandoned me twice, and you’re really asking me why I hurt you guys?” Lance laughed, shaking his head. “C’mon big guy, I know you’re not as stupid as you look.”

Hunk’s mouth had opened a few times while Lance spoke, but no sound had come out.

“Yeah.” Hunk was quiet for a moment, twisting his hands and playing with the floor with the tip of his shoe. “What did they do to you?”

“Are you seriously asking me that?” Lance countered. “I mean seriously? First you guys hurt me, then you all accuse me of something I didn’t do, and then I was abandoned, and I mean you technically abandoned me twice, and you’re really asking me why I hurt you guys?” Lance laughed, shaking his head. “C’mon big guy, I know you’re not as stupid as you look.”

Hunk’s mouth had opened a few times while Lance spoke, but no sound had come out.

Vrepit Sa.” Lance spat out in response, enjoying how Hunk’s face turned ashen at the words.

In the back of his mind, he felt Blue flinch at the words. Through the conversation, she’d been continuously sending him waves of disconnect and disagreement that he’d ignored. She seemed to deem that he’d said enough now, letting her displeasure be known with a low growl.

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“At least with them, I know exactly what type of monsters I’m dealing with.” Lance continued, still ignoring Blue.

“Do you? Coran says you’ve got some addiction to quint… quintessence. Did you know about that? Or how you’ve been corrupting the Blue Lion with whatever they’ve done to you? What about your scales, and suddenly being Altean?”

“Shut up!” Lance shouted, throwing his hands out in a slashing motion in the air. Electricity sparked at his fingers, and when he performed the action, a wave of lightning followed his hand. Hunk jumped back despite the protection of the barrier. “You don’t know anything!”

A wave of nausea and exhaustion hit him as he stood up. He didn’t care, even after he swayed enough that he had to use the barrier to support himself.

“Shut up!” Lance shouted, throwing his hands out in a slashing motion in the air. Electricity sparked at his fingers, and when he performed the action, a wave of lightning followed his hand. Hunk jumped back despite the protection of the barrier. “You don’t know anything!”

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Hunk was lying about the addition. He wasn’t addicted to anything. He’d know if he was addicted to something. It was just Voltron lying to him, trying to get him to abandon the Empire. Well, it wasn’t going to happen.

Hunk was lying about the addition. He wasn’t addicted to anything. He’d know if he was addicted to something. It was just Voltron lying to him, trying to get him to abandon the Empire. Well, it wasn’t going to happen.

The Empire was his family now, even if Keith had murdered Xana. His family had always been the
Empire, even if he hadn’t known it before.

“I have always been Altean. My parents were Druids for the Galra Empire, and had a rebel not killed them and kidnapped me, I would have been raised in the service of the Galra Empire as well. My Family is the Empire!”

“Bull shit!” Hunk shouted. “Your family is in Cuba, Lance. It’s right here on this castle. It’s in the people we’ve saved. It’s everywhere BUT the Empire.”

“You’re right.” Lance relented, to Hunk’s obvious surprise. “You’re absolutely right… considering Keith murdered my uncle!”

“Oh, come on!” Hunk threw his hands up in the air. “He was trying to kill us, Lance. Just like you were. Keith did what he had to do. We were just trying to get you back.”

“Well maybe I didn’t want to come back.” Lance shot back. “Did you ever think of that?”

“You asked me to rescue you! I wasn’t going to leave you there again.”

“Just shut up!” Lance shouted once more, another weak wave of electricity bursting out from him.

The exhaustion finally caught up with him. His knees buckled at the same time his chest constricted, his heart pounding away like a jackhammer stuck in his throat. He collapsed on his hands and knees, his hands shaking as he tried to reach for his necklace, to try to balance himself back out with its limited quintessence.

“Lance!” Hunk’s voice sounded distant, barely heard over the roar of the rush of the blood in his ears. Blue sprung forward, panic flowing through her as she wrapped herself around him, dragging him through shallows and off the coastal shelf into herself.

Blue felt different than she had previously, like she was… lighter somehow. Maybe more… bubbly? He couldn’t focus on it much, not when he was being hit with the full force of her worry.

Tiny pockets of light bubbled around him, gleaming like pearls in the darkness of the depths. She pushed Lance into them, begging him to accept as the pearls filled his vision, obscuring it with bursts of blue as bright and brilliant as his scales.

They were cold as Lance accepted them, leaving a lingering chill that he could feel down in his bones.

When he opened his eyes, the blue was gone; replaced by the stormy dark sky and sea of his Astral Plane. The ocean bubbled with malice and corruption.

The waves washed up on shore, yet when they touched Lance, the corruption brightened until it turned as blue as the waters of Cuba. Water surrounded him wherever he touched, keeping him safe moderately safe from the corruption.

He’d have to remember to thank Allura when this was all over. If she hadn’t flooded Blue, and himself through extension, with so much fresh quintessence, then he would probably have been lost to the corruption again.

“I’m a mess.” He sighed, resting his head on his knees, ignoring the ice forming on his clothes from the moisture of the water.

“We are.” Blue agreed, adding herself into the mix. Like Lance, there was circle of blue
surrounding her, and he was certain that from above, she’d look like a strange blue and black sun with how the water and corruption mixed around her. “But we are getting better now.”

She was, of course, talking about the water touching them instead of the corruption.

Lance rolled his eyes. “I’m pretty sure I just passed out from quintessence exhaustion.”

“You did.” She confirmed.

“And I’m pretty sure I would have died if you hadn’t stepped in.”

Blue didn’t confirm Lance’s words, but her silence was all that Lance needed. He scowled, kicking at the water and sending tiny drops of glowing blue into the sea of black. The drops hit the water, sending out ripples of blue wherever they landed, temporary cleansing the sea before dispersing into the corruption.

Despite what he’d said to Allura…. He didn’t want to die. He wished there was a fix, a cure, for what had been done to him. Unfortunately, he couldn’t think of any way to quickly fix this. This being the wide expanse of corruption in his Astral Plane.

“There’s still so much of this shit.” Lance complained, flopping back on the beach. “This will take forever.”

“I will help,” Blue’s voice was so much nicer now than it had been, and if Lance stopped focusing, he could almost pretend that her voice was the gentle notes of his mother’s wind chimes and the dull roar of the surf of the ocean by his house. “As well the others, in time.”

Lance wasn’t so sure. He’d done a lot of damage to them, almost par for par for what they had done to him. An eye for an eye, so to say. But to quote some smart Chinese guy, if everyone takes an eye for an eye, then they’d all be blind… or something like that.

“I’m not so sure.” Lance admitted to Blue, sitting up to look at her. “They kind of hate me right now. I did try to kill them.”

Blue was quiet, probably thinking of a response to give him.

“Perhaps you should have more faith in your team.” She finally responded. “There are wounds on both sides. Together you can heal.”

“The power of friendship?” Lance rolled his eyes. “We went from Power Rangers to My Little Pony, right. Gotcha.” He sighed, letting himself fall back on the beach.

He had to trust his friends, and hope that they’d trust him back? His expectations were low, but who knew, maybe they’d surprise him.

Chapter End Notes

Hey Guys! Check out this awesome ART I received from Dhesia!

If you’ve gifted me art and it hasn’t shown up here, please let me know so I can add it! I’m planning on running through and checking links and everything to make sure it’s all up here. :)
Stress

Chapter Summary

Previously on Lilac Sweet: The Paladins visit Lance while he’s being quarantined. During Hunk’s visit, Lance used too much of his quintessence and collapsed. He woke in his Astral Plane.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Referenced/Mentioned Death/Near Death, Referenced/Mentioned Blood, Quintessence, Pseudo Science, Possibly Incorrect Medical Terms, Stress Baking

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hunk wouldn’t say that he was a pacifist, although he had very pacifistic tendencies. He didn’t typically believe in fighting. There were almost always more peaceful ways to go about things.

The war with the Galra Empire and Zarkon was different. Shay, the Balmerians, and the Balmera had proven that to him.

It hadn’t been Hunk’s intention to start a fight with ‘Lance’ when he went to see him. Truth be told, it hadn’t been Hunk’s intention to see him in the first place.

He didn’t really think that the person behind the barrier was his friend. The twisting unease of his gut told him it probably was, but he didn’t want to agree. He just couldn’t see how Lance could have become this murderous stranger.

He wore Lance’s face, spoke with his voice but… he was a stranger to Hunk. Unrecognizable as the Lance Hunk had last seen.

Coran and Allura believed that Lance – the real Lance – was in this imposture, somewhere. Keith and Pidge seemed to be buying into it, Keith more so than Pidge. He knew they both felt somewhat responsible for what had happened, but that was little excuse for the faith they had in this imposture being Lance.

Lance would never have attempted to kill his friends, no matter what happened to him.

But then again, everyone seemed to be under the impression that he’d been brainwashed or something. Hunk would never try to seriously hurt and/or kill his friends and yet he had twice. Once when he was brain swished by the mermaids, and again when he was being controlled and forced to fight against Pidge.
Perhaps this was something similar?

Even if he did start to buy into the idea of this being a brainwashed Lance, he was still uncomfortable with the idea of considering this version of Lance as his friend.

The only reason he’d gone to see Lance was because Pidge had pestered him to. Allura and Coran wanted Lance to be more open with them so that when and if Lance was purified, he would hopefully be less murderous.

Hopefully.

“You’re his best friend.” Pidge had stated so matter-of-factly, like Lance hadn’t been trying his damn hardest to kill Hunk less than a day before. “You know him better than any of us, and if anyone can get through to him, it’d be you.”

There was little arguing with Pidge when she got like this, and while he could try as much as wanted, the end result would be him going and talking to Lance by the end of the day. There was no point in delaying the inevitable.

So, Hunk had gone, passing Allura and Coran in the hallway before entering the Medical Bay. The conversation turned bitter and sour before it could even really begin. Then again, Lance himself was very bitter, bringing up things that he knew would ruffle Hunk’s feathers.

He tried to be the better person. He tried to apologize, to explain himself. He tried to get through to Lance. Yet for all his attempts, Lance just needled and nettled him into a confrontation.

Hunk shouldn’t have indulged him. He should have diffused the argument, walked away, done something more than to respond in kind. At the first sign of the sparks, he should have left.

He didn’t.

He didn’t, and now he was paying the price of it. He kept shouting, hoping with everything in his body that Allura and Coran were still need the infirmary, that they’d somehow be able to hear him and come and help.

Because he had no idea what to do.

He didn’t even know what happened. One moment Lance was spitting out bitter vitriol with enough passion to create the electric waves, and the next he was falling, collapsing to his knees. His hands were at his throat, like he couldn’t breathe… like the force of his own bitterness was choking him out.

Hunk threw caution to the wind, shouting out Lance’s name as he disengaged the barrier and rushed to Lance’s side. Currently a friend or not, he was wearing his friend’s face and Hunk couldn’t just leave him.

The Garrison had given them all first-aid training, but for the life of him he couldn’t recall it. The knowledge eluding him, dancing around just barely out of reach in his mind. He had the sense to check Lance’s pulse, pressing two fingers against Lance’s throat above the necklace.

For a sheer heart pounding, anxiety driven moment, Hunk didn’t feel a pulse. Too many thoughts ran through his mind, the most prominent ones being ‘holy shit’ and ‘Lance is dead’. The exact moment Hunk felt a pulse, Lance’s whole body went cold.

His fingers against Lance’s throat went numb as the chill seeped into him from Lance. It was cold
enough to steal Hunk’s breath away, temporarily silencing his calls for help. A violent shiver ran through his body, and his hand felt stiff when he finally pulled away from Lance, reassured by Lance’s now constant pulse.

He heard the doors open but it wasn’t Allura or Coran who entered.

Hunk couldn’t really say that he knew Keith well, but he didn’t need to know Keith to say that it looked like he’d had better days. The bags under his eyes – while not as bad as Allura’s – were a clear sign of a lack of sleep.

Hunk had noticed it earlier, but now it just seemed so much more pronounced. Keith leaned against the door, panting softly, leaving Hunk to briefly wonder if he’d ran here.

In the end, he supposed it didn’t matter. He needed help, and now he had it. Even if it wasn’t the help he wanted or expected. Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth, and all that.

“He just collapsed. His pulse is steady.” Now.

Keith frowned as he approached, kneeling by Hunk and pressing his own fingers against Lance’s neck. Irritation bubbled up within, and with it came along the urge to snap at Keith that he had already checked that.

Keith’s sigh seems bigger than it is, coming not just from his mouth but his entire body.

“I’ll go get Coran.” Even Keith’s voice sounded tired, exhaustion dripping off his words like buttercream frosting off a warm cake.

Hunk’s previous irritation turned to ash in his mouth, and swallowed it down knowing that it didn’t have a need to be said. Concern took its place. Allura was exhausted, Keith was tired, and Lance collapsed. There was something more going on here than Hunk understood.

Especially since he can tell from the sweat on Keith that he’d been in the training deck. There was no way he could have heard Hunk from that far away. No way that Keith should have known to come, and he had known since he’d ran here.

There was this unsettling feeling in his gut, one he’d felt pop up every so often since joining Voltron. Like the sides were closing in on him, the walls impossibly tall, like mountains towering over a crater. It left him feeling small, but undeniably part of something so much bigger.

He had the suspicion that if he were to try to climb over the mountains, he’d probably get a lot more than he bargained for. So, he stayed down in his crater, sheltered but also suffocated by the walls around him.

The feeling disappeared as quickly as it appeared, and Hunk nodded, swallowing down a strange thickness in his throat.

“Kay.” That’s all Keith needed to hear before he was out the door, sprinting down the halls.

He made a mental note to try to convince Keith to take a nap later. Hunk took a deep breath, holding it for a second before releasing.

Keith was going to get Coran, Lance had a steady pulse… Hunk could take a moment to calm his heart and try to convince himself that everything was okay. The weird coldness had even started to disappear.
He looked down, studying Lance.

Since Lance’s return, Hunk couldn’t say if he’d ever seen Lance look so at peace, and if it wasn’t for a couple of things – like the scales under his eyes, the faintly evil-looking glowing necklace, or their surroundings – then Hunk could pretend that Lance had just fallen asleep on him after watching a movie in their dorm.

As cautious as Hunk could be, he was equally curious. He didn’t know when or if he’d ever get a chance like this again… and to be honest, he still wasn’t 100% certain that the scales were real.

He’d wondered about Allura and Coran’s scales before, but for some reason, he’d always shied away from the idea of asking them if he could touch them. It just seemed too personal to ask them.

Some part of him felt bad for thinking about touching Lance’s, especially without his permission… but… he just couldn’t believe they were real and not just some stickers or paint that the Galra had put on him.

He gingerly traced the edge of one of the scales, surprised by how seamless it seemed to blend into his skin, despite the cool, smooth texture of the scale. There was no seam that he could feel, nothing to lift, no way to remove the scales, and yet they felt too solid and smooth to be paint.

Lance’s eyelids fluttered, his lashes brushing across his cheek in a way that Hunk had envied once.

Hunk froze as Lance opened his eyes, and while there was no actual physical change, his eyes seemed clearer. Lance met his gaze, and Hunk’s heart felt like it literally stopped beating, his muscles tensed, ready to fight if needed.

“He just collapsed.” Hunk answered.

“Hunk.” The corners of Lance’s mouth tugged upwards, Hunk’s name escaping Lance’s mouth in a quiet breath – almost a sigh but too breathy.

It was reminiscent of Lance before all this happened, of the Lance that Hunk knew to be his best friend. All his thoughts about this being an imposture were wiped clean and he suddenly understood why Keith and Pidge were so convinced that this was Lance.

Hunk wanted to respond, but he was frozen. Frozen by disbelief and by fear. Even when Lance’s eyes closed again, he was still, waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop and the brainwashing to kick back in and cause Lance to start trying to kill him again.

It didn’t happen.

Lance was limp and relaxed in Hunk’s lap, and Hunk wondered if he’d imagined Lance waking and speaking his name. Perhaps Keith and Allura weren’t the only ones who needed more sleep if Hunk was hallucinating that vividly.

His heart jumped into his throat when the door opened, Coran bursting through his gaze darting around before it fell upon Hunk and Lance.

“What happened?” He asked, jogging over to them and kneeling beside Lance to check him over. Hunk willingly handed Lance over, watching Coran and Lance carefully.

“He just collapsed.” Hunk answered.

“He just collapsed.” Coran repeated, pausing to look up at Hunk and narrow his eyes. Hunk
shifted uneasily, feeling distinctly uncomfortable with the scrutinizing tone in Coran’s gaze. Hunk looked away, unable to take the feel of the gaze on him anymore.

“We were talking-”

“Talking?” Coran interrupted.

“Fighting.” Hunk corrected himself. “We were… fighting, and he was getting upset and... then he just collapsed.”

Coran hummed, the tone neutral and uninformative as to whether Coran believed him or not.

But it was the truth. He’d fought with Lance and then Lance collapsed. It wasn’t Hunk’s fault! It wasn’t, really! He didn’t know why Lance collapsed.

“He seems to be fine.” Coran informed Hunk after a moment. “Could you please trigger the pull-out bed from the wall? I don’t want to just leave him on the floor.”

Hunk nodded, following Coran’s instructions while Coran picked up Lance. Not surprisingly, Lance remained limp in Coran’s arms, not even moving when Coran deposited him gently on the bed. Perhaps Lance waking up really had been a figment of Hunk’s imagination.

Coran triggered the barrier again once they were both clear of it.

“Do you know what happened?” Hunk asked.

“I can only speculate.” Coran replied, shrugging. “Without a certified alchemist onboard, I am unable to check Lance’s quintessence levels. If they dip too low, it is entirely possible for his body to cease functioning.” Aka, it was entirely possible for Lance to die.

His mind went back to the purple sparks, and how Lance collapsed immediately afterwards. The guilt had never gone fully away, but now it slammed back into Hunk like a bag of flour falling to the ground.

He didn’t understand all that quintessence stuff, but he knew enough that the sparks and electricity Lance created was a form of it. If he hadn’t antagonized Lance… if he hadn’t continued the argument, then Lance wouldn’t have collapsed. He would have been fine… or well, as fine as he could currently be.

He didn’t wait for Coran’s response before heading to the doors and exiting. He couldn’t stay in there, not when he’d almost caused Lance to die. He had almost killed Lance. Man, talk about a 180 reversal.

There weren’t many places on the Castle that he could retreat to, but there was at least one place where he could go and work out his emotions: the kitchen. He didn’t know how long he’d been working in the kitchen. He didn’t even register when someone entered, and he couldn’t have said how long Allura had been in the kitchen before she announced her presence.

“He’s fine.”

Hunk jumped, the tray of his latest attempts at cookies almost falling to the ground. He put them on the counter and turned to face her. She was sitting on a chair by the door, which really didn’t give him any indication as to how long she’d been there.

“I don’t-”
“Lance.” She interrupted. “He’s fine.” She smiled, tilting her head ever so slightly. She stood, her robes and nightgown whispering against the floor as she walked towards him. She stopped a few feet away from him, looking down at a different tray of cookies.

Hunk was quiet, although her comments about Lance were reassuring, it did little to assuage the guilt he felt at having nearly caused his death.

“Any one of us could have triggered that from Lance.” Allura’s words were steady and clearly meant for him despite her examining the various cookies on the counter. “Keith and I could have just as easily triggered it last night.” She paused to look up at him, her gaze unreadable. “We didn’t, but we could have.”

No. It’d been Hunk who’d triggered it instead. He swallowed down a lump of emotion, ignoring how uneasily it settled in his gut, like he’d just swallowed a stone.

“His quintessence was already low from the events of the past couple quintants. This was bound to happen sooner or later.”

“What’s to stop it from happening again?” The words spilled out of Hunk’s mouth, hurried and rushed.

“I have no formal alchemy training, but I remember sitting in my father’s lap as he went over reports on the work of the Lions.” She smiled fondly, her gaze turning downcast as she recalled her father. None of that answered his question, but he was too afraid to interrupt the moment.

“There truly is nothing else in the universe like the Lions that we have found thus far. I remember my father being amazed at the sheer amount of quintessence that they all held. He compared them to wellsprings of knowledge and quintessence.”

Hunk waited to see where she was going with this. Maybe it would answer his question.

“There is no denying the bond between a Lion and its Paladin. The Lions are beyond what Science can explain, but my father certainly tried. He had a theory that the bond was an exchange between the Lion and the Paladin, a symbiotic relationship of giving and taking quintessence and knowledge. Unfortunately, he was never able to test that theory.”

The gears in Hunk’s brain were spinning as she spoke, connecting the dots in puzzles and answering questions he hadn’t thought he’d had. The lines connected, forming a picture in his head as realization settled on him.

“That’s how Lance was able to mess up Blue. His theory was correct.”

Allura nodded, reaching out to pick up a cookie before hesitating and pulling back her hand. She resumed studying the cookies.

“We were operating under an assumption that the bond was just a bond, but if my father’s theory was correct, then it is the true reason that a Paladin must share the same base type quintessence as the Lion the Paladin is partnered to.”

“Because it’s an exchange.” Hunk breathed out. “Like a blood transfusion, except going both ways. You wouldn’t want to mix Types A and O. The A recipient would be able to accept O, but O wouldn’t be able to accept A.” And that would only be important if O was going to be accepting A’s blood which meant… “The Lions could give their Paladin’s quintessence.”

Allura’s smile was bright as she looked at Hunk. She’d nodded before lifting her selected cookie
up to her mouth and taking a bite. Hunk watched with no small amount of amusement as her
smiled crumbled, mirroring the cookie as she bit into it. Her hand rose, cupping the air under her
mouth in a vain attempt to catch the crumbs as they fell. She chewed, swallowed, and wrinkled her
nose.

“Was that supposed to happen?” She asked, eyes wide.

“It can.” Hunk laughed, shaking his head.

“Oh.” She put the remains of the cookie down on the counter, and brushed her hand over the
garbage shoot, her smile strained as she looked at Hunk. “In any case, yes. As attached as the
Blue Lion is to Lance, I feel there is little concern about him experiencing dangerous levels of
quintessence exhaustion.”

Hunk nodded slowly.

“But what about earlier? His heart stopped…. I couldn’t find a pulse.” Allura frowned, furrowing
her eyebrows at Hunk’s words.

“It’s possible the Blue Lion waited till the last moment in an effort to protect us. The less
quintessence he has at his disposal, the less he has to attack us with.” Her answer sounded
unsure. “As I said earlier, there is a lot that we do not know about the Lions. It is hard to guess
their motivations for their actions.”

“He felt cold… after I felt his pulse. It… lingered. I’d never felt anything so cold before.”

“That would confirm the Blue Lion sharing quintessence with Lance.” Allura subtly knocked the
cookie she had tried into the garbage shoot, and although Hunk noticed, he didn’t draw any
attention to it. “I’ve heard Blue quintessence can be quite cold. It does not surprise me that Lance
would be cold after receiving quintessence from the Blue Lion.”

Hunk continued to nod, puzzle pieces still fitting together in his head. Lance’s quintessence was
‘corrupted’, and he could – and did – receive quintessence from the Blue Lion.

“You’ve ‘cleaned’ the Blue Lion recently, right?” He asked. Allura blinked at him, tilting her
head.

“Why do you ask?”

“I’m still thinking about this in terms of blood, and I’m not gonna pretend to be a doctor or a
medical professional, but I know I’ve seen TV shows where someone has ‘bad blood’ or
something, and they go through a series of transfusions to try to correct that. Sorta where the ‘bad
blood’ is removed and new blood is put in at the same time because we can’t live without blood,
obviously. So, if this quintessence is as similar as it seems… then wouldn’t it make sense that it’d
operate similarly?”

“I am not familiar with your concepts of blood, but… that does sound remarkably similar.” Allura
hummed.

“So, all we need to do is just remove the corrupted quintessence and replace it with quintessence
from the Blue Lion.” Hunk’s finishing grin faltered as he noticed Allura’s frown.

“There is no way to extract quintessence from a person, that I am aware of.”

“Lance will do that for us.” Hunk replied. “We just need to…”
“Aggravate and annoy him into attacking the particle barrier until he collapses, and the Blue Lion
intervenes?” The moment Allura continued on his thought, he realized how wrong it was.
Sheepishly, he pointed his fingers at each other, making a triangle and bouncing them off each
other.

“Yeah, never mind… Hearing you say it kinda drove home how wrong that was.”

“Indeed. While it is a viable solution, I highly doubt that would endear ourselves to Lance. I fear
that solution would be counter-productive.”

“Just a tad.” Hunk stopped only to hold his finger and thumb out in a demonstration of his words.
Allura returned a strained smile at the gesture.

“I had a thought to try to dilute the corrupted quintessence through flooding both Lance and the
Blue Lion with clean quintessence, however, I keep running into a problem with the quantity of
quintessence required for such a feat, as well as the possible adverse side-affects such a procedure
would have on Lance’s mind.”

“Right… quintessence is a bit more spiritual than blood. Gottcha.” Hunk crossed his arms. Truth
be told, Hunk was a bit out of his field here. He wasn’t a doctor. He was a mechanic and a chef.
Neither of those applied here.

Allura stepped closer to him, reaching out to rest her hand on Hunk’s shoulder.

“I should leave before Coran tracks me down, but you have given me much to think about. Thank
you, Hunk.” Her smile was less strained and more friendly. She patted his shoulder twice before
nodding and stepping away. When she was at the door, she paused, looking back over her should
at him. “Good luck with your… baking.”

The wrinkle of her nose when she spoke and her earlier reaction to the cookie was all Hunk needed
to know what her opinion was on the cookies. His laughter followed her out into the hallway as
she left.

Chapter End Notes

Still No News about my Sister's house. She had an open house and a showing on
Saturday... but no offers yet. :(  

Please send best wishes. The sooner she gets an offer, the sooner I move out, the
sooner I get about 1.5/2 more hours of freetime to write (and that's just from
DRIVING time being cut down... just imagine the extra energy and time I'll have from
being AWAY from my family).

I have some stuff going on this week, but I'll try to have a chapter out next Monday for
you guys. Mom's Birthday is on Friday, and she's been quilting me about not spending
time with her, so I'll be taking her out on Thursday (maybe... I'd prefer not to.) and then
Dad is coming up from FL, and Mom will be (hopefully) leaving at some point this
weekend.
Discovery

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Hunk visited Lance and after an antagonizing conversation, Lance collapsed. Once he confirmed Lance was alive and fine, he left Lance in Coran’s care to do some stress baking. Allura checked up on him and they discussed about quintessence.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Invasion of Privacy (?)

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was crazy how quickly things started to change in the castle. Pidge wouldn’t say it was Lance’s fault, per se, but he was the most likely variable to have caused the change.

Something seemed to have changed between Allura and Keith. From how it was before, it seemed like their relationship had flipped 180 degrees. It was like a cork had been popped and all the tension between them had been poured out.

They weren’t butting heads as much, which was the total opposite of what Pidge had assumed would happen after Lance’s return.

She wasn’t sure what she’d been expecting, but the calm alliance between Keith and Allura definitely wasn’t it. Especially since Allura had yet to make any big breakthroughs, although that was mostly Coran’s fault.

In any case, she didn’t really know what happened to cause the change between Keith and Allura, and she couldn’t even begin to speculate, but she knew the facts that had been presented to her thus far.

1. Lance was back.
2. He was mostly murderous and full of hatred.
3. He was slowly becoming better. He smiled at her without a threat yesterday. (Improvement!)
4. Whatever had happened caused Allura to be ‘magically’ exhausted.
5. Keith and Allura’s relationship had improved.

Based on the facts presented, Pidge could make a logical and sound hypothesis that Allura must have attempted to ‘cure’ Lance, and while it had somewhat worked, it hadn’t been able to perfectly wash away whatever the Galra had done to him.

Hey, whatever Allura did had probably been enough for Keith to be appreciative, so progress! Any
release in tension between the two of them was welcome.

It was sound reasoning, and the only thing that made any sort of sense to Pidge. Although she didn’t know why they wouldn’t just tell everyone that.

Maybe it was because Allura’s attempt had essentially failed?

Pidge hated it when her own failures were brought to attention; a result of too many years of bulling at school. She could understand a reluctance to share the news of a failure, even if it wasn’t truly a complete failure.

It couldn’t be, not when Lance had smiled at her without a threat. He smiled. Without. A Threat. Given her new, slightly terrifying image of Lance in her brain, the thought seemed impossible. Yet it was true.

She flicked through a documentary about quintessence as she pondered over things. She’d tried to watch it in hopes that she could find something in it to help with Lance’s ‘addiction’ or with his personality switch.

Unfortunately, her Altean was still only rudimentary. There was little she could understand from the documentary except for bare basics, like people’s names. She kinda wished this doctor? ‘Honerva’ lady was still around. She seemed to be one of the Altean’s leading scientists in quintessence.

In the end, all Pidge had learned was that quintessence was powerful. Dangerous, but powerful.

Pidge tapped her finger against her keyboard, not typing, but just liking the soft repetition of the noise. There wasn’t much she could do in terms of quintessence, and but there were other things that she could do.

Like talking to Lance for her daily ‘required’ conversation, although she was pretty sure Hunk was trying now. He’d become so much more insistent after that first day. Apparently, something had happened, not that she was told what.

The communication on this team sucked.

A lightbulb went off above Pidge’s head as the thought sparked another, and she looked about her workstation for the communication device Lance had broken in the beginning of this mess.

She hadn’t touched it since they brought Lance in, feeling too much like it was taboo. That machine had technically caused Lance’s departure, and some suspicious part of her that hadn’t been squashed by logic was afraid that it could cause something worse this time.

But that was ridiculous, right?

She pursed her lips, looking over at it and humming thoughtfully, her tapping ceasing on the keyboard. She supposed she could take another look at it. Maybe the break away from it was what she needed.

Not that she hadn’t taken breaks before, but those breaks had been a bit more distracting. Like… robeasts, Lance, Keith, more robeasts, the mission to get Lance, etc.

She rolled her chair over to it, hooking it back up to her computer and setting to work on it again.

Maybe it was the break, but for some reason, it just seemed easier to manage than it had before.
The encryption that had given her so much trouble before just seemed to crumble beneath her skills and genius.

Had she maybe been hindering herself, too absorbed in her fears about the device’s contents? It didn’t matter. Not when her computer was finally recognizing the hard drive and showing files. Some were registering as corrupted, but for the most part, it all looked good.

This was fantastic! Now she could see the secrets Lance had fought so hard to keep. Maybe they could shed light on how to help Lance now. Or at the very least, give them a direction for talking to Lance.

She didn’t hesitate to click on the earliest file, double tapping it to launch it. The Audio file opened up and… what in the world was this?

Pidge stared at the computer as complete and utter gibberish came out of the speakers, assaulting her ears with the sounds of what could have been argued to be some alternate reality demon summoning chants.

She paused the audio and stared at the computer for a moment before looking to the communication device and finally to the Green Lion.

“The fuck?” She asked the Lion.

The Green Lion offered her no response, not that she was really expecting one. The lions were only sentient when their Paladins were piloting them, as far as Pidge knew.

She turned back to the computer and took a deep breath. This was fine. She’d figured out the hard drive, and she’d broken the encryption. How hard could figuring out this be?

She just… needed to figure out what hellish language that was.

Pidge replayed the first file from the beginning and frowned. Okay, so yeah, it wasn’t Altean or Galra – as far as she could tell. It definitely wasn’t Spanish, and honestly, Pidge couldn’t think of any other language that Lance would know.

She tapped her fingers against the desk, grimacing as the horrid noise from the file assaulted her ears. She wasn’t picking up anything that she was registering as a word in her head, but… maybe the ship’s translation program would?

She tried playing the audio again, this time running it through the ship’s translation program. “No results.” She muttered, narrowing her eyes at the computer. What did it mean ‘no results’? She was this close to cracking this stupid communication device. THIS close.

She refused to be thwarted by some weird nonsense! She lived weird nonsense! She was the embodiment of weird nonsense!

“UGH!” She growled and replayed the audio.

She could clearly hear Lance’s voice… although it sounded super weird. And there was someone else’s voice… so it was a conversation. Just not one she could understand. She ran the audio through the castle’s translators again and received the same result: none.

Maybe she was thinking about this too hard.

It wasn’t like this communicator device hadn’t been the most complex and encrypted Galra thing
that she’d ever encountered, although it was the most annoying. She was just… over thinking this.

Maybe it was a simple fix. What would she do to vex and annoy someone after a difficult encryption on some audio files?

...

Well, to be honest, she’d probably turn the audio files into pictures. Matt had always gotten pissed off anytime she did that, mostly because he complained that it ‘ruined’ the audio file. He preferred to keep the audio file the same, but just… reverse it.

No. It couldn’t be that simple. It couldn’t be… but… she set the audio to play in reverse and played the file again.

“Ugh… I can’t just start a conversation with ‘My Life Sucks. I feel like I’m running a space kindergarten, and I just got the equivalent of a toddler kicking me in the shins today.’”

Pidge’s mouth dropped open as Lance’s voice flowed from her computer’s speakers in a sentence she could understand. She couldn’t believe it. That had been it. She beat the stupid communicator. Hacker Voice: she was in.

She couldn’t wait to tell everyone else. They’d all be ecstatic, and finally, finally they’d have answers.

“That sounds like a wonderful and interesting way to start any conversation, really.” A new voice replied to Lance. She paused halfway through standing before slowly sinking back down in her chair.

It wouldn’t hurt to listen to the files first… right? Like, she deserved it. The others kept things from her…

Lance replied, proposing a trade of information about… drama of all things. Pidge half smiled, shaking her head fondly.

“Only Lance.” She muttered.

The unknown voice talked about his father being injured, and maybe she was reading too much into it, but the whole ‘five against one’ comment sounded a lot like this guy’s father had fought, and lost, against Voltron.

Lance told him about karma, and then Unknown asked if karma would visit the ‘toddler’ that Lance had mentioned previously.

Lance laughed, and Pidge would be lying if she said that she didn’t miss the sound. “Oh, if only. I wish. He’s not that much younger than me, but, I swear, he’s so immature.” Lance dragged out the syllables in ‘so’ as he spoke in a way that made Pidge smile. It was just so typically Lance, and so far, nothing in this conversation sounded or felt like Lance was betraying them.

He was just venting, the same way she’d vent to Matt about her friends or her parents. Complaining wasn’t too unusual for Lance, and it wasn’t like any of them had opened their doors up to Lance to vent.

The most ‘dangerous’ information had been Lance mentioning Shiro’s disappearance and the team’s less than stellar response. But… he hadn’t given away any real identifiable information
when he said that.

As a matter of fact, the more Pidge listened, the more it sounded like Lance was trying not to share information more than needed.

“So, Ke… my teammate is all about training. I swear, he’s going to over train himself into an early grave. And I tried to get him to stop and take a break because like I just said, he’s going to train himself into an early grave.”

Pidge snorted, covering her face with her hand. Okay, yeah, that was Keith. Lance complaining about Keith. What else was new? This was just so… typically Lance. So far not a single part of this conversation raised any red flags. Besides the obvious talking to a stranger thing.

Unknown sided with Lance and agreed that taking breaks was important, and then Lance went on to explain his training fight with Keith and…

“He blames me for our space dad being missing!” Pidge gasped at the same time Unknown gasped. She knew Keith had done something like that… they had all agreed that they all had a part to play in what happened with Lance, but to hear it being talked about from Lance… it was something else.

“She’s kind of? Do they all treat you like this?” Unknown asked.

“I mean, kind of?” Lance replied. “I mean, not really, sort of, yeah no?”

Pidge paused the conversation and stared at the computer. She replayed that last little segment, unable to believe what she’d just heard. Surely she hadn’t just heard what she thought she had.

“I mean, kind of? I mean, not really, sort of, yeah no?”

The words didn’t change. She’d heard them correctly the first time. No wonder Lance didn’t want them to hear the contents of this device.

Some part of her felt offended. Like, she didn’t treat Lance _as badly_ as he was implying, but… She thought back before Lance disappeared, and how she’d treated him. Snapping at him when he’d only been trying to help in the ways that he could. When was the last time she had thanked him without venom in her voice?

The file played on, uncaring of Pidge’s current mental crisis.

“That tells me nothing.” Unknown sighed. “Except that they probably are. I mean, you did say you were running a ‘space kindergarten’ which sounds like it implies there’s more than one youngling on your team.”

“Well, I mean there’s Pi…… P. There’s P. They’re kind of like a toddler, or a youngling as you said.”

She sucked in a deep breath, her eyes widening as Lance’s words registered in her brain. That was her. This was it, she’d get to hear how Lance really felt about her. Or more accurately, about how he’d felt about her before his disappearance.

Lance complained about her always being on her computer, and how he had to take care of everyone and… called them all incompetent. Well, he didn’t exactly. Unknown said it, but Lance didn’t exactly disagree.
She listened in mute silence to the rest of the file, and then to some of the others. They were all along the same lines. Just... friends complain about each other’s lives to one another. Like... distant penpals, or instant messenger friends.

Quiznak. This was basically like a long-distance diary for Lance. He had asked one time about keeping ‘vlogs’ or something like that... but his suggestion had been turned down. He’d been looking for ways to vent before, and they’d only been ignored and denied.

Man, they were shitty teammates.

She exited out of the files and stared at her blank desktop.

Pidge had hoped that the communication device would solve some puzzles for her, but instead all it’d succeeded in doing was making her feel... guilty. She’d been the one that caused Lance to cry in some of those audio files.

She could clearly hear Lance’s cheerfulness being chipped away when she had browsed through a couple of the files at random. He’d been upset, and lonely, and... no one on the ship would give him any time of day.

He was a social creature, and... he was alone.

Fuck. This was depressing. This was worse than finding out that he’d been a Galra spy or something! At least then she wouldn’t feel so guilty.

No wonder he had left. He didn’t feel wanted or needed here. No one would want to stay in that environment.

She would know. She’d been bullied all though school, and thinking back on those days, it was only Matt and her supporting family that had kept her sane. Up here, Lance had no one.

Quiznak.

She needed to show this to the team. Allura didn’t seem to hold onto the belief of Lance being a Galra spy as strongly as she had before... but this would help clear up any lingering doubts. She was sure that everyone would benefit at least a little from listening.

This didn’t explain where Lance had gone, or what happened to him while with the Galra, but it answered questions about why he’d left in the first place. And if they knew where Lance started, then maybe they could all understand how he ended up where and how he was.

Pidge saved the files onto a separate hard drive, and then locked her computer. She had some people to seek out, and a certain someone she owed an apology to.

Chapter End Notes

Hey! Sorry about the late update. I had a lot going on. In the past week it has been the birthday of my niece, my mother, and my brother-in-law. So, I've been a bit busy with all of that. Then I had an (mostly unexpected) client meeting on Monday and Tuesday.
In other news, my sister's house is officially under Contract. April 20th is the next 'land mark date' as that's the last day per the contract the buyer has to back out without losing money. If all the inspections and everything go through well, then we'll be looking at a May 7th closing date at the earliest (Fingers Crossed). Then I'll need to stay with my sister for a month or two until she can take over payments and then I CAN MOVE OUT.
Realization

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Pidge finally cracked the Communication Device that Lance was using at the start of this mess and listened to the recordings.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Mental Trauma, Heavy Topics, Referenced/Mentioned Dubious Consent, Horrible Comforting

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance didn’t understand why the Voltron team seemed so invested in him now. They had never cared about him before, so what changed? Why did they suddenly give a shit about him now?

It was a rhetorical question.

What had changed? Him. He had left them abandoned. He was the one who’d changed and had gained a purpose. They hadn’t realized what they had until they lost him, and now they saw him with all his potential and power and thought ‘I want that back’.

He was the ex-girlfriend who had blossomed into herself after a cruel and harsh breakup and Voltron was the heartbreaker fuckboy who left. Lance didn’t need or want them anymore and they could only blame themselves for that.

They were the ones who’d tossed him out like trash, abandoning him after he risked everything to save Keith and Red. They were the ones who’d taken so long to come pick up Blue, who hadn’t found him until it was too late.

They had yet to give an excuse – or an apology – to him for that, besides the quasi apology that Coran had sorta given.

Yet they expected him to just forgive them. To welcome their unwanted and unneeded assistance as they tried to ‘fix’ him. To turn him back into the mess he’d been before the Galra, before Lotor, gave him purpose.

Hunk had been spending his ‘time’ trying to convince Lance that they needed and missed him; that they had looked for him.

Bullshit.

They’d nearly torn the universe apart getting Allura back from Zarkon. The team had worked themselves nearly to death trying to find Shiro. If they had truly wanted to find Lance, then they
would have. At the very least, they would have put considerably more effort into it.

But no. They hadn’t found Lance until Hunk had been captured and Lance revealed himself to them.

Then again, they hadn’t found Shiro yet either. And as far as he knew, Pidge had yet to find her father or Matt. Of course, he could help with some of that… if he chose to. Frankly, he wasn’t sure she deserved that information.

Without Shiro, the team was still painfully failing. Bringing Lance back wouldn’t change that, although he did enjoy the way the team was obviously crumbling, breaking apart at the seams. A strong team needed a strong foundation of communication and trust – all of which Voltron lacked.

Yet despite his enjoyment at how the team was failing, there was always a bitter aftertaste of sorrow and despair.

Once upon a time, he had been happy here.

Although tinted with bittersweet nostalgia, those happy memories still lingered. Sometimes they slipped though in a bark of laughter, a smile, a joke; like he wasn’t a prisoner kept behind a particle barrier. Those moments tore though him, filling him with guilt and disappointment in himself.

They were Voltron: Defenders of the Universe! They were supposed to be the standard that everyone else looked up to. Role models and heroes for civilians of all ages. How could they have fallen so far? Masquerading as defunct Power Rangers in Space, playing make-believe at being a team.

He’d been making a difference with Lotor, hadn’t he? But had he been happy? Really?

It was too late to go back and change anything, to change how he discovered his parentage and lineage. To change how he met Matt and his resistance, to change his interactions with Sonali and the Druids. It was too late to change the past.

But they could still change the future.

Voltron was a symbol of freedom, an icon to the various resistances. Voltron was powerful, not just in actuality, but also as a symbol. These people didn’t even fully understand what they had here.

They were squandering it, wasting the potential. They had the right people – he could feel it through his connection with Blue, a strain of certainty that guided him forward, linking him with this broken team. The right pieces to make everything work, but there were things missing – pieces, modifications, connections… trust, communication.

There was a part of him, growing larger with every tick, which pressed and pressed, suggesting and hinting that this could be fixed. It reminded him of the happier times, pushing those nostalgic memories to the forefront of his mind.

There was potential, both in himself and in the others. A way to take the broken pieces and fit them all together. To make something greater than themselves. To make Voltron, to make a team.

Perhaps something had happened when Hunk had touched his scales. When he’d felt Hunk’s worry and fear and hope all the way down in the Astral Plane, strong enough to turn his ice to sand and overcast skies to rain in the sunshine.
He was still irked that Hunk hadn’t asked before touching his scales, but that was something for another day. He was sure that had Hunk known what a social taboo he was committing, then he wouldn’t have done it.

It was hard to look at Hunk and the others, but it was even more difficult to look at Keith.

Positive memories clashed with the bad. Keith’s frown became superimposed over his smile, and vise-versa. Shouts mixed with quiet whispers. A bonding moment, tender and sweet, clashing with the violent murder of Xana.

Lance seldom looked at Keith when he visited, and he always visited. He came after everyone else, after the castle switched to the ‘night’ cycle and darkened.

The bags under his eyes mirrored Lance’s, and while Lance knew why he couldn’t sleep, he wondered why Keith couldn’t.

Nightmares of him? Of Shiro? Something else, maybe?

Keith yawned, and Lance cursed how contagious yawns could be. He was more susceptible due to his own exhaustion – caused by social interactions, lack of sleep, and the lethargic response of recovering from quintessence exhaustion.

Blue was helping with the quintessence exhaustion as best she could. When he’d overspent himself, she had flooded him enough to keep him alive and safe before slowing the stream down to a trickle. Even the Galra – despite how much they used it – were wary of large amounts of quintessence, saving the quintessence baths as last resorts.

It was dangerous to introduce too much quintessence to a person too quickly.

He could feel the exhaustion tugging at him, and his resistance grew weaker with every tick. His blinks became longer and longer, until he could feel himself on the precipice of sleep.

He wondered how long Keith planned to stay for his ‘visit’. He almost never spoke, preferring to stay until Lance had fallen asleep like some sort of freaky stalker. Like, Lance knew he was pretty, but he wasn’t interested in Edward Cullen or his weird habits of watching people sleep.

“Why don’t you use the bed?”

It was hard to say which was more surprising; Keith talking, or the question he’d asked. Lance blinked slowly, his brain tugging itself back from the edge into the waking world.

“Can’t.” He mentally winced at how tired he sounded, and the general lack of response from his tongue when he’d tried to speak.


“You could say that, I guess.” Lance replied, sensing that Keith wasn’t going to be giving up his sudden newfound desire for conversation anytime soon. “Been a while since I slept alone.”

He hadn’t meant to say that but… he supposed it wasn’t anything they hadn’t already suspected. Although Coran and Allura had been courteous enough to leave him his necklace, they’d taken his bracelet. Gifts like those were not freely given in the Empire, and he had no doubt they would have jumped to conclusions.
Surely, they would have learned their lesson about communication by now and told everyone?

He blinked, and his gaze slid into his second sight just in time to see a flash of rapidly flickering Red. Quintessence? Startled he looked over to Keith, noting the way his fists were balled, the purse of his lips, the averted gaze, and Keith’s quintessence.

For most people, quintessence wasn’t anything that they were aware of. Maybe they knew that they had it, as did all living things, but it wasn’t something they consciously thought about. It ran through a person, powering their lives; highlighting and haloing them in it’s light.

The Paladin’s quintessence was different, and Keith was no exception to that. If anything, Keith was a bit more… extreme than the other Paladins.

Keith’s quintessence was… loose, for lack of a better term. It swirled around him like a firestorm, which – if Lance’s theory was correct – was an indirect reflection of his emotions.

Pidge and Hunk were similar, but they weren’t as… pronounced as Keith.

As far as he could tell, it was harmless. They couldn’t manipulate it, if they even registered there was something to manipulate in the first place. Few people had the ability to manipulate quintessence, and even fewer still had the ability to manipulate it well.

When Lance wasn’t exhausted, he had noticed that his quintessence was similar, although it looked more like blue ink diffusing in water around him. Neither Xana nor the other Druids had ever mentioned it, so he assumed that he was fine.

Although, now that he saw that Keith and the others were displaying similar symptoms, he had started to theorize that perhaps it was an effect of being a Paladin to a Voltron Lion. Perhaps it was a visual affect caused by an overflow in the transference of quintessence between the Lion and the Paladin?

That would help explain why it seemed to spike when the Paladin in question was feeling heavy emotions. The Lions tended to check in more on their Paladins during emotionally trying moments.

Blue huffed in his mind, and were she able to talk here, he was certain she’d tell him to quit trying to explain what Science could not explain – to quote Allura.

That didn’t mean Lance couldn’t study it later.

It did give him the benefit of having a bit of a window into Keith’s headspace and emotional status, and Lance grinned, seeing a chink in Keith’s emotional armor.

“Awh, what’s wrong, Mullet?” Lance asked, leaning forward until he was practically pressed against the barrier separating him from Keith. “Jealous someone would want to sleep with me?”

“No.” Keith’s response was too quick, the flush on his cheeks only helping further Lance’s case. The firestorm of red around Keith kicked up again, and Lance watched it for a moment, trying to discern what the swirling patterns it made could have meant emotion wise.

Without Keith touching his scales, there was no sure-fire (ha) way for him to truly know Keith’s emotions.

Absentmindedly, he reached and fiddled with the necklace as the thought about various theories of quintessence and if his current theory about this being an effect of overflow from a Lion could be
possible. Overflow was dangerous, but he couldn’t see the Lions harming the Paladins.

Blue wouldn’t have hurt him. She seemed almost offended at the thought of it, and Lance was quick to assure her that he wasn’t questioning her or her faith to him.

“It wasn’t forced, was it?”

“Huh?” Lance dropped the necklace, furrowing his eyebrows as the words Keith spoke tried to make sense in his brain. They clicked, a tidal wave of fury resulting from the conclusion he’d come to. “I didn’t force someone to sleep with me.”

“That’s not what I meant!” Keith was quick to protest, shaking his head. “I meant for you, not them. You weren’t forced, were you?”

It felt like he’d been physically punched in the gut by Keith’s words, the air departing from his lungs in a gasp and leaving him breathless. Keith hadn’t thought Lance had forced others to sleep with him… he thought Lance had been…

Well, he wasn’t too far off target.

No. No, Keith didn’t care about Lance. Not like that. Not when he’d murdered Lance’s family and forced him out to be abandoned. Yet the swirling around Keith didn’t falter – not that it was a lie detector, but it made Lance feel more… secure? Safe? Certain?

“Why do you care?”

“Is that a yes?” Lance ignored Keith’s question like he’d ignored Lance’s; choosing to look away from Keith and his firestorm of quintessence.

His hand found his necklace again, this time playing with it in an attempt to calm himself back down. He didn’t need to be lashing out with quintessence, not after what happened with Hunk a couple quintants ago.

“Lance?” Keith continued to press.

The steady sensation of the quintessence in the necklace resonating with him was soothing. It reminded him of Lotor, and how safe and warm Lance had always felt in Lotor’s presence. Lotor had always known how to calm Lance down. He’d always been there to make things better.

“He loves me.” Lance’s words weren’t a mutter or a whisper, but something caught between the two.

“If he loved you, he wouldn’t have forced anything on you.” Keith returned and the fire in his voice was enough to spark Lance’s own anger.

What would Keith know? He hadn’t met Lotor. He didn’t see how Lotor looked at him. He didn’t hear how Lotor spoke to him. He didn’t know how Lotor felt. How safe and warm and slimy and possessive and obsessive Lotor could be.

“He didn’t!” Lance argued. “He… I… I wanted it.”

He had wanted it, hadn’t he?

Lotor was attractive and he wanted Lance, and who was Lance to deny his future Emperor anything? Lance was in Lotor’s debt. Lance was Lotor’s pet Druid and his lover. Lance was
going to be for Lotor what Haggar was for Zarkon.

Lance had wanted everything that he’d done with Lotor. He’d even regretted not doing it sooner. Why hadn’t he done it sooner? There’d been reasoning and thoughts and… he… he…

“Did you? Did you really, Lance?” Keith kept pushing, and with every push, Lance gripped the necklace tighter, reaching out for it’s comfort.

“He loves me.” Lance repeated. The necklace was proof that that fact. “He treats me well, takes care of me.” He’d taken Lance on dates, offered him breakfast in bed, given him food, shelter… Kanki.

His stomach rolled, the memory of that night still hazy. He… he had consented, hadn’t he?

“There’s no agreement under pressure.” His mother’s voice echoed in his ears. She shook her head as she diced a vegetable for that night’s dinner. They were talking about a girl, about the government, about business deals.

There was no agreement under pressure, and he had been undeniably under pressure in that moment. It was one of the reasons he’d been so mad afterwards.

“But did you want it?” Keith asked again.

It was like something very physical snapped inside Lance, a tidal wave of emotions breaking through a dam and hitting him full force. Purple lightning hit against the barrier, not directed at Keith, but unleashed all the same.

Blue growled in the back of his mind, mentally springing forward the moment the lightning was set loose and wrapping herself protectively around him.

“I did what I had to!” Because he’d had no choice. It was that or worse options, and Lance had done what he’d needed to do. Those six words could define every second of his time with the Galra. He did what he had to.

“Still doesn’t sound like you wanted it.” Keith snapped back at him. “Did you want it? Do you love him?”

Lance felt himself deflate at the last question. A part of him was demanding he answer yes. He’d sworn himself to Lotor. Lotor was his prince, his emperor, his lover, his everything. Yet an equally strong part of him recoiled, forcing the words he could have said to taste bitter on his tongue.

Tears welled up in his eyes, pressure building behind his eyes and in his ears as he fought the reaction to cry.

“I…”

“If you can’t answer, then I think that’s answer enough.”

“He loves me!” Lance repeated, not sure of why that one phrase was so important. Was he trying to convince Keith or himself at this point?

“Did he?” Keith’s voice was quieter as he tried to be nicer, but… somehow that just made everything worse. It felt like Keith was purposely trying to soften a blow that he knew would hurt. “Or is that just what that necklace tells you?”
The necklace slipped out of his hands at Keith’s preposterous question or was it?

His first instinct was to tell Keith that he was full of bullshit. To repeat that Lotor loved him and that the necklace was a sign of said love. Except the necklace had never been a sign of love. He’d known that when he’d accepted it.

It was a sign of ownership, of possession.

There was a gentle cool brush as Blue pushed the memory of Hunk’s imprisonment forward. She drew his attention away from Hunk and towards his own reaction to the missing necklace. The way the necklace felt when it had been removed in the first place, how he couldn’t manage without it.

Xana had said something about how he shouldn’t have removed the necklace, hadn’t he? Strange how Lance’s mental breakdown had occurred after the necklace was removed… like the necklace was influencing him.

When had he received the necklace exactly? When had he started questioning about Lotor? Was it before or after the necklace had been put on him?

He had assumed at one point that the necklace was harmless, and he could see now that his assumption had been wrong. It had helped to corrupt him, to twist him into something Lotor could manhandle and bed. It twisted his desires and thoughts, corralling him into what the Galra wanted.

He wanted the necklace off.

He didn’t realize he was acting on that desire until Keith was there, pulling away his hands and undoing the clasp. He threw the necklace at the far wall, only briefly surprised when it didn’t hit a particle barrier.

Now that he knew what to look for, it was painfully obvious. He could feel his quintessence already fluctuating, becoming unstable with the disappearance of the necklace.

How could he have been so stupid?

Blue hissed at the thought, washing over him in gentle waves as she worked to help re-stabilize his quintessence. She apologized that she couldn’t have done anything sooner. Neither of them were in a position to be able to handle it until recently.

He could feel the tears from earlier spring back up, and despite how hard he fought them, they slipped out with every blink until he couldn’t hold back anymore.

Keith moved, reaching forward towards Lance’s face and he almost flinched back but Keith stopped.

“May I?”

He was reminded of when Coran did the same not too long ago. He’d been without his necklace then too, hadn’t he? Could he survive without it? Coran had something about addiction and he panicked, his heart racing too fast.

At least Keith was asking… unlike Hunk.

He nodded, and that was all Keith needed before he gently swiped over the scales, wiping away the tears. Keith’s emotions came in little waves because of that, full of warm concern and hot anger.
although Lance could tell it wasn’t directed at him.

It helped divert him from the panic he’d been feeling. The helplessness and insecurity and the fear. Keith felt more sincere than Lotor ever felt. He cared about Lance… for Lance.

Lance clung to that for a moment before throwing himself at Keith, sobbing into his shoulder as the rest of the dam holding back Lance’s emotions broke, bolstered by Blue’s assistance with his quintessence and Keith’s overflow from touching his scales.

He lost track of time, lost in the gentle rock of Keith’s body, the warmth surrounding him, the flow of Blue as she worked as a substitute for his necklace to stabilize his quintessence.

“Why does everyone suck at comforting?” Lance asked.

Keith shrugged. “Hunk might better.” He suggested, noncommittedly.

“You suck.” Lance replied after shifting to be a bit more comfortable.

“You stopped crying, didn’t you?” Keith returned. “I don’t have to let you rest your boney chin on my shoulder.”

“Your shoulder is just as boney!”

The banter was familiar and friendly. Blue purred quietly, content with the ease of the conversation. She conveyed approval. Lance didn’t need heavy topics after all that. He needed rest and comfort.

“You need some sleep, Lance. And my shoulder and back hurt.” Keith replied after a moment, throwing Lance off from the suddenness of the new topic change.

Part of him was very tempted to point out about how his own back hurt but he held his tongue. He didn’t want to risk saying anything and ruining what little moments of peace he had left. He clung to Keith although he was really clinging onto the lingering peace.

“I’m not going anywhere.” Keith’s voice was in his ear, hot air blowing against his ear. “Let’s get to bed.”

His heart jumped, Lotor’s face appearing in the shadows and leering at them. Once the idea of Lotor brought Lance comfort, now, it was brought up a melody of painful emotions too raw for Lance to sort through yet.

But he hadn’t felt that from Keith. There’d been desire, just a hint of it, but it was deep down. So, buried under concern and anger that Lance had barely even registered it. Not to mention how furious Keith had been at the idea of someone forcing Lance into anything.

He took a deep breath and loosened his grip, just enough so he could pull away and look at Keith.

“You won’t go anywhere?”

“I won’t go anywhere.” Keith promised.
Some of you may have already noticed that there is a new Fic in the Series called "The Delected Scenes of Lilac Sweet". The fic is exactly what it's named. Check it out for Alternative Chapters and Alternative POVs. I've posted an alternative POV of this chapter there. It'll be Chapter 10 of that fic. :)
Surprises

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: During a conversation with Keith, Lance realized that the quintessence stored in the necklace was negatively influencing him. He asked Keith to remove it. Keith did so and remained with Lance through the night as comfort.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Referenced/Mentioned Invasion of Privacy, Victim Blaming, Miscommunication, Poor Communication, Referenced/Mentioned Abuse

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Keith couldn’t tell how long he had been staring at the ceiling, half awake and lazing about in the after-glow of sleep.

There was just something calming about the warm weight of Lance’s arm over his stomach, or the warmth of his breath into Keith’s neck. He didn’t need to move to know that their legs were tangled together, and even if they weren’t, Keith wouldn’t have been able to escape with Lance’s body pinning down his arm.

Lance shifted, moving closer to Keith until Keith could feel Lance’s eyelashes flutter against his jaw. His stomach swooped at the movement, his heart fluttering in his chest.

He didn’t know what time it was, and he didn’t care. This was the first time that he’d waken up naturally and he was enjoying the peace of it. Every other time he’d been woken through the night had been due to Lance’s nightmares.

Sometimes he was furious, but more often than not, Keith woke to tears.

It was all Keith could do to wipe away the tears and offer words of comfort until Lance resumed sleep. He was loath to move and wake Lance up because of that.

Lance sighed quietly before shifting, his lips pressing against Keith’s jawline in an obviously soft kiss just below Keith’s ear.

Quiznak. Keith was not equipped to deal with this.

“Wha time izit?” Lance’s voice was a quiet whisper, sending shivers down Keith’s spine and making his mouth dry despite the obvious sleepy slur. His heart shapeshifted from a fluttering butterfly into a terrified rabbit.

Who did Lance think he was? The stranger who ‘loved’ Lance?
He bristled at the thought, although he couldn’t tell if he was angered more from Lance thinking him to be the stranger, that the stranger had abused Lance when he could be this sweet and soft, or a mixture of both.

Lance didn’t wait for a response. Keith could feel his breathing even back out as he started to drift back off to sleep.

He didn’t know what time it was, but the lights in the castle had already reverted to the ‘day’ cycle. It wouldn’t be long until someone came to check on Lance and something told him that a wake up like that wouldn’t be good for Lance after the stressful night.

He heaved a heavy sigh, not wanting to get up yet but knowing that he had to. He shifted as best he could to look at Lance, memorizing how peaceful Lance looked.

“Good morning.” Keith tried, hoping that Lance hadn’t fallen too deep back into sleep. Lance’s nose wrinkled, and he whined lowly, shifting until he was pressed back up against Keith. Keith half laughed, rolling his eyes.

Of course, Lance was a clingy sleeper. He’d never admit it, but it was kind of cute. Well, if that wasn’t going to work…

He tapped his fingers against Lance’s hip, wincing as the motion prompted his sleeping arm to burst into a thousand pins and needles. Quiznak, he hated it when limbs fell asleep.

Lance muttered something incompressible into Keith’s neck, pressing his face further into the crook where Keith’s neck met his shoulder. Despite the sensation of his arm being asleep, Keith continued to tap his fingers, hoping that if he did it enough he would a) get feeling back in the arm, and b) wake Lance without Lance freaking out on him.

“C’mon sleepy head.”

“Time izzit?” Lance sleep slurred, and Keith could feel his eyelids fluttering thanks to the eyelashes against him.

“Time to wake up.” Keith replied, half shrugging to try to continue to get feeling into his arm. Lance whined again at the movement but pulled away, yawned as he did so. He licked his lips and blinked, staring up at the ceiling before finally looking to Keith.

To be honest, Keith was sorta expecting Lance to panic or freak out, but all he did was yawn again and then somehow untangle their legs and swing himself over Keith in a move so smooth it had to be practiced.

For a single second Lance was hovering above Keith, straddling him with his knees on either side of Keith’s hips, looking down at Keith was half-lidded eyes and… then he was gone, off the bed and stretching up to the ceiling as he yawned for a third time.

Keith was not okay. In no way shape or form was Keith okay. But he couldn’t let Lance know that, not after the conversation they had just last night.

Lance was always flirtatious, and he probably thought that the best way to move past what happened was to act as if it hadn’t happened. He probably wasn’t flirting with Keith, or at least, not meaning to… and Keith felt shame and guilt prickle under his skin from the thoughts that had sprung up.

He sat up, shaking out the arm that was still trying to wake up, and cleared his throat.
Lance looked over his shoulder at Keith, his eyes seeming to brighten as he grinned and spun back around. “Morning.”

“Good Morning?” His voice was a traitor, coming out squeaker than expected.

Lance laughed quietly before sobering. “Thank you,” When Lance leaned forward into Keith’s space, it didn’t matter that they had shared a bed and… cuddled, he was far too close for Keith’s comfort. “…For last night.”

Did he have to say it like that?

Seriously? Did he absolutely have to make it sound like they had done something last night? Had Lance always been like this with him and he just never noticed? He swallowed thickly and nodded.

“No problem.” Keith replied, his voice still squeaky but not as badly as it had been.

Lance just found out he was being… used and had cried about it multiple times through the night. Surely, he wasn’t soliciting Keith. He couldn’t have been. People didn’t get over trauma like that quickly… did they?

Even if they did, it just wasn’t right to do anything with Lance like that after what he’d found out. Then he’d be just as bad as the stranger who used Lance, and Lance deserved better than that.

Besides, Keith was probably just reading too much into all of this. He had just woken up, and hormones and emotions were always strange for the first hour or so – or until after training.

Lance’s gaze – too sharp for only having just woken – watched Keith as he slid off the bed and skirted around Lance.

“I have training.” Keith informed him, like it was an excuse to escape this incredibly uncomfortable situation. Lance narrowed his eyes, but after a moment stepped away, giving Keith more distance.

“I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.” Lance looked away, folding his arms in front of his chest in a move that was all too recognizable to Keith.

Quiznak, Lance was closing himself back up to Keith. He couldn’t let that happen. He couldn’t let so much progress be lost. The others would be devastated.

“You didn’t!” Keith shook his head. “I’m fine, really… Are you okay?”

Keith knew he messed up almost immediately. He wasn’t the best at reading atmosphere, but even he could feel it change the moment he asked that question. Lance’s responding look was more poisonous than Nunvill, and that stuff was deadly.

“I’m fine.” There was a chill in the air after Lance’s words from how coldly they were spoken.

Well, that was a complete shutdown of conversation if Keith had ever heard one. Quiznak, the others were going to be so pissed at him.

“I didn’t-”

“Don’t you have training?” Lance’s interruption was as cold as his last statement. Keith nodded, recognizing that he wasn’t going to get any further with Lance right now. Maybe later, like that
night. Lance had seemed better after getting some sleep and he did say that he didn’t like sleeping alone.

Keith turned for the door, almost forgetting to put the barrier back up. He passed by the necklace and debated throwing it away, but the thought that Coran and Allura might be able to use it somehow stopped that.

He looked at Lance, knowing that what he was about to say would only make things worse but… he needed to know.

“Will you be okay? Without the necklace, I mean?”

Keith didn’t want to give it to Lance, especially since he seemed to have managed fine all night without it but… he didn’t know how it’s absence would affect Lance when he was all alone.

The ice in Lance’s eyes melted the tiniest amount, filling Keith with almost a giddy sort of relief.

“I’ll be fine, Keith. Go kill yourself with training.”

His tone was still cold, but it seemed warmer than just a moment ago. Keith would take whatever success – unexpected or not – he could. Keith smiled thinly, activating the particle barrier and exiting the Medical Bay. There was nothing else for him there.

He debated stopping by his room but decided against it. If he changed his clothes, he’d just be getting them all dirty again by training. There was no point.

He could take a nice long shower after training.

Unfortunately, he never made it to the training room.

“Keith!” Pidge was breathless and wide-eyed as she called his name, sprinting down the corridor towards him. She slowed as she approached, leaning down to rest her hands against her knees as she panted. “Been. Looking. Everywhere.”

She bounced up; her bright eyes only darkening the heavy bags under them. Despite her obvious exhaustion, she seemed so full of energy she could probably put the energizer bunny to shame.

Had she even slept last night? Based on the oil on her eyelids and the weight of the bags under her eyes, Keith would hazard to guess that she hadn’t. Her energy was probably coming from a second – or third or fourth – wind.

He should have checked on her before going to talk with Lance.

“I was with Lance.” Keith replied. It wasn’t like he was lying. He had been with Lance.

“Doesn’t matter.” Pidge shook her head and reached out, grabbing Keith’s hand and tugging lightly. “C’mon, lets go. I got everyone else already. You were all that was left, and now I’ve got you so Let’s Go!”

Keith blinked at her, going along with her for now. “Where are we going?”

“To the lounge. I gotta show everyone what I found.”

“Is it Shiro?” Keith didn’t want to get his hopes up but… they found Lance, now all they needed to do was fix him and find Shiro. They were already working on fixing Lance so…
Pidge snorted. “I wish. No, it’s about Lance. Well, no, it’s about us, but it pertains to Lance.”

Well, that told him nothing except that Pidge was probably running on little to no sleep. Well, best he indulged the resident hacker. He was not interested in seeing what she could do to him if he provoked her ire.

Pidge didn’t explain anything when they reached the room. She just bounced over to a terminal, did some typing and…

“Ugh… I can’t just start a conversation with ‘My Life Sucks. I feel like I’m running a space kindergarten, and I just got the equivalent of a toddler kicking me in the shins today.’”

Keith felt like the breath was knocked out of him the moment he heard Lance’s voice come through the speakers. He was rendered motionless for a moment, stuck as his mind tried to figure out what was happening.

“Is that?” Hunk pieced it together first.

Pidge spun around, nodding excitedly. “Yep. Some of the audio files are corrupted, but I salvaged what I could.” She turned to Allura now, sobering up as she continued to speak. “He wasn’t a traitor, just… upset at how we were treating him.”

Was it wrong that Keith’s first initial reaction was anger? He couldn’t tell if it was his or Red’s, but it was there, bubbling and boiling under his skin.

The sensation only grew worse as the recording continued to play, until Keith couldn’t take it any more and snapped.

“Why didn’t he talk to us?” Everyone turned to face Keith as he spoke, surprise on some of their faces, concern on others, and understanding on Coran’s. “Why did he talk to some random stranger instead of us? What made him trust them?”

“Gee, maybe the fact that we were the problem?” Pidge paused the audio, giving Keith a flat look. “He complained about us the most. You don’t just go up to your bully and complain about them to their face.”

“I was not bullying Lance!”

“‘He blames me for our space dad being missing!’” Pidge turned away only to look back at Keith as the segment played. “‘He blames me for our space dad being missing!’”

“That wasn’t training, Keith. You beat him and then blamed him for Shiro’s disappearance.” Pidge said quietly. “Sounds like bullying to me, and I know you’re mad, Keith, believe me, I understand. Lance said some stuff about me too, and I wish he’d come to us… but can you really say that you would’ve listened? Can you say that Lance would’ve thought you would listen after that?”

“No.” Hunk answered, looking down at the ground. “I wouldn’t if I was Lance.”

Keith looked away as both Hunk and Pidge argued against him. Well, they weren’t really arguing, but they weren’t siding with him either. And… as much as he hated to admit it, they were right.

Quiznak, they were right.

Red snarled as his anger flared out, being replaced with a weary sort of exhaustion. She was still
furious that Blue’s Paladin would outsource to another, but she could carry that anger on her own. His shoulders slumped as he looked back to the group.

“Yeah. Yeah, you’re right.”

No one seemed to know how to respond and after a few seconds of silence, Allura broke it. “Keep playing the audio, Pidge.”

The anger from before resurfaced, ignited by a different reason. One Keith felt far more valid and reasonable.

“Don’t.” Keith immediately demanded, shaking his head. “We shouldn’t be listening to this. You verified that Lance wasn’t selling us out. One person hearing secrets he didn’t want to tell us is enough.”

Lance had risked everything to keep them from hearing this. While spoken to another person, they were Lance’s private thoughts and feelings.

After last night, Keith didn’t want to betray Lance by listening to this.

“There is so much information we can glean from this, Keith.” Allura argued. “This is information we can use to repair the relationships between Lance and the rest of the team.”

“He can’t know about this.” Keith knew his words would garner disagreement from the rest of the team, but that didn’t make them any less true. They couldn’t tell Lance about this. It would crush him.

“Poor communication is what got us in this mess in the first place.” Pidge argued, her eyes flashing in the light of the lounge.

She wasn’t wrong, and Keith would never dream of suggesting that she was. There was a severe lack of communication between everyone on Team Voltron. He wasn’t blaming Lance for that. He’d been set straight on that earlier, but… if Lance had come and spoken to them instead of a stranger, then perhaps things would have been different.

Then again, Keith could just as easily accept the blame as well. If he’d been more open and less hostile, then maybe Lance would have come spoken to him. If Keith and Allura had communicated better… if Allura had gotten to know the team better…

So many ‘ifs’ and they all revolved around communication.

“I agree with Keith.” Hunk added quietly, shocking nearly everyone.

Hunk’s change in sides made sense when Keith considered that Hunk had never been on either of their sides. Hunk was firmly on Lance’s and if that meant agreeing with Pidge one moment and Keith the next, then that’s what it meant.

Pidge seemed speechless, which gave Hunk all the time he needed to continue.

“Lance didn’t want us to hear this. He tried to destroy that thing for a reason. Telling him that we invaded his privacy isn’t the way to get him to trust us.”

“Exactly.” Keith agreed. “That’s why we can’t let him know.”

Pidge looked to Allura and Coran, her mouth working but no words escaping until “You can’t
agree!” finally worked its way out.

“I don’t.” Allura replied tersely, glaring at Keith. “How can we help Lance if we do not know where to start? These recordings are the beginning of everything. There is much they can answer.”

“Okay, Allura.” Hunk nodded. “Sure, that’s fine and all but… let’s say there’s recordings of the conversations you had with your hologram dad. You cool with us listening to those?”

Pidge froze, and Keith watched as realization slowly started to dawn on her face.

“Absolutely not! I fail to see the correlation, Hunk.” Allura continued to argue.

“Those are recordings you wouldn’t want us to listen to, right? Recordings where you may or may not have complained about us to an interested 3rd party. If Pidge says that he didn’t sell us out, then I believe her. I don’t need to hear anything more. Lance doesn’t need to know what we’ve heard.”

“You’re right about that.” Pidge interrupted the argument. “But… we can listen and not inform him. He doesn’t have to know why we’re suddenly apologizing for how we treated him. For all he knows, we could have just done some deep soul searching or something.”

“I don’t want to lie to him.” Hunk replied. “And lying leads to miscommunication, and miscommunication leads to messes like this. No. Thank. You. Not interested.” As if to add extra emphasis, Hunk made sure to add in dramatic gestures to the last part.

“Lance isn’t in a place that he would take the news well.” Keith added.

The knowledge of what he’d discovered last night weighed on him. Should he tell them? It wasn’t his thing to tell, but it was something they all probably needed to know. At the very least he’d need to tell them about the necklace being removed, but that would lead to questions why.

“We can’t just ignore this information, Keith.” Allura argued.

Keith shook his head. “No, Allura. Lance will talk about it when he wants to.”

“And if he never does?”

“Then he never does.” Hunk replied.

“I’m not saying ‘forever’. It’s just that after last night, Lance doesn’t need to think that we’re manipulating or betraying him too.”

Almost immediately everyone’s attention converged on him.

“What happened, Number 4?” Coran asked. Thus far, Coran had been silent in the conversation but now he seemed to be the only one who could talk. Keith hugged his arms to himself, suddenly feeling very much like a fish out of water with everyone’s attention on him so acutely.

“We talked, he realized some stuff.” Keith shrugged. “Not my business to say, but the necklace is off now.”

There were various gasps among the group at Keith’s statement. He glanced up to see Allura’s gaze burning into him, as if she was hoping she could read his mind to find out what he knew if she stared hard enough.
“The only way that could happen is if you…”

“Lowered the particle barrier?” Keith finished for Coran. “Yeah, yeah, I did. It was that or watch Lance strangle himself trying to get that thing off.”

“Lance needed it to help regulate his quintessence.” Coran shook his head and started to head for the door. “It may already be too late.”

“He was fine this morning.” Keith cut him off. “I already checked on him.”

“That’s not possible. He’s too accustomed to corrupted quintessence. He shouldn’t…”

“If he needs that, then he has the Blue Lion now.” Keith interrupted him. “Lance will be fine. He might have needed the necklace earlier, but he doesn’t need it now.”

“And you’re certain he was trying to remove the necklace?” Allura’s question came from nowhere, and Keith turned to her, knitting his eyebrows as he nodded. She turned to Coran and gave him a look. “Could that be considered rejecting the gift?” She asked.

Coran’s lips turned downwards as he looked at the princess.

“You could not be seriously accepting that fraudulent courting.”

Keith was fairly certain that if this were a show of some sort, there would be a record screech noise at this exact moment. His gaze darted to Hunk and Pidge to see them with similar expressions of bewilderment and confusion, mirroring what he was sure was on his face.

“I’m sorry, but did you say ‘courting’?” Hunk asked.

Puzzle pieces clicked in Keith’s head. “He loves me.” The strange attachment to the mind altering necklace. Allura and Coran talking about… courting. Quiznak. Lance’s situation was more fucked up than he originally thought.

No wonder he’d been so broken to find out it was all false. Unless he was mistaken, courting equaled marriage. Lance had basically been engaged to his abuser.

“We have no way to know if it was fraudulent or not.” Allura argued. Keith opened his mouth to inform them that it was, but no words escaped. If he told them it was fraudulent then they’d ask how he knew and he refused to spill about what happened to Lance. “Now would Lance’s attempt to remove the necklace count as a rejection?”

“Technically. But if it had not, I would hope that you were not planning on honoring the courtship should the Galra have come calling.”

“No.” Allura replied. “But this way we have full authority to deny the courtship without-”

“Without what? Starting an intergalactic war? News flash, we’re already in one.” Pidge interrupted, staring at Allura and Coran like they had grown extra heads.

“What the quiznak? Lance was engaged, and you didn’t tell us!?” Hunk seemed more upset about the whole Lance being engaged thing. Which to be fair, Keith was pissed about too, but if Keith was honest, he was pissed about every part of this conversation.

Allura faltered, seemingly recognizing the folly of her original thought patterns thanks to Pidge’s brilliant outburst. “Yes, I suppose that is silly now that I think about it. To be honest, Lance’s
courtship was something that had fallen to the back of mind.”

“Are you just going to ignore me?” Hunk waved his hands. “I exist. I am here, and I would like to
know what the quznak is up with this courting talk. Is my best friend engaged or not?”

“Not anymore.” Keith answered him. “I took the necklace off. Which means he rejected, which
means the… courtship… was broken.”

“Correct, Number 4.” Coran nodded and looked to Hunk as he continued. “The jewelry we found
on Lance appeared to be courtship jewelry. Of course, it’s been ten thousand deca-phoebs, so
customs and traditions may have changed. If the jewelry was from a courtship, it would not be
allowed to continue regardless of Lance’s rejection.”

“This is a mess.” Pidge muttered, a hand going over her face. Her shoulders slumped, and for a
moment she looked as tired as Keith knew she had to be feeling. “You know what? I was up all-
night listening to those recordings, and if you don’t want to listen to them, then fine. I’m going to
bed and leaving it up to you guys. I… need to get away from this mess.”

Pidge turned on her heel, exiting stage right, and Keith didn’t blame her.

This whole situation was a mess. First with the recordings and then with the knowledge Keith
knew about Lance’s abuser and now the whole courtship thing.

“Okay, okay.” Hunk was still staring at Allura and Coran, ignoring Pidge who stopped to linger in
the doorway. “But who was Lance’s suitor?”

Allura pursed her lips, looking at Coran and exchanging looks. She sighed, and when she looked
back at Hunk, her face had taken on the same expression one made when eating a lemon. A bad
feeling settled in Keith’s stomach as more puzzle pieces seemed to click in his mind.

The ‘owner’ of the ship that Lance had been on. The extravagance of the jewelry. The power to
give Lance a position as a Druid. The ability to obtain mind altering jewelry. There was only one
person Keith could think of who would have that much power in the Galra Empire right now.

“We believe it was Prince Lotor.”
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith woke up after spending a night with Lance, and after blundering through an awkward conversation, left to ready himself for the day. Pidge caught him before he could, as she had discovered something important. Pidge had managed to hack into the communication device and recover some of the conversations Lance had with Lotor.

Keith was initially upset at Lance for not coming to them, but then redirected his anger towards the fact they were betraying Lance's trust by listening to the recordings. Hunk sided with Keith, while Allura and Pidge argued that they needed to know the information in the recording. Keith let it slip that Lance had talked to him and that the necklace was off now.

Coran disagreed with the removal of the necklace due to Lance's unstable quintessence levels. Allura wondered if the removal of the necklace would count as voiding the 'courting'. It was explained that Lance's jewelry were courting gifts to the other Paladins. Pidge decided this was a mess, and turned to leave, but heard that Prince Lotor was Lance's suitor before she left.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Breakdown, Dry Heaving/Vomiting, Cursing, Argument,

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance’s fingers tapped against the energy barrier to the quickened tune of his mother’s lullaby. If he was honest, sleeping with Keith had been the best rest he’d had in a while, and it had left him with more energy than he knew what to do with.

Physically at least.

Mentally, he still felt… exhausted seemed like too weak a word to describe how he felt. Strained? No. That wasn’t it either. Confliction was a definite feeling. It was coiled up inside him, spiraling out through him like a storm.

Blue hummed along – as much as a giant robot space cat could – with the song, sounding like rain against a window accompanying a piano in his head. It would have been soothing had the rain not been a torrential downpour that pounded at the windows instead of gently tapping against them.

His neck itched where the necklace had once sat, and more than once since Keith had left, Lance
found himself reaching for where the jewel once was.

He wanted to curl up in a ball and hide under a blanket. He wanted to run around and scream. He didn’t know what he wanted anymore.

He’d wanted an adventure at one point in his life, and man, had he gotten one. Were there any refunds? He didn’t want this anymore.

He needed something to distract him, but there was nothing for him to do or use. He could meditate but…

“Quiznak.” Lance snarled, throwing out a wave of quintessence as he slammed his hand into the barrier. Blue immediately washed over him, chiding him as she worked to once more re-stabilize his quintessence levels.

It felt like someone dumping a bucket of ice cold water over his head, and his whole body shivered at the sensation despite the cold not really affecting him as it once had. Blue chuffed, settling back down in his mind to resume her previous noise making from before.

Almost automatically, Lance’s fingers started to tap the lullaby out against the barrier again and he scowled, pushing his hand flat against the barrier as if that would help stop himself from tapping out the tune.

Faintly, he could feel the currents of quintessence running through the barrier, giving it life and purpose. Blue paused in her ‘music’ to let out a low warning grumble, but Lance ignored it.

He wasn’t going to try to escape or anything. He was just… exploring. It wasn’t like he had anything else to do.

He pulled his own quintessence up to his hand, and briefly noted that it almost seemed to be more a bluish purple now. Pleased contentment streaked through Blue’s warning rumble at the observation. He rolled his eyes and pushed his quintessence out, careful not to spread himself too thin. He followed the currents of the barrier, slowly twisting around them and intermingling before he pushed gently.

The barrier pushed back, and it was not as gentle about it as Lance had been.

“Sonova-Quiznak!” Lance shouted, throwing his whole body back away from the barrier and cradling his hand to his chest as if he was physically wounded. “Fuck you too!” That last part was more directed at Blue, although there was no heat to his words.

If his reaction was akin to something one would have upon touching a hot stove, then Blue’s reaction was the same as one who had told the idiot not to touch the stove in the first place.

There was some concern, yes, but since she knew Lance was fine, that concern was overpowered by the amusement leaking through their bond along with the smug sense of ‘I told you so’.

Lance did not need that in his life. He so did not.

He didn’t need any of this in his life. He hadn’t asked for any of this – except for in his dreams. He hadn’t asked to be alien, or to be some mystical paladin of a legend, or to be some magic wielder. He hadn’t asked to be used by a prince. To be manipulated and humiliated and turned into a toy. He hadn’t asked to become a pet project of the Druids. He didn’t ask for quintessence or anything regarding it either!
If he was asked what the hell he was thinking at that moment when he threw his quintessence out against the barrier, he wouldn’t have been able to answer.

He was caught in a whirlwind of frustration, desperation, boredom, betrayal, and so many other potent and toxic emotions which left him kneeling on the floor as quintessence sparked against the barrier around him and tears fell onto his lap.

Blue’s amusement immediately ceased the moment she caught drift of Lance’s mental state and for once in her long, long life faltered. There was a single moment where she panicked. Her, an eons old Lion with more knowledge and experience than any other outside her pack, and she panicked.

Her panic only lasted a moment, but a moment was all that was needed for her panic to compound and mix with Lance’s own personal toxic cocktail of emotions. She stopped the leak, but it was too late. The damage was done, and all she could do was watch in horror as Lance’s already fragile state spun out of control.

She couldn’t let this continue, and not knowing what else to do, flooded him with herself. She washed over him, setting his veins to ice and freezing the air in his lungs until his breath turned white and he could barely breath. He breathed in as sharply as he could, and his vision blacked out until he could see the Astral Plane beneath the lids of his eyes when he blinked.

He had never given the saying ‘one foot in the grave’ much thought, but he imagined this was a bit how it felt. He was neither in the Astral Plane or in Reality but caught in some weird place in-between. Cradled there by Blue as she fretted over him.

For once, Blue’s emotions washed over Lance unfiltered, and as such, neither could tell if her sudden indecision and insecurity over her actions was from Lance or her. It was a two-way connection in a way that it hadn’t necessarily been before. As much as she had over saturated him, he had flooded into her. Flashses and bits of knowledge that Lance shouldn’t have had passed before his eyes like bubbles in water and if he reached out-

They felt solid under his fingertips, but the bubble popped at his touch and he was…

Swimming in an ocean with Blay…no, swimming in a sea of blood. Civilizations destroyed and for what? So much fighting and fleeing. The Black Lion’s turmoil leaking out to the others. Waiting, waiting, waiting to be found. A glimpse of a galra woman and a human male in a familiar cave on Earth. The hope of not being alone anymore.

The thoughts and images flashed through his mind, sometimes too quickly for him to properly interpret. He lost track of everything, as it all became just too much. Before, he had felt like an exposed wire, but now he just felt cold and raw.

Something touched his shoulder, violently physical despite how gentle the touch was.

Lance jerked back away from it, blinking away the nonexistent water and ice to see vibrant bright yellow and vivid red which immediately stole his attention away. Feedback echoed in his ears, sounding like waves crashing against a shore for a moment before distorting into something wrong.

The noise continued, drawing Lance’s attention away from the red and yellow towards a color he hadn’t noticed before as it faded into the light bluish white of the background. The new color wasn’t blue, but it wasn’t green either, and Lance could understand how and why Blue had allowed it to pilot it her, despite the lack of a proper match.
It was a small octagon in a circle design. It could fit, but it didn’t fill the design.

There were gaps left over, holes where things leaked through. Connections that failed to establish. The memory of the experience grated against Lance, and it took him a full moment for him to realize that it wasn’t his memory but Blue’s.

He was going to be sick.

Not because the idea of sharing Blue’s memories was sickening to Lance, but because the remembered sensation of Coran attempting to pilot her crawled under his skin and twisted his stomach and did not mesh well with the sensation of Blue attempting to separate herself from him after all she’d accidently poured in.

Correction, he was not going to be sick, because he was sick.

He was on his hands and knees, coughing up thick sticky black goo in the Astral Plane bile, dry heaving as warm – so warm, felt like coming home, like sand and beaches and home – hands rubbed his back.

He looked up and the bright yellow blurred until he could make out other colors and see Hunk’s face. Thick yellow veins ran through him, like light shining through spiderweb cracks in his skin, or a vein of precious metal in a mine. Sound filtered in like a radio suddenly tuning into a clear station.

“…why the necklace shouldn’t have been removed!” Lance couldn’t think of the last time that he had heard Coran’s voice be so high and shrill. There was an edge of panic to his tone, which coupled with the shrillness, grated Lance’s already raw nerves.

“Keith was right!” Lance might have shouted, or he might have whispered. He wasn’t aware of his own volume. Keith was right to remove the necklace. Lance hadn’t wanted it, and he would have hurt himself to get it off if Keith hadn’t removed it. It was his own fault he was like this… well, his and Blue’s.

When he turned his head to look at them, his eyes fell right past the vivid red of Keith – it had to be Keith, no one else was that shade of red – onto the cool color of what had to be Coran, and Lance was sick again.

Once more, his skin literally crawled as the sensation hit him again and even Hunk’s touch felt like it was too much. Considering he had only been dry heaving, he had no issue with just resting his head against the floor once it all started to fade again.

The floor was cold, and it took Lance longer than he would have liked to realize that the reason why was a thin layer of frost which slowly evaporated into blue wisps.

Fucking quintessence.

He closed his eyes – and ignored the very brief flash of shamegriefhorror from Blue – and tried to focus on his own breathing and the beat of his heart.

Hunk continued to rub Lance’s back and he allowed it for now but once he was better, he was going to rip Hunk’s hand off if it continued. Hunk abruptly stopped, and it honestly didn’t occur to Lance that he might have spoken the threat out loud.

“What is he doing?” Someone – Hunk – stage whispered.
“Trying to center himself, I’d imagine.” Allura’s crisp voice was unexpected and surprisingly somewhat welcome. He grimaced to himself and wondered how much of that reaction was his own and how much of it was whatever remnants of Blue that had become part of him.

The flash of apology from Blue was promptly ignored.

He opened his eyes and raised his head to scan the room, carefully avoiding the area Coran was in – Keith’s vivid red was helpful for that at least – until his gaze fell upon pink at the entrance to the room.

Allura’s quintessence was coiled, ready to react in a tick’s notice. Her staff was notably missing, but… somehow Lance didn’t doubt it wasn’t nearby. His body still hurt from his last encounter with it and he was not keen to repeat the experience.

“Princess-”

“Will you shut up?!” Lance interrupted with a snarl, curling his lip as just the sound of Coran’s voice made his stomach flip and his throat hurt and his skin itch, and then he made the mistake of looking and his stomach felt like it literally contracted as he squeezed his eyes shut and dry heaved once more onto the floor.

“Cor-” Lance’s body automatically tensed at even the beginnings of the man’s name, and Allura must have caught it because she cut herself off. “He seems to be reacting to you. Perhaps it best that you leave?”

It was worded like a suggestion, but Lance had heard similar enough things from Lotor in that same tone to understand that she was telling him to GTFO. Ordinarily, he would complain on Coran’s behalf, but as it currently was, Lance was in full agreement.

Coran didn’t protest, or if he did, Lance didn’t hear it. Part of him felt bad about how he was treating the older man, but the part of him that had just been dry heaving on the floor from looking at him honestly didn’t care.

“Is he alright?” Keith’s voice was uncharacteristically quiet, and coupled with the question he asked, it was enough to make Lance want to snap at him too. He was just dry heaving onto the floor and Keith wanted to know if he was alright?! “Right. Sorry.”

This time it occurred to Lance that he maybe voicing things out loud. His own thoughts were too loud in his head, so it made sense he was saying them out loud. Because, of course he was.

“What happened?” Hunk asked.

“Sensitivity to quintessence, if I had to guess.” Allura answered before Lance could snap or snark. “Although he seems to be having a serve reaction to…” She trailed off, and Lance didn’t have to guess to know whose name was being left unsaid.

She wasn’t entirely wrong, but there was a difference between sensitivity and being “Over-fucking-saturated.” Blue flinched, letting out another whimper of apology. Lance would get around to forgiving her once it all settled.

“I thought I was done with this shit when I left the Druids.” Not that he had left of his own free will or anything.

Words tasted weird in his mouth, and he couldn’t decide if that was a side-affect to blame on Blue or a result of the dry-heaving. He licked his mouth a few times trying to figure it out before
deciding it didn’t matter as he was only dry-heaving because of Blue. Ergo either option meant it was Blue’s fault.

Her flinch was less pronounced this time, and although she was still whimpering her apologizes, there was a definite undercurrent of annoyance.

“But you didn’t leave.” Hunk replied, and Lance wanted to laugh. Actually, he did laugh. It was harsh and dry, and it hurt like hell, but it felt so good too.

No. No, he hadn’t left. Not of his own violation, and likely he would never have. He had been so ensnared into Lotor’s trap, forcibly removing him from the situation had been the only solution. Not that he could have left, even if he wanted to.

“I had my reasons.” Too many people relied on him. Like Matt’s resistance. Like Lotor. Like Sonali. Like Xana. So many reasons, so many people. It was tempting to namecheck Matt, but he was going to hold onto that ace for now.

Pidge didn’t deserve to know about her brother. He’d hold onto that until the perfect time to stab her with the knowledge.

“Care to share?” Allura asked immediately, and Lance sat up just to shoot her an icy look. Pink floated in a hazy halo around her, highlighting her form. Lance frowned and wondered if his other vision had just become permanent.

Quiznak, he hoped not. He could already feel the impending headache, looming over him like a dark cloud.

He glanced at Keith and noted that his quintessence still whipped around him like it was a firestorm. A very dangerous part of Lance wanted to see if it felt as hot as it looked and was tempted to touch it. He quashed that impulse down.

He could see quintessence and while he could manipulate it, feeling quintessence like that had never been one of his talents.

“No really, no.”

He didn’t have to be looking at Allura to know that she pursed her lips when she replied with a frosty “I see”.

Speaking of frost, Lance could still feel it under his hands, but more than that, he could feel it settling under his skin. He generally avoided looking at himself, but he had a feeling that if he were, he’d see a patchwork of blue.

“I still don’t know what happened.” Hunk muttered.

Lance debated giving the poor guy a break and throwing him a bone or two, but he wasn’t feeling all that generous at the present. Besides, then he’d have to give them a crash course on quintessence and explain the connection to the Blue Lion and that she basically over-saturated him with her quintessence so much that it was essentially leaking out of him and forming the frost on the floor.

“I drowned.” Was a much simpler – if not more cryptic – answer. If there was a response, he ignored it.

He focused on the energy running through him, noting almost immediately how different it felt.
There was a thick layer separating him from the corruption, like it was buried under feet of impenetrable ice. It was no less present, but distant, and when Lance reached for it, all he could feel was cold, cold, and more cold.

Ice and water ran through his quintessence channels now instead of the ooze and electricity of the corrupted quintessence, and equally strong parts of Lance were both delighted and horrified by this discovery.

What had Blue done to him?!

There was no hint of apology from Blue this time, and the response she gave him was essentially her way of saying ‘I did what needed to be done’. She was keeping her distance from him, giving him space while still being as present as she could be.

He had a feeling that beyond the snappiness, his current state of apathy had a lot to do with her. Cold numbed, and he was feeling pretty numb emotionally right now. She replied the same as she had before, and Lance scowled to himself.

It made sense. He’d been doing just a wonderful job of processing everything earlier, so she had stepped in to help in the only way she could figure out how to.

That didn’t mean Lance had to like it.

He glanced at Allura, and despite better judgement, called on his quintessence. He internally followed his quintessence, tracing it along his body before attempting to pull it towards his hand and force it to manifest.

Before this nonsense, the result would have been instantaneous; now, he could feel his quintessence moving at a glacial pace, carving through frozen channels of quintessence until finally his hand lit up… blue.

That was both expected and unexpected, and he heard his audience gasp. Hunk scrambled away from Lance with a shrill shriek that almost had Lance losing focus. He didn’t, thankfully, not that losing focus would have been that dangerous with the little amount of quintessence that Lance had manifested. He shifted his focus from trying to manifest it to trying to shape what had manifested into a ball.

For the first time in ages, the quintessence said ‘no’ and faded away.

There was no way of knowing how he’d feel about his revelation before Blue had numbed his emotions, but his current state of emotion was caught somewhere between the inconvenience of losing all the control he’d had and calling Blue a ‘bitch’.

Blue couldn’t talk outside the Astral Plane, but he was getting the very clear feeling she was telling him that this was for his own good. And it probably was.

He wouldn’t deny that. This probably was for his own good, but that didn’t mean that Lance had to like this. He was going to have to relearn quintessence manipulation all over again, and just because he had inherent talent for it didn’t mean he wanted to experience relearning it.

Each person’s quintessence was different, and manipulating blue quintessence was already difficult because of the versatility of its nature. He was going to have to figure all this out… again.

Blue’s apology was all but sarcastic now.
He already felt drained and tired from Blue, from dry—heaving, but how he was hit with a wave of exhaustion that he knew came from the attempt at manipulating quintessence. Quiznak, when was the last time he’d been hit with exhaustion like this?

“You can’t do more than that, can you?” Allura asked after a few moments. There was a tone of glee in her voice at the realization, and enough of Lance was thawed to be annoyed by that.

Maybe it’d get better once he’d finished thawing out? It was a hopeful thought that Lance clung onto once it occurred, and he ignored Allura to eye Keith and re-examine his previously quashed impulse.

No. That wouldn’t work. Quintessence didn’t work that way and he knew from Blue that he was right on that. Attempting to mess with Keith’s, or anyone’s, quintessence was asking for trouble. Best he stayed clear of that.

He would not become Xana or any of the other Druids that had messed with him.

The vivid colors of the Paladins (and princess) hurt his eyes, and yeah, that headache was a definite guarantee now. He blinked, looking away from them and Allura gasped, seemingly reaching another conclusion.

“Can all Druids see quintessence?” Allura asked, and then as if realizing how out of the blue her question had been, back tracked. “I mean, if that’s what you keep looking at. I mean you’re looking at us, but it’s not at us.”

Lance smiled thinly at her. He was too tired for this, or to keep being so cryptic and mean.

“Not all.” He admitted. Her quintessence seemed to glow brighter, the halo undulating around her form in her apparent excitement. Keith’s firestorm seemed to flare up. A thick crack on Hunk faded away only to be replaced by a thousand tiny cracks.

Huh.

That was… interesting. Definitely something to explore later. Maybe once he had better control over this new vision and didn’t get headaches like this from it anymore. Or when he wasn’t so tired.

“Magic.” Hunk huffed drily. “Of course, it’s magic stuff.”

“You said you drowned.” Keith finally spoke, and his tone was thoughtful. Lance looked back at him, curious as to where he was going with this. Keith’s gaze was intense as it focused solely on Lance, understanding burning in his eyes. “It was Blue, wasn’t it?”

“Whoa, wait, like the Lion?” Hunk immediately asked as Allura gasped. She spun around, exiting the room without another word. Well, it seemed she didn’t deem him a threat to be watched anymore.

The corners of Lance’s lips turned downwards, and he felt himself shrink back into himself as he observed Keith and his quintessence. It flickered, as sensing Lance’s stare, but if he really focused, there was something about Keith’s quintessence that was different from Hunk’s.

It was more akin to Lance’s in one particular way and Keith’s question to Lance had all but confirmed what Lance now suspected. Keith’s bond with Red had progressed to the point of communication, much like his and Blue’s had.
“If you don’t understand, Hunk, then spoilers.” Lance finally replied, tearing his gaze away from Keith. “And you know I don’t share those.”

Hunk frowned, crossing his arms. “Fine. I’ll just leave you to have your secret little conversation with Keith then.” He turned to follow Allura out but paused and looked back at Keith. “Don’t forget to put the barrier back up before you leave.”

“Oh yeah, that’s real trusting.” Lance called out, narrowing his eyes as Hunk ignored him.

And then it was just him and Keith. He eyed Keith, noting that he was wearing the same thing as when he had left. Which wasn’t saying much considering their clothes were cloned, but it was something about how the clothes sat on him that told Lance that it wasn’t a fresh set.

“I thought you had training.” Lance finally said.

“I thought you said you’d be fine.” Keith countered.

“I was fine.” Lance bit out.

“Didn’t look like it.”

Lance looked away at that, unable to deny that truth. He hadn’t been fine. He had been lonely and bored, and it had allowed him to stew in thoughts that were best left forgotten. He could already feel parts of him thawing, and he was hit with a wave of fear at the thought of Keith leaving him alone like that again.

“There’s… It’s nothing.” Lance started to complain before shaking his head, crossing his arms as if to hug himself. “I’ll be fine.”

He would be fine, because he had no choice but to be fine. Keith would be there for him at night… at least he hoped he would be. He could last the day. Today was just a fluke, and even if it wasn’t… Blue wouldn’t let him fall like that again.

She rumbled her agreement, and Lance hoped that would be the end of the conversation, but it wasn’t.

“Somehow I don’t believe that.” Keith disagreed. “You were upset enough that… what upset you?”

“Why do you care?” Lance shot back. “It doesn’t matter.”

“It does!” Keith argued. “It does matter. I care, and I don’t want you to be upset.”

Lance laughed at Keith’s words. Didn’t want him to be upset? Oh boy, where was that before when Keith knocked Lance down and hurt him? Where was this concern when Lance needed it before? Where was this?

Also, didn’t want him to be upset? Was he not allowed to be upset? He’d been hurt and used, and quiznak, he was allowed to be upset.

“I’m going to be upset, Keith! I was used! He used me and told me he loved me, and I’m allowed to be upset! You can’t just waltz in here, make me realize some bombshells and then just expect me to not be upset!”

“I’m not saying you can’t be upset.” Keith shook his head. “I’m saying I don’t want you to be
upset. You can be upset, but that doesn’t mean I can’t try to help prevent it.” He pursed his lips and looked around the cell area as if he could see what had caused Lance’s breakdown.

“Leave me alone, Keith. I thought you have training.”

“And I thought you would be fine!”

They repeated the original point of the argument, and Lance bit the inside of his cheek, knowing this fight was just going to continue going around in circles.

“There’s nothing you can do.”

“I refuse to believe that.” Keith shook his head, and the flames around him kicked it up another notch. “Let me help, Lance. How can I prove that I’m genuine to you?”

Lance’s stomach twisted as only one solution came to mind, and he could feel Blue already starting to suggest against that before she paused and fell quiet. She would let Lance decide this on his own. She would not attempt to sway his choice with this.

He hated doing this, hated the invasion of privacy, but there was only one way that Keith would be able to prove his sincerity. He reached out, and Keith let him. He reached out, and grabbed Keith’s hand, pulling it up to his face and pressing it against one of his scales.

“Prove it to me.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey Guys!

Sorry it's been so long since I last updated. Thank you for all your patience, support, and encouragement! I'm finally all moved into the Townhome, and while there is still some unpacking to do, I was able to get a chapter out. I hope you guys enjoy! I currently plan to update weekly, every Wednesday between 11AM and 11PM EST.

There's a new piece of fanart by Alexander's Art on Tumblr! Check it out! :D
Emotionally

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance was dealing with some mental stuff and Blue decided to 'help'. She was a bit too over zealous in her attempts. Coran blamed Keith because Keith removed Lance's necklace. Lance discovered that his control over quintessence had vanished as the quintessence that responded to him was more blue than corrupted.

Lance got in argument with Keith, as Keith wants to help Lance. Lance doesn't think Keith is sincere, and believes Keith just wants Lance for Voltron. Keith disagrees, and Lance challenges him to prove himself.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional, Reference/Mentioned Minor Character Death, Reference/Mentioned Emotional/Mental Abuse, Referenced/Mentioned Manipulation

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

Eye scales were something that not even the Druids had a full complete understanding on.

There were rules about touching them as the emotional feedback could be unpleasant, for all parties involved. There were instances where they were used for that purpose, as Lance had discovered first hand, but… more often than not, they generally treated as a physical identifier towards one’s base quintessence color.

Given the stigma against using the scales as anything other… the act of sharing emotions through the eye scales was a strangely intimate one.

Warmth blossomed out where the soft tips of Keith’s fingertips gently brushed against Lance’s scales, as if Keith was scared to touch them. No, not scared, Lance amended that thought, but cautious. His eyes met Lance’s; his gaze searching for *something*.

Keith’s uncertainty bleed through the scales like ink bleeding through paper in water and Lance shivered; not because he was cold, but because of the strange spine-tingling sensation of someone touching his scales and the memories and people associated with the action.

Keith was different from Lotor, yet the prince still came to mind as he had been one of the few who had ever touched Lance’s scales.

The wounds from Lotor were still fresh and deep, but this was something Lance felt he *had* to do. He needed to be certain of Keith’s sincerity. It wasn’t a want but a *need*; one he hadn’t realized existed until this very moment.
Lotor had always felt… off. Like he was able to project what emotions that Lance felt from him, but somehow always failing to some degree. There was a prevailing slimy sensation that always leaked through with Lotor, but it had become so commonplace that Lance had just stopped actively registering it.

It was hard not to think about that slimy feeling now that he had another person’s touch to compare it to. Keith was so different from Lotor, and as if sensing that, Blue rumbled and pushed herself against Lance, like that would help him brace against the emotions slowly filtering through.

It wasn’t like Keith could affect Lance’s emotions, or make a permanent change in them, but this was still likely to be very emotional.

Lance expected Keith’s emotions to feel like the wildfire storm of his quintessence. He expected heat, and while he got it, it wasn’t at all how it imagined it. Keith’s emotions felt like a fuzzy blanket that had just been pulled out of a dryer. A warm comforting blanket knitted of Keith’s emotions that left Lance feeling secure and content, if not just a little uncertain.

Lance sighed, his eyes fluttering shut as he sunk into Keith’s emotions, diving past the exterior to get to the meat of Keith’s emotions.

There was an immediate change as anger flashed, bright and potent. It was tempered by confusion so strong, Lance could feel it resonate within himself. He blinked at Keith as understanding dawned upon him that Keith had no clue what was happening.

How could he not know? Lance was certain that Keith had asked before about touching his scales, hadn’t he? Why would he have asked unless he knew about this?

Lance almost pulled away from Keith, his eyebrows knitting as he debated to break the connection or not. The need to know Keith’s sincerity hummed under his skin, but his lack of desire to take advantage of Keith like this… to become Xana and Lotor, had him hesitating.

“They’re like empathy receptors.” Lance explained, hoping that it would help absolve some of his guilt over feeling Keith’s emotions like this without properly getting Keith’s consent.

Lance didn’t need to feel the confusion give way to understanding and embarrassment; the slightly pink tint of Keith’s cheeks and the aversion of his gaze was enough. “So, you feel what I feel?” Keith asked, his voice oddly subdued and almost squeaky.

Lance exhaled sharply in an attempt to hold back his amusement at that. If it wasn’t for Keith’s hand on his face, he would have nodded in response to his question. “Something like that.” He paused, and then continued. “Knowing that, do you still want to do this?”

Keith’s gaze jerked back up to meet Lance’s, the uncertainty melting away to determination. Keith treated Lance’s offer to back away as a challenge, and Keith wasn’t one to decline. “This will prove myself to you?”

Keith’s voice was unwavering, a clear demonstration of the determination running through him. Lance’s response, in contrast, was quiet and subdued. “Yeah.”

Keith nodded once, a sharp incline of his head. “What do I need do?”

Lance narrowed his eyes, somewhat surprised at how willing Keith was to this. Keith was a lone wolf with walls that only Shiro were allowed through; yet now he was lowering those barriers for Lance, for someone who could very well turn around and kill Keith – not that he would.
Lance could explain some of it away with the challenge that Keith decided to take, but... still, the trust was staggeringly unexpected.

“Just focus on what you want to show me to prove yourself.” Lance replied after studying Keith for a moment. He’d feel Keith’s emotions regardless, but it would help Lance sort through the emotions if Keith focused.

Lance didn’t really have the training for this, but he was confident that Keith wouldn’t be able to hide it from him if he wasn’t genuine about wanting to help Lance. It wasn’t like Keith was trained against this kind of thing, after all.

He knew Keith was, to some degree, sincere from the last time Keith had touched his scales; but the connections had been too fleeting for Lance to be certain. He needed to be certain. After everything, after all the things and people he thought he could trust...

He just needed to be sure.

“You want me to think of you?” Keith asked.

With no warning, Keith’s quintessence flared up around him as a wave of emotions slammed into Lance. It was unexpected and strong enough to physically take Lance off guard. He stumbled under the sheer magnitude, and his teachings echoed in his mind as if a belated warning.

Red was passionate, and Keith was pure red.

Keith’s free arm wrapped around Lance, his hand unbearably warm against Lance’s lower back as he steadied him. His other hand remained on Lance’s face, holding the connection despite Lance’s stumble.

“Sorry.” Keith whispered, his face suddenly close enough that Lance could feel the heat of his breath. Despite his apology, the unending wave of emotions bombarded Lance, leaving him breathless and disoriented.

Lance couldn’t reply at first. He was lost in Keith’s emotions like a tiny ship lost out at sea during a freak storm. He was just along for the ride, unable to fight back. Once more, he closed his eyes. He leaned more on Keith, accepting the support and steadiness that was offered.

He hadn’t thought a person could hold so much anger, but Keith was practically breaming with it. It was everywhere, present in everything. Some of it was directed at Lance, but only a small amount. The rest of it was directed at Keith himself, at the situation, at Shiro... a good chunk at Pidge and Allura and at...

“Lotor.” Lance opened his eyes to meet Keith’s, and Keith’s gaze sharpened at the name. Lance wondered briefly how Keith knew about Lotor considering Lance had never named him... but Keith’s anger was a distraction. It rose at the name, strengthening into a blazing inferno that burned brighter than any of the previous anger combined.

Anger was too weak a word to describe Keith’s feelings on Lotor.

Lance winced, squeezing his eyes shut as Keith’s emotions continued to course through him. The inferno was almost painful, and he wondered how Keith could manage with this.

Desire crashed over the inferno, burring it underneath and wrapping around Lance. It radiated comfortable warmth, and it took Lance a moment for him to realize that the desire he was feeling - that Keith was feeling - was to protect.
“Sorry.” Keith whispered again. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“It’s fine.” Lance reassured him, touched by how strong and sincere Keith’s desire to protect him was. There was something at the core of it, something which flickered away anytime Lance tried to better observe it.

Lance recognized it even without being able to observe it. He recognized it and pretended he didn’t. He wasn’t ready to acknowledge it.

“You’re different… from before.”

Keith half laughed, the sound humorless. “I could say the same about you.” He replied.

Lance didn’t reply, but instead refocused back on Keith’s emotions. The desire to protect didn’t waver, but it did fade into the background like white noise. It was always there, like the anger, but gentler.

“Having the team fall apart before my eyes was a bit of a wake-up.” Keith added after a moment of silence.

There was shame and guilt and resentment in that statement. He hated himself for allowing it to happen, for not doing something to prevent it. “I… I should have been a better leader. If I had, then maybe you wouldn’t…” Keith trailed off as the desire to protect resurged, stronger and more potent than before.

The only thing stopping Keith’s hands from clenching was the fact he was touching Lance. The twitching of his fingers betrayed the desire.

Lance hummed a low acknowledgement as he thought over Keith’s words and emotions. Actions spoke louder than words, and Keith hadn’t done much to warrant any form of forgiveness or trust from Lance. But in this case, the words Keith spoke were loud and true, Lance could feel that at least.

“Maybe.” Lance replied, pulling away. Keith didn’t bother to keep his hand on Lance’s scale, and it brushed against Lance’s cheek as it fell. Likewise, the hand on Lance’s lower back fell to Keith’s side.

It felt like getting out of a warm bed into an icy room, but he hadn’t wanted to see anymore of Keith’s emotions. He had gotten what he wanted – what he needed – and knew now that Keith’s desire to help him was genuine.

The source of that was something Lance wasn’t ready to confront yet. It had been the fleeting emotion at the core of Keith that Lance had recognized. Even now, thinking of it made Lance’s heart clench and Lotor flash in his mind.

Affection.

To be honest, Lance wasn’t sure he’d ever be ready to face that again. It was surprising that Keith had felt it at all towards Lance considering their past – and sort of present – animosity. He supposed it didn’t matter, he made the choice to ignore it, and so he was going to do just that.

“You’ve finally stepped up to being the leader we need?” Lance asked, raising an eyebrow and resting a hand on his hip.

Keith’s eyes widened comically and that was the only clue Lance needed to re-examine what he’d
just said. Quiznak. He’d basically just told Keith that he would rejoin Team Voltron – if they’d have him.

His feelings on rejoining the team were complicated. In honesty, he didn’t want to – Blue sighed mournfully at the thought – except, he had to if he wanted to keep Blue. And he would be keeping Blue, there was no question of that. Him and her, till the end. She perked up at that, purring quietly in appreciation.

“I don’t know if I’m there yet.” Keith admitted quietly. “But I’d like to think I’m better than I was.”

“You’re no Shiro.” Perhaps Lance’s words were cruel or unneeded, but he said them anyways. Keith’s lips tightened, his eyes darkening. Lance spun around, walking over to the bed and sitting down on it for a moment before letting himself fall back the rest of the way. It was tempting to just close his eyes and drift away.

The only thing stopping him was that the quintant wasn’t even half way done – yet he felt as if he’d been up for several. A lot had happened already this quintant. It was reasonable for him to be tired; between quintessence, Blue, and just… everything.

Blue purred reassuringly in the back of his mind, but he knew sleep wouldn’t come no matter how exhausted he was. Even with eyes shut, he could see the quintessence veins of the castle and a vague red haze in Keith’s general direction.

Fortunately, the vision seemed to be fading. Maybe after this conversation was over he could take a nap and it would be gone? One could only hope.

“I’m not.” Keith agreed, and Lance started from the suddenness of it. His mind blanked for a second before recalling what he’d last said. He didn’t really have a response for that, so he remained quiet. The intensifying red glow and the sound of quiet footsteps indicated Keith came closer. “Do you trust me now?”


Keith frowned, wrapping his arms around him in a way that used to piss Lance off. He always assumed it was Keith being standoffish before, now he knew it stemmed from somewhere and something different. His fingers drummed on his arm, and he averted his gaze.

Silence reigned for a good dobosh – he timed it.

Keith’s sigh was the only fore-warning Lance received. “Why didn’t you leave the Druids?”

“And go where?” Lance countered, sitting back up. “It isn’t like I had many places to go, Keith. I couldn’t come back here, I couldn’t go… home.” Lance hesitated on the word, his mind flashing to the family and friends he missed on Earth. “I didn’t have anywhere else to go.”

Keith faltered, deflating at Lance’s words. Silence reigned for another dobosh or so – this time Lance didn’t time it.

“That’s not the only reason, is it?” Keith seemed bolstered by a thought, and like a dog, he wasn’t going to be letting this go easily. Lance sighed. “You told Allura you had your reasons.”

“So what if it’s not.” Lance snapped. “I’m allowed my secrets!”
Lance inhaled sharply, preparing himself for Keith to disagree, for this turn into yet another fight. Yet it didn’t happen. Keith nodded and quietly agreed. “You are.”

Lance’s eyes widened, his mouth falling open. “I… am?”

“Yeah.” Keith shrugged. “I don’t have to like it, but… if you feel the need to keep them, then keep them. Just don’t endanger the team.”

“I tried to kill you all.” Lance said flatly. “I still could.”

“You weren’t yourself.” Keith disagreed, shaking his head. “If you still wanted to kill me, you would have done it by now. I’ve given you plenty of chances.”

Frustration at Keith boiled inside, chaffing at Lance. He was expecting resistance, disagreements, and anything but this. He hadn’t been prepared for Keith’s agreement and acceptance.

He dug for anything he could use to hurt Keith – he didn’t have to look far – and ignored Blue’s quiet whines for him to stop.

“You killed my uncle.” Lance spat out, and he could see the exact moment the impact of his words hit Keith. His whole body froze, his eyes widening once more. “…In front of me.” Lance added, like twisting a knife still in the stab wound.

Keith’s face twisted as he registered the words. “Fuck.” The word escaped in a breath, so quiet that Lance wasn’t sure Keith himself knew he’d spoken. “Who? The Druid who was with you… He was…?”

Finally, a reaction that Lance had expected. Surprisingly, he didn’t feel nearly the amount of glee he was expecting to have considering Keith’s pain at the news.

“His name was Xana.” Lance replied.

“T’m sor-” Keith started, but Lance cut him off.

“Don’t you dare.” Lance shook his head. “You’re not sorry. He was hurting… Pidge, I think, and you did what you thought you had to do.” Lance had felt how protective Keith could be first hand now, he knew that Keith would do anything – even die – if it meant saving one of his teammates.

He sighed, the frustration melting. His shoulders slumped, and he looked away. “He was a rotten uncle anyways.”

Blue gently washed over him, carefully as to not agitate the wounds caused by her flooding and over-saturating him. He knew it was better than Xana was gone. The man had used Lance and treated him like a personal experiment.

Xana wasn’t family in any of the ways that counted. All of his relationships on the Galra-side were built on lies and crumbling foundations. He couldn’t trust any of them. Then again, he wasn’t sure he could trust anyone here either.

The only people he might have been able to trust were Matt and Sonali, but they were gone now. There was no way for him to contact them, and if he could, what would he say, what would he do? He was useless to them if he wasn’t working for the Empire.

“I can still be sorry for your loss.” Keith finally said. “And I am.”
Lance sighed, too emotionally worn out to continue this conversation. “Whatever.” He looked away, wrapping his arms around himself.

“Was that what upset you?” Keith asked. Lance laughed once to himself, shaking his head. “Then what did?”

“It’s a personal problem.” Lance informed him. Because it was. Keith, Pidge, Hunk… they were all introverts. They did better when alone in a room, working on their own individual projects. Or when working together.

Lance wasn’t smart like they were. He couldn’t hack a computer or engineer something. He wasn’t as physically capable as Keith or Shiro. He wasn’t as fast, or as strong. He didn’t even have control over his quintessence anymore, thanks to a certain someone.

He could only imagine the mess his Astral Plane was going to be in.

“I can’t help if you don’t let me.” Keith argued, and Lance sighed.

“Why is everything a fight with you?”

“Why can’t you just talk to me?!” Keith countered, raising an eyebrow. “I said I wanted to help, you asked me to prove it. I did, so let me.”

Lance stared at Keith and Keith stared at Lance. He knew that whoever looked away first would be the one to lose this fight, but Lance remembered how strong and fierce Keith’s need to protect had been. Keith would not lose this fight, and so he looked away, curling into himself.

“It’s all in my head.”

“What is?”

“Everything.” Lance replied, looking at Keith. “It’s all in my head, repeating and replaying over and over again. There’s nothing else for me to do, but just sit here and think about it.”

“You need a distraction.” It wasn’t a question, but Lance nodded anyways.

“It would have been nice before Blue forcibly gave me one.” As if to prove his point, he held up his hand and manifested the quintessence. Even less manifested than before and when he looked back at Keith, his head spun from the movement.

If he focused, he could feel the corruption better now than he could before. It was meant to grow, to corrupt quintessence. Like a zombie virus from a badly written horror film. It was slow going, but if he let it fester, he might get back to where he was.

But did he want to do that? Did he really want to go back to all that pain and suffering? Blue had basically given him as close to a reset as she could manage, and she wasn’t saying it, but he knew she had exhausted herself with her actions.

He wouldn’t have to go through all the hard work of re-learning quintessence, but… he couldn’t put himself or Blue through that corruption again. Not without a damn good cause.

To his credit, Keith didn’t react to the quintessence beyond lowering his head to cover his neck with his chin.

Keith continued to stare at him as he released the quintessence. “You should take a nap.”
Lance shot Keith a look, raising one eyebrow. “Excuse me?”

“That thing you just did… it’s tired you out even more, didn’t it?” Keith asked, and Lance wondered if Keith had always been this observant or if it was yet another thing that was different about him. “You were already exhausted, so you should take a nap.”

Lance narrowed his eyes at Keith, trying to think of what game Keith could be playing here. Nothing really came to mind.

“We’ve already discussed my sleeping habits, Keith.” Lance reminded him. “I don’t like to sleep alone.” He didn’t like to be alone, period.

Keith faltered there, falling quiet for a couple of doboshes before speaking again. “Give me some time, Lance. I’ll… see what I can do about a… distraction.”

Translation: ‘try to sleep so you don’t go crazy and force Blue to intervene in a horrific way again while I go and try to solve this situation.’ Right. Lance could understand that, even if he couldn’t see why Keith couldn’t just toss him a Rubik’s cube or something.

Not that they had a Rubik’s cube up here or that Lance even wanted one of those evil things, but whatever. Not the point. Even a bouncy ball would have been welcome at this point.

He huffed, shifting onto the bed so he was actually laying on it with his back to Keith. “Whatever. I’ll try.”

Keith responding sigh of relief was almost too quiet for Lance to catch. “Thank you. I’ll be back soon.” He promised, turning on his heel. Lance counted the quiet footsteps until the buzz of the barrier coming back online prevented it, and then closed his eyes and tried to rest.

The moment he gave into his exhaustion, he found himself first in darkness, and then slowly, the Astral Plane started to filter in.

The ocean had completely frozen over with ice thick enough to walk on. Lance looked down, and despite its thickness, the ice was clear enough that he could see the darkness of the corruption beneath him, threatening to swallow him whole if he allowed it.

Lance sighed.

“That’s not going away, is it?”

“It will likely always be in the depths.” Blue confirmed, and Lance looked around to see her sitting on the ice shelf that had become the beach. “How deep depends on you.”

Lance sighed again. “I’m sorry. No. Sorry doesn’t begin to explain-”

“I know.” Blue interrupted gently. “I will be fine. Black will be able to help me should I ever need it.”

“I know.” Blue interrupted gently. “I will be fine. Black will be able to help me should I ever need it.”

“Black?” Lance furrowed his eyebrows. “Shiro has corrupted quintessence?”

Blue did not respond, and after a while – time always worked strangely in the Astral Plane – Lance looked away. He kicked an ice chuck and watched it spin and slide around.

“I miss the beach.” He muttered.

Blue continued to be silent, and Lance sighed, sitting down on the ground – ignoring the dark mass
under the ice – and hugged his knees. “This place is supposed to be a representation of me, right? So why is it so empty and icy?”

Blue sighed and moved, sliding down so she was laying down on the ice instead of sitting. “You know the answer.” She replied, her tone gentle even as her words chided him.

Lance didn’t sigh, but he did lean back to look up at the blank dark sky. He thought of Hunk and Pidge and Keith and Shiro and everyone else that he’d separated from himself. “Yeah, I know.”

It was so icy and cold here because that was all Lance allowed for there to be. Back when his astral plane had been a beautiful Cuban beach, he had friends and family. People he cared about and ‘let in’. Now, he shoved everyone away with a cold shoulder, not letting them touch him.

Things changed in the Astral plane could affect reality, but changes made in reality could affect the astral plane just as well. The thing was… he didn’t think he could let anyone in anymore. Not after all that had happened.

Not when he was still struggling with the corruption. “We still have a long way to go before we ever have full control over the corruption, don’t we?”

“Perhaps.” Blue replied.

“What if I spread it to the others?” The ice creaked, and both Lance and Blue were quiet, waiting to see if it’d break and let loose the corruption it contained. Lance’s heart raced in his chest, and he moved to hug his legs to his chest again. “I don’t want to… no one should have to deal with this.”

“It is possible.” Blue admitted. “But I have faith in you.”

Lance huffed, frowning at the response. “No pressure.” He muttered. “I wish there was some way I could just… I don’t know… extract it from myself.” Lance’s eyes lit up and he sat up straighter, twisting to look back at the Blue Lion.

“Blue! Do you think that’s possible? If we could find a dead quintessence crystal, and I could isolate the corruption, I should be able to refill that crystal with it… right? Then so long as the crystal is contained or destroyed properly, it shouldn’t be a problem anymore, right?”

The words escaped Lance in a rush in his excitement at a possible solution.

He would be stained from the corruption, but that wouldn’t be something that could actually affect him like the corruption could.

Blue hummed. “I am… uncertain.” She admitted.

Her response should have killed Lance’s excitement, and while it did hamper it, it didn’t diminish it completely. Lance stood up, using the ice to spin around to fully face her instead of just twisting.

“But it could work?” He pressed.

“You would need to isolate it first and prevent it from growing. It will cling to you.” She didn’t say it, but Lance could feel the words regardless. She worried for him. Lance smiled at her.

“We can fix this.” He told her. “I will fix this, I promise.”

“It will be difficult alone.” Lance winced, crossing his arms and looking away.
Alone. That was a thing wasn’t it?

If he wanted to keep Blue – and giving her up was not an option. Not anymore, not again – then he would need to stay with Team Voltron. More than that, he would need to be able to form Voltron with them, to connect to them.

“I’m not sure I can do that again.” He admitted, but the truth was that he would have to. There was no giving Blue up and that meant he had to deal with them. He had to let them in at some point.

He couldn’t wait – the universe couldn’t wait – for Lance to get his shit back together. But if he opened himself back up to the others, he a) risked infecting them and b) would be vulnerable to them again. But then again, Keith had already proven that he was someone he could somewhat trust.

At least he could trust Keith’s desire to protect. He didn’t think Keith would let something happen to him if he could help it. Not after what he’d felt.

“I’ll work on it.”
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith allowed Lance to feel his emotions through Lance's scales in order to prove his sincerity to Lance. After which, Lance semi-trusted Keith to at least let him know that being locked up in the medical bay with nothing to do was dangerous for everyone involved, including Lance. Keith asked Lance to rest while he tried to work it out. While resting, Lance spent time in his astral plane, and promised to Blue to work on restoring his friendships with the team.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Self Depreciation, Cursing

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](https://example.com).

Lance woke slowly, reality slowly starting to filter into the Astral Plane until he blinked his eyes open and was staring at a wall.

Although his headache still lingered, Lance was thankful that his vision seemed to be back to normal. There was a quiet sound behind him that took him a moment to recognize as whispering, and then another moment to recognize the hushed voices.

Why were Keith, Pidge, and Hunk here?

He laid still, drifting between being awake and asleep, trying – and failing – to listen to the quiet conversation behind him.

“…days now…’llura said…”

“…with…. Blue… fine. Just needed…”

“Are you… this, Keith? I don’t know.”

Lance let out a yawn as he stretched; rolling over to face the others. They all looked over to Lance, the conversation falling silent. Pidge and Hunk were both wearing their armor, but in a bold show of trust, Keith was in his casual clothes. In another bold show of trust, the barrier imprisoning Lance was missing.

Lance’s stomach grumbled and growled as he sat up and rubbed lightly at his eyes to get the sleep sand out. He wondered how long he’d slept for since it’d been a while since he felt this refreshed and hungry.

Hunk perked up at the noise, grabbing a bowl off the counter/control center and holding it out to
Lance. “You hungry?”

Lance’s stomach turned as his gaze dropped from Hunk’s face to the contents of the bowl. There was a sour taste at the back of his throat as the green goo jigged from the movements of Hunk’s hand. He was hungry, but just the sight of the goo was enough to kill his appetite.

“Pass.” He’d rather starve than eat food goo again.

Hunk’s eyebrows furrowed, his hesitate smile faltering and falling at Lance’s curt refusal. “You should eat.” He prompted. “Once you’ve finished, I can take you by your room to freshen up.” He offered the last bit like Lance was a child who needed to be bribed into eating their vegetables.

Although the idea of freshening up was tempting, that temptation didn’t win over the irritation of being treated like a child. He crossed his arms and frowned. “Pass.”

“Oh, come on, Lance. You’ve been asleep for two days. You’ve got to be hungry and itching to clean up.” Pidge interjected when Hunk didn’t respond. Lance blinked up at her.

Two days? He’d been asleep for two quintants?! He must have really over-exerted himself to have slept for that long. Blue quietly agreed and confirmed the information.

Lance sucked on teeth as he looked at the food goo, but his stomach twisted again. Yeah, nope, not interested.

Keith sighed aggressively, stalking forward and claiming the bowl from Hunk – giving him a look as he did so – and approaching Lance. He held the bowl, with all of its quivering goo, out to Lance to take. Keith’s gaze was hard, and hesitantly, Lance accepted the bowl, although if Keith thought he’d eat it, then he had another thing coming.

“So… I eat this and then I get to go by ‘my room’ and ‘freshen up’?” Lance asked, looking at Keith. Between the choice of looking at the goo or Keith, Lance would choose Keith any and every time.

“Allura and Keith decided that if you’re with one of us or the Blades, then you can be out of here.” She paused, her gaze turning speculative as she looked at Keith. “Although Keith doesn’t want you spending time with anyone other than us.”

Keith’s expression was purely unapologetic as he shrugged back at her. “I’ve already told you why.”

“In what reality?” Pidge scoffed, rolling her eyes.

“The reality where you listen to me.” Keith’s reply was flat. “Instead of ignoring me to work on your projects.”

“I was-” Pidge flushed slightly, adjusting her glasses.

“I know.” Keith cut her off. “And it needs to be done, but there’s other things you need to focus on too.”

Lance was silent, floored by the conversation happening in front of him. Keith? Chiding Pidge? Over communication?

What reality was he in? Was he in the right reality? Was this really happening or was this some
sort of dream. Blue nudged him, reassuring him that this was not a dream and it was in fact happening.

“You’re one to talk.” Hunk huffed, crossing his arms as he looked at Keith. “You were only supposed to train for three hours yesterday, and I have it on good authority that you trained for four and a half.”

Pidge stuck out her tongue, making a ‘ha!’ noise.

Keith flushed. “I… we all have things we need to work on.”

“Woah, woah, woah. Hold on… When did this all start?” Lance asked.

Because it almost sounded like they had a schedule, which was crazy because they didn’t have a schedule. They all worked on their individual talents until they died. That was how it was. So where was this ‘pay attention to people and have conversations’ thing for Pidge and ‘three hours of training’ thing for Keith coming from?

“Recently.” Keith replied. “Especially since we’ll be taking shifts with you, so you don’t have to stay in here anymore.”

Well, that had already been alluded to/mentioned, but hearing it again just made it that much more concrete. They were really letting him out of this imprisonment. How stupid were they? What angle were they going for? What was their plan?

Lance didn’t trust this.

“I don’t have to stay in here anymore?” Lance asked for clarification, suspicion dripping from every syllable.

Keith didn’t seem to pick up on that, smiling bright enough to rival the sun at Lance. That too was new. Keith didn’t smile like that for just no reason. “That’s right.” There was even a warm happy undertone to his voice. “Unless you want to be alone or in here… then you’re free to leave.”

Seriously… was he in the right reality? He didn’t somehow sink through the Astral Plane into an alternative reality, did he?

Lance’s gaze went to the other two Paladins, both of which were still standing some distance away and shuffling awkwardly. “And they’re okay with this?” Lance raised an eyebrow as he looked back at Keith.

“Things will be awkward for a while.” Keith side stepped the question, glancing over his shoulder at the others. Lance scoffed.

Oh yeah, things would be ‘awkward’ for a while. “I tried to kill them, Keith.” Well, he tried to kill Hunk in particular and would have succeeded had Allura not intervened.

“I trust you.” Keith replied simply, and he didn’t say it, but Lance could hear the ‘even if you don’t trust me’ tacked onto the end.

Lance didn’t understand. He trusted Keith’s desire to protect. He trusted Keith’s anger. Those are constants, things he could rely on. This wasn’t something he could have predicted. This wasn’t something he had expected, and it threw him for a loop and left him feeling strangely warm.

“You… trust me?” Lance repeated quiet, looking down into the bowl of goo that he had yet to
touch. “You’ll regret that later. I’m a traitor.”

Pidge gasped quietly at Lance’s admission but didn’t say anything. Likewise, Hunk was quiet, although he lowered his head to hide his face.

“I doubt it.” Keith replied. The confidence in his voice was something Lance wished he could feel.

“That you’ll regret trusting me, or that I’m a traitor?” Lance asked. Keith’s eyes darkened, but it wasn’t him who responded.

“What happened wasn’t your fault, Lance.” Hunk said. “You were pretty messed up with that quintessence stuff.”

“He still is.” Pidge muttered, and Lance looked up to shoot her a dark look. She pursed her lips. “But I know the Lance who used to try to drag me out to clubs at the Garrison is still in there somewhere.”

“You never came with us.” Lance frowned.

“Maybe next time I will.” She replied. “If Lance asks instead of you.”

“Pidge!” Hunk hissed.

“Lance was jokes, laughter, happiness, and smiles.” She replied, staring at Lance as if challenging him. “This is a poor facsimile of Lance as far as I’m concerned.”

“Then maybe you didn’t know me after all.” Lance growled.

“Enough.” Keith’s voice cut through the conversation, ending it with one word. “We’re here to support Lance.”

“No, you’re here because you need Voltron and without my cooperation, you know it won’t happen!” Lance argued, turning his glare from Pidge to Keith. He tossed the bowl on the floor, not caring as its contents splattered across it. “I’m not interested in playing your game.”

Everyone fell quiet at the outburst from Lance, and Keith’s gaze was full of fire. Blue sighed, sounding entirely too much like Lance’s mother whenever she heard about the trouble he’d gotten into at school.

“You said you’d let me help you.” Keith’s voice was quiet, and he opened his mouth to continue, but Lance cut him off before he could.

“This isn’t helping me, Keith. This is helping you and your team.”

“Which you’re a part of.”

“Because I’m so welcome.” Lance shot back, throwing a hand out towards Pidge and Hunk. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw them both flinch as they expected quintessence to accompany his hand movement.

“Would you rather sit in here alone?” It was Lance’s turn to flinch, and he slightly curled into himself at the question. He’d expressed to Keith before that he wasn’t interested in being alone. Being alone left him to thoughts and memories and… oh.

Oh.
Lance adverted his gaze, crossing his arms. “Fine. I’ll play along.”

“Great.” Keith’s reply fell a little flat. “You’ll be with me today, and I’ll go over the schedule.”

“What? Pidge and Hunk too scared to be alone with me first?” Lance asked, narrowing his eyes as he looked at them. “Kinda cruel of them to treat you like a guinea pig with whether I’ll kill someone or not.”

Keith muttered something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like ‘patience yields focus’ and took a deep breath. “I volunteered. I thought you’d feel more comfortable with me first. Was I wrong?”

“Maybe.” Lance shot back at him, and some small part of him enjoyed the flash of pain that momentarily appeared in Keith’s eyes. Blue sighed again, and Lance grumbled to himself. Fine, he had promised her that he’d try to repair his relationships with the others.

It wasn’t like he had much choice. If he wanted to keep Blue – and he needed to keep her – then he had to do this.

Quiznak, he was tired of not having choices.

“So, we’re going to my room?” Lance asked, standing and stepping around the mess.

Keith raised an eyebrow as he looked pointedly down at the mess. “After you clean that up. We’ll stop by the kitchen after you freshen up.”

“I’m not touching that.” Lance curled his lip. “Shit’s disgusting.”

“He dines with a prince and suddenly he’s too good for food goo.” Pidge stage whispered to Hunk.

Lance’s whole body bristled in indignation. He’d never cared for food goo. It was food goo. The disgustingness was in the name!

He barred his teeth in a too sharp smile. “Given the size of the castle, I’m sure there’s some gardens in here somewhere. We could grow our own ingredients. Meats and stuff we get from liberated planets or space markets or something.”

Lance tried to keep his tone light and not antagonistic – he didn’t want to give away how much she’d bothered him – but given how Keith took a half step between him and Pidge, Lance wasn’t sure he entirely succeeded.

Hunk ignored the tone, humming as he touched his chin with his hand. “We could ask Allura…” He trailed off briefly in thought.

“You can’t be serious.” Pidge cut in.

“A castle this size would need a steady source of food, and I doubt the Alteans only ate food goo considering the kitchen. It makes sense to me that there’d be gardens in here somewhere.” Hunk shrugged at Pidge. “It’s worth asking.”

“Where did you even get the idea of a garden from anyways?” Pidge turned her attention back to Lance, leaning towards him in a way Lance couldn’t not take as threatening. “I can’t imagine it came from the Galra, I mean-”

“Yeah, actually.” Lance interrupted. “My favorite place on the ship was the garden.”
Pidge’s mouth literally fell open, the retort on the tip of her tongue dying at the information. Lance crossed his arms, his smile becoming smug as he leaned back.

“What?” Pidge asked. “There was a garden on that ship?”

“Yeah, there was. Complete with a waterfall. It was very…”

“Romantic?” Hunk suggested, and Lance flushed, his hand automatically going to touch his neck before he realized what he was doing and looking away. It had been very romantic. The garden had been one of Lotor’s favorite places to take Lance for a date, and there were many once fond memories there.

Now those memories were sour, and Lance regretted even bringing up the garden.

“Fine.” Keith’s voice cut through Lance’s thoughts, and he gently pressed against Lance’s arm to indicate for him to move. “We’ll look into a garden. Pidge, can you get one of the robots to clean this up? Hunk… could you see if there’s anything we can feed Lance before he starves? Lance, let’s go.”

Hunk cheered while Pidge groaned as Keith led Lance out.

“Wait, really?” Lance asked.

“Yes, really. A substitute for the food goo is something we should have looked into ages ago.” Keith confirmed with a half shrug. “It’s a good idea.”

Huh, that was… odd. He wasn’t used to Keith agreeing with any of his ideas. Then again, this Keith was ‘different’. He’d even made this weird schedule thing so Lance could be out and about and not trapped in the tiny cell.

“What was that about?” Lance asked a few doboshes into their journey to Lance’s room.

“Hmm?” Keith paused, looking at Lance and tilting his head ever so slightly. “What was what about?”

Lance gestured around the hallway and then back to the medical bay. “This. All of this. This letting me wander around thing?”

“You’re not wandering around.” Keith was quick to respond. “At least, not alone.” He added a few seconds later. “And it’s exactly what I said before. You needed a distraction, so this is it. Being active might help you escape from those thoughts.”

Keith shrugged and continued walking, clearly thinking that the conversation was over. Lance stayed back. It took a couple of steps for Keith to notice and look back.

“Thank you.”

Keith smiled and nodded his head in the direction they’d been going. “C’mon. Let’s get you out of those clothes and into something a bit more familiar.”

Lance hesitated at the mention of something familiar, but the prospect of getting out of the medical suit was tempting enough to prompt him along. They traveled in silence for a moment before Lance broke it.

“Did you actually limit your training time?” He asked. Upon a lack of response from Keith
besides a nod, he added, “Why?”

Keith opened his mouth before shutting it and seemed to be chewing over an answer. Lance let him think his response over, although it wasn’t until they were almost to Lance’s room before he replied.

“I thought about what you said, and everything that happened.” Keith gave Lance a look, one Lance wished he could understand, but he didn’t. “I don’t think I trained at all when you were gone… and I was better with the team for it. But… then we fought you and… I should have been better, so I realized I couldn’t just stop training.”

He stopped outside Lance’s door and gave Lance a wry smile. “So, I figured moderation was key, and then when I came up with this idea. I sat down with the others and made a schedule.”

“You think you’ll be able to stick to it?” Lance asked.

“I hope so.” Keith shrugged. “We have team training at least twice a week, and personal training time three times a week. There’s also personal time for projects or whatever. I don’t know. It’s a work in progress.”

Well, that was… vague and not very detailed. Lance’s lips thinned. “You just came up with it for me, didn’t you? To babysit me.”

Keith’s look turned sour, his eyebrows furrowing in a way that could mean frustrated or guilty. “Allura is still… cautious.”

“She should be.” Lance barked out. “You all should be. I shouldn’t be out here, I’m… dangerous.”

“And it’s because you say that that I trust you.” Wow. Lance had known Keith was some kind of stupid, but his response just really showed Lance how stupid he was. “Look: You need a distraction, so this is it, Lance. Let us help you.”

There was an unspoken plea added onto the end of that, a quiet ‘let me help you’ that Lance could read plainly in his eyes, tone, and body. Lance averted his gaze, looking instead at the door to his once bedroom.

He didn’t know how to feel. Now that he was in front of the room, part of him wanted to continue to argue with Keith to avoid entering. He reached out, his hand hesitating above the door panel to let him in.

He either somehow swallowed a frog or his heart jumped up into his throat. He didn’t know what to expect when he opened the door, but to see it exactly as he’d left it was… not really a surprise.

The jacket sitting folded up on the bed was new.

Air escaped from Lance’s mouth in a quiet whoosh as he approached it, quietly picking it up.

“I found it in the Blue Lion.” Keith spoke from the doorway.

Lance side eyed him. “You went inside Blue?”

Funny, Blue never told him. She’d been quiet through this all, and she remained quiet even now. Lance tucked the information away to be brought up in private later.
“She wasn’t happy about it.”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

Keith gave him a tight smile. “I’ll be right outside the door. Let me know if you need anything.” He took a step back and the door shut.

Lance stared at the closed door for a good couple minutes before he looked back at the jacket and then at the closet and drawers where the rest of his (cloned) clothes were. It was surreal standing alone inside his unchanged bedroom again.

He never expected to be here again, like this. Being able to possibly wear his old clothes, standing in his old room, stuck with his old teammates.

He missed the Galra. Yes, they had used and experimented on him, but he liked to believe his friendship with Lotor’s generals was genuine. He missed Ezor, who was just as outgoing – if not more so – than himself. He missed Corral’s snark, and Zethrid’s bluntness.

He missed Lotor.

He took a deep breath, moving past that thought and ignored the pressure behind his eyes as he approached the closet. The closet slid open, the door that had moved automatically shifting into a mirror.

Rows of his old clothes stared back at him, and Lance’s stomach twisted.

How could he wear these clothes again? He wasn’t the same person who had worn them before and to wear them again felt like betraying the Lance of the past. His hands shook as he glanced at the mirror and he blanched at his own appearance.

The bags under his eyes were considerably less noticeable than he expected, but then again, he had slept for almost two days. There was no denying the grease in his hair or how bad he looked in general.

He glanced back at his nonexistent clothing choices and imagined how he’d look with his new Altean features. He could hide them but…

Then he would truly be back at the beginning, and despite not having asked for them, he had come to somewhat like his scales and eyes. He couldn’t imagine hiding them away, no matter how much more comfortable it would make the others.

He hated that he had no choices here. He had to make up with the Voltron Team. He had to eat food goo. He had to wear his old clothes. What choices did he have anywhere? He had no choices here, and he had no choices with the Galra.

Was there anywhere that he would have choice?

He sighed, slowly changing out of the medical clothes and into cloned copies of his Earth clothes. It felt like he was putting on a costume, something that he wasn’t. However, it would probably make everyone else feel more comfortable to see him like this – except for his scales and ears and eyes.

He stared at the mirror and watched as his features morphed to hide his scales, his ears shrinking back down and rounding out, and his pupils darkening to become more human in appearance.
He stared at himself in the mirror, his hands shaking as he observed how little difference there was between the ‘Lance’ he remembered and the Lance he had become. He had changed, he knew this. It was evident in every interaction and thought, but... visually, like this...

It was like he never left.

But he had left. He had left, and things were different, and... there was a knock on the door, and Keith’s muffled voice. “Lance, you okay in there?”

Rather than respond verbally, Lance turned away from the mirror and headed to the door. It slid open when he prompted it. Keith smiled at him, soft and warm, as he looked Lance over. At least, until he looked at Lance’s face. There, Keith’s smile faltered, twitching as it almost fell.

The face was where most of the Altean changes had been: scales, eyes, and ears. And now it was gone, and Lance tried to imagine how Keith felt looking into a Lance who basically stepped out of history.

There was conflict in Keith’s eyes, but in the end, he didn’t say anything about Lance’s appearance. “You can take a shower later. Let’s get you some food.” And that was it.

Chapter End Notes

Hey! So everyone who checks my Tumblr probably already knows, but my youngest cat Gizmo hasn't taken to the stress of anything that's happened in the past month or so well.

**Warning: Blood Mentioned, Possible Death of an Animal Mentioned**

Since the 14th of July, he's been urinating blood. I took him to the vet and was told it was a UTI. He was sent home with some medicine. I noticed that he was still urinating blood, so I took him back in. After some radiographs, it was discovered that he had Bladder Stones and was sent home with MORE medicine and a special diet. On July 30, I noticed that he was STILL urinating blood, and called the vet. I was informed that if he's still urinating blood by the 9th, he will have to have surgery. If he does not have surgery to remove the stones, he will die.

Obviously, I'm terrified for my cat. Gizmo is only 2.5 years old. I've had him since he was a kitten. I'm not a religious person, but please keep Gizmo in your prayers. His vet bills have already cost us $400, and with the move, neither Ghost nor I are in a position to afford surgery costs. We've already discussed that if the surgery costs too much, we'll put Gizmo down. We don't want him to die in pain.

The hardest part right now is the wait. There's nothing I can do (unless the stones go ahead and block his ability to urinate (and then that's just forcing the 'surgery or death' to an earlier date), so I'm just stuck... waiting and watching to see if anything changes (hopefully for the better).
Learning

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith worked out a schedule while Lance got some much needed sleep. The Schedule is a schedule for the entire team to help them better become a team by limited how much alone time they can have, and mandating team building time. The schedule is still, very much, a work in progress. Keith took Lance to his old room to give him a chance to change into something other than the medical bay body suit.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Pidge

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pidge slowly peered over the top of her computer monitor, her gaze automatically going to the same spot as it had for the past couple hours. Lance paid no attention to her, sitting cross legged on the floor, his hood pulled over his downcast face.

If she didn’t know any better, she’d assume that he fell asleep.

A prickling sensation ran along her shoulder blades as she slowly – as slowly, if not more than when she rose – sunk back down into her chair.

A message popped up on her monitor, immediately drawing her attention.

“*Leave him be.*”

She side glanced at Hunk, who for all intents and purposes looked to be still immersed with his work despite the message on her screen saying differently. She pursed her lips, the temptation to pout hard to fight.

She didn’t want to leave Lance be. She didn’t know what she wanted with him, if she was honest. She just knew that she couldn’t take his silent presence in the hangar. It felt like she was being hunted, like he was a leopard or jaguar hiding in the foliage of a jungle, stalking her, waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike.

And how could she not feel like that?

This Lance was both everything and nothing that Pidge expected.

When Keith and Allura had come to her and Hunk about allowing Lance out of the Medbay, she had reservations. They didn’t know the full extent of what had happened to Lance while with the
Galra, and he had, more than once, tried to seriously harm – if not outright kill – them. How could they trust him to be allowed to wander around the castle, even with a Paladin or a Blade of Marmora guide?

Despite agreeing with Keith vocally, it didn’t take a rocket scientist to see that Allura had her own reservations. And Hunk? The poor guy had yet to sleep a full night since Lance’s ‘return’. He wouldn’t talk about his dreams, but she knew that Lance took a starring role in them.

They all had reservations, except for Keith, who didn’t seem to be afraid of getting close to Lance even without armor. It was horrifying the first couple of times, but the more Pidge saw it happen, the less she dreamed of Lance stabbing Keith through his stomach with his claws.

It didn’t mean she was more comfortable with this Lance.

Especially since visually, he looked he’d never left. After a shower and changing his clothes, he’d looked exactly like the Lance she remembered, down to the ears, eyes, and the lack of scales. The only real visual difference was that this Lance seemed to prefer wearing his hood up and brooding under it.

She wondered if that was a Druid habit that he didn’t want to break, or if it was to purposely show a difference from his past self.

Neither the Alteans or Keith seemed to appreciate the change, although they all kept their objections quiet. Too many times, Pidge had seen Coran start to approach Lance before deciding against it. Pidge pitied the poor guy.

“Keith told us not to bother him.” Hunk messaged her again, and Pidge snorted quietly as she read it.

“K told us not pry into his time w/ the Galra.” Pidge quickly typed back, peering back over her monitor once she’d finished.

Like so many times before, Lance acknowledged the instant messaging conversation going on between her and Hunk the same as he did her peering at him: he didn’t.

“Keith left him in our care, alone, for once.” Hunk replied, pausing to break the presentation that he was working to give her a pointed look. “Don’t mess this up.”

She snorted again. “Who? Me?”

It was a big deal, she guessed, that Keith had left Lance alone with them. Especially when she considered that Keith was almost always present now-a-days. It was like Keith was terrified of leaving Lance alone with anyone but himself, and honestly, it was starting to grate on her nerves.

He was the one to suggest that they took turns watching over Lance. Him skipping out on his training to ‘supervise’ them with Lance was completely unneeded and, frankly, insulting.

She wasn’t sure whether he was more scared for her and Hunk, or Lance, and the fact she didn’t know bothered her a lot little. Then again there was a lot about the situation that bothered her.

Visually, Lance stepped right out from the past, but there was no denying that the Lance with them now was different.

Lance once was all confidence and bravo. He was laughter, jokes, smiles, and finger guns. This strange Lance who now looked like the past wasn’t. He was cold, snappy, and rude. He was quiet
and secluded. It was clear that he didn’t cope well on his own, but it was also painfully clear that he didn’t want *their* company.

“Your turn still or mine?” Pidge typed to Hunk. He paused again, presumably to try to figure it out, and while he did that, Pidge risked another look at Lance.

There was no change, not that she expected one. He hadn’t moved since he’d first come in with Hunk, and since neither she nor Hunk had left, she had no clue whether Lance was sticking with her or him. Not that it mattered since she didn’t plan to leave and she was 90% sure that Hunk was the same.

There was safety in numbers, regardless of Keith’s assurances that Lance wouldn’t hurt them.

Lance sighed. Pidge froze as she stared, transfixed as Lance turned his head and asked her a quiet “What?”

Hunk’s typing fell immediately silent at the sound of Lance’s voice, and out of the corner of her eye – she didn’t dare take her eyes off Lance – she noticed that he was still as she was.

An uncomfortable silence fell upon the hangar, the awkwardness thick enough that it could be cut like Scooby-Doo fog. Lance sighed again. “You’ve both been looking at me, so, what?”

Unease and discomfort prickled the back of Pidge’s neck. There was something about the tone that Lance used that set her on the edge.

Pidge moved, adjusting her glasses and dared to exchange a look with Hunk. Hunk’s returned look was full of concern, but he spoke first to answer Lance.

“What are you doing?”

It was probably for the best that Hunk spoke first. Pidge probably would have asked one of the insensitive questions bouncing around in her head. Like, why Lance thought it was a good idea to get *engaged* to the *Prince* of the *Galra* Empire. Or why Lance didn’t leave the Druids, or why Lance joined them in the first place.

In her – admittedly limited – experience with this Lance, he didn’t usually answer questions; so when silence answered Hunk, she wasn’t surprised. That quickly changed a few seconds later when Lance replied “Meditating.”

“Meditating?” She repeated.

“It helps, sometimes.” Lance’s tone softened as he replied with a shrug. “Most of the time I’m just connecting with Blue…” Lance trailed off.

“Blue?” Hunk asked before she could. “You mean your lion?”

Pidge glanced back at the Green Lion sharing the hangar. The Lions were confusing to Pidge, but then again, she tried to operate within the realm of science and logic. Not… whatever the Lions were.

There was no denying that they had moved on their own. She had been protected by Green and Black before, and Blue had reacted plenty without Lance piloting her.

She didn’t doubt they were alive, per se, she just wasn’t sure if they were completely sentient without their pilots. After all, sitting in one place for ten thousand years was a long time, and she
just couldn’t imagine how they managed the wait.

 “… Are the Lions always alive?” She asked out loud, and she heard the sentence of ‘yes, Hunk, like the Lion’ be cut off short.

 “Are you always alive?” Lance snapped. “Just because your Lions don’t talk to you, doesn’t mean they aren’t alive.”

 The tone Lance used with her grated on her nerves, but she pushed past it, looking back at Lance. “No, I mean… when they were waiting…” She trailed off as Lance’s expression fell. His eyes dropped, his face softened, and when he spoke, his voice was quiet.

 “Yeah… yeah they were.”

 Pidge swallowed thickly. She enjoyed her alone time, but… ten thousand years of it? Isolated, alone… unaware of what was happening in the world, trapped in a cave or temple? It was… sad to think about.

 “How do you talk to your lion?” Hunk asked.

 “I just talk to her.” Okay, that sounded like the Lance Pidge knew. She didn’t even need to imagine the ‘duh’ look that Lance was giving Hunk. “It wasn’t like I had anyone else to talk to.” Lance continued, and Hunk flinched at the same time she winced. “One day she responded back. Now she’s always there.”

 “Always?” Pidge asked, adjusting her glasses again.

 That sounded minorly annoying. She liked her alone time and the thought of an alien space cat battleship sharing her mind always didn’t exactly sound like an ideal situation. What if she wanted alone time? What about in the shower? Or in the bathroom? Where was her privacy?

 “Just about.” Lance confirmed. “It’s like I’m piloting her all the time, except I’m not; and when I am piloting her, it’s like… the experience was 100 times more… intense.”

 “You said you were drowned.” Hunk started, and Pidge wondered when exactly this happened. She couldn’t remember anything about that. “Keith thought it was Blue, and you said you wouldn’t share the spoilers.”

 “I still won’t.” Lance replied, crossing his arms. “You’ll have to experience it all for yourself.”

 “But it’s all magic stuff.” Hunk argued. “How am I supposed to understand that?”

 “You understand Voltron, don’t you?” Lance argued back. “It’s just like that. You’re a smart guy, Hunk. If Keith could figure it out, so can you.”

 “Keith figured it out?” Pidge asked. She was probably about on the same page as Hunk in terms of knowledge about this stuff, but even still… it stung that Keith – who couldn’t even figure out a simple cheer according to Hunk and Lance – had figured out how to talk to his lion before they had.

 Then again, Keith ran off instinct, something he shared with his… lion. Allura had once explained about each lion and its characteristics. It had been a long time ago, but Pidge was fairly certain that they all shared something with their lions.

 Mentally she tabled the topic, making a mental note to return to it later. The amount of knowledge
that the Lions must have… she could only imagine how much that could help them if they could just talk. Maybe not share minds… but just… talk.

“So, you’ve been meditating to talk with the Blue Lion?” Pidge clarified a moment later, tossing ideas around in her head about things. Like the fact Lance had indirectly said that he didn’t need to meditate to speak with Blue. So why was he actually mediating?

“Yeah, I guess.”

“But you’ve been able to communicate with her without meditating, right?” She pressed.

Now Lance looked a bit uncomfortable, and the way he uneasily shifted proved that. “Yeah.”

“So why are you really mediating? Does it have something to do with-”

“Pidge.” Hunk warned quietly.

“- your druid abilities?” Pidge continued like she hadn’t heard Hunk. Lance’s face went blank and Pidge knew that she’d hit the hammer right on the nail. “I’m right, aren’t I? It has to do with that?” She pressed.

The room was quiet for a minute, for two, for five, for ten as Pidge and Lance stared at each other. Hunk fidgeted quietly, opening his mouth every so often as if to try to break the silence before falling quiet again.

“I have to.” Lance finally replied. “If I want to get better… if I want to fix what the Galra did to me-”

“And what did they do to you, Lance?” Pidge questioned. “From where I was standing, you looked to be in their good graces. You-”

“Understand nothing!” Lance hissed, interrupting her just as she had interrupted him. “You don’t know what they did to me. Do you know what it feels like to be electrocuted to the point you lose track of reality? To lose yourself as they experiment on you? Do you know what it’s like to be used and treated like a play thing?”

Frost spread out from where he stood, growing out in a fractal circle. His voice didn’t change in volume, but it did grow cold. His eyes were intense, and Pidge felt like if she stared at them too long, she’d end up drowning in a sea of storms.

Instinctually, she took a step back.

Keith had warned them not to poke and prod too much into what had happened, and she was realizing now that she really should have heeded that warning. But how could she have expected this to happen. It wasn’t like she knew that Lance was Elsa from Frozen now.

“I did what I had to do.” Lance continued, and Pidge shivered – not just from how cold his voice was, but also how cold the room had rapidly become. “And I refuse to be blamed for that.” Her and Hunk’s breath both appeared in little white puffs. “I had little choices there, and I did the best with what I had.”

“Lance, buddy, pal.” Hunk intervened, stepping out around his work table to stand between Pidge and Lance. “Maybe you should sit back down, maybe do some more meditating. Think happy thoughts, and maybe consider not… this?”
Hunk had been making placating movements with his hands but at the end, he gestured around them at the frost on the ground which was slowly starting to climb up the tables, to the general coldness of the room.

Lance froze, suddenly becoming so still, Pidge doubted he was even breathing – it had not escaped her attention that Lance’s breath had not become white, and she wondered how cold he was for that to happen. He blinked, and then before her eyes, the icy cold anger in Lance seemed to shatter.

Lance closed his eyes, crossing his arms – no, hugging himself – as he curled in on himself. He looked so… vulnerable. Staring at him, it hit her.

“He can’t control this.” She whispered, looking down at the frost forming on the table. There was the sensation of something pulling at her, encouraging her to take a couple steps back into the protective circle of the Lion, but instead she stepped forward, propelled by her curiosity. “You can’t control this, can you?” She spoke normally as she spoke to Lance.

“Pidge, get back.” Hunk ordered, but she moved around him.

“He’s scared, Hunk.” Pidge replied. “And he isn’t in control.”

“All the more reason to stay back.” Hunk argued.

“And what? Wait for Mr. Instincts to inevitably show up and fix this?” She snorted. “Please. We got this.” If not ‘we’, then her. She knew she could handle this.

Knowing that Lance wasn’t in control should have scared her, and it did, but somehow it scared her less than the idea of Lance purposely trying to hurt her. If he hurt her like this, it was an accident that she helped create. It wouldn’t have been done on purpose. It wouldn’t have been done with ill-intent.

While she still couldn’t imagine approaching Lance without her Paladin Armor on, she thought she could understand now why Keith was okay with approaching Lance. He trusted that Lance wouldn’t hurt him on purpose, and strangely enough, she trusted that too right now.

She took off her glasses – they were mostly for show anyways – and put them on one of the now frosted tables and walked over to Lance. Hunk fretted for a moment before heading for the door.

“I’ll go find Keith.” He informed her, and Pidge rolled her eyes, but didn’t offer a response other than that.

Her main focus was on Lance.

It was even colder by him, but she ignored that as she touched his arm. “Hey, I’m sorry, Lance. I didn’t mean… I didn’t mean to stir up bad memories.”

Lance’s eyes flew open and he jerked away from her. This close, she could tell that his eyes were faintly glowing blue, and his scales had made a reappearance. They were glowing too. Her curiosity spiked, but she mentally tabled her questions. Now wasn’t the time.

She hadn’t been sure of what to think of the scales before, but… now she thought they were kind of pretty? Lance’s eyes were pretty too, and she wondered if all Alteans had such unique colored eyes. Allura and Coran did as well, so she could only assume that they did.

“Yes, you did.” He hissed. Pidge winced as there was a loud cracking noise from something glass in the room not taking well to how suddenly the temperature of the room had changed.
“You’re right. I did.” Pidge admitted, nodding her head. “I did, and it was wrong of me, and I’m sorry.”

Lance made a noise so small and broken, it didn’t sound like something she could ever imagine Lance making. Pidge smiled at him, like how she used to smile at Bae Bae whenever he was scared and nodded at the floor. “How about we take a seat?” She asked, already beginning to sit down.

The frost was colder than any normal frost. She could feel it through her armor, the chill biting into her skin, but she remained smiling, encouraging Lance to take a seat next to or in front of her. He hesitated, but after a moment, sat down in front of her.

Now that he was sitting with her, and seemingly less hostile towards her, she hoped that the ice and cold would cease, but it just remained constant. “How can I help? I caused this… so... I want to help.”

Lance snorted quietly. “What is with you people and helping?”

“You used to be the same way.” Pidge replied. “So… how do I help?”

Lance didn’t seem to have an answer; so, Pidge took over, using stuff she remembered from when she was sent to ‘grief counseling’ after finding out about her father and Matt. Distractions was a thing, and it was a thing she knew worked on Lance because Keith had told them all it was.

That was why Lance was out of the Medbay to begin with.

Quiznak, she was such an idiot sometimes, but she couldn’t focus on that. Her mind raced as she tried to think of a distraction, and upon not finding anything, blurted out the first thing that came to mind.

“Why are your scales glowing?”

Lance’s gaze jerked up from the floor to her, his eyes wide and eyebrows furrowed, and subconsciously, he raised his hand to touch one of the scales. “They glow?” He asked, and Pidge nodded.

“Blue.” She supplied, and then upon coming upon the realization he wouldn’t understand, elaborated further. “They glow blue, almost the same as your eyes.”

“It’s gotta be from the quintessence.” Lance muttered, almost to himself.

Pidge mentally noted the word. She’d heard it before and sorta knew what it was from listening and context. This seemed to be a safe topic of conversation for now. Or so she hoped.

“Quintessence?” She prompted.

Lance hummed an affirmative. He seemed lost for a moment, his eyes almost cloudy despite how clear they were, and looking off into the distance. She’d like to say that she saw confliction, but the truth was that she didn’t know this Lance well enough to say that for sure.

Heck, she wasn’t even sure she knew the Lance of before well enough to say that for sure.

Lance blinked, coming back to himself. He fiddled with the sleeve of his jacket as he replied. “It’s basically living energy. There isn’t a living creature in the world without it.” He seemed to be still debating something, so Pidge stayed quiet, waiting to see what he would be willing to share.
This Lance wasn’t as loud or talkative like he used to be. He didn’t fill silence with the sounds of his voice and laughter. It was something that Pidge had never foreseen herself missing, until it was gone.

If she’d stumbled onto something that even made Lance think about talking, then it was a subject worth pursuing.

She missed Lance. She missed how he was like an older brother. He was no Matt, but he was familiar and friendly. He was someone she could battle in video games or tease. He was her family, even if it wasn’t through blood.

Lance’s gaze dropped to the ground for a moment. “Blue is my color, but…” He paused, his head jerking up as he looked at Pidge. “Did you notice me glowing like this before?”

“Uh… I don’t think so? Why?”

Lance deflated. Like, he physically deflated, shrinking back into himself. “Oh.”

“Hunk or Keith probably noticed!” Pidge quickly added on. She didn’t want Lance to close up again, not when she was finally getting somewhere with him. She was finally get answers; perhaps not to the most pressing of questions, but baby steps.

Everything about Lance seemed to brighten, and it made Pidge smile when he offered her the ghost of one. “Thanks. I’ll hafta ask them.”

“Why?” Pidge repeated her earlier question. “I mean, not ‘why ask them’ but ‘why did you want to know’.”

Lance chuckled, the noise calming something inside Pidge. It was like she’d been given water in a desert, and she suddenly wanted to hear more of the sound. It’d been too long since she’d last heard Lance’s laughter.

“I got you.” Lance reassured her. “I just wanted to know if I was glowing blue because that’s my base or if it’s because it’s the quintessence I’m currently using.”

“Your… base?” Pidge raised an eyebrow.

“Yeah. It’s my color. Allura explained it before.”

“When and Where?”

“At the beginning.” Lance replied. “Our quintessence mirrors our Lions, which are the largest source of pure base type quintessence. It’s what makes them so powerful and rare… and what makes potential Voltron Paladins so special.”

Alright, so… she’d picked this subject because it seemed like the easiest to get Lance to talk about but… this was actually turning out to be pretty interesting. Even if was nonsense magic stuff.

“Fascinating.” Pidge moved to adjust her glasses before remembering she’d left them on the table – and she really hoped that wasn’t what she heard cracking earlier. “So, your scales are blue because you have a Blue Base, and you have a Blue Base because you pilot the Blue Lion and mirror her?”

“Almost. I have Blue Scales and pilot Blue because I have a Blue Base. I don’t have a Blue Base because of Blue.” Lance corrected her.
Pidge nodded. “Gotcha. By that logic… I’m green, Keith is red, Hunk is yellow, and Shiro is black?”

“Nope.” Lance shook his head, the beginnings of a smile tugging at his lips. She started to protest but Lance interrupted that before it could really start. “Black quintessence doesn’t technically exist.”

“What?” Pidge’s tone was flat. “No, no, no. There’s a Black Lion and a Black Paladin with the Black Bayard. What do you mean Black Quintessence doesn’t exist?”

Lance shrugged. “It doesn’t.”

“Then how—”

“Does the Black Lion exist?” Lance finished for her. “Technically Black quintessence is two different color variations: purple and… pink.” He paused at a thought and snorted. “Guess Zarkon didn’t want to be known as the Purple or Pink Paladin.”

Unbidden, the image of Zarkon wearing a pink version of the Paladin armor came to mind; and Pidge nearly choked on the burst of laughter the thought produced. “You’re telling me Shiro is the Pink Paladin?” Pidge asked between laughter, and at her question, Lance joined in.

His laughter wasn’t as loud or boisterous as it once was, but it was still uplifting to hear it again. It wasn’t a dry chuckle like earlier or sarcastic and mean like this Lance normally gave them.

She shifted to a more comfortable position and noticed that when she put her hand down on the ground, there was no sign that the frost had even been there.

It was warmer in there now that she thought about it too.

Awesome. Score. Success for Pidge! Pidge: 1, Keith: 0 for being too late. Actually, if she was really keeping score, she was beyond hope behind Keith, but… she wasn’t going to count that.

“Hey, Shiro would look amazing in Pink.” Lance countered. “But I think he’s more… purple. I don’t know, I haven’t seen him. Allura is Barbie pink tho. Like, I’m talking Malibu Princess Barbie Pink.”

Of course, this was the moment where Hunk finally returned with Keith in tow. Warm air gushed into the room as the doors opened, and Pidge looked up just in time to see Keith’s gobsmacked face before it could smooth over into blankness.

Ha! Take that Keith! She got him to laugh. She was sorely tempted to stick her tongue out at him because she was mature. “Hey guys!” She grinned and waved instead. “What be up?”

“Are.. you guys alright?” Keith’s question was almost hesitant, his gaze constantly flickering between her and Lance.

“What?” Pidge smiled. “Hey! Did you know Zarkon’s actually the Pink Paladin?”

“I said he could be Purple!” Lance protested, shaking his head. Pidge was please to note that he was still smiling. “Black quintessence is both pink and purple; and I said Zarkon was likely purple.”
“Oh, so Shiro and Zarkon can be purple, but Allura is barbie pink?” Pidge teased, raising an eyebrow. “Or is it that Zarkon can’t be pink because pink is Allura?” She continued to tease, clasp her hands together and tilting her head as she batted her eyelashes.

“Go off why don’t you.” Lance rolled his eyes, shoving her away from him lightly. “I can appreciate someone who’s gorgeous, Pidge; and ‘sides, you know it’s not like that between us. I don’t have a thing for black quintessence anyways.” Lance’s looked away from her, his gaze lingering on Keith for just a second too long.

Oh. That was interesting. That was interesting indeed. Queue mental rubbing hands together. She grinned, storing that information away to be brought up later. “What does a person’s base quintessence matter anyways?” She asked.

Lance rubbed at his eye and yawned, which was weird because they just had lunch about a couple hours ago before Hunk came in, and it was too early for Lance to be wanting to go to bed, so unless he took naps…

But Pidge couldn’t recall Lance taking any naps – besides his meditation – over the past couple days since they started this whole ‘babysitting’ thing.

“It matters because it’s everything, Pidge.” Lance replied. “Quintessence is life energy, so it gives people life, but also shapes their life too. Uh… I wrapped my head around it by thinking of quintessence like auras.”

Pidge blinked, and she looked back at Keith and Hunk to see understanding starting to dawn on Hunk’s face. Keith’s face was still blank, but he was watching Lance. She heard Lance yawn again, and Keith’s eyes narrowed a fraction.

So, he knew something about that, did he?

Well, if Keith wasn’t sharing with the class, then Pidge would have to try to pick his brain later. She knew he knew more than he was letting on when it came to Lance, and this kind of proved it. Now, she just had to get Hunk on board – she could say it was to better help Lance, and she was certain he’d agree with her – and then they could tag team Keith until he spilled.

“The different colors are different personality traits.” Hunk’s words cut through Pidge’s thoughts and she hummed, considering that. It did make sense now that she thought about it. Although, that meant that personality wise… Shiro was similar to Zarkon.

Pidge grimaced at the thought, shaking it away. Shiro was nothing like Zarkon, and she knew the others would agree.

“Kinda, sorta, yeah.” Lance replied. Pidge looked back at him, noting how he seemed to be withdrawing himself again. Was it Hunk or was it Keith’s presence that caused it? Or had their appearance reminded Lance that he wasn’t friendly with the team?

Lance stood, resting a hand on the wall to steady himself. “I’d like to go back to the Medbay.” Translation: He wanted to be alone. Pidge frowned, standing back up herself and moving out of Lance’s way.

Keith didn’t say anything to Lance, but he did move out of the doorway to allow Lance to pass through. He looked back at Hunk and Pidge and spoke as the doors closed. “I’ll take it from here, thanks.”
Season 7 on FRIDAY!!!!!! So Excited!!!

I just have to get through tomorrow. :/

For those worried about Gizmo, he has his vet appointment tomorrow. He's still urinating blood, but it's much lighter in color than it was. It also seems to be less and less blood. That's promising, right? We'll know for sure tomorrow. I'll be updating on Gizmo's status on my [Tumblr](http://example.tumblr.com).

Update: Gizmo requires Surgery. To see the most up to date information on Lilac Sweet AND Gizmo, please check out my [Tumblr](http://example.tumblr.com).
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Pidge was Pidge, and after a heated conversation, triggered Lance. Lance temporarily lost control of his quintessence. Hunk left to get Keith, but Pidge was determined to fix this on her own. She made the mess, so she had to clean it up. She managed to convince Lance that she wanted to help, and attempted to distract Lance. Her attempts worked and Lance calmed down.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Bad Flirting, Science, Quintessence

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

“‘You don’t need to hide your scales.’” Keith reminded Lance for the ‘n’th time.

Lance answered him with a yawn that popped his jaw and a stretch the popped the rest of the his joints. He rubbed his face into Keith’s pillow as he debated whether or not to dignify Keith with a proper response, or to attempt to get more sleep.

He knew Keith wanted a response. This wasn’t the first time that he’d felt the need to ‘remind’ Lance, and somehow, Lance doubted it would be the last. Keith wasn’t even the only one bothering him anymore.

It’d only been a week since his emotions outburst in the Green Hangar, but it seemed that was all Pidge needed to jump onto Keith’s crazy train. She’d been a pain in his ass ever since that outburst, and her fear disappeared like trace amounts of quintessence when exposed to air.

“‘My scales aren’t hidden.’” Lance replied, making no movements to remove himself from Keith’s his bed. He did, however, shift to look at Keith as he spoke. “‘You can touch ‘em if you want.”

They both knew the offer was an empty one. Keith went out of his way to avoid touching Lance’s scales. Why was anyone’s guess, although Lance suspected it was because Keith valued the privacy of his emotions. With nosey lions in their heads, they had to find privacy somehow.

Keith’s eyebrows knitted together, the corners of his lips tightening every so slightly. “‘I meant outside of this room.”’ He crossed his arms, and Lance idly let his gaze roam over them. If Keith noticed, he didn’t say anything.

Lance hummed, a clear – in his mind – dismissal to the topic. Keith was up and ready for the day, which meant Lance needed to be up and ready for the day. He couldn’t just stay in Keith’s his room alone all day.
He stretched out again before languidly sliding out of the bed and turning to where he kept a small pile of his clothes. He didn’t have to look at Keith to know that he turned away with an exasperated huff.

“You have your own room.” Keith muttered under his breath and Lance rolled his eyes, not bothering to dignify that with a response and restart a near week old argument. Lance didn’t like his old room. It brought up too many bad memories Lance hated, and if he didn’t sleep with Keith, then he would be sleeping alone in the med bay, and honestly? No thank you.

He would much rather just continue to share Keith’s room. Keith got to sleep in his own bed instead of the med bay bed, Lance got to sleep with someone as he still hated sleeping alone. It was a win-win situation all around.

He spun around as he finished dressing, mentally lamenting the lack of time he’d have to go to the bathroom and perform his skincare routine. “So, who’s baby sitting me first today?” Lance asked, cheerfully brushing past Keith to get to the door. “Hunk? Pidge? Or do I get to sit in the training room while you do your thing?”

It wasn’t that Keith didn’t spend time with him – quite the opposite considering they slept together – but Keith did spend a lot of time in the training room. Lance tended to use the time to practice with his quintessence and get a quick restless nap if needed.

He had already fallen asleep on both Hunk and Pidge, and he was not keen to repeat either experience again.

“You’re allowed to join in.” Keith’s flat reply had the corners of Lance’s mouth twitching upwards, and he spun around to walk backwards as he replied.

“Why join in when I can watch?” At first Keith didn’t seem to understand, and then his eyes widened and his face flushed – the tips of his ears turning a color to rival the Red Lion.

“Lance!” Keith growled out, but it didn’t have the same sternness as one of Shiro’s reprimands. Probably because Keith’s voice still got all squeaky when he was like this. It was adorable.

In any case, it distracted Keith from trying to get Lance to join. It wasn’t that Lance didn’t want to fight or train. Realistically, he knew he had to but… every time he thought about it, his mind went back to the incident in the Green Hangar and how much control over that situation he didn’t have.

He’d already lost control of his powers once already, what if it happened again? He’d rather practice and train away from anyone else.

Besides, what form would his Bayard take now? Would it resume its previous form of a blaster rifle, or would it become something else? It was meant to be like the Astral Plane in the sense of being a representation of its user. It took the form best suited for them.

If that truly was the case, then if it took any other form than the blaster rifle, it would only further prove that he wasn’t the same person that he’d been when he left.

He knew he wasn’t the same person. People didn’t have experiences like he did and come back without a change. Change was natural and expected and terrifying. He didn’t want to think about this change. About whether he’d changed for the better… or for the worst.

Right now, the Bayard was that one guy whose name started with an ‘S’’s cat that was neither dead nor alive until the box was opened. Only the cat was his identity, or past identity, and he wasn’t sure if he wanted to know its status.
“You’re with Pidge this morning.” Keith finally answered him, and Lance automatically shifted, hiding away everything Altean about him. Keith frowned, his hands clenching into fists. For a tick, Lance thought he might finally say something more than his friendly ‘reminder’, but he didn’t.

Lance sighed.

While Keith had been bothering him about his heritage and social skills – like Keith was one to talk – Pidge had been bothering Lance with questions. Her quest for knowledge clearly overrode whatever survival instincts she had towards Lance.

She had even ditched the armor yesterday and treated him like he couldn’t accidentally freeze her to death.

He knew people with a green base were curious, and he could understand why she would be curious about him, but… this was getting a bit ridiculous.

Anytime he was stuck with Hunk or Pidge, Hunk would go over to his work station in the Green Hangar, and Pidge would leave hers to wander down to Lance and start talking. Even if his answers and responses were cryptic or vague, she just kept on at it. It was… alarming how easily she was suddenly treating him like…

Like he mattered. Like they were friends. Like she cared.

It had to be a trick of some sort because she certainly hadn’t cared before. He told himself that she was just interested in the knowledge that he had, but sometimes she didn’t even ask about that.

It was… confusing and annoying, and really, Lance would rather be stuck in the training room, watching Keith get all hot and sweaty kill himself with training while he worked on his Druid Magic.

“Really?” Lance whined, giving Keith his best puppy eyes. Keith’s frown became a bit more pronounced and he shuffled uneasily.

“Yes.” Keith’s reply was short and clipped and Lance mentally frowned, taking note of that. Keith had been getting snippier with him lately. Was it something Lance was doing? Had he upset Keith in some way?

Besides taking over his bedroom. That wasn’t going to be changing anytime soon, and he got the feeling Keith had resigned himself to it about half a week ago.

He couldn’t think of anything else that would have upset Keith. Lance didn’t complain often, and he’d gotten much better at keeping the others at a moderate distance without being too frosty with them.

“Allura still wants to talk to you.”

Lance audibly groaned, slowing a stop to point his face up at the ceiling as if to ask a non-existant god ‘why’? “I don’t want to talk to her.” Lance groaned. “Or Coran.” He added as an afterthought.

Allura and Coran were both persistent little thorns in his side, despite the fact they’d barely seen each other in the past week. Coran still left a bad taste in Lance’s mouth and as for Allura… well, Lance wasn’t keen to see her at all either.
He was so done with Space Royalty.

“I can’t keep her away forever.” Keith was as unhelpful as always. “This is her castle.”

Lance groaned again. “She just wants to know about these.” Lance gestured to where his scales would be. “She doesn’t care about anything else but the possibility of there being other Alteans.”

Keith snorted. “You and I both know it’s not just a possibility.” The weight of Keith’s gaze was a heavy one, and Lance looked away, uncomfortable with the certainty of the statement. He never confirmed that, but Keith was smart enough to put two and two together. Lance was a Druid and Altean. Xana was a Druid and Lance’s uncle, therefore, Altean. Zarkon’s space witch was the High Priestess of the Druids and – according to Allura – also an Altean.

They were right: there were other Alteans. However, none of them would be strictly happy to welcome Allura and Coran into their ranks. Lance had been welcomed, but he’d also been treated as an experiment.

“She won’t like what I have to say.” Lance replied after a moment of silence.

Keith muttered what sounded like ‘I figured’ under his breath. “Look, I’ve got stuff to do with the Blades today. You’ll be with Hunk and Pidge, and you’re not getting out of that unless you want to spend time with Allura.”

“Fine.” Lance sighed dramatically, dragging out the vowels of the word. “I’ll stick with Pidge and Hunk.”

Keith rolled his eyes at how dramatic Lance was being, shaking his head and opening the door to the green Hangar. Hunk looked up as the door open and Lance slipped past Keith into the room.

The Green Lion loomed over them and the back of Lance’s neck prickled for no other reason than just the pure amount of quintessence stored inside her. He imagined all the Lions were like that, but without seeing any of them, there was no way to know for sure.

Pidge also looked up from her workstation, her eyes widening as she saw Lance and Keith and a smile appeared on her face. “Great!” She cheered. “I was just about to go find you two.”

Hunk shot her a look, furrowing his eyebrows before shaking his head and muttering to himself as he returned to work. As Lance approached, he could make out the words to basically be a mantra of ‘keep to myself’ or ‘none of my business’ or something.

“No need.” Keith replied. “I’ll be back sometime after dinner, so don’t wait on me.”

“Be safe!” Pidge smiled at him, waving her hand as the door closed. Once it was fully closed she stopped and looked at Lance, the smile on her face growing larger. “Hey Lance!”

Lance took a step back away from her and towards Hunk.

“Hi?”

“So, I was thinking about what you said last time,” She started, and Lance could have groaned. ‘Last time’ for Pidge could have meant anything from the last time they’d spoken or the last time they’d spoken about a specific topic. Which meant last time could be literal or it could mean a week ago. “And are there more types of quintessence than just the five?”

Lance blinked at her.
“I mean, it doesn’t make sense that there would be just five unless the Alteans use blue quintessence and the Galra use black? I mean, it’s kinda purple, but Allura was talking about corruption, and the Blade of Marmora seemed to know what she was talking about, so I’m figuring that it’s just corrupted quintessence, but then I couldn’t figure out what the Alteans use and…”

“Breath, Pidge.” Hunk interrupted. “Remember to breathe.”

“The Galra use corrupted quintessence.” Lance took Hunk’s interruption to supply what he thought was the answer to her question. There were times he felt like being an asshole and being vague or cryptic, but both Keith and Blue were pushing him to be a bit more… friendly with his teammates, and…

The ice had started to thaw in his ocean, and the shelf was starting to have sand and rocks again. There were bioluminescent algae growing in the water now and the light of it helped keep the corruption at bay.

It was a work in progress, and he had to admit, that maybe his previous teammates had something to do with it. Maybe.

“And the Alteans?” Pidge pressed.

Lance shrugged. “It’s like… pure quintessence. It’s not a particular color. With the corrupted quintessence, the color doesn’t matter as it all becomes corrupted anyways. The quintessence the Castleship uses is more… unfiltered.”

“Unfiltered?” Pidge asked.

Lance shrugged. “It is what it is. It’s like… a mixture of all the colors, but not.”

“But it looks blue.” Hunk said, chiming into the conversation. “Not blue like… Blue Lion blue, but… blue? If that makes sense?”

Lance held up his hand, pulling his quintessence there and manifesting it. Hunk automatically took a couple steps back away from Lance, making sure to keep his workstation between them. Pidge stayed put, although there was a ghost of apprehension in her eyes.

“This is Blue Quintessence.” Lance informed them, slowly coaxing the quintessence into a ball. He wasn’t to the level of talent as he previously had been, but… at least he could do this again. It didn’t even drain him as badly as it once had before.

Keith was always anxious anytime he formed it and played with it in the training room. Like he thought that Lance would lob it at him.

Then again, Lance had teased about helping Keith with dodge practice.

“Notice it’s beautiful coloration, and then look at the veins of quintessence in the castle… that are obviously not in the Hangars… and tell me the castle uses Blue Quintessence again.”

Hunk shrunk into himself, and Lance wondered why before he realized that he inadvertently threatened him. Oops. Oh well.

“Veins?” Pidge asked, and Lance gave her a flat look for two ticks before he realized she legitimately didn’t know what he was talking about. He released the quintessence and walked over to tap one of the visible veins in the hangar.
“See this glowing green light?” He asked them. “This isn’t a light. It’s a quintessence vein. They run all over the ship, sometimes visible, sometimes not. I guess the architect decided they made fantastic natural light fixtures.”

“That’s Green Quintessence?” Hunk asked, staring at the vein with wide eyes. “Does it help power or recharge the lions, or was it just a design choice?”

“For the charging thing, I would think it’d depend on whether the quintessence is headed toward the lions or away. If it heads towards, then it’s charging them, but if it’s heading away… then the Lions are charging the castle.” Pidge added? Suggested? “But how do we know what direction it’s going?” She wondered out loud.

Hunk hummed, bringing his hand up to rub his chin as he thought. Lance stayed still, hoping that Hunk wouldn’t remember...

“Lance!” Lance winced at Hunk’s shout and smiled weakly at him.

“Yeah?”

“You can see quintessence, right? Could you tell?”

“Wait you can see quintessence? Like, without it being like this?” Pidge gestured at the vein.

“I… can. Yes.” Lance nodded at her before looking back at Hunk. He mentally grimaced and tried to think of a way out of using his other vision. Ever since Blue flooded him, it had been weird and the headaches that came from using it were nothing to joke at. “Quintessence isn’t like electricity or a wall plug. Quintessence is the blood that runs through the veins of the ship, like a… circulatory system.”

“Is this an artery or an actual vein?” Pidge questioned, immediately jumping onto the circulatory system idea. “Or does it just flow either way?”

“Like a give-and-take system?” Hunk mused. “Its probably powered and filtered by the Balmeran Crystal.”

Lance shrugged. “Just cause I can see it doesn’t mean I know how the castle works.”

“But you know how Galra ships work, right?” Pidge’s question almost sounded sly.

Hunk’s lips thinned into a line. He never agreed with her pressing Lance for information like this, but without Keith present, there was nothing to make her stop…. Beyond Lance getting upset like he had last time.

Except she never let it get that far. Once was enough for her to somehow get good at telling when she was pushing too much and when she could push a bit more.

Lance shrugged again. “I guess.”

Pidge was nothing else if not persistent. “So, you do know.”

“I guess.” Lance repeated, looking away from them both. He heard her inhale and prepare to ask again, and mentally prepared himself for being pushed into talking about it.

“That’s his ‘I don’t want to talk it about it’ response Pidge. Let it be.”

“But… if we knew more about how the Galra Ships worked, we could better strategize. We’d
know the best places to target for greater impact.” Pidge argued.

“That doesn’t mean he wants to talk about it.” Hunk replied. “And yeah, that information would be useful, but we’ve been surviving without it this long, we can survive without it for a bit longer.” Lance glanced over at him to see Hunk smile and offer a discrete thumb up.

The friendliness Hunk displayed – while not at the levels it had once been – made Lance uncomfortable. He had tried to kill him, had been up close and personal about it too. How could Hunk be so… friendly despite that?

Sure, he kept his distance but… when Lance had fallen asleep in here, Hunk had offered his shoulder as a pillow. And every so often he stood up for Lance like he should have before.

“You people are confusing.” Lance muttered.

“Says the cryptic and vague Druid.” Pidge shot back. Lance pulled his hood over his head in response, and Pidge snorted. “Why do you hide like that anyways?”

“Habit.”

“Well… duh.” He couldn’t see Pidge roll her eyes, but he was certain she was. “But I meant like… you hide with us.”

Lance remained silent, waiting to see where she’d go with this.

“I saw you with Keith when he was training. You had your hood down and you looked…” She paused, possibly trying to find the words.

“Like you weren’t from the past.” Hunk supplied. “I mean, it was a total shock to see you walk through the doors looking like you did but… Why are you doing it? Its clear that it upsets you.”

“I have no choice but to.” Lance replied quietly. “I have to be friends with you and my Altean Features would only hinder that.”

“You don’t have to be friends with us, Lance.” Pidge snapped. “I mean, I want to be friends with you, but I want you to want to be friends with me too. And we can’t get used to your… features if you never show them off around us.”

“Yeah man. You’re not the same Lance that left, and yeah, that’s not exactly okay, but it’s not not okay either. It’s kinda expected for you to be different, just like it’s expected for us to be different.” Hunk chimed in.

Lance looked down at his feet, unsure of how to feel about the conversation taking place. For the first time in a while, Blue showed interest in the conversation, prodding at him to accept the olive branch his teammates were offering.

Pidge said he had a choice, but he didn’t. Not really. If he didn’t make friends with them, then he’d eventually lose Blue and be alone in space. But if he did make friends with them… then what did he have to lose?

He was being petty and spiteful by denying them, especially when they seemed to be genuine attempts to try to make things normal between them again. Well, maybe not normal, but better.

And wasn’t that what he wanted? Didn’t he want them to treat him better? Hadn’t he wanted them to not ignore him and blame him for what was happening? Hadn’t he wanted this?
He looked up at Hunk, and despite the fear he could still see there, he could also see how sincere Hunk was. Of course, the only way he’d know that for sure would be to have Hunk touch his scales but... he couldn’t just make everyone he doubted touch him in such a private way.

He looked at Pidge and it felt like his heart shattered. She looked so earnest and well-meaning and hopeful. She really wanted to be friends with him again. They both did.

He shifted back to his Altean form and lowered his hood.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you guys for reading!! It's super appreciated! It's crazy that we're on Chapter 79, lol. (And I still don't know how many more chapters there are. There's still a lot I want to get done....... oh well, lessons learned for next time.)

Also thank you for all your support regarding Gizmo! Some Rude Person commented on a post where I was worrying about Gizmo that I should of 'thought about this before 'I' got him'. This being the Bladder Stones or the cost of the Surgery, I imagine. :/ I would like to state that if you are that person, while I can't block you on AO3, you're not welcome to interact with me or my stories. I don't need that type of negativity in my life or around me right now. One day I hope you mature enough to realize how rude, mean, and hurtful your statement was.

Moving on... Gizmo's surgery is tomorrow! I'm taking a couple days off work to watch him, courtesy of my boss :D So, I get a couple of days of work free to get some more writing done! :D I'm super excited for that (nervous about the surgery, but excited for the time off).

Gizmo's Surgery was super successful! They removed some non-dissolving stones from his bladder and also flushed out some dissolved stones that were getting stuck in his urethra. Had I waited for surgery, it wouldn't have been good.... so good thing I didn't wait! :D For the most up to date information on Gizmo, please check out my Tumblr!

In other news... Season 7 was... interesting. If you want to talk about it, please hit me up on my Tumblr. If anyone reads the comments, then you'll know that while I disagree with how Adam was handled, I do not feel that DREAMWORKS or LM or JDS queerbaited. I do, however, feel that NETFLIX did. I do not support the negative messages that are being sent to both LM and JDS. That's all I'll state on AO3. If you want to talk further, you can reach me at my Tumblr.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith left Lance in Pidge and Hunk's hands while he left the castleship. Pidge and Hunk were able to convince Lance to finally stop hiding behind the image of the past.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Allura, Referenced/Mentioned Death, Minor Cussing

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lance tapped out his mother’s lullaby on the table in the workstation, ignoring Pidge and Hunk who were arguing about some math or science thing.

Blue hummed along with the song, content that he’d taken a chance and somewhat repaired his relationship with them. Every so often she gave off waves of emotion that reminded Lance of his mother’s smile every time he returned from school and told her about a new friend.

His Lion was totally mothering him and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it.

Pidge and Hunk both had been surprised when he lowered his hood to reveal his Altean features. Pidge had recovered first, smiling brightly at him and asking, “Now that wasn’t so hard, was it?”

Hunk had been more apprehensive, understandably. He nodded, and offered a shaky smile, and then they had returned to talking about various things until Pidge and Hunk had gotten into an argument about single or double… modding? modulating? mod-something or another.

“Single.”

“Double.”

“Single!”

Lance sighed, rolling his eyes as they continued to bicker over this. The doors to the Hangar slid open and Lance perked up, hoping it was Keith back early from his mysterious mission. The person who walked through the door, however, was most certainly not Keith.

While his ears drooped at the sight of Allura, her eyes brightened. She smiled brightly at him, although her smile dimmed a bit when she caught sight of the two arguing behind him.

“Lance, just the person I wanted to see!” She sounded cheerful enough, although her voice was quiet. “Would you care to take a walk with me?”
So, she could interrogate him about all the Alteans that would love to dissect her and present her to High Priestess Haggar for power, he was sure. He physically grimaced, looking back at the two bickering and wishing they would notice and say something to stop this.

“I’m not supposed to go anywhere without Keith, Pidge, or Hunk.” He informed her. Her smile dimmed a bit more at his response and Lance hoped that meant that she’d leave him alone.

“I am certain I can handle any situation that should arise.” She replied, her tone firm and unyielding. Her smile was dim but sweet in the way that said, ‘I can fuck your shit up’ and Lance knew it. Keith had warned him about this, so he supposed there was nothing to be done.

“SINGLE!”
“DOUBLE!”

He sighed heavily, standing up. It was really like he’d never left. They wouldn’t notice him leaving now.

“I guess.” He grumbled, walking towards her.

“Splendid.” Her smile brightened, and she clasped her hands together. “I look forward to this.” Oh yeah, Lance was sure. The doors slid shut behind him feeling like an ominous omen, and maybe he was reading too much into this, but he really just wanted to turn around and go back to Pidge and Hunk.

“I see you are no longer hiding your Altean features.” Allura said as they started to walk down the halls. “Keith mentioned that you were adjusting and insisted that I let you be… but Coran and I were quite concerned.”

“I’m sure you were, princess.” Lance’s reply was as strained as his smile.

He didn’t doubt that she was concerned so much as he doubted she was concerned for him. She was likely more concerned about an Altean hiding their features.

It wasn’t that he thought badly of the princess or anything, and while it was true he’d once wanted something more with her… the truth was that he’d had his fill of princesses and princes. She wasn’t Lotor, but there were too many similarities between them for Lance to be comfortable.

Like, yes, Keith was like Lotor, but he was similar in a different way. They were both passionate and instinctual. Allura and Lotor both had a similar accent and cadence to their speech. They both presented and held themselves in specific ways and…

Lance was so done with royalty.

“Yes. We were all worried during your stint with the Galra. It is a relief to see that you are recovering well.”

Uh, bullshit? This was bullshit right… because it sounded better than the truth. It sounded better, and it tasted better, so he was just supposed to pretend it really happened? Even Blue was skeptical. Actually, scratch that; she wasn’t skeptical, she was downright furious.

Allura had most certainly not been worried about him at all in the beginning. Her concern for him only started recently, and he had a pretty good hunch as to why.

“Oh, no offense, but… what do you want?” Lance asked flatly. “I know you didn’t care about me
before, and you lying is insulting.” He stopped walking and crossed his arms.

Allura stopped as well, her eyes wide and ears drooping. She raised a hand to her cover her mouth. “Lance.” She blinked at him. “You do not really believe I did not care for you, do you?”

“Allura responded sternly, then shook her head. “Once we knew where you were, we did everything in our power to get you back. It was important to the team—”

“Really? Cut the bullshit. You only care about me now because a) you need Voltron and Blue has made it clear that she’ll only accept me and b) I’m Altean. You’ve never liked or cared about me, and when you accused me of being a traitor, you left me to rot.”

“That is not true.” Allura responded sternly, then shook her head. “Once we knew where you were, we did everything in our power to get you back. It was important to the team—”

“Oh yeah, to the team. Point A has been made, thank you.”

“I want to help you the same as anyone else on this ship!” Allura raised her voice as she spoke, her eyebrows knitting in anger. She pursed her lips, glaring at him as if he was singlehandedly responsible for ruining her life, which was totally wrong. Zarkon held that honor, thank you very much.

“Do you?” Lance argued. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m thankful for your help. If it wasn’t for you, then Blue and I would still be drowning in corruption, but don’t think I can’t tell when I’m being used. You’re no Lotor, no matter how similar you two are.”

Okay, maybe he crossed a line there, but he didn’t appreciate her trying to sweet talk him into thinking she cared for him the whole time. He knew better, and for her to think otherwise was, frankly, insulting. This whole farce was insulting.

She gasped. “Some way of showing your appreciation! How dare you compare me to him!?”

“You didn’t do this for me or Blue.”

“I did this for the universe!”

“You did this for yourself!” Lance shouted. “You did this in some twisted hope that you’d be absolved from the guilt of failing your people and planet, for not seeing who and what Zarkon was. You did this because you thought that if you could save me then you could save other Alteans too.”

“How dare you speak to me like this! I am your Prince—”

“You are no princess of mine.” Lance repeated words that Pidge had spoken once before so long ago in a low growl. “I know what you want to know, and let me tell you, they would rather dissect you and turn you into an experiment than follow you. You’ve lost them to the High Priestess, to Zarkon’s witch. You might have saved me, but they are beyond saving.”

“You do not know that!” Allura argued. “Nor can you make that call for them all.”

“The Druids would have nothing to do with you.” Lance repeated. “Nothing. You are not their Princess. You haven’t been for ten thousand deca-phoebs, and it’s foolish of you to think that you can just waltz in after all that time and set things back to the past. Things change, and you have to accept that.”

“That was then.” Allura shook her head. “That was then, and now is now. They do not have to side with the Galra to survive anymore. They have other choices!”
“You think they side with the Galra to survive?” Lance repeated before laughing. “You think they side with the Galra out of lack of choice? You think they’d choose to side with you?” Lance shook his head. “The only reason they’d follow you is for your power and if you don’t think they’d backstab you at the first sign of weakness, then you’re more naïve than I thought.”

“Perhaps I am.” Allura’s voice was surprisingly even considering the fight they were having. “Perhaps I am naïve, but I would like to believe there is still some good left in my people.”

“They aren’t your people.” Lance interrupted. “They’re raised on corruption until their scales rot off their faces, leaving behind only stained skin where they once were.”

Allura gasped, the anger in her eyes fading enough for horror to take over. She shook her head. “I cannot believe them all to be gone.”

“Among the Druids, you’ll find no friends. You will not find your people. I don’t know if the Alteans exist elsewhere, but I know you’ll find none with the Druids.” Well, that was a minor lie. He knew the Resistance knew where to get uncorrupted Alteans as they mentioned past attempts for Druid spies; but given how Allura had basically confirmed that she only cared about him for his heritage, he wasn’t keen on sharing that piece of info.

“So, what? Am I just to abandon potential innocents?”

“Among Druids, there are none.” Lance felt like he was repeating the same message over and over, waiting for her to finally understand it. It seemed to have fully sunken in as tears formed in her eyes. She would have fallen to the floor had Lance not caught her.

“I… I had hoped…”

“I know.” Lance’s voice was softer now. “I know, but you can’t save them, Allura. You can’t.”

“I saved you.” Her voice was so quiet, and Lance couldn’t think of a time he’d ever seen her so down. Guilt for how the conversation had come about crept up on him, but he pushed it away. She had deserved it for how she’d acted.

“You can’t save everyone, Allura; and if your intentions for Voltron were as you said, then regardless of my betrayal, you should have saved me. The fact that you only did so upon finding out you needed me for Voltron and because I’m Altean speaks poorly of you and your intentions. If you truly planned to use Voltron as you say, then you can’t choose who to save.”

He understood how contradicting he was being, but… both stances were true. She could not save everyone, and she could not choose who to save. The Druids were beyond saving and to try was foolhardy.

“Then I should be allowed to save the Druids.”

“You save them by granting them a quick and swift death.” Lance replied. “Trying to do for them what you did for me would only be considered torture, and if they did survive, then they would forever resent you and always be in pain. Death would be a mercy.”

He wasn’t wrong. He wasn’t even fully recovered from his short – compared to most Druids – time with the corruption. It had been painful, and dangerous, and for her to attempt it with a proper Druid would be torture.

“Would you have welcomed death?” She asked, her voice hardening into a challenge. Lance frowned, pulling away to look down at her.
“You already know the answer to that.”

“Are you here to kill me, Allura?” The words he’d spoken in the Astral Plane repeated in his head, and based on how she stiffened in his arms, he knew she was thinking of it too.

“I just kill them? That is all I can do?”

Lance sighed, letting go of her and taking a couple steps away. “If you want to try to save them, then be my guest. It is hypocritical of me to tell you to try to save everyone but the Druids, but… killing them is the best salvation you can give them.”

Allura’s lips were thin lines, but she sighed, shaking her head. “It was wrong of me to treat you as I did without the facts.” Allura muttered, looking away. She still looked unsteady on her feet, but at least she no longer appeared on the verge of collapse. “I am sorry about that.”

“I know.” Lance replied. “But you can’t just sweep it under a rug and hide it away. You can’t pretend the past is gone. I may forgive, but I don’t plan to forget anytime soon.”

“When did you get so wise?” Allura asked, sniffling. “I do not remember you being like this before.”

“I spent a lot of time with an actually decent ruler.”

Allura winced at his words, pursing her lips. “You consider Lotor to be a decent ruler?” She asked. “Despite all he has done? Despite all he has done to you?”

Lance curled his fists, taking a deep breath and holding it for a moment. Blue rumbled her support, wrapping herself around him like a cool cloak, numbing his emotions slightly as her attempt to assist. Lance thanked her for it, taking all she offered.

Absentmindedly his hand rose to play with the gem of his necklace, or where the gem would have been if he’d been wearing the necklace. It was hard to break a habit that had become so deeply ingrained.

“He cared for people.” Lance said, thinking back to how often Lotor would spend his time reading through reports, pouring his soul into attempting to make things better for the Empire. “He left to force Haggar to recall the Robeasts, Voltron be damned.”

Lance wondered if Lotor regretted that choice now that Voltron had stolen Lance away from him.

“He… did care for me, in his own way.” Lance muttered, and Allura looked back at him with something akin to pity in her eyes.

“I would hope so. He was courting you with those gifts… unless Galra culture has changed from that. But courting and intentions is not enough to make up for what he has put you through.” Allura furrowed her eyebrows as she looked at Lance. “Perhaps you should wear a different necklace to replace his.”

“I’ll consider it.” Lance said. “The point is, he wasn’t a bad emperor.” A bad person, maybe. Lance still felt too raw from the wounds Lotor had dealt him, and while he wanted to believe Lotor hadn’t meant it, he couldn’t forgive him. Not yet. Possibly not ever.

“We will agree to disagree on that.” Allura’s voice was flat and Lance internally sighed.

“You’re a good person at heart, Allura.” Lance informed her. “But you let things cloud your
judgement, and when you try to ignore those things, you end up in a worse position than before. I know you have the potential to be a good leader… that potential is inside of you, it’s a part of you.”

“My quintessence?” Allura asked, her hand raised to her chest over her heart.

“If the Black Lion didn’t obviously prefer purple, I wouldn’t doubt that he would take you.” Lance half smiled. “You just need to work on somethings. Like, not judging hastily, but not over thinking things.”

Allura looked down, and he could tell that she was taking in his words and actually considering them.

“Why do you want to save the universe so badly, Allura?” He asked after a few moments of silence. She looked back up at him, her mouth falling open as a response immediately came to mind, and then she paused.

“For the good of everyone.”

It sounded fake, and he knew that she recognized that by the darkening of her eyes and the tightness of her mouth.

Lance hummed disapprovingly. “Think on it. When you can give me a real answer, maybe then I can forgive you and see you as the Princess you claim to be.” He turned away, unwanted and unwilling to spend any more time with her.

He’d said what needed to be said, and the conversation he’d been dreading was finally over. He could move on now. He headed back towards the Green Hangar and frowned as he noticed the shouting match still occurring behind the workstation.

“SINGLE!”

“DOUBLE!”

It really was like he never left.

He turned on his heel, not wanting to experience that further either. He wasn’t supposed to be without Pidge, Hunk, or Keith… or the princess, but… he let his feet guide him. There was something calling to him, and it wasn’t until he was standing outside the Blue Hangar that he realized what it was. He couldn’t tell if the pit of anxious excitement in his stomach was from him or her.

The doors slid open with a quiet whoosh, and the Blue Lion lit up as he walked into the hangar. She lowered her head as he approached, and Lance smiled.

“Hey, Beautiful. I’m here.”

The thing was… Lance knew he was where he wasn’t supposed to be, and he knew that Blue knew it too. The thing was, they both felt this unsettling creeping guilt, but neither of them really cared. The thing was he was Blue’s and Blue was his.

The thing was… they missed each other.

After the stressful conversations of the day – two in one quintant? Three if he counted his conversation with Keith. Wasn’t he just a lucky, lucky boy? – Blue’s presence was a balm for his soul.
Ordinarily, Blue washed over him like a towering wave, knocking him off his feet and sending him spinning into the depths. This time, she was gentler, softer. Waves washed up, brushing against Lance as he made his way to her, gradually getting deeper as he advanced.

The water was all in his mind, but it didn’t make it any less real to him. It was almost over his head as he reached Blue and she welcomed him back with one last wave and he was submerged.

He was pulled to Blue, like a riptide or an undertow but gentler. She called to him and there was nothing he could do but answer her call. His hands shook as he reached out. Blue was cold and solid but that wasn’t something that Lance actively registered.

He did register the flow of quintessence running through her. She brushed against him, inviting him into the current.

For a moment, Lance was reminded of the main crystal on Lotor’s ship and Blue growled, the water whipping around him like there was a storm occurring above the surface. He didn’t have to hear her voice to know she was insulted by the comparison.

She was better than that, and she would show him.

He closed his eyes and kneeled before leaning forward, resting his forehead against her and letting himself be washed away.

The water filled him, somehow still liquid despite how impossibly cold it was. She was careful not to wash him out like she had before, but to take him into her. The corners of Lance’s lips curled up physically as he synced with her properly for the first time in ages.

Quintessence flowed around him in strings of bubbles. Although he couldn’t see Blue raise the particle barrier, he knew when it happened because he helped her raise it. He could feel a pulse as Blue’s systems came online as he swept through their bond.

“Lance!” Allura’s voice sounded distant and distorted, like he was hearing her underwater, but also crystal and clear.

When Lance opened his eyes, he did not see the metal of his Lion, but through her eyes. The princess stood at the edge of the particle barrier, looking at them.

Lance was fine with Blue. She had her Paladin back, and they were reunited, not just in the Astral Plane but physically too. There was much she needed to show him, to tell him, to teach him. He had floundered long enough and had finally reached a place – mentally, physically, and emotionally – where she could finally properly help him.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone hasn't heard, Gizmo's surgery was successful! There was a bit of a scare on Saturday Night, but the vet determined that he just needed some more pain meds. He's been perfectly fine since! :D

Also, yes, the argument that Pidge and Hunk are having came from the show. XD
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith left Lance in Hunk and Pidge's care while he left the castle. Hunk and Pidge managed to convince Lance to lower his hood and reveal his Altean features. Afterwards, in an attempt to seem more 'normal' around Lance, Pidge and Hunk started an argument, which drew their attention away from him. Allura coincidentally chose this moment of distraction to pop into the room and steal Lance away for a conversation.

Keith had previously warned Lance that Allura would want to talk to him, and knowing exactly what she wanted to talk about, Lance was not thrilled to be with her. They argued about the Druids, Alteans, Allura's 'concern' for the team/Lance, and the future. As the argument comes to it's conclusion, Lance felt the call of the Blue Lion and followed it.

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Trauma, Cursing, Astral Planes, Paladin Bonds

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

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Keith was waiting, leaning against a nearby wall with his arms crossed as he stared at the Blue Lion.

The mission had been as successful as it could be. He’d worked with the Blade Members onboard the ship to try to create rumors and decoys and proof to throw off their trail. If there was one good thing Keith could say about Lotor, it was that he was persistent.

He was certainly more persistent in his efforts to get Lance back than Team Voltron had been in the beginning. Voltron’s only saving grace was that Lotor seemed to be a bit too preoccupied with aspects of running the Empire to devote his full attention to hunting them down.

And their time was running out.

The Blade operatives still at the main Galra headquarters that Zarkon had used finally reported that Lotor had taken his leave. Meaning it was only a matter of time before it was Lotor himself following up on the ‘rumors’ that Keith and the other Blades made to create false trails.

Keith wouldn’t lie and say that the truth that Lotor did more to find Lance even while preoccupied didn’t sting; but it was the past and he had learned from it. Never again would he let something like that happen. Never again would he help abandon a teammate like they had.
Red rumbled in agreement before yawning in a pointed reminder to Keith as to how late it was.

Keith was well aware of how late it was, just as he was well aware of how many hours Lance had been kneeling beside Blue, forehead pressed against her like he was praying. Through the glimmer of the particle barrier, he could see Lance’s scales glowing.

It was barely noticeable, but they pulsed in time to a heartbeat, and more than once Keith had gotten lost in his thoughts while staring at it.

He knew nothing was wrong thanks to Red, who assured him in the beginning that Lance was safe, but…

A shiver ran down his spine and Keith shuddered, feeling like someone had dropped ice down the back of his shirt. It wasn’t the first time the sensation had occurred, and Red perked up at it like she had all previous times it had occurred.

She seemed equally displeased and pleased by it. Keith didn’t know what it was, but it reminded him of when Lance and Blue had shoved him out of the way of the Robeast’s attack. When Lance and Blue had taken that hit and for a moment he had felt Lance and Blue, and his connection with Red had evolved into this.

The connection was evolving again.

The moment he’d stepped back into the Castle ship, he had known something had happened. Pidge and Hunk both looked… sheepish, and Allura had looked troubled, and Slav… Slav had looked downright delightful.

“This is good!” he told Keith, grinning – or what Keith assumed was grinning. “His bond with the Blue Lion has strengthened back to how it should be.”

And that was when Keith officially knew that something had happened.

It seemed that Pidge and Hunk had gotten distracted and Allura had taken Lance out and then… from there things were unclear but Lance had made his way to the Blue Hangar where he was currently behind a particle barrier with the Blue Lion.

He left his team alone for one quintant. Just one, and he came back to this.

He was too tired to be upset. Allura had been hounding him about talking with Lance – something he assumed she did. Why else would Lance have sought the Blue Lion’s reassurance? – and Pidge had been bothering him about nonsensical ideas about him and Lance.

Just the thought was enough to make Keith scoff. Him and Lance? Ha.

Yes, they shared a room currently, and yes, Lance had opened to Keith the most out of everyone, and yes, Lance didn’t seem to like to be touched except for by Keith recently… but none of that meant anything.

It just meant they were… close friends, that’s all.

Red snorted and Keith ignored her.

A shiver once more ran down his spine, and Keith growled to himself, bouncing off the wall to approach the particle barrier. Red had gone very quiet and very still in his head as he reached out and knocked against it as he had seen Lance do once before.
The past two times he’d tried this, nothing had happened. This time the particle barrier collapsed.

It bowed in on itself before breaking down, faintly colored light – quintessence, his mind supplied – spilling over the edges and through the gapes. It overflowed out of the collapsing barrier, hitting into him like a tidal wave and for a moment he was underwater, spinning and spiraling, in a sea of emotion and thought.

Red hissed, whining about getting wet.

Keith blinked, standing exactly where he had been before. Coolness brushed against his legs, like he was knee deep in water, but when he looked down, there was nothing there… visibly, he corrected. There was nothing there visibly.

He could feel it though. It was cool and liquid, lapping against him in tiny waves. When he blinked, there was an after image of blue glowing in his mind where the ‘water’ was.

Why did he always have to go through this? First Allura, and now Lance. At this rate, he’d have to help Pidge and Hunk when they went through this and… Shit. Keith paled as he imagined what Yellow or Green would do.

Wait. Fuck that. He imagined what he might have to go through with Red. Man, if this was evolving, then Keith was so not interested in dealing with the fire that his Lion would bring.

While she was still irritated at being wet – an image of a sopping wet cat came to mind – Red laughed at him, and with a start, he realized he could hear another’s laughter as well. It echoed in the water around him, and he knew without a doubt he was hearing the Blue Lion.

Keith took a deep breath and reminded himself that it was far too late for him to say, ‘fuck this shit, I’m out’.

He waded through the… water? quintessence? light?… to the Blue Lion, to Lance who was still kneeling in the now waist deep water.

Lance was glowing. Not in the sense that he was beautiful – although he was – but in the sense that he was quite literally glowing. His scales were still faintly pulsing to a heartbeat, but the water around Lance was visibly glowing. It was like Lance was bleeding blue, and it was surreal to see it fade out into the nothingness.

Keith reached out and touched Lance’s shoulder and…

He was standing on an ice shelf, staring out at an iceberg filled ocean under a starless black sky. Bioluminescent algae lit up the world, swaying and twirling in the ocean’s currents. Something dark loomed under the surface of the water, just out of sight of the algae’s light.

Even with his jacket on, Keith was freezing, and he wondered how the heck the algae stayed alive in such a cold environment. Maybe the water was warmer? He leaned down, intent to touch the water, but a voice startled him.

“I thought it was you.” Keith spun around, staring at Lance. Lance wasn’t looking at him, but instead looking down at a flat stone in his hand. After a moment, he tossed it, attempting to skip it on the calm-ish ocean.

“What is this place?” Keith asked.

“It’s an Astral Plane.” Lance replied. “Everyone has one, I think. It’s supposed to be a
representation of a person.”

Well this was clearly not the representation of Keith. The moment he those words popped up in his mind, the world blurred around him. Lance paused mid throw, his mouth forming a small frown. The ocean vanished in a blink, drying out to form a dusty desert with looming canyon walls.

Before them was a ranch, or well, what remained of a ranch. A lava pool had formed partially under it, and the house was half burnt as a response. Hot wind kicked up sand, and the sun beat down on them.

Lance looked around, his frown becoming more pronounced as he surveyed their surroundings. Part of the house that wasn’t already charred black caught on fire and Lance whistled lowly, wincing as he looked at it.

“You might want to get that fixed.”

Keith stood, horrified and transfixed by the image of his childhood home bursting into flames. He felt like he couldn’t breathe, and he realized the reason why was because air was turning to ash. The wind picked up as the heat seemed to rise in spite of the now suddenly darkening sky.

Lance approached Keith and took his hand just as the skies above unleashed a torrential downpour. The temperature immediately dropped, the fire sizzled out, the ground beneath his feet become muddy and slick until he was sliding and-

Back in an ocean, kicking the water as he tried to swim. Lance’s hand was still holding his, and he felt Lance tug. Something caught his foot under the water, but then Lance was hauling him up onto an ice shelf. There was a loud groan and a grating shrieking noise as ice tumbled off a glacier, producing an impossible lava flow into the ocean. The ice screamed as it came in contact with the heat, steam rising into the air.

Lance winced as his gaze moved between it and Keith.

“You’re a hot mess.” Lance muttered, and Keith blinked, and they were back in the Blue Hangar. Lance’s eyes were dark as he met Keith’s gaze.

Keith shivered, feeling too hot and too cold at the same time, asked the only question that came to mind: “What the fuck!?”

“Astral Planes.” Lance shrugged, giving off an air of nonchalance, but Keith could see the turmoil and anxiety in his eyes. He could feel it like a chilly echo in his mind, like he had felt the ‘water’ in the hangar. “I can’t tell you how many times mine produced you guys trying to kill me or tried to drown me.”

“We tried to kill you!?”

Lance shrugged, again, and Keith wanted to scream and shake him, but he knew that wouldn’t produce the answers to any of the questions Keith so desperately needed answered.

Red purred, wrapping herself around him in an attempt to calm him down, and he was vaguely reminded of what happened to Lance last time he freaked out.

Would Red burn him out like Lance had been drowned?

If she was offended by the thought, she didn’t show it.
“Most of it was the corruption, I think.” Lance replied. His eyes were still dark as he met Keith’s gaze. He furrowed his eyebrows, leaning impossibly close to Keith. His breath moved Keith’s hair, his eyes were the only thing Keith could see.

Coolness rolled off Lance like Keith radiated heat and he was hit with the sudden need and desire to be even closer to Lance, to press himself against him in a hope that between the two of them, they would be able to get back to a normal temperature.

Lance’s hand cupped his cheek, holding his head still. “Funny, I never noticed how… Galra your eyes were.”

Keith jerked back, falling onto his hands and backwards crab walking away from Lance. His tongue ran over his teeth and he could feel how much sharper they suddenly felt. “Keith!” Lance shouted, falling forwards when Keith moved, and then crawling after him.

Lance’s hand wrapped around his ankle, and even through his boot he could feel hold cold Lance’s touch was. Water washed over him, and Lance hissed, recoiling away and holding his hand to his chest like he’d been wounded.

Both Red and Blue growled in unison. Blue’s was physical, but Red’s was mental, and Lance flinched, looking at Keith with such impossibly wide eyes. Lance trembled and then like a rabbit, he shot up to his feet and ran.

Keith didn’t realize he ran after Lance until he had him pinned to the ground, both of Lance’s wrists being held against the small of his back. Keith held Lance down with a hand to the back of his neck, his legs straddling his hips and thighs.

“Fuck!” Keith rolled off him, and Lance rolled the other direction and they both stared at each other. “I didn’t, I mean…”

Lance swallowed thickly, and Keith’s gaze was immediately drawn to this adam’s apple as it bobbed. His whole body felt taut, tight and hot. Hot concern from Red burned through their bond, although there was a flicker of amusement in the fire.

So glad his turmoil was entertaining for her.

Lance stayed still for a minute, two, three, four, until he finally moved at five. He relaxed, slowly moving until he was in a half sitting, half crouching position.

The door to the hangar slid open, and while Lance flinched, neither he nor Keith looked to see who entered. They didn’t need to. Keith knew it was at least Pidge and Hunk, although he didn’t feel them as clearly as he felt Lance.

“Keith!” Hunk shouted, and he knew he and Pidge both skidded to a stop, staring at the two of them.

“Everything’s fine.” Lance’s voice said carefree and not concerned, but Keith knew otherwise. His muscles had tensed once the door open and he had yet to relax. There was a buildup of energy inside him, like a tidal wave building up before it crashed into the shore or an unsuspecting ship.

“Keith?” Pidge asked, edging closer until she was within Keith’s peripheral view.

Lance’s gaze bore into his, and Keith looked to Pidge and nodded. “Everything’s fine.” He repeated Lance’s words. A sign of trust that he immediately knew was correct because he could feel it was. His instincts were screaming at him that he’d made the right choice. “What brought
“A feeling.” Allura’s voice was unexpected, and Keith looked past Pidge and Hunk to see her standing in the doorway. She was wearing her bathrobe over her nightgown, her arms crossed. Beside her were the two Blade of Marmora members. Slav peeked around the door for a second before disappearing.

The whole castle was here, huh.

The back of his neck prickled, and he turned to look at the hand that Hunk was suddenly offering him. Since Hunk wasn’t running away screaming, Keith had to believe that whatever Galra—holy shit his eyes had been Galra, and his teeth had felt sharper, and he really wanted to panic but he needed to hold it together right now—Lance had seen in him was gone.

Pidge was offering Lance a hand, and he saw Lance hesitate for a moment before firmly accepting it. If anything, weird happened, neither Pidge or Lance showed it. Keith accepted Hunk’s assistance.

“As you can see, everything is fine.” Keith informed Allura once he was on his feet.

Coran slid past Allura into the hangar, and Lance stiffened as he saw him before relaxing. Lance was… different after his time with Blue, just as he’d been different after being drowned, just as he’d been different after his time with the Galra.

Quintessence clearly had a huge impact on Lance. That was something Keith needed to keep an eye on.

Lance smiled at Pidge, the first smile to actually reach his eyes in a while and he could tell Pidge noticed immediately. Lance’s gaze flickered to him as if noticing that he was staring, and Keith swore could feel a chill for a second.

Quintessence clearly had a huge impact on him too. “We should get some sleep.” Coran announced. “We’ve all had a long day, and now that Number 3 is finished convening with his Lion, that should be it.”

The Blades shifted uneasily, and Keith narrowed his eyes at them. They had expressed concern over Lance before, both for his Druid Status and his closeness to Lotor. They had probably been bothering Coran over Lance being alone with the Blue Lion.

Red huffed, shaking her head. As if Blue’s Paladin would ever purposefully harm his Lion.

Everyone slowly filtered out of the Hangar, Lance caught between Pidge and Coran. He looked back at Keith and his eyes seemed to beg that they talked later. Keith nodded, there were things he needed to ask Lance.

Keith was one of the last to leave, as when he passed by the blades, they gestured for him to stay. They wanted to talk, and Keith could feel frustration flare up inside him.

Keith didn’t have the time to wait and talk with them. He wanted, no needed, to talk to Lance. It was already bad enough that he wouldn’t be able to do so until morning. Coran was likely to stay with him in the medbay and ask his own questions which meant Lance wouldn’t be meeting him in his room.

A growl worked itself out of his throat unbidden as Myklar rested his hand on Keith’s shoulder. Not even a second later and it was removed.
“I was afraid of that.” Myklar narrowed his eyes. “It was hypothesized that you would come into your Galra heritage the more contact you had with quintessence.”

Keith’s mind flashed to all the missions Kolivan had been attempting to ask Keith to join once they found all the Paladins again. If he recalled correctly, most of them had involved quintessence in some manner. Had the Blade of Marmora been trying to force him into becoming more Galra?

The thought had him rising his shoulders akin to how a dog or cat would raise their hackles. The hair on the back of his neck stood on end, and he took a step back away from them, lowering his head so his chin covered his throat.

“Excuse me?”

“I sometimes forget how young you truly are.” Azur said, like that answered Keith’s question. “It’s only natural to respond to certain stimulants.”

“Excuse me?” Keith repeated. “I’m fine.”

“For now.” Azur replied. “But who can say for the future.”

“I think it’d be best for you to come to the Blade headquarters to better acquaint yourself with your Galra blood.” Myklar added.

Red roared in his mind, growling and threatening them for even suggesting for him to leave the team. They were already down a person, two if one counted Lance. He was needed here. He had a bond with Lance that he couldn’t just ignore.

There was tug, the sensation of ice down his back and he just knew that somehow, he’d gotten Lance’s attention. Yet despite that, Lance was still moving away. Red half purred, half growled.

“I think I’ll be fine here.” Keith replied, snarling quietly.

Myklar and Azur exchanged looks, and man, Keith hated when they did that. Myklar looked back at Keith and frowned slightly. “Are you sure that’s wise?”

“I won’t leave my team when they need me.” Keith’s tone left no room for argument.

“When your team needs you, or when the Druid needs you?” Apparently, Azur didn’t get the memo. Fury burned in Keith like an inferno, impossibly hot at the implication, and before he knew it, Azur was pinned against the wall. Myklar’s sword was firm against Keith’s neck.

“Release him.”

Keith didn’t move except to press his claws – since when did he have fucking claws? What had Lance done to him?! – against Azur’s throat. “That Druid is part of my team.” Keith hissed lowly. The idea of someone threatening his team burned him inside, and he knew it wasn’t just from his own fury but Red’s as well.

No one hurt the pride and got away with it. No one insulted them either, and if Black wasn’t here to take care of it, then Red would.

“Azur.” Myklar’s voice was a stern but quiet scold, and Azur’s eyes dropped.

“Of course. My sincerest apologies.” Keith doubted that, but he dropped the other Galra, taking a step back as Myklar lowered his weapon.
“We’re not suggesting a long trip. Just to explain the changes you’ll be experiencing with a... trained medical officer.” Keith glanced at Myklar as he spoke before quietly snarling. “It would just be a day trip, like today. Unless you’d like to risk treating your team like this.”

Keith hesitated at the last bit, looking at Azur and imagining Pidge or Lance there instead. Heck, he didn’t even need to imagine with Lance. He had already hunted him down and pinned him to the ground once. Who or what was to stop him from doing it again?

Lance had looked scared for a moment there, trembling before he bolted. His blood raced at just the memory. He never wanted to experience that again. Not with any of this team.

Red’s anger still burned through him, but she settled down at his thoughts, cooing quietly to assure him. If it was just a day trip, she would leave the choice to her Paladin. Whatever his instincts demanded, she also demanded. But sometimes, it came down to more than just instincts. Once more the idea of him accidentally hurting his team flashed through his mind.

“Just a day trip?” Keith asked.

“I swear it.” Myklar promised.

Chapter End Notes

So, season 6 made it canon that Keith's Galra traits can show through, but the way the show prefaced it, was that it only happened in highly emotional moments (like fighting Shiro). I call Hax on that. There were a lot of other emotional moments for Keith where those traits could have shown through earlier. So... something must have triggered it (unless we go with the theory that Galra mature later than humans do, and he didn't reach his Galra Age of Maturity until sometime in the 2 years that Canon!Keith time traveled through)?

So... There is an event that triggers it in this story. This event, this chapter.

Which makes it seem like this event was done JUST to pull out Keith's more Galra Traits. Not So. The fact this event pulled out Keith's more Galra traits is just a side effect.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith came back to the castle ship to discover that Pidge and Hunk had gotten distracted and Allura had taken Lance for a conversation, which upon the completion had found Lance behind the particle barrier with the Blue Lion. He approached the Particle Barrier and knocked. The Particle Barrier fell, and upon reaching Lance, Keith found himself in the Astral Plane. They witnessed each other's Astral Planes.

Exiting the Astral Plane, Keith discovered that some of his Galra heritage and traits had been activated. Recognizing this, the Blade of Marmora convinced Keith to come to their base to better aquatint himself with his Galra blood.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s): None... I think?**

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com). Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Are you sure you have to go?” Lance asked, totally not pouting as he sat on the counter in the kitchen while Keith told them ‘goodbye’. He nibbled lightly on the corner of an attempted space breakfast cookie.

More than half of it was made from goo, but he appreciated that Hunk at least made the effort to try to make something for him. If Hunk had some fresh ingredients, then Lance was pretty sure that he’d more than make up for this abysmal excuse for a breakfast cookie.

If he could get ahold of some quigs, then he bet Hunk could figure out how to make like an apple cinnamon breakfast bar. Or Seksi. Quiznak, Lance missed Seksi. Man, he would kill to see what Hunk could make with some Seksi.

“Yeah!” Pidge agreed, her glasses glinting in the light as she adjusted them. “I didn’t think you were going to be spending this much time with the Blade.”

Keith’s gaze met Lance’s as he spoke. “Something came up.”

To his measure, Lance didn’t physically react except to look away. The heat of Keith’s gaze remained on him though. Lance had three guesses at to what exactly ‘came up’ and the first two didn’t count.

He still wasn’t entirely sure what Blue had done to him – or to Keith. Or maybe, he’d been the one to do something to Keith in a moment of unclear clarity. It was confusing, but then again, so was
most of his life.

Whatever Blue had done to him, it was like something had finally just… snapped into place, causing things to just make sense to him again. He felt less muddled. Things were… clearer, crisper. He felt lighter in a way he hadn’t in a while.

He’d tested some things last night, and it seemed like his quintessence vision finally settled. It didn’t hurt to access it anymore, nor did it hurt to stay in it for a while. He still wasn’t at his previous level of quintessence manipulation, but it was less taxing on him now.

He felt like a million bucks, and he knew it all had to do with Blue.

She preened under his mental praise.

But for all the good Blue had done, other stuff had happened too. He didn’t know for sure what had happened between him and Keith, but it was as if they were connected, bonded in a way similar to the Lions.

He knew when Keith looked at him, he knew when Keith thought strongly of him, he knew Keith. Which made sense considering he had seen Keith’s burning mess of an Astral Plane and Keith had seen his.

Whatever had happened between them had woken up Keith’s recessive Galra genes, and man was Lance sorry about that. He hadn’t meant to trigger Keith’s predator instinct last night no more than Keith had probably meant to trigger Lance’s prey drive.

Not that they were picture perfect examples of ‘predator’ and ‘prey’.

Just thinking about it had Lance wanting to pull up his hood and hide. He had never missed his Druid hoods more than when Keith had been staring at him so intently last night. A shiver ran down his spine, bellied by the heat the of Keith’s stare.

He was acutely aware of Keith’s position in the room, even as he looked away and paid attention to other things. He could feel Pidge and Hunk too in a way he hadn’t before. Pidge was close to something, a breakthrough in her quintessence. The veins of green on her were just starting to blossom, painting green vines and ivy swirls into her skin.

Not that anyone but him could see it.

“This is just unexpected, man.” Hunk shrugged. “Come back safe, right? We were gonna do that thing Allura agreed with today… remember?”

Lance perked up and jumped down from the counter to lean on Hunk. “Allura agreed to what?” Touch was still a touchy thing with him, and it was even touchier between him and Hunk. Hunk stiffened, his smile becoming tense, his eyes wild.

It was tempting to pick at Hunk’s quintessence. To pick at the cracks in the rock and stone until it gave away, to see what he could weather away, but Keith’s voice cut through that impulse with a stern, “Lance.”

He flushed, backing away from Hunk and choosing to lean on Pidge instead. She grimaced as she bore his weight, but she didn’t resist like Hunk had. The swirls of her quintessence loosened where Lance touched, stretching out towards him like roots towards a water source.

“Allura agreed to me?” Lance quipped, grinning at Keith. It was interesting to note that despite
Keith’s flat look, there was a slight tint of pink to his cheeks.

“Not what I meant.” Keith’s reply was more than a little flat. “I asked Allura about the gardens, and she agreed to stop at the closest market.” Keith answered Lance’s question. His flat look turned sullen, and Lance frowned.

The market was a great thing! It meant progress – and good food! Keith had no reason to be upset… except for the fact that he was skipping out to go with the Blade of Marmora.

“Maybe you can come with us next time?” Hunk asked, clearly picking up on the same thing Lance was. “If this is successful, I mean.”

“We’ll be fine, won’t we Lance?” Pidge grinned up at him, lightly hip checking him.

“You betcha.” Lance winked and shot Keith a finger gun. Hunk inhaled sharply and when Lance glanced at him, Hunk was staring at him like he’d grown a second head.

“Are you… feeling alright?” Hunk asked uncertainly, and Lance could see why he was concerned. He had been giving them all the cold shoulder, and while that was still going to happen, he was currently feeling too good to do that.

“Blue put some stuff in perspective for me.” Lance replied. “I feel…” He rolled onto the toes of his feet before falling back to his heels. “Better. Lighter.” He paused, looking at Keith, “Thawed.”

“That’s good to hear.” Keith’s eyes flashed briefly, and Lance smiled sweetly at him.

“Better enjoy my good mood while it lasts.” Lance teased Hunk. “Unless you’re saying you prefer me all moody and icy?”

“No!” Hunk shook his hands as Pidge snickered. “No, no. You’re good like this. I think you’re better like this.”

“Blue quintessence can be as temperamental as Red. It’s a very adaptable and fluid quintessence type.” Coran added into the conversation, pausing to survey Lance. “Given recent events, it’s not surprising that Lance fluctuates between ice and water.”

The advisor had been sitting in the corner of the kitchen. It seemed that after the events of last night, and Lance managing to stay in the medbay with him all night, that he assumed that Lance was good with him again.

He wasn’t entirely wrong. His presence still grated on Lance, but it was nowhere near as bad as it had when Blue flooded him. He still needed to have a conversation with Coran though to clear up everything.

He’d do it after this market trip.

“Magic.” Hunk sighed.

“Magic.” Pidge agreed, nodding her head solemnly. “And our resident slightly psycho mage.” She nodded her head to Lance.

“Technically he’d be considered an alchemist on Altea.” Coran informed them.

Lance smirked, holding back laughter as he spoke. “Shame Shiro isn’t one. He’d totally be
“Don’t worry number 4, nothing bad will happen. Not with me as chaperone.” Coran announced. Keith exchanged a look with Hunk and they both grimaced while Lance and Pidge both grinned. All four of them were clearly remembering the space mall adventure.

“Hell yeah!”

It felt good to be joking and friendly with the Paladins. The corruption was still there, teetering on the edge of Lance’s senses, but it was manageable. It was inconsequential right now. He flowed in the conversation, sliding between the participants and soaking up the experience and attention.

Blue purred, reassuring and soft in his mind. A low buzz he barely noticed. Both he and her were at peace, in their element, doing their thing. This was how it should be between the Paladins.

“I got ‘em Keith. You should get going before those Marmora guys leave without you.” Pidge said.

Keith grimaced, and Lance privately agreed with him. He sincerely doubted they would leave without Keith. He reached out, gently offering his reassurances, and he knew Keith felt it by the way he tensed and looked at him.

Lance smiled innocently at him. The smile Keith returned was less certain. “Be safe, alright?” Keith asked, sounding like he didn’t really trust them not to be safe. Lance glanced around at the team, and after a moment of consideration agree. Yeah, he could see Keith’s cause for concern.

They were all a trouble-making little crew, weren’t they?

Keith hesitated for a tick before exiting, his desire to stay evident in that lingering tick of hesitation. Lance pitied the guy.

Lance was aware of how distant Keith was becoming as he headed to the general hangar where the other ships were kept. The room seemed cooler without him, and Lance deflated some at his departure.

“So, we’re finally going to get Hunk some decent cooking materials?” Lance asked in lieu of anything else to talk about.

Pidge nodded, her face bright as she turned to look at him and Hunk. “Yep! I wonder if we can make cake. I haven’t had any since Matt…” She trailed off at her brother’s name, and Lance felt a stab of guilt.

Since even before the beginning of this adventure, Pidge had been looking for her lost brother. The same lost brother that Lance had found. The need and desire to tell her bubbled up inside him, the words threatening to flow from his mouth, but he swallowed it down.

Good to know Keith’s absence wasn’t the only thing that could kill a good mood.

He couldn’t tell her. It would kill her, especially since Lance wouldn’t be able to tell her how or even where to find Matt.

Blue noticed his distress and whined, and he soothed her until she calmed back down and resumed her purring. It was quieter than it had been, but Lance would take what he could get.
“I don’t know.” Hunk muttered, playing with his hands.

Lance plastered on a smile as he looked to Hunk. “If we can find some quigs, you might be able to make an apple tart.”

“Quigs?” Hunk repeated.

“Space apples. It’s no Seksi,” Cue spit-take from the humans because of the ridiculous name, “fruit, but it’s still delicious.”

“Seksi?” Coran asked. “Is that still a product of Bsët?” His eyebrows furrowed as he pulled out a tablet and scrolled through it.

Lance grimaced at the name of the planet or village or whatever. “Along with space weed.” He wrinkled his nose at the faint memory of the scent.

“Space… weed?” Pidge asked, raising an eyebrow. Hunk groaned, looking completely done with the conversation. Lance shrugged, still grimacing at the memory.

“Far-something or another. It smells like, super-duper sweet. Like, imagine the sweetest thing ever and then multiple it by 100%. It made my head spin.”

“Furë a kuqa.” Coran corrected, a look of mild horror washing over his face. “You were exposed to Furë a kuqa?!” He asked just as Allura entered the kitchen. At the words, she immediately pivoted to face Lance.

“Are you alright? Nothing came of it, right? He did not do anything untoward to you? I thought you said he was-”

“A good emperor.” Lance interrupted Allura quietly. “I said he was a good emperor.” The atmosphere in the room was completely changed the moment Lance spoke. His voice was colder than before, and he could already feel ice starting to creep back into him. Pidge shivered, taking a half step away from Lance.

Well, so much for his good mood. Between Keith leaving, Pidge’s mention of her brother, and now this… he could guarantee it was gone for now.

“I’d really rather not talk about my experience with that crap. The best thing that happened on Bsët was the blooming of the Lula a shiut and dancing in the rain.”

“But.”

“No, no, no, no, no, no, no.” Lance shook his head and his hands and once he’d finished, stopped and look at Coran. “Look, Coran, you’re a great Space Uncle and all that, but just no. I won’t talk about it.”

Allura and Coran inhaled sharply and exchanged looks. “Right. Well… I will be staying here in the castle while Coran takes you to the world below.” She paused, looking at Lance. “Stay with either Hunk or Pidge.”

“Yeah, yeah. Stay with my babysitters, I got it.” Lance rolled his eyes, crossing his arms, and leaning back against the counter.

“We mean it Lance. Don’t pull another stunt like you did with the Blue Lion.” Allura warned.
Lance scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Believe me, there’s probably going to be nothing down there that’ll make me want to leave either of these two’s sides.”

Pidge brightened, smiling at him while Hunk gave him a dimmed half smile. “Good to know.” He muttered.

“Awh, cheer up, Hunk. I’ll probably stick with Pidge.” He grinned at her. “At least I know she likes me!” Guilt passed over Hunk’s face like a shadow and it was reflected inside Lance. He knew his friend didn’t mean it and that he deserved to be treated like this, but it didn’t make it hurt any less.

“Well, we best be going.” Coran said, standing up.

Everyone nodded, and they were all quiet as they took one of the small transport ships down to the planet they were nearest.

Lance’s stomach twisted with anxiety as he approached. He could feel Keith still, distant and almost gone completely, and he tried to take comfort in Pidge and Hunk instead. They both induced guilt, although in different ways, however, despite the guilt, they both felt safer than the looming market.

Pidge’s face was pressed against a window, her eyes wide as she took in the open-air market. “This reminds me of the farmer’s market near home!” She announced, pulling away from the window to look at Hunk and Lance. “I never cared for it when we visited but…” She trailed off, looking back through the window. “I remember Matt used to get me honey sticks. 1 for 25 cent, or 5 for a dollar.”

“It’s okay, Pidge.” Hunk smiled at her, resting his hand on her shoulder. “We understand.”

Arg, his heart. He sorta wished that Blue had left him as he’d been before. He didn’t need this in his life. He didn’t need the reminder that the only thing keeping Pidge from her brother was him. That if he’d told Matt about her, that they’d be reunited by now.

But no, he hadn’t told Matt and now it was too late. He had no way to contact him or his resistance. Pidge’s chance to find her brother was gone, all because he was a jerk.

He should have told Matt while he had the chance.

Blue was sympathetic, sweet in her comfort; but Lance didn’t feel that he deserved it. He’d caused the team so much trouble, and for what? Nothing had really changed, had it?

A faint wave of heat shined on him and he smiled faintly, laughing once to himself.

Well, no, he couldn’t say that. Keith had certainly changed. He’d grown into a better leader and a better person. Allura was… a work in progress. Pidge was opening up to things, her quintessence blossoming was a sure sign of that.

Hunk was possibly the one who had been the most ill-affected by the whole affair, and Lance mourned that he’d caused such a disservice to his friend.

Pidge nodded, sliding back down so she was sitting back in her seat. She was quiet for a moment, presumably moping about her family before moving on. “I hope we find something decent here.”

“I’m sure we will.” Hunk glanced at Lance. “Lance seems more familiar with space food now.”
Lance held up his hands in a ‘woah, wait a moment’ gesture. “I’m not the culinary master.” His hand gesture switched to a finger gun pointed at Hunk. “You are. I’m sure you’ll be way more successful at finding stuff than me.”

“How about a competition?” Pidge asked, her eyes gleaming. “I can take Lance, and you can take Coran. Winner is right about whether to single or double modulate.”


…

They were still having that argument?! What the quiznak?

He wisely chose to keep to himself, looking out the window himself to distract him from the mini-argument breaking out between them.

Pidge was right. The outdoor market did remind him of farmer and flea markets. It was strange to see something so… human on an alien world, but then again, space malls were a thing. Perhaps it wasn’t so much a ‘human’ thing so much as a ‘life’ thing.

Coran landed the craft easily, and Lance was one of the first ones out.

He knew better than to switch to his quintessence vision here. He wasn’t sure if he was able to get headaches anymore, but if he could, then he was certain that in a place so full of life as this, he would.

He’d have to rely on his new found ‘Paladin-sense’ to keep track of Pidge and the others. Hunk was explaining the competition to Coran, so Pidge took that as an opportunity to grab Lance by the arm and drag him away.

“C’mon; head start!” She cheered.

Lance laughed, reminded briefly of his own family on Earth. How many times had he been dragged into competitions not too unlike this one by his younger relatives? His heart continued to ache as he remembered that he’d probably never be able to see them again. His smile might have dimmed in sincerity, but he kept it up for Pidge.

“Alright, alright.”

He meandered through the market, careful to always keep Pidge within a visible line of sight. The last thing he wanted was to give her a heart attack by thinking she lost him. Evidently Keith had not been pleased about her and Hunk losing him to first Allura and then Blue for a ‘stupid argument’.

The market sold a variety of things, and he was more than happy to point out a couple of things that would definitely be useful in the kitchen or if they were to start a garden.

They weren’t buying yet so much as just walking about seeing what all there was to offer – and if anyone had better prices – so that they didn’t miss out on something great. “We are so gonna win.” Pidge grinned up at Lance. “I bet Coran is showing Hunk all the nasty food.”

Lance laughed, shaking his head with a smile. “I’m sure.” He paused as a shop full of beads caught his attention, and his smile turned sad as he remembered the bead bracelets his younger relatives used to make him.
He wondered if they still remembered him. He must have been in space for at least a deca-pheob now. It was hard to keep track of the time when he didn’t even know when he’d first come to space.

Was it sad that his first inclination was to ask Lotor when Voltron first showed up?

But that no longer an option. His time with Lotor was over and done with. Allura and Coran would be better options to ask for that. He was still getting used to the fact that he would need to ask them for things and knowledge again.

Man, he missed all the knowledge that the Druids had amassed.

“Lance?” Pidge tugged on his jacket sleep and he slightly jerked, his smile brightening when he looked at her.

“I’m fine.”

She studied him, her lips thinning slightly. “If this is too much… we can go back? We just thought… you know, since you wanted the garden and hated being cooped up…”

“It’s fine, really.” Lance reassured her, touched that she cared.

He wished he could do something for her, but all the knowledge he had would only bring her pain. While once he had wanted to inflict that, now… now he just felt guilty.

“I was just… thinking of my family.” Lance half-admitted.

What right did he have to think of his when he had essentially taken hers away?

“I’m sure they miss you.” Pidge tried to reassure him. Her words only made him feel worse, but he smiled regardless.

“I just hope they don’t pull what you did,” He teased, “and come and look for me.”

“How will they even leave Earth?” She asked, shaking her head. “Will they find a mythical sixth lion which will whisk them away to us?”

He knew she was joking, but it still didn’t make him feel better. “I hope they don’t. I don’t think they’ll like what I’ve become.”

Pidge was silent for a long moment. “I… you have changed, and I wasn’t sure I liked it either, but you’re getting better every day. We all are.”

That was at least some small degree of reassuring. He sighed, looking out at the markets when something caught his eye.

His breath was caught in his chest and his heart ceased to beat despite the sound of it echoing loudly in his ears. His hands curled into fists and only then could he feel how sweaty they’d quickly become. It must have been just a trick of the eye, a phantom of his mind.

He knew she’d taken after her mother species in at least appearance, so it’d make sense that Lance would see someone else from the same species and think of her… yet something dark yet hopeful settled in Lance’s gut.

Blue whined lowly, too distant from Lance to do anything much else. There was a faint ring of worry from warmth that reminded him of his distant connection to Keith as well.
So much told him that this was a bad idea but… the seed had been planted. If he’d seen who he had truly thought he’d seen…

“What’cha looking at?” Pidge asked, craning her head as she looked in the direction Lance was looking in.

Lance looked down at her, offering her his brightest fake smile. “Nothing important! Something colorful caught my attention, but I don’t see it now.”

…If he’d seen who he thought he’d seen… then maybe he could get Pidge in contact with her brother again after all.

Chapter End Notes

Update on Gizmo: He's doing Great! He recently was freed from the Cone of Shame, and he's ecstatically happy about that. It looks like everything is going to be smooth sailing thus far.
Trouble

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance, Pidge, Hunk, and Coran go to a nearby market. While there, they decide to have a competition and split into teams. Lance goes with Pidge while Hunk goes with Coran. While out with Pidge, Lance thought he saw someone he recognized and realized he had a chance to reunite Pidge with Matt.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Guilt, Crying, Anxiety, Curse Words

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It wasn’t hard to wander away from the foods they were supposed to be looking at, over to the gadgets and gizmos that he knew would distract Pidge. He felt guilty for doing this to her, for deceiving and ditching her but… if he was right, then it would be well worth it in the end.

Blue disagreed, but what did she know? If everything all worked out the way it was in Lance’s head, then it’d all be fine.

Once Pidge was fully distracted, he ducked away. Guilt sliced though him like a hot knife through butter at betraying Pidge’s trust like this. She’d only recently gotten comfortable enough to not be watching him a majority of the time, and here he was… taking advantage of that.

But it was for a good reason. At least, that’s what he kept telling himself.

He slid though the crowds with the ease only a person who’d grown up in a tourist trap would know, and it didn’t take him long to return to the spot where he’d first seen… what he thought he’d seen. Despite the risk of a headache, he switched to his quintessence vision, looking for any of the signatures that he knew so well.

He was right about someplace so alive being a nightmare on his eyes. The headache hadn’t started, but he could feel it trying to. So many colors, almost too many to comprehend, all blurring and blending into each other.

In the distance, he could see a shining bright reassuring yellow that cut through the other colors like a beacon which could only be Hunk. Likewise, Pidge’s green was just as bright and noticeable. It was good to know he could still find them despite the crowd, but neither of them was the person he was looking for.

He sighed. It had been a fool’s hope anyways.
He turned to return to Pidge when his attention was caught, and this time his heart truly did stop beating. The world crumbled around him, and he lost the ability to live as he ceased to exist for a moment.

He had seen her after all.

He was caught between two choices: going after her and continuing with his plan – something Blue heavily disagreed with – or going back to Pidge and telling her that they needed to get off this planet immediately.

And by immediately, he meant, 20 doboshes ago.

It felt like the world was collapsing inward on him, inception style. Like the market stalls were leaning in, trapping him where he was. Was this a trap? Was it possible to leave, to escape? Was his half-thought up scheme actually able to work? Was it the only way out?

Too many questions plaguing his mind and not enough answers. And sadly, he knew the only way to get those answers.

His hands were shaking, and Blue was trying her hardest to coax him out of this mad, mad idea. And it was a mad idea. He’d just left the belly of the beast. Why would he ever want to return? He could only imagine what would happen to him, what could happen to him.

But sometimes it wasn’t about what a person wanted. Sometimes it was about what was right, and it was right for him to do this.

He made his choice and made his way through the crowd, turning his back – figuratively and literally – on both Hunk and Pidge.

At some point his target must have noticed him trailing her, as she started to head to less populated areas. Places where no one would notice if he were to suddenly disappear after walking down a lonely alleyway or entering an abandoned building.

His stomach had tied itself into a knot of anxiety as she led him to the building option, and he stood in the doorway of the darkened area for at least a dobosh debating his life choices before finally stepping in.

What was done was done, and he couldn’t exactly change his mind now.

Thanks to his quintessence vision, the darkness wasn’t really an obstacle. He could see her clear as day even if she opted to turn invisible on him. He could see her, slowly and carefully moving around to attack him.

He took a breath, swallowed his fear, and called her name: “Ezor?”

She froze, becoming so still that Lance thought he might have made a mistake. Perhaps it was just someone who looked and acted just like Ezor? But that made no sense. What were the chances that she’d have Ezor’s quintessence signature as well?

He closed his eyes and braced himself as he tried again. “Ezor?” He called her name again and then as an extra measure added, “I’d like to go home… please.”

He wasn’t prepared for how fast she moved, pinning him against a wall, and he cried out as her nails dug into his neck. Quiznak, was this what Hunk had experienced? He owed him a thousand more apologies. It was something he would work on after he finished this for Pidge.
“How do I know you are who you claim to be?”

Her voice was normally so chipper and bubbly. He had such fond memories of her, even if she had been complacent in his abuse from Lotor. It was unreal to hear her so… dark now. Then again, she was one of Lotor’s top generals.

His mind raced as he tried to think of something he could say, something that would prove his identity to her. She pressed tighter, squeezing just a bit more.

“Gardens.” He gasped out. Her grip loosened some, just enough for Lance to better speak. “We ate in the gardens and watched movies. Our prince likes classical music and has an addiction to Seksi fruit, and we both think he ate your last Seksi cream puff.”

Ezor gasped, the hand and claws disappearing from his neck within an instant. He was swept off his feet, two strong arms wrapped around him tight enough for his back to crack as he was spun around. He clung to Ezor if only because she was the only thing for him to hold onto.

“Lance!” She cried out, stopping long enough to nuzzle him. “We were so worried! Where have you been? What are you wearing? Where is your jewelry? What happened? We’ve been looking everywhere for you!”

Lance trembled, her questions bringing a barrage of memories and thoughts that he thought he’d moved past, but evidently not. He tasted bile at the back of his throat and swallowed it down. Blue was silent; her comfort was nonexistent.

He only needed to say one thing and she’d understand, but the word was caught in his throat. He had not betrayed them before, not really, not technically. This would be a betrayal, no doubt about it. Yet the end justified the means.

Pidge needed this. Voltron needed this. Lance could sacrifice himself if it meant fixing the mistake he’d made. What was he compared to the team, to the universe?

“Voltron.”

Ezor went still. “Voltron?” She repeated after a moment. “So, you have been with them? Lotor suspected as much. He’s been having me and the others look everywhere.” She pouted for a moment before heavily and dramatically sighing.

“This was the first I could escape.” Lance said. It wasn’t exactly a lie, but then again, it wasn’t the truth either. He hadn’t been looking for an escape for a while. “I… I didn’t expect to see you. Please… is… is our prince here? Or Acxa or any of the others? I just want to go home.”

Acting had always been a strong point of Lance’s, and he prayed that Ezor would fall for it. That she would believe the lies the spilled out of his mouth. Hopefully his trembling and obvious distress would do him favors here.

“Are there any other Paladins here?” Ezor asked. There was a certain tone to her words that had Lance’s hair standing on end. This was a test, and he knew it.

She knew there was at least one other paladin here. Was it Hunk she’d seen? Or Pidge? Hunk was more likely, but… he didn’t want him to be captured again. Bile once more rose to the back of his mouth as he settled on an answer.

“Yellow and Green.”
Her quintessence spiked in interest. “Yellow and Green?” She repeated. “No Red or Black?”

Lance shook his head, not trusting himself to not say Keith’s name. “I’ve managed to get Green to somewhat trust me but… Yellow remembers his time in our Prince’s cells well. He doesn’t trust me.”

He didn’t have to see Ezor to know that she smiled sharply.

“Do me a favor, Lance?” She asked, her voice sounding so sweet like it had any other time she’d asked for a favor. Except Lance had a funny feeling that this favor wouldn’t be distracting Lotor while she took a cream puff. This hadn’t been part of his plan. “No, would you do our prince a favor?” She amended.

Lance shuddered but blinked innocently up at her. “If I do will you take me back home?” He asked. “I miss him.” The tears in his eyes were not false, and shamelessly, he let them fall until she pulled him into a tight hug.

“Oh, Lance. Do this favor and I’ll do more than bring you home.” She promised. “I’ll bring you right to him. He’ll forgive you for vanishing once he hears what happened, once he sees the pretty green gift you’ll bring.”

Lance swallowed thickly, his fear confirmed.

“I’ll be behind you every step of the way.” Ezor told him, and he knew it was meant as a reassurance. For who, however, was the question. For Ezor to make sure Lance didn’t change his mind, or for Lance to feel like she was supporting him.

“What do you need me to do?”

Ezor pulled away, putting him back on the ground. “Good boy.” She pat his head twice like she used to. “I’ll show you where to lure the Green Paladin.” She took his hand, and exited the building, showing him another abandoned building closer to the food and gadgets. “Take the Green Paladin here. Remember, if you need help, I’ve got your back.”

The look she gave him was meant to be reassuring, but all Lance could feel was fear and panic. He nodded, and she vanished before his eyes. He only knew where she was from her quintessence signature.

Bile once more rose to the back of his throat, leaving a bitter and disgusting taste in his mouth. He was trembling as he looked around for the vivid green of Pidge. It wasn’t hard to spot her, and he started to make his way through the people to her.

Ezor hung back, and for a moment her voice carried before being consumed by the noise of the market, and then she was following him.

She had most likely called for backup. The realization made him mentally squirm.

Fuck, this was so wrong. He was so wrong. He shouldn’t have done this, but it was too late to back out now. This wasn’t what he had planned. His plan had been so simple. Go back to Lotor, get Sonali, get in touch with Matt, reunite Pidge with her brother.

He hadn’t meant for Pidge to get involved like this, but now he had no choice. He could either watch his team try – and fail – to take on Lotor’s top generals, or… he could continue with this plan. Like so much in his life, he didn’t really have a choice.
Pidge wasn’t entirely where he left her, but she was looking for him. She spun around in slow circles, her gaze always moving, and he could see her relief when she finally spotted him in the slope of her shoulders.

“Lance!” She called out, approaching him only to slow when she took him in. “Lance?” There was concern that he didn’t deserve in her eyes, and he avoided her gaze.

“I’m sorry… I just... I saw something that reminded me of home.” Pidge’s gaze immediately softened, understanding flooded her features.

“Oh.” Her eyebrows knit just a little, and she shuffled awkwardly. “…show it to me. If… if we have enough I’ll buy it for you.”

Lance’s whole body jerked. He hadn’t expected that from Pidge, but then again, if anyone could sympathize with missing home and family, it was Pidge. Guilt was eating him away inside, but, he kept reminding himself that the ends justified the means.

Pidge would be reunited with Matt and Voltron would find an ally in the resistance.

“What about the competition?”

“Fuck it.” Pidge shrugged. “If you’re this upset over it… then I’ll go swimming in another fountain to get the GAC to get it for you.”

Lance had to turn away, her words stabbing him in the heart. “It’s this way.”

Sweet curious innocent Pidge, who for once in her life didn’t question him. Well, she was about to learn the lesson about that, and pay a nasty price for it too. He took her to the building, and she slowed as they approached.

She was finally questioning him. Too bad it was too little, too late. “Are you sure this is the place, Lance?”

Lance nodded. “Yeah, I’m sure.” He stepped inside and through his quintessence vision he could see Acxa and Narti. Pidge followed a step behind him and the moment she was through the door, Narti’s hand was on her. Pidge fell unnaturally still as someone wrapped their arms around him and twirled him around – Ezor.

“You did it, Lance! I’m so proud of you.”

Once upon a time her sugar sweet praise would have made him elated; now it only filled him with dread.

It took every ounce of will for him to not look at Pidge, and instead focused on squirming to get out of Ezor’s grip. “I don’t feel well, and I miss Lotor. You promised to take me to him.”

The sooner he got to Lotor, the sooner he could find Sonali. Hopefully, she’d just be put in the cells, until Lotor figured out what to do with her. Now he’d have to free Pidge too. A small hitch in the plan, but… he could make this work.

He had to make this work.

He just didn’t know how long it’d take for him to get to Lotor and smooth things over with him. With Pidge being captured, he’d have to speed up that timetable. Hopefully, Lotor would still dote on him as he had before.
It just meant he’d have to lay things on really thick and hope it that it stuck.

Ezor made a face and put him down, allowing for Axca to circle around him. “You don’t feel well?” Acxa’s voice was sharp and businesslike. “How long have you been without the necklace? Have they been treating you well?”

“Not as well as our prince.” Lance replied softly. “I miss him. Everything is cold and dull without him.”

“Acxa, he did as he was asked.” Ezor defended him, wrapping her arms around him – but leaving his feet firmly on the ground – as if she could shield him.

“You know Lotor won’t question his loyalty.” Acxa replied sharply. That was good for Lance. If Lotor didn’t question him, then it wouldn’t take that long for him to lull Lotor into a sense of peace and slip away.

“And why should he? He’s delivered us the Green Paladin.” Ezor shrugged. “Such a good Druid.” She cooed as she pat his head again. “So eager to please.”

“I just want to go back.” Lance complained. “I just want to go home, where I belong, back at our prince’s side.”

He couldn’t see her that well in the darkness, but he was certain Acxa pursed her lips. “We should have a Druid examine him before we inform Lotor.”

All the blood in Lance’s body froze. Quiznaking fuck. No, that was not a good idea. He didn’t want to be experimented on by more Druids. They would mess him back up and then he’d be back to where he started with Lotor.

Pidge would never be freed. She would never meet her brother. Lance would fail. Was he not laying it on thick enough? What more did he need to do to convince them not to bring in a Druid.

“Uh, why and how?” Ezor asked. “He delivered the Green Paladin… clearly he’s not with them. And also… what Druids? Petyr has yet to return, and with Xana-”

“Dead.” Lance interrupted. Ezor and Acxa both paused, and he could feel them looking at him.

“What?” Ezor asked. “I mean, we kinda assumed it, but…”

“He was killed in front of me by,” don’t say Keith, don’t say Keith, “the Red Paladin.” Lance would have wrapped his arms around himself had Ezor not already been holding him.

“Oh.” Ezor breathed out. “You poor thing.” She looked to Acxa. “Look at how traumatized he is! A reunion with Lotor would do him good and you know Lotor would get… upset if he found out we found Lance and didn’t immediately hand him over.”

Acxa exhaled sharply, her thumb and pointer finger pinching the bridge of her nose. “Fine. We’ll return him promptly.”

Lance breathed out a sigh of relief. He didn’t know what he would have done had Acxa insisted on him seeing a Druid. If they were good enough, they’d only need to take one good look at him to see how little hold the corruption had on him. That was not something he’d be easily able to bullshit or hide.

“Narti, take the Green Paladin back to the ship; Ezor, contact the Prince. I’ll be keeping an eye on
this one.” Acxa commanded, and each of the generals snapped to their jobs. Ezor squeezed him before letting him go and pushing him in Acxa’s direction.

Acxa sighed. “It’s for your own good.” She told him before reaching out and knocking him out.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo.... guess who's near the path for Hurricane Florence? If you guessed me, then you'd be correct. I'm (thankfully) a bit more inland and a bit more North than it’s current projected path, but even still, there's like a 99% probability I'm not gonna be unaffected by this.

I'm just thinking about what this'll do to my cats... especially since they're both terrified of storms. Work implemented BCP (Business Continuity Plan) so that I can work from home instead of braving the storm to work. I’m hoping I can ease my cat's anxiety some (as well as my own) since I’ll be home.

Anyways, to any of my readers who are in the path of Hurricane Florence, stay safe! Be careful!

Don't be an idiot (me) and go biking in a Cat 2 hurricane to get your mother's rain coat that you left at the top of a tree. Don't go out and do those stupid Facebook things about 'yeeting' the storm away either. Seriously, just don't. You got limited time before the storm hits. Charge up external batteries, charge your electronics, go shopping (not that there's much left) and store/save important documents.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: While at the marketplace, the groups split up into two teams; Pidge and Lance, and Coran and Hunk. During this outing, Lance thought he saw Ezor and realized he could use her to reunite Matt with Pidge. In order to do so, he would need to return to Lotor in order to find Sonali.

He approached Ezor, informing her that he wanted to return. Ezor saw an opportunity herself, and took it. She told Lance that he could return if he helped capture a paladin, specifically Pidge. Seeing no other alternative, Lance agreed and helped lure Pidge into a trap.

**Chapter Notes**

*Trigger Warning(s):* Blame, Guilt, Arguing

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com). Thank you!

About midway through the market excursion, the bad feeling that had been plaguing Hunk since the beginning grew worse. Coran did what he could to help distract Hunk from it, but… it was like an itch under the skin that he couldn’t scratch. Some weird sixth sense he’d had ever since he was young that something was amiss.

That feeling was only proven correct when both Pidge and Lance failed to rendezvous with them back at the ship.

Coran had suggested they wait to see if perhaps they were running late, but Hunk just knew that it was more than that. The radio silence from his attempts to contact Pidge just seemed to further confirm that, and after an hour had passed with no communication and no sign of them, even optimistic Coran had to call it quits.

Lance and Pidge were gone.

But where, and how? What could have happened?

What ever happened had to have happened quickly, else Pidge would have contacted him or Allura to call for assistance. Or maybe Pidge had thought she could take on whatever it was but failed? No. She wasn’t that impulsive. Which meant that the only other alternative was that the Galra had some way to block their communications now, and that just was way too scary to even think about.

Or that Lance had betrayed them.
Which was totally what Allura was thinking. Coran too, if the knitted eyebrows and downcast gaze was any indication.

And Hunk wanted to defend Lance. He really did. It was just… hard. There was no evidence to prove Lance guilty, but there also wasn’t any evidence to prove him innocent either. Pidge wouldn’t expect an attack from Lance – not with how much ‘better’ he was lately – and such an attack would be quick enough to prevent Pidge from calling for help.

But why?

Why would Lance attack Pidge specifically? He had been doing so much better! Like with anything with Lance lately, there was more to the story here. There was something Hunk wasn’t seeing, something he didn’t know.

And he would wager all his cooking skills that if he could find that something, everything would just all fall into place. After all, if one tried to make a recipe while missing an ingredient, it all turned out wrong.

Hunk rolled a quig in his hand. He’d dropped off the rest of the groceries while Coran broke the news to Allura – and man, who was gonna break the news to Keith? – but he’d kept one of the quigs. Lance had referred to it as a space apple, and honestly, Hunk could agree with that.

Oddly colored and shaped, but still vaguely apple-ish.

Had the desire for fresh food been just a ploy? A trap for them?

He didn’t want to think so poorly of Lance. He didn’t want to think that Lance getting ‘better’ had been an act, but… Lance was a talented actor. He was charismatic and charming and a damn good actor. Hunk was sure that if Lance wanted, like, really wanted to pull the wool over their eyes, he could have.

But, the question then became, was Lance a good enough actor to pull the wool over Keith’s eyes? Keith, who watched Lance like a hawk with a gaze as sharp as his bayard or Mamorian blade? Keith who rarely ever let Lance out of sight?

Or what about the Lions? They could see deeper inside a person than anything else. They could see the core of a person, what made them them, if everything Hunk was understanding about Lions and Quintessence was correct.

Surely, it couldn’t be easy to fool a Lion?

But then again, Zarkon had fooled Black, hadn’t he?

Too many questions and not enough answers. There was no evidence to point towards guilt or innocence. Humans were willing to believe ‘innocent until proven guilty’, but it seemed the Alteans operated on ‘guilty until proven innocent’.

And could he really blame them given what all had happened? But could he really blame Lance either?

If he’d defended Lance against Pidge… if he’d been a better friend… if he’d been available for Lance to complain to. There was only so much a person could take, and he should have noticed that Lance was near that limit.

If he had, this whole mess could have been avoided.
But he supposed there was guilt for all there.

But what of this current situation? Should they follow past examples and blame Lance without hearing him out? Without knowing more? Or… should they judge him and proclaim him guilty based on his previous twisted desires to kill them?

So why Pidge?

Why not Hunk, who Lance had already made an attempt on? Why not Coran, who Lance avoided like a plague? Why not Keith – well, he wasn’t there, but still. There was plenty of opportunities where Lance was alone with Keith. Plenty of opportunities to slice his throat open with those claws he could form.

Why Pidge? Why now?

What was he missing?

“It is good to see you so stable for the end-game.” The message from ‘Keith’ popped up on his holoscreen, nearly causing him to drop his quig. He swiveled around, his gaze falling upon Slav – who offered a cheeky wave – sitting at Keith’s terminal.

He blinked at the caterpillar scientist, briefly wondering when he’d come onto the Bridge before wondering why he was sitting at Keith’s terminal.

Well, he supposed sitting at any one else’s would be in poor taste, considering their missing status.

Besides, Hunk knew Keith spoke to Slav, so perhaps, Slav felt most comfortable using his station? Regardless of why, neither Allura nor Coran seemed to take any notice of the scientist. Coran remained staring at the floor and Allura continued her frazzled and frantic pacing of the bridge.

Personally, Hunk didn’t have much opinion on Slav beyond him being a little creepy and odd; although his teammates had made their opinions of the creature rather clear. Although their opinions made a wide spectrum of what to expect.

Coran was mildly annoyed by Slav, but Shiro… man, Hunk didn’t think there was a single entity that could get as much pure disdain from Shiro as Slav did. Not even the Galra triggered a dislike so strong that Hunk barely hesitated to call it ‘hate’ from Shiro like Slav did.

Keith often grumbled about how aggravating Slav was, but he seemed to hold the creature’s words to some sort of truth. If Keith trusted him, then maybe he had some sort of insight after all. Keith wouldn’t trust someone who was completely bad, would he?

He put the quig down and slid the algorithms and tests currently on his screen to the side to respond to the scientist.

There was a lot he thought of asking, starting with what Slav really knew. Could he actually see into different realities? Was there a reality where this never happened? Was there a reality where they all died by now?

Was there maybe a reality where he never became a Paladin of Voltron?

It was tempting to ask but, in his heart of hearts, Hunk knew better. The past was the past, and he was a Paladin of Voltron now – for better or for worse. He just had to keep moving forward. There were better questions to ask. More important and relevant ones.
Besides, more than a few people seemed to find Slav aggravating, and he had a feeling asking those questions would only cause Hunk to agree with that assessment.

Hunk considered Slav’s message, tapping his finger lightly on one of the keys as he did so. The end-game usually referred to a final stage or a final act. That begged the question of what the ‘game’ or ‘arc’ was.

Was it their time as paladins? This whole debacle with Lance? Something more? Something less?

Furthermore, had Slav been the one helping guide Keith all this time? If so, then what did Slav know? What had the alternative universes shown Slav? What could have been prevented or avoided?

Was Slav trying to guide Hunk now since Keith was away?

If Hunk listened, what difference would it make? If he didn’t, what would change?

So many possibilities. So much Hunk didn’t understand.

He reread the message again, this time the usage of the word ‘stable’ jumping out at him. Now that he was thinking about, he could vaguely recall something Lance said during one of Pidge’s conversations about magic of all things. “Yellow base quintessence focuses on stability, like forming foundations.”

Hunk would be the first to admit that he didn’t like all this magic stuff. It was great for role-playing games, and movies and books, but real like? Not so much.

He preferred to work with guarantees, like math and science and engineering. Magic most certainly didn’t fall within those views, but… he could admit there was a certain appeal to it.

Not to mention the Lions and most of the Altean technology seemed to run on it.

Pidge had the right idea to pick Lance’s mind on it, but now he had neither Lance nor Pidge available. He only had a frantic princess who was bound to start calling for Lance’s blood any moment now, Coran, and a cryptic alternate-reality viewing creature.

There was no one he could ask about this stupid quintessence crap, which might have been why Lance had taken Pidge, now that he thought about it.

“I can’t believe we trusted him!” Ah, there was the explosion Hunk was waiting for from Allura. “I should have known better. I should have been on the trip. None of the paladins were ready to take on someone of his caliber. It had taken three of you to win one battle!”

Coran’s lips were thin, his knuckles where probably turning as white as his gloves as Allura complained but didn’t speak up on Lance’s or anyone else’s defense. Instead, he did as he always had, and attempted to soothe Allura with a quiet agreement. “He fooled us all, Princess.”

Hunk understood where he was coming from, really. But, really, this type of attacking mentality was part of the reason they were all in this mess to begin with. If they’d had just listened to Lance before, communicated with him and hadn’t just attacked him without knowing the whole story, then all of this could have been avoided.

And now it was happening again.
Keith was right about this place being a shit storm of a mess. They were just doomed to keep making the same mistakes over and over again. It was exhausting.

“Not all.” Slav interjected, staring at Hunk. Allura ceased her pacing, blinking at Slav before slowly following his gaze to Hunk. Coran finally looked up, also following Slav’s gaze.

Everyone was staring at Hunk, and it took all his will power to resist squirming and ducking behind the back of his chair. Instead, he stared back at Slav.

“Hunk?” Allura questioned.

At the market, he’d been so anxious, but he had chalked it up to just being stuck near Lance, or Pidge being alone with Lance.

It wasn’t that Lance had done anything wrong since being drowned or cleansed, or whatever, but it had been hard for Hunk to put what happened behind him. Every time he fell asleep at night he woke to Lance’s glowing eyes boring into his own and his claws at his throat.

It made conversation awkward.

Hunk’s anxiety and mistrust of Lance had stemmed from that, not from Lance himself. Not from how he was now. He didn’t get betrayal vibes from Lance so much as unstable ones, but he was getting better every day.

Unless he was just that good of an actor… but to fool everyone including the Lions?

Man, Hunk’s head felt like it was just spinning in circles, over and over and over again.

What was he missing?

Ha. What wasn’t he missing? The facts. And the facts were that Lance and Pidge vanished. The facts were the Lance was getting better. The facts were that last time they had judged without all the facts, they had judged wrong. The facts were that they had dug their own grave when they judged wrong.

The facts were, they didn’t have all the facts; and that one fact sat heavily on Hunk.

He wasn’t keen on repeating the mistakes of the past and he knew that if he let things continue, then they would all just re-spiral down that hole and nothing would change. Change needed to happen and if no one present was going to push for it, then he would.

But first, there was something he needed to check. If only Lance and Pidge hadn’t disappeared, he could check with them about quint… wait. Allura knew about that crap too.

Well, there went his theory that Pidge was taken because of that. So then why? Because she was there? No, Lance was usually more personal. Just her being there shouldn’t have been enough.

So, what happened?

No, he was getting side tracked again. He needed to check another theory about quintessence.

“Princess, Red quintessence is instinct, right?”

Allura’s eyebrows furrowed as she registered his question, no doubt wondering where it came from and what it had to do with anything.
"Yes."

Hunk nodded to himself. That sounded about right. Keith operated off instinct. It was how he knew to get Shiro, how he could pull off some of the stunts that he did. He was perhaps the only person on the team with a better gut instinct than Hunk.

That tended to cause Keith to leap without looking, and sometimes that was fine, but other times… it wasn’t. Instinct wasn’t always right. Sometimes one needed to stop and think, and Keith wouldn’t unless something brought him… *stability.*

"And Green?"

"Curiosity and Intellect.” Coran answered this time. He was still staring at Hunk, but there was something different to his gaze now. Like he was looking at Hunk in a new light.

Hunk nodded again. Yes, Curiosity and Intellect fit Pidge to a tee. Without *stability,* one tended to descend into the depths of insanity in the pursuit of knowledge. How many nights had Pidge forgone sleep to continue a project, to search for answers? How often had he helped Lance drag Pidge away from her research to take care of herself? How often had Hunk needed to warn her to tread carefully around Lance when he wasn’t *stable?*

And that was just it, wasn’t it? Stable. Stability. It all suddenly made sense in ways it hadn’t before.

"Blue?"

"What are you getting at Hunk?" Allura asked instead of answering, but that was okay. Hunk was pretty sure he already knew the answer. Lance was so emotional and trusting. Without Hunk to help support him, he was in an uncontrollable free fall, like a waterfall.

Hunk was the Yellow Paladin. He was supposed to be *stable* ground, the sense of *stability* and *support* for the team. He was a leg of Voltron, and he was supposed to *support* the team along with Lance. He’d shirked on his duties – left Lance alone to carry the team – but he would not do that again.

He felt more secure and stable than any other time since he’d been with Voltron, and it was because of that that he was able to look Allura in the eye and speak his piece.

"We don’t have the facts, Allura.” Hunk informed her. “We don’t have the facts, and last time we didn’t, everything fell apart.”

Allura opened her mouth as if to argue, and Hunk continued before she could. “Everything.” He reiterated. “If we’d talked to Lance, asked him to explain instead of cornering him. If we hadn’t judged him, then we wouldn’t be in this situation, and you know that. We don’t know that Lance betrayed us. We don’t.”

“But—”

"We don’t.” Hunk repeated, interrupting her. “He could have, yes. He wasn’t entirely stable, and it’s possible he ran at the first chance he got. It’s also possible that something else happened. They both could have been kidnapped. But that’s just my point: *we don’t know.* And until we do, I won’t make a judgement.”

He spoke the truth as clearly as he thought he could. There were facts there: Lance had been unsteady lately, alternating between ice and water and whatever the Druids had done to him –
Coran had pointed that out himself. But they did not know whether Lance had betrayed them.

They didn’t.

And until they did... well, they tried it the Altean method of ‘guilty until proven innocent’, so maybe it was time to try ‘innocent until proven guilty’.

AND, if Lance had betrayed them, then Hunk doubted that Lance had maliciously betrayed them. There had been a good reason for Lance to turn on them, something that had caused him to act impulsively. But then again, why Pidge? Lance wasn’t one for circumstance. He just wasn’t. Not with people he knew.

Allura was quiet, staring at him with a fire in her eyes to rival Keith, but Hunk wasn’t scared. Well, he was, but no enough to stand down. Not for this, not again. He ignored her, turning to the scientist.

“Slav,” Slav stiffened at the attention Hunk was giving him. “How many days should we wait before we can assume the worst?”

Slav blinked at him. “You plan to wait?” He asked curiously. “You don’t intend to find the Blue or Green Paladin?”

How he wanted to, but as history had proven time and time again, he wouldn’t find them. Not easily. Not alone. Not down three – potentially four while Keith was gone – paladins.

“How many days?” Hunk repeated.

“What are you talking about?” Allura raised her voice and took a step towards him. “We cannot wait! The universe needs Voltron.”

“Look, no offense, Princess, but without Shiro, Keith, Lance, or Pidge... we aren’t getting Voltron.” Hunk gave her a Signature Lance Flat Look. “I’m not going to storm wherever is holding Pidge and Lance on my own, and we don’t have the facts.”

“The facts are that Lance betrayed us and Pidge is now missing because of that.” Allura interrupted.

Hunk heaved a long heavy sigh. “No. The facts are that we don’t have the facts. We know that Lance and Pidge are both missing. Could they have been kidnapped? Maybe. Could Lance have betrayed her? Who knows. What we know is that we don’t know, and if he did betray us, then I trust that that he felt that he had to do this for something important.” He rehashed back out for her, again.

Hunk switched his gaze back to Slav. “So, that returns me to my previous question. How many days do we need to wait?”

Slav was quiet for a good couple of minutes as everyone stared at him. “It’s hard to say.” Slav replied cautiously. “There are a lot of variables that we have no control over, but, I would say, if nine days pass and there is no change, then it can assumed that the Blue Paladin has been lost forever.”


A little over a week, and he could lose his best friend forever.
“And if we don’t wait?”

“Was this avoidable?” Allura demanded at the same time as Hunk’s question. Slav’s mouth twitched again as his gaze slid over to her, giving Hunk the impression that he was frowning at her specifically.

“Not typically.” Slav answered her dismissively. “I don’t know.” He shrugged at Hunk.

Hunk frowned, thinking back to where they’d first gotten Slav and the stories he’d heard about the tiny alien scientist. “Don’t you usually give off percentages?” Hunk asked.

“I’ll tell you the same thing I told the Red Paladin. You won’t like the numbers.”

Well, that was reassuring in all the ways that it wasn’t. Still, at least he had some idea of what was to come. Lance had nine days max before he was lost, whatever that meant.

Hunk got the feeling it wasn’t ‘lost’ in the sense of finding him a map. It was a deep term, one that made Hunk uncomfortable in his bones. It was a bad word, one he didn’t want to see happen. One he’d do anything to ensure didn’t happen.

The thing was, he was pretty sure it was already too late for him to prevent it. If it happened, it happened. If it didn’t, well, he’d make sure it could never happen again.

They had nine days, unless something changed. “It’s all out of our hands, isn’t it?” Slav didn’t verbally respond, but then again, Hunk didn’t need him to.

Now, to just wait for Keith’s arrival and to inform him of what happened before anyone else could.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for this being posted late. My Tumblr has more details, but the gist of it is that the original chapter for this wasn't up to my typical standard, and it was painfully obvious. I sat down with Ghost, hashed some stuff out, and she helped me figure out some semantics.

Next week's chapter has already been given the green light to post, so there shouldn't be a delay. :D
Escape Pt.1

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Hunk and Coran realized that something was amiss when Lance and Pidge failed to rendezvous with them after the Market trip. Allura was quick to blame Lance, thinking that he'd been fooling them all along. Hunk disagreed. He didn't want to repeat the mistakes of the past and judge Lance unfairly without the facts again.

**Please Check Trigger Warnings**

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Emotional Manipulation, Referenced/Mentioned Drug Use, Referenced/Mentioned Alcohol, Referenced/Mentioned Violence, VIOLENCE, Reference/Mentioned Vomit/Sick, Minor Character Death, Referenced/Mentioned Blood and Gore, Cursing, Dark Content, Quintessence, Corrupted Quintessence

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://www.tumblr.com). Thank you!

Seriously. With this chapter, **please** let me know if I need to add/remove warnings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pidge’s head painfully pulsed as she woke in stages; the pounding of her heartbeat in her ears alone was enough to exacerbate her headache. There was this strange sense of unease, a roll to her stomach that left the taste of bile thick in the back of her throat.

There was this awareness in the back of her mind that she was on a ship. Something about the sound, the feel of the metal beneath her hands, about the *motion*. She couldn’t put her finger on what it was exactly, but there was just something different about being on a planet verse a space craft.

And she was undoubtably on a space craft.

Which begged the question of *who* or *what’s* spacecraft?

She’d look, but only darkness greeted her eyes, telling her that she was either in a very dark room or blindfolded.

It wasn’t the castle. That much was for sure. She’d never be waking up on the floor if she was in the castle. She’d be waking up at either her work station, her bed, or a cryopod; but never the floor. Furthermore, she was *handcuffed*. Which meant her captors had to be an enemy of Voltron’s.
Or stupid and ignorant as to who she was.

She couldn’t recall how she’d gotten here. The memories were foggy and vague, and the only definitive thing she could recall were indistinct horror-movie ghost whispers that sent chills down her spine and made the hair at the back of her neck prickle. Before that, she was about ninety percent she had been at a market with… Lance.

Quiznak, Lance! At the thought of him she started to struggle against the handcuffs. She hoped he was okay and that he’d managed to get away from whatever had happened. Warned the others maybe?

Or maybe he’d been the one to get her stuck in this predicament? She shook her head, attempting to physically toss the poisonous thought from her head. Yes, Lance had his moments, but he’d seemed so much better, so much friendlier lately.

He’d even said that Lotor wasn’t a good person, which granted, based on what Pidge knew of him was an understatement, but progress was progress.

Either way, being captive would definitely not be conducive to his healing. If anything, it might cause a lapse back into that horrid brainwashed state, and that was something Pidge wanted to avoid at all costs.

The handcuffs didn’t seem to appreciate her struggle as they beeped loudly before snapping magnetically to the floor. She grunted, pulling at them, but there was no give at all. She was only hurting herself.

“I was wondering when you’d wake up.”

There was something oddly familiar about the voice, like she’d heard it before although she couldn’t place where or when. The darkness vanished, and she blinked in the dim – but still bright after the darkness of the blindfold – lighting of a Galra ship.

Her gaze fell immediately on the one she assumed had spoken. He sat – no, that was too nice a term, he manspread – on a throne, completely at ease and resting his head on a closed fist as he gazed at her with what she assumed to be muted disinterest.

Well, if he was Galra – and this was a Galra ship, so obviously he was – then he was like no Galra she had ever seen before. Something about him set off alarms in her head. It might have been the way he was looking at her, or the ease at which he sat. She didn’t know for sure, but what she did know was that this man was dangerous.

“I expected it to be harder to capture a Paladin of Voltron considering the trials you’ve put my father through.” There was a strange, almost familiar lilt to his voice, which tugged at the recesses of Pidge’s memory until he mentioned his father; at which point reality crashed down upon her as she realized who he was and why his voice was so familiar.

She had heard his voice before. She’d heard it countless times while listening to hours of recordings. This was the person Lance had been talking with. The person truly responsible for tearing her team apart and causing Lance so much grief and misery.

The Emperor Pro-Tem, Prince Lotor.

Her hope that Lance had managed to escape grew, strengthened by the knowledge of who held her captive. She held her head up high and looked him dead in the eye. “Release me and I’ll show you exactly what this Paladin of Voltron can do.” She spat at the ground in front of him, only mildly
disappointed that she couldn’t actually spit on him.

He laughed, like her challenge was a joke.

“Oh, Lance was right.” His eyes glimmered with something as he leaned forward, his hands on his knees. The way he said Lance’s name bothered her. He said it like it was the sweetest thing he’d tasted. Like it was something to be savored. “You are positively delightful.”

She soundlessly snarled at him. “You don’t know anything about Lance.”

“Don’t I?” He countered. “I’d hazard a wager to say that I know more of him than you.” The smile he gave her was sharp and unsettling. Once more Pidge was hit with relief from the knowledge that Lance was away from this monster. “After all, he’s the one who bought you to me.”

Pidge felt herself shatter at the words; her jaw dropping, eyes widening. She shook her head, her brain attempting to process the words he’d said, but just encountering an error over and over again like a computer popping up with the ‘Pidge.EXE has stopped working’ message.

No.

No, no, no. She couldn’t believe it. She wouldn’t believe it. Lance had LEFT this guy, and he was getting better, and why would he come back?! Why would he do that? Why would he…. It just didn’t make sense.

No scenario in her head made sense. Unless…

The image of Lance crying in the market place came to mind. He’d seen something that reminded him of home. Had he been forced into this? Had there been something forcing him to lead her into a trap? Had there been a proverbial invisible gun being held to his head, something he couldn’t even counter with his fearsome Druidic magic?

Some poisonous part of her argued that ‘home’ had been here, this Galra ship with the Emperor Pro-Tem. He’d willingly led her to this trap to return. He’d been crying from the sheer joy the prospect of returning gave him.

“SHUT UP!” She shouted, not knowing or caring if she was screaming at the prince or at her own dark thoughts. “Lance would never betray us! You’re lying.”

Lotor’s face visibly darkened. “I don’t lie.” The statement was so definitive and confident. It sent a shiver down her spine, one she was sure would not be the last while dealing with this man. “You can ask Lance yourself, if you’d like. I’ve never lied to him.”

It felt like her heart was going to burst out of her chest as he inferred that Lance was there. That he was on the ship somewhere, just waiting for Pidge to demand answers she needed from him. Had he really betrayed her? The team?

For what purpose? Why? Why would he betray them? What purpose did it serve? Why had he done this?

He was getting better, damn it!

“I see. Crying like this must be a human thing.” Lotor tilted his head, studying her – or more accurately, studying the tears that had start streaming down her face unbidden. “Does the knowledge of Lance’s betray hurt you?”
“You know it does, you bastard.”

“Good.” He smiled again, that same sharp smile. “Lance should enjoy your misery.” He laughed.

“Fuck you.” She snarled. “You’re lying.” Lotor’s laughter stopped. “Lance wouldn’t betray us, betray me.” She repeated the sentiments from earlier.

“I see. It appears you need more proof to see that he belongs to me.” He made a gesture to someone out of Pidge’s sight, and there was the quiet hiss of a door and then…

“You called for me?”

Pidge’s heart went from trying to burst out of her ribcage to crawling up her throat at the voice. She recognized it from principal alone, as everything else about it was just wrong. Lotor smiled at him, his teeth hidden behind his lips, his gaze admittedly softer than Pidge thought him capable of.

“Lance.” Lotor said Lance’s name like it was the last breath in his lungs, like it left him breathless and in awe. Like he was some deity to worship and lavish. Considering what he’d done to Lance – what she could only imagine he’d redone to Lance – it made her sick to her stomach. “Come here.”

He stood, his arms open as if in welcome or requesting a hug.

The taste of bile once more rose, coating the back of her throat.

It was an understatement to say that Lance walked past Pidge to Lotor because he didn’t simply walk, he drifted. Wearing the Druid Robes, it was like Lance was a dark cloud of purple lightning and misery, rolling across the metal floor of the room.

There was a static taste on Pidge’s tongue. Static and metal. The taste and scent of an electric thunderstorm.

Lance didn’t spare her a single glance as he passed, heading straight for the open arms of Lotor.

“Yes?”

There was still something wrong about Lance’s voice. It sounded almost as if he were dazed or in a dream. There was a barely noticeable slur to his words. Was he drunk? Drugged? Brainwashed again? How long as she been out, and how quickly could Lotor mess Lance back up?!

Lotor smiled down at Lance and cupped Lance’s face. She couldn’t see what he was doing since Lance was facing away from her, but she could imagine Lotor was stroking his cheek or something else equally nauseating.

“Don’t touch him.” She snarled, curling her lip.

Even if Lotor had been telling the truth – which she doubted – then Lance still didn’t deserve to be touched by that slimy prick. He poisoned Lance, twisting him into a mockery of himself, filling him with hatred and everything disgusting and despicable.

The pair of them ignored her – ignored her demand – as if she wasn’t even present.

She had to endure a moment longer of this facsimile of affection before Lotor spun Lance around, so he was facing Pidge. He rested his hands on Lance’s shoulders, looking over them at Pidge. “The Green Paladin thinks I’m a liar, pet.” He cooed in Lance’s ear, just loud enough for Pidge to hear.
Lance’s face twisted into an almost painfully familiar expression, but his eyes were off. Pidge was close enough to tell that his gaze was unfocused; his eyes glazed and glossy.

“What did you do to him?!” She demanded.

“Nothing he never asked for.” Lotor’s voice was a rumbling purr of amusement. “Isn’t that right, pet?”

“Of course, my prince.”

Oh. Well, that was certainly retch worthy. What a horrid horrible nickname. How could Lance let himself be degraded so much? Pet?! Really? Well, if Lance wasn’t going to be angry, that was fine. She had enough anger for the both of them.

“Get your filthy hands off him!” She demanded again, since they were actually responding to her now.

Something flashed in Lance’s eyes and his gazed focused on her, the familiar expression fading into a snarl. “Don’t speak to my prince that way.”

“Now, now, pet. She doesn’t understand.” Lotor purred. Lance’s hostility faded away as if it Lotor’s voice could just brush it away. “She doesn’t believe that you’re mine. That you’d come back to me. That you belong to me.”

The taste of bile was ever growing stronger in her mouth, threatening to force her to be sick at this.

How could she be expected to believe that Lance had truly wanted this, that he’d been acting of his own volition when he was like this? When he was drugged or drunk or brainwashed, or whatever the hell this was. He might as well as been an empty puppet for Lotor to control.

“He doesn’t.” She snarled. “He doesn’t belong to you.”

“Well, he certainly doesn’t belong to you.” Lotor retorted sharply. “Do you, pet?”

“I live to serve you, my prince.” That dream like quality was back in Lance’s voice, his gaze unfocused once more. Pidge bristled with indignation. How dare Lotor do something like this to one of her team members. How dare Lotor try to turn her against Lance.

Even if Lance had betrayed her… Even if what he was saying was the truth… She wouldn’t believe him. Not until Lance told her himself, not this disgusting fake puppet of Lance.

“Who do you belong to?” Lotor asked Lance, his gaze meeting Pidge’s.


“Such a good boy.” Lotor murmured. “You’ll be rewarded for such good behavior later, my sweet.” Pidge’s entire body shuddered at the implications of what that reward could be, and her stomach twisted in a way that left her honestly fearful that she would be sick. Lotor smiled at her. “You see? I’ve trained him well. He belongs to me. He will always be mine.”

He walked around Lance and tipped his head up by his chin, pressing a thankfully chaste, but no less disgusting kiss against Lance’s lips. Lance sighed into the kiss, his eyelids fluttering shut as he leaned on Lotor.

Pidge audibly retched, although thankfully nothing came up. “You’re vile.” She hissed at Lotor.
Lotor broke off the kiss, shrugging at Pidge before smiling and cupping Lance’s face. “Go rest in our room, pet. Drink more Kanki, let it wash away the stress of this meeting.”

“As you wish.” Lance’s voice was quiet and soft, but no less dazed. He drifted past her, floating on the high of this ‘kanki’ and whatever Lotor had done to him.

Pidge wished more than anything that she could just leap up and take him by his shoulders and shake some sense into him. That she could yell at him to ‘wake up’ and it’d actually affect him. But she knew it wouldn’t. Not while Lotor was present, not while Lance was so deep into the rabbit hole, he couldn’t even tell he was lost.

Lotor watched Lance leave before looking back at Pidge, a smug look on his face that Pidge wished she could punch off. Just one solid punch, that was all she needed. If only she wasn’t handcuffed and stuck to the floor.

“You see?” Lotor smiled that ugly sharp smile, tilting his head. “I’ve told no lies. Lance delivered you to me. He belongs to me. You’ve lost.” He spun around, returning to his throne before taking a seat. He smiled at her again before waving his hand.

“Narti,” He called out, and it took all of Pidge’s restraint not to agree and say that he was ‘naughty’. “Make the Green Paladin comfortable while we finish her accommodations.”

Pidge’s stomach flipped as the creepy whispers she only vaguely remembered returned, and the last thing she saw was Lotor’s ugly grin before it all faded to black.

Pidge groaned, her headache returning full force as she woke, this time in a cell. Okay, so whatever the quizznak ‘Naughty’ was, it could knock her out and give her one of the worst headaches she could ever remember having. Not to mention the creepy whispers.

It was easier to focus on that than the other events that had occurred. Lance’s potential betrayal, her conversation with Lotor, the sick display Lotor put on with Lance…

Oh, yeah, it was just easier to push all that to the back of her mind.

But she couldn’t do that. She was trapped in a cell, on the Galra ship… and her only potential ally was brainwashed or drugged or something.

Man, didn’t Lotor know that the absence of rejection wasn’t consent? Just because he drugged or brain washed Lance didn’t mean Lance actually consented to be used like that. To be called a pet and treated like that.

For a brief moment – or a couple hours, it was hard to tell the passing of time in the cell – she wished Shiro was with her. Shiro would know how to escape. He’d done it countless times before, and she had no doubt that he could do it again.

Lotor would be no match to Shiro; and together they could free Lance and find out what really happened.

Because she refused to believe that Lance would actually betray her. Not when he’d gotten better. Not after all the healing he’d done.

The small poisonous part of her mind hissed that she was just in denial. She was going through the five stages of grief. Anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance; although not exactly in that order.
Or perhaps, exactly in that order. She’d already been angry, and now she was in denial. Denying that Lance could have betrayed her, betrayed Voltron. Denying that Lance would have done something like this to her.

She had trusted him.. but she supposed she should have known better. She should have been more aware, wary. But no. He’d come to her crying and she’d just walked right into the trap.

But she couldn’t focus on the past. She needed to focus on the present, and that meant getting herself – and Lance if she could manage it – out of here.

No. Not if she could manage it. She’d be getting Lance, end of story. She couldn’t in good conscious leave him here in the hands of that vile disgusting man. She couldn’t! That was what had upset Lance with Hunk.

Hunk had been here once before Lance, and thanks to the Blade of Marmora, had left him. And that had just given Lotor the ammunition he needed to further pry open the cracks in Lance’s defense and pour in his corruption.

Leaving Lance here was not an option. It never should have been an option in the first place.

And if Lance HAD betrayed her. If Lotor hadn’t been lying, and Lance had willingly walked her into a trap... then she needed to take Lance with her to face the judgement of his peers. To put him someplace where he could no longer hurt anyone else.

But how to escape?

There was no chance that she wasn’t being watched, and besides, she had nothing to use in the cell. If she had been wearing her paladin armor, then she would have at least had access to the built-in computer or her bayard.

She wasn’t a Druid like Lance. Her arm wasn’t a built-in weapon like Shiro. Her body wasn’t a weapon like Keith’s was – she’d seen him training and seen his hand-to-hand. She wasn’t built like Hunk was.

She was just small little Pidge. The hacker. The techno genius.

Granted, that didn’t mean she was useless, but, in a small little cell, there was nothing she could do. There was no where to hide, no robots to hack. And after what had to be a couple days, no visitors either. Well, no visitors unless she counted the various Galra guards who slipped her trays of food.

The guards were all alive, so she couldn’t rewire them, and none of them spoke to her.

That didn’t stop her from listening to them though.

Between their conversations – useless but mildly entertaining and sometimes interesting gossip – and the meals they provided, Pidge had no other alternative to measuring time.

Apparently there was another person imprisoned on the ship; a ‘bridge officer Sonali’, who evidently failed a task and greatly displeased Lotor. Which was good for her. Pidge could appreciate anyone who displeased Lotor, Galra or not.

Less interesting was the drama of Bmuth and Kynia, who were evidently giving it another go after Bmuth’s brother was transferred. The couple seemed to be a favored topic, seeing as they’d both been cheating on the other, except one of them was cheating with the other’s brother.
It honestly reminded Pidge of the soap operas that her mother used to watch, and it was fascinating to learn that some things just didn’t change, no matter what the species. Now, if only consent was one of those things that carried over too. Consent, and morality, and ethics.

Oh yeah, the Galra could learn a thing or two about *ethics*. Not that she thought they were interested much in learning something as *silly* as ethics.

Queue generous eyerolling.

But as intriguing as the gossip was, it didn’t change the fact that Pidge needed to escape. It’d been a couple of days, but she had yet to figure out how to escape.

If there was anyone here from the Blade of Marmora, surely they would try to help Pidge escape, right? Or had Lotor managed to hunt them all of his ship? Was Pidge truly stuck here, weaponless, defenseless, and ally-less.

Or so she thought.

She woke to a commotion in the hallway outside her cell. She tensed, wondering if perhaps the Blade of Marmora had finally come to help her, or if somehow the Paladins – Keith and Hunk – had managed to locate the ship once more to rescue her.

She doubted that second thought. They had no way of knowing where she was or who had taken her, unless someone on the ship was on her side. And with Lance… predisposed, that left the Blade of Marmora.

Or not.

Lance’s hand glowed purple – which was never a good sign – as he lowered it.

…

Wait, what?

Her gaze jumped from his lowered hand to his face, and she felt her heart literally stop when she looked into his *clear* eyes. Well, not entirely clear. There was still a glossy finish to them, like he’d been crying or drinking or something, but it was certainly clearer than it had been.

Clearer and more focused. More alert and aware. Dangerous.

Blood ran from a cut just below an eye scale, dripping down his cheek to his chin. He stared at her as she stared at him, neither one of them moving for a good couple of heartbeats. And then he moved forward and Pidge’s life flashed before her eyes.

This was it. Keith and Hunk each had their near-death experiences with Lance and now it was Pidge’s time. Except it wasn’t going to be a near-death experience for her. Oh no, it’d be a full death experience.

He was lost to Lotor, and she was going to…

Be released from her handcuffs?

He tossed them off to the side, like they hadn’t been the bane of Pidge’s existence for the past couple days – or however long she’d been in here.

“Lance?” Her voice wavered as she called his name, hoping more than she thought herself capable
of that he really was Lance despite the terrifying purple glow to his hands.

Lance opened his mouth to say something, but he was cut off by a female voice from behind him. “Lance, we have to…” A helmetless female Galra poked her head into the cell, and had she not been speaking to Lance, Pidge would have yelled in warning. She cut herself off to stare at Pidge like she had two heads. “Stars and ancients, she does look just like Matt!”

Pidge’s brain literally sputtered to a stop. “Matt?” She repeated.

No, that was putting it lightly. Her brain screeched to a stop like a train going thirty miles too fast on a track before a turn. It crashed and burned, and the only thing she could think of was her brother, Matt. The name echoed in her brain in the female Galra’s voice. It took all of her resistant not to push Lance away and shake the Galra and demand what she knew of Matt.

How did she know about Matt? What did she know?

“Not the time, Sonali.” Lance interrupted, his voice still slurred from whatever Lotor had done to him. Pidge’s gaze switched to him as he spoke. Irritation was flush on his face, sweat dotting his brow. “We’ve got to go.”

Huh. Sonali… where had she heard that name before? Never mind about that. Nevermind what the Galra knew about Matt. The important question as what did Lance know about Matt?

“How did she know about Matt? What did she know?”

“Not the time, Sonali.” Lance interrupted, his voice still slurred from whatever Lotor had done to him. Pidge’s gaze switched to him as he spoke. Irritation was flush on his face, sweat dotting his brow. “We’ve got to go.”

“Not the time.” Lance repeated. “You can talk about it more-”

“You knew my brother!?” Pidge interrupted him, the need to know more about her family demanding she do so. Fury replaced the fear at the thought that Lance might have been keeping information about her family away from her.

“Quiznak, this isn’t the time, Pidge.” Lance snapped. Quintessence flared out from him in reaction to his irritation, a mixture of purple and blue that would have been pretty if she didn’t know what it was. But she did, and she knew that it's beauty only hid its danger.

The scent of electricity once more invaded her nose and the hair on her arms stood on end with the amount of static energy in the air. Lance teetered, his gaze going unfocused for a moment long enough for Pidge to fear he was lost under Lotor’s influence again. Sonali, the guard, muttered something under her breath – a curse perhaps – before taking a large step away from Lance.

“Let’s go.” Lance snapped again, grabbing her by her upper arm and jerking her out of the cell.

This close to him, the scent of ozone was nearly overpowering, but underneath it, there was a worse one. This one was so strong it reminded her of the scents that would ooze out of bath stores and infected mall corridors. This scent made her eyes water and nose burn.

She stepped over the dead – holy quiznak, those were dead bodies – bodies of her guards, and only then did she recall where she’d heard the name Sonali.

The guard had gossiped about her. About how she’d failed a task given to her by Lotor, and how he’d been so displeased that he’d imprisoned her. Why was Lance with her now? Did it have to do with how she knew Matt?

What was going on here? Was Lance her friend still? Her ally? Or had he betrayed her as Lotor had said? She wanted, no, needed answers.
Yet there was no chance to ask the questions she had. No time to obtain those answers. Lance kept them moving, stopping only at every other door to press a purple hand against the panel just long enough for sparks.

After the third time, Sonali pulled him away from the door. “It’s too much.”

There was something urgent in her tone, but Pidge couldn’t tell if her words were meant to be a warning or a threat. What was too much? Lance doing this to every other door? Or Lance using quintessence?

“I’m fine.” Lance growled out. He leaned against the door, his head slightly bowed. He was panting more than he should have been and the sweat beading at his forehead had dripped down. At some point he’d smeared the blood on his cheek.

Lance physically fit none of the definitions of ‘fine’ that Pidge knew; and just based on the fact he’d spent days in Lotor’s ‘tender care’, she doubted he was ‘fine’ emotionally or mentally either.

“How much Kanki did you have?” Sonali asked Lance.

Pidge’s ears perked up at the mention of ‘Kanki’. Lotor had mentioned it to Lance at one point, but she still had no idea what it was exactly? Lance was in no mood to answer, as he pushed himself of the door and spun around – or tried to at least – to head down one of the halls.

Sonali frowned. “How much Kanki did you have?” She repeated.

Pidge admired the guts it took for her to do that. Lance had ‘clearly’ dismissed her, and it was gutsy of her to continue risking Lance’s ire. Having been on the receiving side of Lance’s freaky druidic magic once before, Pidge held no interest in experiencing that again. Sonali clearly held no fear as she stepped forward, frowning at Lance.

“I smell it on you.” Sonali continued in a quiet hiss.

Ah. So that was what Pidge smelled. She wondered if it was an alcohol or a drug. Either was plausible considering Lotor.

“Not much.” Pidge had to purse her lips to stop herself from calling Lance out on his lie. “Enough.” He amended… or perhaps commanded. It was hard to tell. He turned a corner, stopped and then threw his hands up, the glow of quintessence lighting up the small corridor.

Pidge and Sonali caught up to him just in time to see glowing spikes of purple darkness tear through the hallway and into the group of soldiers running towards them. The soldiers never a had a chance. They ran straight into the spikes, the soldiers in the back of the group pushing the ones in the front.

The tips of the spikes pushed through the bodies, impaling the other guards behind. Blood spilled down the spikes, rolling down and forming pools at the base of the spikes. More of it was sprayed against the walls where those impaled had spurted blood out their mouths as they screamed.

…

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Holy Quiznaking Fucking Shit.
Even Sonali stopped and stared, her eyes wide and her skin pallor. “Stars and ancients.” She whispered, sounding both awed and distressed. Pidge didn’t blame her. She really didn’t.

Really, that was the only type of reasonable response to that level of carnage – because what else could one call that?!

This was a war. This was a war and people died every day. She knew that. Quiznak, she was sure she’d even caused some deaths. But never had she seen it so… personally. Never had she watched the blood drip down from the bodies, seen the death first hand.

It was one thing to know death was happening, but another to see it.

Fuck. She was too young for this. They all were. Lance, Shiro, Keith, Hunk… hell even Matt and Sonali. They were all too young for this. Too young for war. For death. For this.

Lance threw his hands back and the spikes dissolved into dark particles. If Pidge had thought the sight in the corridor to be carnage before… well, that was nothing compared to what it became after the spikes vanished.

The bodies slumped forward, blood squirting from wounds and mouths. The bodies fell into one bloody messy pile. The sight alone was enough for her stomach to turn unpleasantly, the taste of bile coating her tongue.

This whole ship made her sick.

Why had Lance come back here? If he had, in fact, come back here on his own. Why had he returned to Lotor? Why did he betray her? Had he betrayed her? If so, why? Why? Why? Why?

When would she get the answers to her questions? After they escaped this hell hole of a ship? Was that when she’d find out Matt, about Sonali? About whether Lance had betrayed her or not?

Quiznak, she hoped Lance hadn’t betrayed her. She really did. It was just crazy to her to think that after all the progress he’d made, that he’d turn his back on it to return to this.

Lance wrapped his hand around her upper arm again, tugging her away from the death. “You need to get back to the castle Pidge. I didn’t mean for you to get caught up in this.” Lance was speaking, but the words weren’t making sense.

They weren’t clicking in her brain. It felt like this whole experience had broken her best asset: her intelligence. She didn’t understand.

What was Lance talking about? They both needed to get back to the castle. And that nonsense about how he didn’t mean for her to get caught up in this… Was he confessing to her?

Was he confessing that he’d betrayed her? That Lotor had been right and he’d willingly brought her here? That he’d lured her into a trap and then handed her off to Lotor like a shiny Christmas present?

What. The. Fuck. Lance? Seriously, what the fuck?

“You both need to get back.” Sonali was quick to reply where Pidge was, for once, not. Echoing the thoughts Pidge herself had been thinking.

“But you’re coming too. Pidge needs you.”
Pidge needed the Galra woman? What importance did this Galra soldier have? Besides the knowledge that Pidge looked like Matt. Was that the reason Pidge needed her? Because of Matt?!

Sonali seemed equally confused before realizing what Lance was getting at. “Oh.” She breathed out, the awe in her face becoming more pronounced. “Oh. You returned for me.”

Pidge stopped in the middle of the hallway. This was too much. She needed answers. Lotor said that Lance had returned for him, and now this Galra lady was saying Lance returned for her? Lance was apologizing about dragging Pidge into this – whatever this was. Nothing was making sense.

Why couldn’t things make sense? Why couldn’t someone just explain to her what the quiznak was going on?! Besides war, and death, and apparently mind fucks and riddles. Normally Pidge enjoyed a good riddle or puzzle, but at this point, she just wanted answers.

If what Sonali said was true, then Lance thought her important enough to betray Pidge and return to this hell hole. She’d wonder why, yet the only answer she could come up with was ‘Matt’, since Sonali apparently knew him.

But wasn’t there any better way for this? What ever ‘this’ was. What ever Lance had planned. And man, who let Lance come up with a plan?! Why hadn’t he come to her, why hadn’t he explained anything?

Why hadn’t he told her about Matt, her brother?! She was tired of not having answers, and equally tired of needing them.

She would be getting her answers. Just… as soon as they were out of this place.

The lights in the corridor suddenly flickered off. And not just the lights in the corridor they were in, but down adjacent corridors as well. They flickered once, twice, and then turned a bright dangerous red. An alarm sounded, and Lance snarled.

He spun around again, and it was then that Pidge was remind of how inebriated he was. In which, extra fuck because he’d done that level of carnage and death while drunk or drugged. It was crazy to think that he had that much power… and was drunk. Or drugged. Like, that should have been illegal.

It was like having a gun grafted onto his arm and getting drunk. Or like Shiro getting drunk. It was just wasn’t responsible. Not that Pidge was going to lecture him. Oh no. Not until they were safely off and away from this ship and she had answers.

In any case, Lance widely spun around, his hand glowing as he pressed his hand against a red glowing wall panel.

No. Not a glowing wall panel. Against a quintessence vein.

Electricity sparked out from around his hand, spiraling around him. Both his eyes and scales flashed bright blue before holding a steady purple glow. The electricity intensified, sparking and arching out, flashing bright enough for Pidge to shield her eyes.

The smell of an electric storm returned in full force, filling her lungs with static charged air. “Lance!” Sonali shouted and all at once, everything around them went dead silent. The electricity ceased, the flashes faded. The sound of the alarm cut off abruptly along with the red lights.

Lance’s body collapsed. He fell forward into the wall, and then stumbled back where Sonali caught him. His entire body was trembling, his hair wild, and eyes wide. The cut under the scale
was bleeding again. He shut his eyes and for one full heartbeat, Pidge thought she might have seen his end.

But then he put a hand back on the wall, using it to brace himself as he stood. Sonali watched him with razor sharp eyes, her lips un-pursing only to ask, “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” Was it Pidge, or was that slur worse than it was before? Also, she was completely convinced that he was not fine. “We need to keep going.”

“Keep going?” Sonali repeated and scoffed. “We can’t. You just…” She waved her hand at the very dark corridor around them, and then at the super dim quintessence vein. “This is emergency lightning. You cut off access to the main crystal.”

There was a hint of awe in the hysteria of Sonali’s voice. It was interesting to Pidge how awed she seemed to be of Lance, despite the things he was doing. Or perhaps, in spite of the things he was doing. And, if Pidge was honest, if Lance had done what she was thinking he’d done… what Sonali had implied he’d done… then she was pretty impressed too.

It left them stuck there, but it was still pretty impressive.

“I did.” Pidge couldn’t think of the last time she heard Lance sound this tired. “But I can reroute the secondary crystals to let us through, open the hangar door, and get us out.”

Okay, now Lance was talking her language. Except… if she was understanding correctly, then Lance just… “Did you hack into the crystal array and imply that you can reroute it at will?”

“I didn’t imply anything.” Lance muttered. He shook his head and pushed himself forward. He stood unsteadily on his own but to his credit, he only stumbled a little when he walked. Sonali sighed, giving Pidge a tired look before nodding for her to follow along.

“The ship runs off quintessence.” Sonali needlessly explained to Pidge. Pidge set her jaw, resisting the urge to snap that she knew that since Sonali was finally answering something. It wasn’t exactly important, but it was an answer. “Lance is very… uh… talented at manipulating that.”

Sonali shot a look at Lance as she spoke, her face twisting into a weary expression. That expression added with the hesitation before ‘talented’ made Pidge wonder what else the soldier could have been implying. Was it a compliment? A complaint? Something else entirely? How many licks did it take to get to the center of a tootsie pop?

The world may never know.

“We don’t have time.” Lance rubbed his hand over his face, pulling it down before dropping his hand and pressing it against a door panel. Without power, the door was useless, but if what Lance said was true…

The door lit up and slid open with minimal fuss.

Well then. Color her impressed. He could reroute power at will! That was so qu znaking useful!

They continued a few times more through doors like this before they came to what Pidge thought might have been the door leading to the hangar. They were almost free, almost done.

“I’ll feel much better once we’re in a ship and away from he….” Lance trailed off, staring at the empty hangar before them. He swallowed thickly and inclined his head in greeting. “Ezor.”
Pidge couldn’t see anything there, but the last time someone – Lotor – had said some weird nonsense – Narti – like that, she’d been knocked out and she was not interested in reexperiencing that. Beside her, Sonali had gone stiff; which Pidge took as another indication that there was a Problem – with a capital ‘p’ – with this ‘Eзор’.

“Stay close. Ezor can camouflage into her surroundings.” Sonali whispered to her.


That was exactly the information that Pidge wanted to hear. Ezor was a person who could turn invisible. She wondered if it was generated through cloaking software like her Lion, or if that was a natural ability of Ezor’s.

Not that it mattered. Either option sucked, but at least if it was generated through software Pidge might be able to disrupt it.

“I vouched for you.” A very distinctly female voice echoed in the ‘empty’ hangar. “And you betray us.”

“Seems to be a running theme with me.” Lance replied. His gaze was glued onto something, prompting a memory of Lance explaining about seeing quintessence. She supposed that if that was the case, then invisible wasn’t all that invisible to him. “Are the others on their way?”

“Lotor isn’t happy with you.”

Lance physically winced and took a half step back. He swallowed thickly, and Pidge noticed his hands were shaking. His entire body was shaking, but it was different than the trembling from before.

Her eyes widened as she realized Lance was afraid. He was scared. Ezor’s words scared him. Or perhaps not the words, but the implication. Lotor wasn’t happy with Lance. Quiznak. She’d seen what Lotor did to Lance when he was happy… what would he do if he was unhappy?

Not that it mattered because they were all in the Hangar and finally able to escape.

“So, you’re here as distraction, to keep us here.” The fear was audible in the waver of Lance’s voice. “Too bad they’re not staying.”

That was the only warning Pidge was given before Lance spun around – sobered by a combination of adrenaline and fear – and used his quintessence to throw both her and Sonali towards the closest Galra fighter.

“Go!” He shouted before throwing more quintessence at something Pidge couldn’t see.

“Not without you.” Pidge argued, picking herself up to run back to him. She promised herself that she wouldn’t let what happened before happen again. She wasn’t going to leave Lance on this ship. Not after what she’d seen before, and certainly not after seeing Lance’s reaction to Ezor’s statement.

Besides the whole ‘right thing to do’ thing, there was also too much that Lance needed to explain. Explanations that needed to be shared to the entire the team. He had answers that Pidge needed.

Arms were wrapped around her middle, and she was yanked back and dragged into a Galra fighter. “We need to go!” Sonali snapped in her ear. “I don’t want to leave him any more than you do, but he can’t come with us.”
“Why not?” Pidge demanded as the fighter closed up around her and Sonali. “Why can’t he come! I won’t leave him.” She looked out at the ‘battle’. In the darkness of the Hangar, there wasn’t much to see except the flashes of quintessence that she knew came from Lance.

“You have no choice.”

There was a flash of quintessence, close and bright enough that it burned her eyes. She blinked and starburst spots bloomed in the space under her eyelid. Sonali started the take off towards the hangar doors.

“No!” Pidge shouted, feeling the movement. But there was nothing she could do.

Chapter End Notes

So for everyone asking about Sonali... here's your answer. :)


Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Pidge was captured while on a market trip, and wakes up to discover she's now Lotor's prisoner. Lance seemed to be back under Lotor's control. Then, after a couple of days of imprisonment, Lance, along with Sonali, break her out. During the break out, Lance stays behind to ensure the escape of Pidge and Sonali.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Cursing, Violence, Referenced/Mentioned Death, Referenced/Mentioned Brainwashing, Referenced/Mentioned Drug, Referenced/Mentioned Alcohol, Keith

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were days where Keith woke up and just instinctually knew that everything was going to go wrong. Well, maybe not wrong exactly, but those days would just be *long.* And not in the fun ‘I-want-this-day-to-last-forever’ way.

The day his father died was one such day. Another day would be when Shiro was declared MIA and KIA from the Kerberos Mission due to ‘pilot error’. He woke feeling like that on the day he was expelled from the Galaxay Garrison, and also on the day that they all discovered the Blue Lion and embarked on this crazy space adventure.

And since starting on said space adventure, there had been many other days where he’d woken and just *known* that it was going to be one of those days.

But waking with Lance in his bed was a nice distraction.

Keith had never particularly subscribed to cuddling or sleeping with someone, but there was something *different* about Lance. There was something comfortable about Lance. Something that put him at ease.

Red suspected it was something to do with the Paladin bond since Blue tended to put most people at ease, or at least, so Red claimed. But Keith was convinced it was something more. Instinctually, he knew it was something more, and of course, the moment he thought the ‘I’ word, Red fell silent.

She trusted her Paladin’s instinct.

Lance’s distraction was nice, but Keith didn’t have the pleasure of it the day of the market trip.
He suspected the feeling that he woke up with had something to do with his visit to the Blade of Marmora, and thus he off put the ‘mission’ as best he could, lingering in the soothing presence of his team.

Keith still wasn’t sure what exactly happened the night before, but whatever it was, it left him with a better sense of his team. He could feel them better than he could before, presences just barely out of reach. Well, out of reach except for Lance, who was a cool breeze brushing against him.

He felt better surrounded by his team, and it seemed that Lance was the best he’d been since returning. It was encouraging to see him smiling and laughing with the others.

Keith didn’t want to go. He promised himself and an absent Shiro that he wouldn’t let things fall apart under his watch again, and it was difficult to keep that promise if he wasn’t actually there to watch over his team.

He had little choice in that matter, and before he knew it, he was at a Blade of Marmora base and strongly reminded of how exactly today was not going to be a good day.

Getting the proverbial ‘birds and bees feat Galra’ talk was something he never wanted or expected. He would have preferred spending the day with Lance and the others at the market, watching over the team to make sure nothing happened.

But instead, he was at a Blade of Marmora base, getting a crash course on Galra things that he wouldn’t have cared about if it wasn’t for the fact it was affecting him. More than once he’d snarled and snapped at his impromptu instructors, resulting in a splash of water to the face or a whack of a dull sword against his body.

Because apparently that was how young Galra were taught, and by their standards, Keith was young. Barely a kit starting his puberty.

Bullshit.

That’s what this all was: Bullshit.

“You’re letting your anger get the best of you again.” Myklar informed him, and it took every ounce of Keith’s willpower not to snap back at him.

He’d already gone through anger management classes at the Garrison, thank you very much. It’d been a requirement after he’d punched a classmate, Griffin, in the face if he wanted to stay in the Garrison. Not that the classes had exactly helped much considered he was expelled for punching Iverson.

He could swear that Iverson had it coming until he was blue in the face, but that didn’t matter. It didn’t matter that Iverson deserved it or that Griffin deserved it. What did matter was that Keith had hurt them.

The Galra were more violent, more prone to anger. They were possessive and jealous and angry, and it felt good to know that Keith was that way because of genetics and not because there was something wrong with him.

Yet at the same time, it made him feel like there was no escaping it.

“I thought my lessons were done.” Keith couldn’t hold back his response as much as he wished he could, although it did come out less snappy than it could have.
“Your lessons were just on the changes you might start to notice.” Like the retractable claws and fangs... or a more possessive take on things.

Keith was already possessive, so maybe he just had that one from the get-go. He didn’t have much and anything he did have, he wanted to keep it. Family, friends... a dagger that was the last thing from his mother. He didn’t want to give any of it up.

“Yeah.” He took a breath and held it, like his anger management teacher had suggested. It didn’t always work, although now he knew why.

His ‘instructors’ had been disgruntled to hear the ‘anger management’ practices Keith had been using and weren’t very surprised to hear they only sometimes worked. “You’re only partially Galra, so of course their solution would only be partially effective.”

Meditation or breathing exercises were evidently for Druids or Alteans. Galra needed a more... physical outlet. Like training or fighting or... well, Red had gotten amusement from the last suggestion they’d given Keith.

She’d been noticeably less amused by the images that suggestion produced. Some part of him was guilty for thinking of Lance like that, but... there was little Keith could have done to prevent it. Lance was pretty. There was no denying that.

And it was okay to think Lance was pretty... but it wasn’t okay to just objectify him, because if what Keith understood about Lotor was accurate, then Lance had been objectified enough. And it wasn’t like Keith wanted to act on those thoughts.

...Okay. So, he did. He really did, but he wouldn’t. Lance didn’t need that. He really didn’t. Not after what happened with Lotor. Keith could be content just as they were.

Besides, he knew he wasn’t thinking of Lance like that just because he was pretty. Shiro and Allura were pretty. Shiro had fan clubs dedicated to him, and beyond a couple of dreams that he ignored and pretended never happened, he hadn’t thought of Shiro like that. He’d certainly never thought of Allura like that.

Ugh. Just the thought twisted his stomach unpleasantly.

In any case, they wanted to see him weekly to work through things with possible changes, like Keith had the time for that. He told them as such, and their response was to offer several different exercises to work out the ‘aggression’.

It all felt pointless.

They hadn’t really gone over anything he didn’t already know to some degree. Anger, possession, jealousy. They didn’t know what physical changes would occur beyond what had already manifested.

The only thing Keith had really learned was what could trigger those responses, and even then, they weren’t entirely sure on account of his human heritage. If Lance had been present, Keith would bet money on a generous eyeroll from him at that.

Red rumbled in his head, curled up in the flames triggered by his irritation and attempting to soothe him, to redirect his anger towards more productive. At the base, she’d been nothing more than a flicker in the background, but as they grew closer and closer to the castle, her presence became more and more noticeable.
Yet other presences did not.

He could feel Hunk clear as day as the blades worked on boarding the castle. He was steadier and stronger than he had been when he left, and the change left Keith puzzled and concerned. Had Lance done something to Hunk in Keith’s absence; something like what he’d done to Keith?

If that was so, then where was Lance… or Pidge?

What could have happened in during the couple hours he was gone?

He should have felt Lance. He should have felt Lance before Hunk or Pidge, yet Lance was just… gone. It left Keith feeling uneasy, and that uneasiness only grew as he stepped off the ship to see Hunk standing there, fiddling with his hands like he was nervous.

Like he had been when Pidge had told him that Lance was behind a particle barrier with the Blue Lion.

His heart dropped into his stomach at the same time his stomach leapt into his throat. It created a kind of wibbly wobbly feeling that suffocated his anger until it was extinguishing. He felt like he couldn’t breath as his mind raced with all the possibilities as to what could have happened.

Despite his inner turmoil, or perhaps in spite of it, Keith stepped forward, demanding answers from Hunk. “Where are Lance and Pidge?”

Hunk’s jaw dropped, leaving his mouth open as he stared. “How did…” He trailed off, his hands stilling as he shuffled.

Keith huffed, crossing his arms and mindful of the claws he could already feel forming from his irritation at having to repeat his question. He enunciated every word, “Where are Pidge and Lance?”

Hunk froze, staring at him. “Your eyes—”

“Yes. I know. What I don’t know is where Pidge and Lance are.” Keith interrupted. That irritation bristled under his skin, only becoming more and more pronounced the longer it took for him to get the answer.

“We don’t know.” Hunk finally answered him, but the answer Keith received did little to soothe him. If anything, it only served to further frustrate him. “They didn’t meet back up with us at our rendezvous at the market. Allura’s blaming Lance.”

“Of course, she is.” Keith cut in, resisting the urge to curse, and threw his hand up before crossing them again. He growled as he looked away, this time fighting down a different strong urge; this time the urge to strangle something.

Quiznak. When he got Lance back – because he would be getting Lance back – he was going to have a really stern talk with him about what he did to cause this. If his Galra traits could be ‘turned on’, then Keith wanted them turned back ‘off’. Thank you very, very much. He never asked for this.

Red let out a low growl of disagreement. This was a part of Keith, it was a part of him that had always been there like it or not, at the surface or not. It was better for him to accept it sooner than later when it could endanger his team.

And it wasn’t like he didn’t know that, because he did. He’d scared Lance just the night before. If
this had been triggered around the others or even on a mission… Well, Keith was thankful that it hadn’t been triggered then.

But that didn’t mean he had to enjoy this.

Hunk shifted, and Keith’s gaze snapped back to him. “And you? What do you think?”

Hunk sucked on his teeth and continued to shift uneasily under Keith’s intense gaze. “She wanted to hunt him down.” Hunk started, and Keith nearly interrupted him to complain that that didn’t answer the question before Hunk continued. “I disagreed.”

“You disagreed?” Keith repeated, surprised.

“We don’t know for sure that Lance betrayed us, and if he did, I trust it was for a good reason.” Hunk shrugged. “We don’t know what happened, and I refuse to let what happened before happen again. Lance might be a witch now, but there’s no need to call for a witch hunt, yeah?”

Keith frowned, crossing his arms at the bad and kind of tasteless joke. Hunk seemed to realize that for he rubbed the back of his neck and looked away. “So.. uh… Is your eyes the reason you had to leave?”

“Yeah they are.” Keith replied, his crossed arms tightening around him. “I should have been here instead.”

“Hey, no.” Hunk shook his head, looking back at Keith. “I should probably be freaking out, I mean… your eyes were yellow and like, if you start turning purple, I’d like to stay that I called that. So like, yeah, I should be freaking out, but I’m just.. tired of freaking out, ya know?”

Well, that was interesting. Keith never thought he’d see the day where Hunk was tired of freaking out. Like, yeah, Hunk could take charge of a situation and work past his freak out, but those times were few and far between.

So, what had triggered it now?

Or was it that it wasn’t triggered so much as he was legitimately just tired of being freaked out. It was possible that he’d finally started to acclimate to the craziness of space life.

He sighed – less of a sigh and more of a short sharp exhale – and looked down. None of them should have needed to acclimate to the craziness of space life. None of them should have to worry about this ten-thousand-year-old war, or aliens, or kidnappings, or corruption or any of this!

But there was nothing to be done about that. What was done was done, and now they couldn’t return to Earth until this war was settled. To return any sooner would risk bringing needlessly bringing Earth into the war.

He didn’t have anyone left there that he cared for, but he knew the rest of his team did. And it was now his responsibility to ensure that his team succeeded in making it back to their families and friends in relatively one piece.

“What’s the plan?”

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Hunk stiffen. Keith suddenly understood Shiro’s exhaustion when dealing with them and the way he’d sometimes pinch the bridge of his nose like he was trying to stave off an incoming headache.
“Hunk… What’s the plan?” Keith repeated. He attempted to meet and hold Hunk’s gaze, but he kept looking away to avoid that.

“Well, I know you aren’t going to like it, but the current plan is to wait.”

... 

Keith must have been more addled by his irritation and frustration than he thought because he could have sworn that Hunk just said their plan was to wait. And he knew that couldn’t possibly be the plan.

For starters, there was no way Allura would allow it. Not if she was interested in hunting down Lance. Not to mention Pidge being missing too meant they were down to two Paladins, and that just wasn’t acceptable.

“I don’t think I heard you correctly.”

“No.” Hunk coughed into his hand. “No, you heard correct. We’re waiting.” He grew more confident towards the last part, finally looking Keith in the eye as he said – commanded – that they were waiting.

Irritation surged inside Keith like a flame catching to a wick. Except that the irritation could not be contained and grew into a roaring wildfire that Red shared. She hissed lowly, a warning not to Keith but to Hunk. Red was the right hand of Voltorn, the second in command, the pack and pride leader when Black was unavailable. By that law and rule, Keith was in charge, and it seemed that Yellow’s Paladin had forgotten its place in the pride.

Hunk swallowed thickly, lowering his chin as if to hide his neck from Keith. Beyond that, however, he gave no other show of submission or standing down. He didn’t take a step back, nor he didn’t shrink into himself.

“You weren’t here to make the call.” There was steel in Hunk’s voice as he spoke.

Keith flinched at the barely veiled accusation. Perhaps Hunk didn’t mean it as such, considering he contested Keith’s earlier statement about being here instead of at the Blade of Marmora base; but the accusation was there regardless.

“We’ve never been able to find Shiro, and it was nearly impossible to find Lotor’s ship last time.” Hunk continued as if he didn’t see Keith’s flinch. “If we search, the only thing we’ll do is tire ourselves out; and if Lance or Pidge, or even Shiro, needs us, we’ll be too tired to be of any use.”

The fire in Keith died down, crushed by the suffocation of the logic Hunk used on him. There was little to argue with that. They hadn’t found Shiro and finding Lotor’s ship in the first place had been an ordeal.

Hunk was right.

Keith wasn’t there to make the call and the call that Hunk made was logically sound.

He was still frustrated, but there was nothing he could do about that. He could be as frustrated as he wanted, but he couldn’t be properly irritated or even angry when he hadn’t been there, and the logic was sound.

Red wasn’t too happy by this, but she settled down with an unhappy rumble.
“So, we wait… until what?” Keith asked.

“Slav says ‘nine days’.” There was more that Hunk wasn’t saying. Keith could feel it like the fire under his skin. If Hunk was keeping it from Keith, then he had to have some sort of reason. People were allowed their secrets. He’d told Lance that once.

Now he wondered if the secrets Lance kept were the cause of this current situation. Could he have prevented this if he’d pried further and pressed for the secrets Lance hadn’t wanted to share?

The past was the past, but hindsight was 20/20; and now Keith was left wondering what he could have done to prevent this from happening. Or did all of this need to happen to get the outcome that Slav wanted for them?

Hunk had used Slav’s name, presumably knowing it would be enough to calm Keith about the choice to wait.

Ugh. He hated that plan with every fiber of his being. He wanted to turn around and go to Red. To go out, to search for his missing pride team himself and bring them back. His hands itched for the cool handle of Red’s joysticks, to push her to her limits to find everyone he was missing.

But no.

He had to wait. He trusted Hunk, and he had to show that by not going behind his back and doing whatever he wanted; no matter how much it frustrated him.

“Fine.” Keith’s agreement was snappier than he intended. His lips twitched into a snarl as he spun around and headed not to Red’s hangar like he wanted, but instead the training room. If he went to Red now, he’d break his resolve. He’d leave.

But the training room was different. There he could work out all his frustration and guilt out on the training bots. He could break and destroy things without harming anyone.

“Allura wanted to see you when you got here.” Hunk called out from behind him.

Keith’s entire body bristled. The idea of seeing the Princess when he was like this was a horrid one. He wasn’t calm enough to see her, to talk to her. Not with the disagreements they’d had in the past. Not with the disagreement he was sure they were going to have again in the very near future.

“I’ll see her once I’ve worked some of this off.” Keith called over his shoulder before continuing on. He heard Hunk stop following him.

“Good idea. I’ll let her know.”

~

Keith frowned to himself as Allura paced the bridge. He knew he should have been paying attention to her after putting off seeing her for a day, but he just couldn’t bring himself to. Why should he when he knew exactly what she was going to say.

“I shouldn’t have trusted Lance, blah, blah, blah. How could I have been so short sighted, blah, blah, blah I shouldn’t have let this happen. We need to replace the missing Paladins. We’re down three Paladins now and the universe cannot wait. Blah, blah, blah.”

Okay, so maybe that wasn’t exactly what she saying, but he figured it was the basic gist of it. And
honestly, even his SparkNotes paraphrasing version of her complaints was enough to set Keith to a low simmer. So, perhaps it was for the best that he was ignoring her.

The last thing the team needed was for him to start butting heads with Allura… again. No matter how much he wanted to argue with her. Especially about the topics of Lance and replacing paladins.

He couldn’t exactly be training while ‘listening’ to her either, which left him at his current state of staring at the ‘quig’ that Hunk had given him before he’d left the kitchen to go to the bridge to ‘talk’ with Allura.

According to Hunk, Lance had recommended these fruits to him. They were just like apples? He pressed his nail against the skin of it. It didn’t feel like an apple. It was vaguely apple shaped and not quite apple colored, but he wasn’t sure he’d say it was a ‘space apple’.

But Lance recommended it, and he could see another uneaten quig on Hunk’s station. Mentally shrugging, he took a bite of it.

There was a noticeable crunch to the skin as he broke it, but then his teeth just slid past the flesh of the fruit like a hot knife through butter. Juice squirted into his mouth and gushed out of the bite, and Keith scrambled catch the sticky juice before it could get everywhere at his station.

Okay. So physically and texture wise, these things were absolutely not apples. Taste wise, however… it was like he’d just taken a bite out of a honey crisp. Just the taste was enough to remind him of the annual apple festival that his father used to take him to every year. Mind, his father had to go as a fireman, but Keith enjoyed them all the same.

There weren’t just apples at the festival, but they were what Keith recalled the most. Even from a young age he’d been drawn to the color red – and Red mentally puffed up in pride at that – like the apples and fire engine.

“Keith.” Allura’s disapproving tone cut through his memories and he realized she was standing in front of his station with crossed arms glaring him down. “Are you listening to me?”

Well, this was as awkward as being caught by the teacher daydreaming when she asked him a question during class. Except then, the teacher had power over Keith and here… well, he didn’t know exactly what he was ranked compared to Allura.

Perhaps that made his transgression worse?

Either way, it wasn’t like he could lie and say that he was. He didn’t really feel a need to lie either. What was the point? He wasn’t. He knew that. She knew that. He knew that she knew that.

“No.” He half shrugged, raising an eyebrow. “You’re just saying the same things you’ve been saying since forever.”

Allura’s entire body went stiff. Her eyes narrowed, her lips thinned into near nonexistence. Her hands curled into fists, tight enough that Keith was sure there’d be tiny crescent moon imprints in her palm from her nails. She exhaled sharply and turned on her heel. “Just go.”

Well, Keith wasn’t going to argue with that.

He didn’t think she was in the mood to argue with him anymore than he wanted to argue with her. It was a sensible choice to send him on his way. He disagreed with her views, she disagreed with
his; and the only thing they could agree upon was to disagree.

He grabbed his quig as he exited the bridge and headed back down to the kitchen. He’d let Hunk know how the quigs were, test out whatever Hunk was working on, and then resume his training. It wasn’t like he had anything better to do during the wait unless he wanted to drive himself crazy.

The more he thought about the wait, the more the itch under his skin encouraged him to do something. Best to keep his mind off it, and thankfully, Hunk was more than happy to help.

~

The last time Keith had been this anxious and excited, it had been Christmas Eve. He couldn’t sleep because he was so excited and so anxious. Christmas day was important to his father. It was a day for family, and with so little of it, it was even more special.

It was a day that his father always tried to get off, so he could spend the entire day with Keith.

Keith could almost never sleep on Christmas Eve due to the excitement, but without fail, he’d wake to his father’s smile and warm hand on his shoulder.

Somehow he doubted this was a Christmas Eve like situation. He was more excited than nervous on Christmas Eve, but now he just felt this bubbling pit of anxiety and nerves in his stomach, threatening to make him lose the meal Hunk had created just a few short hours ago.

It was like there a mental doomsday clock going off in his head, counting down the days, hours, minutes, and even seconds. Hunk had said they were waiting for 9 days. But what about afterwards?

What would they do if after 9 days passed and nothing happened? Hunk’s refusal to talk about it was not encouraging. All he ever did when Keith brought it up was to try to distract him with new food and even offering to train with him a couple of times.

But there was little Hunk could do to distract Keith once he’d gone to bed. In the silence of the castle ship, Keith was left alone with his thoughts, worries, and concerns.

They all pressed against him, filling him up until they were all he could think about. His head felt too noisy. Too many thoughts, too many ideas. Too many fears. And nothing to do to silence them except to lay down and hope that sleep would save him.

But he couldn’t sleep tonight. Not so close to the deadline that Slav had given Hunk.

He knew sleep wouldn’t come to him, and it was pointless to try. Equally restless, Red beckoned him to her hangar. Hunk had been keen to keep Keith away from Red physically for the first couple of days, too afraid that Keith would disregard the choice to wait and go looking for them anyways, but there was nothing keeping Keith from Red now.

He was silent as he made his way down to the hangar, avoiding both Coran and one of the Blade of Marmora members who were on ‘watch’ with an ease he knew he should bring up. With the ship running with a skeleton crew, however… there wasn’t much to be done about the security hole he was currently taking advantage of.

Red started purring the moment he entered her hangar. He could feel the vibrations as he pulled himself up onto one of her paws, and making himself comfortable between her claws. He tapped out the song that Lance often hummed with his foot.
Waiting was never Keith’s strong suit, but it was somehow easier to handle with someone else – Red – than it was alone. Her purring was reassuring and comforting.

He didn’t realize when he started to doze off, but there was a snapping sensation of something falling into place and it jolted him into awareness. **Pidge.** He could feel Pidge.

She was distant, but he could feel her. He knew where she was, and how long it’d take him to get to her, and he wasted no time sliding off of Red’s paw and entering her. Keith was out of the hanger in seconds.

He’d waited like Hunk had asked, and now it was time for him to retrieve one of his missing pride team mates. It was concerning that Pidge was alone. He couldn’t feel Lance anywhere nearby, and the fact the blue Paladin was absent was more than a little alarming.

He could only hope that Pidge had some idea as to where Lance was.

Coran reached out to him within a couple of minutes, asking him what was going on and informing him that a sole Galra fighter was just barely out of the Castle’s short-range scanners. The location Coran sent him was the location of Pidge. He could feel it.

The ship was pathetically small compared to Red, and he scooped it up in her jaws, gentle not to endanger Pidge’s life as he brought her back to the castle.

There was a small party – consisting of two – waiting in his hangar for him and Pidge. Hunk was the most noticeable due to the white of the Paladin armor, but it was very obviously Coran beside him. Doubtlessly the Blade of Mamora members were on the Bridge or just outside the hangar, waiting to see if there’d be any trouble.

The Princess was too ‘valuable’ should something unexpected or dangerous happen, so he suspected she was on the bridge with an open comm link to the hangar bay.

Red released the ship carefully before lowering herself to allow Keith to exit. He felt out of place wearing his casual clothes next to Hunk, but it was just Pidge.

Keith was quiet as he took in the shadows under her eyes, and a thinness to her that he already knew Hunk was itching to fix. A strong part of Keith wanted to wrap her up in a shock blanket and sit her down in front of one of Hunk’s meals.

However, there was the small matter of the unknown female Galra Solider with her.

The unknown female Galra exited the Galra fighter behind Pidge, her eyes wide as she looked around Red’s hangar. Unease prickled at the back of Keith’s neck. Why had Pidge returned with this Galra but not Lance?

Had something happened to Lance? What exactly had happened to Pidge? Who was this Galra?

Clearly following Keith’s line of thought, Hunk summoned his inactive bayard to his hand. Keith would have done the same if he were wearing his Paladin armor, but he wasn’t. Instead he moved his hand closer to where he kept his dagger.

If push came to shove, he knew his Mamora blade would serve him just as well.

Red snorted, physically flicking her tail and scaring the Galra into jumping and clinging to Pidge’s shoulders. Keith growled.
The Galra’s eyes flickered over Keith and Hunk before settling on Coran. Unlike most soldiers that they’d encountered, her eyes weren’t a solid glowing yellow, but more like his own when he was showcasing his more Galra traits.

He knew it just meant that this Galra did not have much exposure to quintessence to make them ‘stronger’ or whatever, but Keith still wasn’t sure how he felt about the similarity.

“You must be Coran, the Princess’ advisor.” Her voice was unexpectedly quiet as she considered Coran. Coran lowered his head, his body stiff as he presumably tried to gauge the threat of this woman. “And Yellow Paladin, it is good to see you in safe hands.” Her gaze lingered on Hunk as Pidge interrupted.

“This is Sonali.” Pidge announced. “She’s part of the resistance.”

Keith immediately gave her a once over, scanning for even a hint of the familiar Luxite blades that the Blade of Mamora favored. There was none.

“Not of the Blade.” Keith replied, coolly challenging her if she was. Her gaze hardened as she studied Keith. The tightness of her lips and the narrowing of her eyes told him that she found him wanting.

“I didn’t realize the red paladin be part of that radical extremist group.” Her words were as sharp as her disapproving gaze. One corner of her lips quirked upwards. “I should have expected as much based on how Lance spoke of you.”

Keith’s entire body bristled as he tensed. His hand itched for his blade, his blood sung for her blood. Irritation bubbled underneath his skin like magma under a volcano, waiting to erupt. Red was quiet but her own disapproval of this person burned through him like an unchecked flame.

It bothered him how she spoke of the Blade, but it bothered him more how she spoke of Lance. It was cruel of her to bring up Lance like that to him. To imply that Lance had spoken poorly of him recently. To sound as if she knew Lance and he spoke to her about things like the team.

“You are correct. I’m not of them, but of another resistance.” Sonali continued as if she didn’t notice what affect her words had on Keith.

Then, before his eyes, she shifted; and based on everyone’s reactions, they were seeing the same thing Keith was.

Her hair remained a dark purple, but her skin lightened from dark Galra purple to a shade between Allura and Coran, which only seemed to highlight the bright red scales that formed as tiny checkmarks at the corners of her eyes.

Pidge stared at her, quietly mouthing a litany of “oh shit, holy shit, oh shit” that told Keith that she had not known of Sonali’s true race. Hunk’s bayard shimmered into non-existence as he dropped it.

Sonali smiled at them, a kinder smile than what she’d given Keith and bowed her head. “As the Green Paladin stated, I am Sonali, and I am an Altean member of the Resistance.”

“As we can see.” Coran stepped forward. “If I may be so bold, but I had believed Princess Allura and myself to be all that survived?” It was phrased as a statement, but the tone said it was a question.

“My ancestors were off planet when Altea fell and were, thankfully, able to hide when Zarkon
swept through the universe searching for our people. They joined up with other survivors and made a new home, hidden away from Zarkon and his tyranny.” Sonali explained.

“The resistance has been looking for a way to contact Voltron for some time, especially when the news of a surviving member of the Altean Royal court reached our ears. Rumors said it was the princess, but we thought that to be a Wake Angel tale until it was recently confirmed to us.” She laughed once. “Despite my assignment, I never anticipated that I would be the one to first meet with the Paladins of Voltron.”

“Your assignment?” Keith immediately followed up on. He knew Coran probably wanted to know more about the surviving Alteans, but he still didn’t trust this person. He had no reason to trust her. Furthermore, he didn’t like her.

She shot Keith a look, but it was Pidge who answered. “She was Lance’s handler.”

…

What?

He understood the terminology, but that implied that Lance was part of this resistance group. Lance. Who was brainwashed and made to think he was head over heels for the crown prince. And she expected him to just believe that Lance ignored his brainwashing and his ‘love’ for Lotor to betray him to the resistance?!

Yeah, no.

Lance had tried to murder them. There was no way he was chill with the resistance.

Mentally, Red seemed to shift, her discomfort painfully noticeable. She tugged on a memory of a conversation. Hunk had said, “But you didn’t leave”.

And Lance had responded, “I have my reasons”. Lance’s laughter, so dry and hurt, echoed around his response to Hunk.

“I was.” Sonali confirmed. The realization hit Keith like a train in the gut. Sonali was one of those reasons that Lance hadn’t left. He curled his hand into a fist and willed himself not to react, not to press her up against a wall and demand answers.

She wouldn’t give them to him like that. He had to be patient. He needed to be patient. Patience sucked and Keith hated it.

“It was a job that I… failed to properly uphold, and as such, I apologize to each of you.” Sonali continued. Her eyes darkened as she thought of what she was to say next. “Had I the strength, then I would have followed through with Lance’s request.”

Alarm bells as loud as the alarms in the firehouse rang through Keith’s mind. There was something off about her phrasing; something that instantly made him uneasy.

“His request?” Hunk asked before Keith could. He recognized the warning tone in Hunk’s voice, and took a little bit of comfort in the fact that he wasn’t the only one set off by what she said.

“He asked that we kill him should he fell too deeply.”

Sonali had no right to say those words so simply. Like those words weren’t a bomb shell. Like those words didn’t have power. Even Red seemed stunned by the revelation. Keith’s whole body
shook.

Based off that request, Keith could infer that Lance had known going off the deep-end to be a possibility, and yet he had still done it. Did that self-destructive choice stem from his feelings of uselessness, or from something worse?

He wanted to ask Lance himself, but he wasn’t there. He was still on that ship, with the bastard who had abused and used him. Blue had been of no help since Lance and Pidge vanished, and any attempts to reach out her had ended in failure.

He had no one to turn to with his fears and concerns about Lance, and it sucked.

“We?” Hunk asked, clearly deciding to focus on that tidbit instead of on the whole ‘killing Lance if he goes off the deep end’ bit.

“Matt.” Pidge explained, her expression darkening. “Lance knew about my brother and didn’t tell me.” While Keith’s flinch was mental, Hunk’s was physical. They both knew how much Pidge’s family meant to her, and for Lance to keep it from her?

He could understand why she’d be upset.

“He returned to Lotor so that I may reunite you with your brother.” Sonali told Pidge in a tone that told Keith this was a tired argument. She was going to say more, but Pidge cut her off.

“He should have told me!” She argued. “I could have helped somehow! I could have planned for being captured and helped somehow!”

“He knew there was nothing you could have done to help, not once Narti had you. She could make you do anything, say anything. She could have asked any secret and you would have gladly spoken it!”

…

…

Okay. Keith needed a moment to process that. To process all of that. Lance had betrayed Pidge to get her captured so that he could return to Lotor so he could set Sonali free so she could reunite Pidge with her brother. Oh! And there was something that could control a person which Pidge had been exposed to. That was… a lot to take in.

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“There is nothing to be done about the past now.” Sonali’s tone on the matter was final. She turned to Keith and the others. “I was unaware of Lance’s plan and only found out when he rescued me. He was insistent on the Green Paladin’s escape and by his words and actions, I can only assume that he never meant for her to be captured as well.”

“So, Lance did betray us.” Hunk sounded as if he were attempting to swallow a spoonful of flour. “For… a good cause.”

“For ME!” Pidge shouted. “He did it for me, and for the resistance!”

“He could have told us if not you.” Hunk pointed out. “But Sonali is right. What’s done is done.
So now, how do we get him back?”

Keith shook his head and held up his hand. “Hold on. I want to know why Lance isn’t with you now if he was there for the escape.”

Both Sonali and Pidge looked away, each looking as if they’d swallowed a lemon. “He sacrificed himself to allow our escape.” Sonali answered when it became apparent Pidge would not.

“You say that like he’s dead!” Pidge instantly snapped back, twisting around to glare at Sonali. “He’s not!”

“He’s as good as.” Sonali argued. “Lotor won’t let what happened happen again. He’ll be under constant watch… if he survived the fight in the first place. And then, as soon as Lotor’s able, he’ll have Lance sent to Zarkon’s central demand or, worse, a Druid outpost to be…” She couldn’t seem to bring herself to say the words to finish the sentence. Instead she just waved her hands about for a moment. “He’s gone.” She finished.

The entire group fell silent. Keith was… unsure how to feel. He needed time to process this entire conversation, but it was moving too rapidly for him to do so.

“Perhaps with the resistance’s aid we can recover him.” Coran suggested after a full moment of silence. He stoked and pulled at his mustache as he thought and planned. “How many of you are there?”

Sonali exhaled sharply, and by the set of her jaw, Keith could tell she wasn’t happy. “A couple hundred strong. Couple thousand if you include other species, although we’re spread and scattered across the Empire.”

“She was assigned to the douche canoe before Lance showed up.” A small smile tugged at Sonali’s lips at how Pidge referred to Lotor.

“She referred to him as Prince L’Oréal.” She informed them all quietly.

Keith snorted quietly to himself. Yeah, that sounded like Lance alright.

“And then you became his ‘handler’?” Hunk asked.

“Yes. Matt and I persuaded Lance to join the Druids.” She paused, her eyebrows knitting as she looked down. “I refuse to regret that choice as it has saved hundreds of lives, but I do regret the affect it had on Lance.”

They were all quiet as that information sunk in. It was disturbing and interesting to think that despite how badly he had wanted to hurt the team, Lance had still tried to save others. That through the corruption and the mess, Lance had still been a Paladin at his core.

No wonder Blue had refused to give him up easily.

“Lance saved lives?” Hunk clarified.

“He did.” Sonali confirmed with a solemn nod. She sighed. “Look, the prince isn’t kind, but… if anyone had a chance of survival… if anyone could survive the Druids and Lotor…” She trailed off, but Keith knew what she about to say.

If anyone could survive, it would be Lance.
Pidge shuddered, an untold story playing out behind her eyes. “The way he said Lance’s name.” She muttered before making a face like she was going to be sick. “I’ve never seen something so twisted before.”

Sonali shared a look with her, a look of mutual understanding. If she was Lance’s handler, Keith could only imagine what all she was subject to. What all she’d seen. What Pidge had apparently seen. He made a mental note to sit down with her and talk about it.

“He had a fond spot for Lance.” Sonali added what Keith felt was the understatement of the year.

Coran nodded, his eyes dark as he looked away. “We assumed as much when we noted his jewelry were courting gifts.”

“There was little choice available on Lance’s part. He put Lotor off as much as he could.” Sonali informed them as if it was meant to make them feel better.

“And was getting with Lotor part of what you and Matt persuaded Lance to do?” Hunk asked, his voice tense. Keith got the sense that if it was, Hunk was going to be having some words with Matt. Heck, Keith himself would be having words with Matt if that was the case.

“No!” Sonali shook her head. “Unfortunately, Lance didn’t have much choice in that matter. The prince was very... persistent.”

“Did he know about you?” Coran asked.

“Lance?” Sonali asked. “He didn’t know of my heritage, no. Standard procedure states that those who become Druid spies are told as little as possible. Within time, all of them succumb to the corruption and betray us. The less they know, the safer it is for everyone. He shouldn’t have known about me at all, but... with his unique status and position, my position had to be revealed.”

“Hold up, I got questions, like, plural. 1) What the Quiznak? Did Lance know about that? 2) His unique status and position?” Hunk stepped forward, closer to Sonali. “You care to explain that?”

Keith watched Hunk cautiously. He recognized the undertone of anger in Hunk’s voice, but unless Hunk actually acted on it, then Keith would do nothing. Those were questions Keith wanted answered himself.

Although, Keith wondered what the source of Hunk’s anger was. Was he angry that Lance had done this knowing the risks, or did he believe that they had not warned Lance at first?

“This was something Lance was aware of, yes.” Sonali nodded. “I tried my best to help him, but... I am no alchemist. I could not have foreseen how aggressive the Galra were in their attempts to corrupt him.” She paused, a beginning of a smile tugging at her lips. “Even still, he put up a valiant battle against it. The Galra were more persistent with him than for any other Druid, and yet he still lasted longer than any other. The information he provided was invaluable. You all should be very proud of him.”

“I’ll be proud when he’s back with us.” Keith replied when no one else did.

The faint beginnings of Sonali’s smile fell, but she didn’t try to dissuade their hope again. She just sighed.

“To answer the second question,” Sonali continued. “Lance’s father’s Blood Brother was the Druid Xana, who was in the running to replace one of the Druids of the Four Directions that served directly under the High Priestess; additionally, he was also Lance’s mentor in Druid Arts. This
gave Lance a… unique position in the Druids, and when coupled with the attention of the prince…” She trailed off.

“And that led to his status.” Pidge added.

“Yes. We’ve already established that Lotor was interested in Lance. Thanks to that, he was able to access things through the prince that no other has been able to access before. Many prisoners were saved from the information Lance provided.”

Well, it was good that Lance was able to use the bullshit he went through to save people, but Keith still wished Lance hadn’t needed to go through it at all.

“So, did Lance just jump into bed with Lotor or was there more there?” Hunk asked. “You said he was persistent.”

“He was.” Sonali agreed. “Lance put him off for as long as he could, but after introducing him to *Furê a kuqa* and Kanki laced with corrupted quintessence, I’m afraid it was a downhill battle.” She pursed her lips.

Coran inhaled sharply at the names, an angry frown marring his face. Keith eyed him and made a mental note to follow up on that later.

“I know the Fur thing is Space Weed, but what’s Kanki?” Hunk asked. Well, at least Hunk gave him some idea of what it was.

“It’s a spirit or an alcohol.” Sonali replied. “I prefer nunvil myself, but Lance made his feelings on that quite clear.”

Ordinarily the reminder of their first encounter with nunvil would have made Keith laugh, but all he could think of was Lotor getting Lance drunk to do things with him. Pidge looked sickenened by the idea, and like she might have witnessed it.

“And knowing this, you still left him there?”

“It wasn’t like I could easily pull him out!” Sonali replied. “Lotor was attentive and by the time I could pull Lance out, it was too late. Besides, he seemed to enjoy it.”

Keith didn’t realize he moved until the others were shouting at him and Hunk’s hands were on him, trying to stop him. The sharp edge of his luxite blade was pressed against Sonali’s neck.

“Don’t ever say he enjoyed it again.” He warned her in a low growl before allowing Hunk to pull him back.

That was it. He couldn’t stay here, waiting. He couldn’t stay and wait for help from a resistance, the same resistance that had subjected Lance to that torture in the first place. He wasn’t going to wait and let Lotor screw with Lance some more.

He wasn’t.

He turned to Red. “We’re going to get Lance.” He told Hunk and Pidge from over his shoulder.

“Keith, no!” Hunk’s hands were back on him, holding him back. “You’re emotional. I’m emotional. We’re all emotional. And, and, and, we’re in no shape to get Lance now. We aren’t. Just think about it.”
“I just did!” Keith argued. “Sonali knows how to get back. We succeeded in getting him back before with the three of us, we can succeed again.”

“I shouldn’t have to remind you how difficult that was, and that was with Lotor gone! We almost died then, Keith. With Lotor there, you think it’s going to be easy? If he’s anything like his father, do you really think we can take him on?” Hunk argued back. Keith opened his mouth to reply but Hunk cut him off. “No. The answer you’re about to say is ‘no’.”

Keith’s mouth shut with an audible snap.

“I want Lance back too, believe me, I do. But let’s see what help Sonali’s resistance and Matt can offer. Then you can fly off the handle and get Lance back, alright?”

Keith’s body shook with his anger, but he swallowed it down and gritted his teeth. “Fine.” He’d continue to have patience… for now. But staying in the hangar or being near Sonali was only going to tempt him. Knowing that, he spun on his heel and exited.

Chapter End Notes

So, Ghost didn't know what a Wake Angel is, and I'm like "I know you've seen Titan AE" and she's like "Okay, so cool, the google definition was right, but what is a Wake Angel?"

So, for starters, if you haven't seen Titan AE, I 100% recommend it. I actually saw it first in theaters, and even to this day, it remains one of my favorite movies. So, if you haven't seen Titan AE, Wake Angels are basically ghost space manta-rays that are supposedly really lucky to see. They follow in the wakes of spaceships.

Second, the way I kinda thought of the Wake Angels in Voltron was that they are super rare and not commonly seen. They're normally spotted out in deep space, and usually thought to be a hallucination. No one's really quite sure if they exist or not. Think the white flying things in S7E6, The Journey Within.

So to say something is a 'Wake Angel Tale', it's basically the same as a 'Fairy tale'. Like a sailor going out to sea and coming back and saying he saw a 'mermaid'. 
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Keith found out that Lance and Pidge were missing. Hunk explained that the plan was to 'wait' for a couple of days to see if anything would happen.

Towards the end of the time limit to wait, Pidge and Sonali happened to find Voltron and be picked up by Keith. Finally, Keith and the rest of the time received some long awaited answers to Lance's activities while not with the team. They agree to meet up with the resistance so that Pidge could reunite with her brother and they could get allies for getting Lance back.

**I said on Tumblr I'd post this chapter a bit earlier than usual, sooo... here you go! :D**

**Trigger Warning(s):** REFERENCED/MENTIONED CHARACTER(S) DEATH, Grief, Sorrow

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on [Tumblr](https://example.com). Thank you!

Sonali’s resistance was based on a small, backwater, out of the way planet known as Pollux; where many Alteans found refuge after Zarkon’s annihilation of Altea. From up in space, Keith could tell it was a beautiful planet with large green fields, sandy deserts, dark forests, and deep oceans.

In many ways, it reminded Keith of Earth.

There was just one really large glaring difference: Pollux looked completely uninhabited by sentient, intelligent life. There were no roads, no cities, no sign of infrastructure at all.

As they approached orbit, Sonali sent a coded transmission that assured the resistance they were friendly. It took a couple of days, but finally the Castle received a response code – something that told Keith there was at least *someone* down there – and they started their decent to the planet’s surface.

The Castle Ship landed on one of the wide stretches of shoreline, bordering on a beach with deep blue waters that stretched out and became one with the horizon. There was a light breeze, clear sky, it was painfully perfect. Keith was sure Lance would have loved it had he been here. It served as a cold, cruel, harsh reminder to the reality that Lance was not with them.

Lance was not with them, and while that seemed to be an ever present, encompassing dark cloud
over his, Pidge’s, and Hunk’s moods, Allura seemed to be doing great. Just. Great.

She was flourishing under the knowledge of there being other *uncorrupted* Alteans out there. Alteans who weren’t the Druids. As such, she – and to a lesser extent, Coran – had become attached to Sonali. There was rarely a moment where she wasn’t asking the former Galra Solider about Pollux and the survivors of Altea.

It seemed as if she’d forgotten completely about Lance in her excitement for these Alteans, although she was seldom quiet when he was brought up. She was vindicated about having been right about Lance’s betrayal. She said she understood why it had been done, yet Keith still felt that she was persecuting Lance anyways.

Keith couldn’t blame her for wanting to focus more on the existence of her people than Lance… but Lance *was* one of her people. She could be excited about this discovery, but he didn’t think it should take her focus away from the fact that Lance was still missing or what all Lance had done.

And it was understandable for her to be so excited. She had believed herself and Coran to be the last, so it only made sense that she was elated at the idea of others. It was natural for her to be excited, and Keith *wanted* to be excited for her.

It was just that Keith could practically see the wheels spinning and cogs turning in her head. He could still feel and see judgement in her gaze anytime she looked at him or one of the other Paladins.

She may not have said the word exactly, but that didn’t mean her thoughts weren’t obvious to him. Allura didn’t think they were *proper* Paladins. She had this rose-colored, stained-glass vision of the Paladins of the Past – except Zarkon – which painted them in a saintly light. They were *perfection*; they were what *true* and *proper* Paladins should be.

Keith and the others didn’t fit into that vision.

He had thought she was over it, but the more time Allura spent with Sonali, the more he started to doubt that.

Not that it mattered what she thought or wanted when it came to the Paladins. While Allura had a connection to the Lions, the Lions themselves chose their pilots, not her. Her attempts to force Blue to move on had been more than enough proof of that.

Allura just had to grow up and accept that they were the Paladins… again.

He would joke about paying to see her try to take any of the Lions away from them, but the truth was that he had already seen that sad spectacle, and he had no desire to witness it again.

Keith turned to Sonali, who was standing closer to Allura on the bridge, and crossed his arms, raising an eyebrow. “Planet looks empty.” He commented curtly.

It wasn’t that he thought she’d lead them into a trap, but… he didn’t like her. She had persuaded Lance to join the Druids, to be abused and used by Lotor, and then had left him after Lance went back for her. If Keith had been in her shoes, then 1) none of that would have happened, and 2) Keith wouldn’t have left Lance to Lotor’s nonexistent mercy.

He knew his opinion was shared by Hunk, who was normally willing to be at least friendly towards potential new allies. Pidge was better with Sonali, but only because she was excited for her brother and trying to ‘honor’ Lance’s sacrifice.
He didn’t judge her for that… he really didn’t. She was trying to distract herself from the horrors she had seen, and he couldn’t blame her for that.

He wished that he had more time to sit and talk with Pidge. It was clear that her ‘trip’ to Lotor’s ship had greatly affected her. While she was vibrating with excitement at the prospect of seeing her brother again, it was almost subdued. Like she wasn’t physically here, like her mind was still on that ship with Lance.

He didn’t know what all had happened. It wasn’t exactly feasible for him to ask Sonali, especially with Allura attached at the hip. Pidge said she was ‘fine’ anytime he’d asked her.

He was about at wit’s end, trying to fix this, but… he didn’t know exactly how or what to ‘fix’. Lance would have. Lance would have been able to take one look at Pidge and known exactly what to do. But Keith wasn’t Lance, and he didn’t know.

Hunk said to just give her time, but somehow, Keith didn’t feel like that was what she needed. Especially since he knew that she cried herself to sleep since returning.

Still, without Lance, he had only Hunk to rely on for this emotional stuff. They were both great emotional supports, although he supposed that was why they were the legs – they supported the team. Which also explained why the team was such a wreck without Lance. They were unbalanced. Not to mention they were missing their decisive head too.

“It’s supposed to.” Sonali replied, smiling tightly at him with a look that made Keith want to punch her. He crossed his arms to prevent himself from following through on the action but refused to look away from her.

Keith knew he should probably head to the training deck, work off some of his frustration and anger, but… it hadn’t been helping when all he could imagine were Lotor and Sonali super-imposed onto the training robots’ heads.

“We keep our cities underground.” Sonali explained, raising her voice slightly as she addressed everyone. “There are some of us that live as nomads on the surface, but… we try to limit our noticeable presence on the planet. The less the Galra suspect us, the better.”

Allura nodded. “It is my hope that in time, we can provide a future where our people need not fear or hide.”

Sonali smiled at her. It wasn’t very different from the smile she gave Keith, but the difference was in the eyes. Her eyes were warm and soft when she looked at Allura, the faintest glittering the only evidence that she was close to tears.

“That sounds like a dream, princess.”

Keith hunched his shoulders, trying his hardest not to make a face as he looked away towards the shoreline once again. He didn’t want to look at the beach. It would only remind him of Lance’s absence, but there weren’t many other places for him to look.

Red gave a sympathetic rumble, telling him that she was there for him.

She wasn’t the best with feelings either, the lion was about action and instinct, but she was trying to understand for him. He appreciated that.

“Believe it or not, Lance was actually incredibly helpful to that cause.” Sonali continued, and Keith felt his gut twist.
And there it was: the real reason Keith couldn’t punch Sonali in the face: she was Lance’s biggest supporter... behind Keith and the other Paladins, of course. Too many times in her conversations with Allura had Sonali slipped in a small but brief compliment towards Lance, alluding to his accomplishments.

Lance was so brave. Lance was so talented. Lance was this, and Lance was that. It almost sounded like she had a crush on him sometimes.

It was heartening to hear someone else support Lance for once, but Keith wished it wasn’t because of all that Lance had gone through. Lance shouldn’t have had to suffer the way he did to earn this praise.

Like any other time Lance was brought up, Allura’s mouth tightened and her gaze hardened. Unlike any other time, she held her silence after a quick sharp look at Keith. Despite the praises Sonali sung of Lance, it seemed that Allura couldn’t let his ‘betrayals’ – real or imaginary – go.

Well, regardless of Allura’s feelings, she wasn’t denying them getting Lance back. Keith would take what victories he could. No matter how small they felt with her.

Keith exhaled heavily through his nose. Hunk shot him a sympathetic look and rested a hand on his shoulder.

“We won’t be here for long, alright?” Hunk promised. “Just to see Matt, get help, and then we’ll go kick Lotor’s ass and take Lance back.”

The corner of Keith’s mouth twitched, and he curled his hands into a fist before relaxing. “Sounds great.”

Hunk’s hand disappeared only to clap firmly against Keith’s back. “Exactly!” And then it was gone again as Hunk turned away and headed towards the Alteans. “So, we going out there or what?”

“I want to see my brother.” Pidge chimed in, immediately walking to Hunk’s side.

“Since my code was used, Matt should have been alerted unless he was on a mission.” Sonali informed her with a small smile. “And since he became a liaison between agents out in the field, he hasn’t really been sent on anymore missions.”

“He’s a liaison?” Keith asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Technically he’s a communications officer.” Sonali replied with a dismissive half shrug. “But he primarily acts as a communication bridge, or a liaison, between the resistance and field members.”

“So, he’s normally safe?” Pidge asked, and Sonali’s smile turned a bit sad.

“Sometimes. While he works primarily as a communications officer, he also is a field agent. If needed, he’s not afraid to go out and, as he says, ‘get his hands dirty’.”

Pidge laughed to herself, her eyes glimmering with unshed tears – happy or sad, Keith couldn’t say. “That sounds like Matt.”

“He’s a good man.” Sonali added. “I know he’ll be excited to see you again.” She paused and laughed to herself. “If for no reason than because someone else will understand his ‘meme-ing’.”

Pidge sniffed and smiled, wiping away the wetness in her eyes. “Yeah.” She nodded. “That
definitely sounds like Matt. And maybe he can help us get Lance back too.”

“Then let’s go see him,” Hunk prompted again, and that was all that was needed for them to get going.

Plans had already been made before landing on the planet. Coran would be staying on the castle. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to see the resistance or the remaining Alteans, but he felt he should remain with the ship while the Princess journeyed on, unwilling to leave the castle in the hands of the Blade or Slav.

Likewise, the Blade of Marmora – including Keith – would be staying behind. Sonali had brought up concerns about Keith’s presence causing unrest amongst the resistance. The Blade of Marmora was considered an extremist group by their society and was distinctly unwelcome.

Likewise, the Blade of Marmora was anything but welcoming to the Resistance. They trusted few outside their organization, and the only reason they trusted Voltron as they did was because Keith was a member.

His exclusion from the group was mostly fine for Keith. He had little interest in going, except to punch Matt in the teeth if it turned out that he had intended for Lance to get involved with Lotor. In his absence, he felt sure that he could trust Hunk for that job.

To no one’s surprise, Slav had elected to stay in the castle. The last Keith had seen of him, he had scampered off towards what Keith thought might have been the Blue Hangar.

He watched as Allura, Hunk, Pidge, and Sonali exited the castle, heading towards the nearby tree line of a vast forest that stretched out towards distant mountains. Keith waited until they faded from sight before turning his back on them and heading further into the castle.

He was mostly fine not going, but he was anxious about being separated from his team again. The anxiety wasn’t nearly as strong as it had been on the day of the market trip, so he chalked it up to normal nerves rather than anything else. He was just anxious because there currently wasn’t a good track record with the team being separated, that was all.

There were a couple of different places he could go and a few different activities he could do to keep his mind off everything, but instead of turning to any of those places, he instead stopped by the Blue Hangar.

He hadn’t been in there since that time with Lance. Without Lance, he was sure there wouldn’t be any answers as to what exactly happened, but he still felt compelled to go in anyways. Like being near the Blue Lion would be like being near Lance.

Besides, he had a hunch that this was where Slav had disappeared off to, and he had a bone to pick with the scientist. Slav had been avoiding him ever since he got back from his ‘field trip’ with the Blade. Not that he could exactly blame Slav for that. His mood had been volcanic since Lance disappeared, and even Pidge’s return failed to properly quench his anger.

He was right about where Slav was.

Slav’s gaze was on him the instant the door opened, considering him. When he finally looked away, Keith felt like he had been found wanting. Slav had an annoying habit of inspiring that feeling.

“Is this right?” He asked.
“It is hard to say.” Slav’s response was almost dismissive. “The multiverse is vast and ever changing. In some realities, you are the current acting Black Paladin.”

Keith didn’t need to think on that statement to know it was fifty shades of wrong. He couldn’t be the Black Paladin. That was Shiro’s job, and Keith just wasn’t cut out for it. Not yet, maybe not ever. All one needed to do was look at how well his command had suited the team thus far to see that.

No, he was fine being the second in command, the one who took control only when Shiro wasn’t around.

He pitied the Keiths in the realities where he became the Black Paladin, and not only the Keiths, but the teams of those realities too.

He didn’t want to linger on the thought of him becoming the Black Paladin. “Did you know about Pidge’s brother and this resistance?” He asked Slav instead. The scientist gave him a curious look.

“The Green Paladin’s brother typically ends up aligned with what ever resistance group has sprung up separate from the Blade of Marmora.”

Well, that answered practically nothing. All it told Keith was that Matt usually ended up in a resistance in most of the realities, but it didn’t tell him if Slav knew about it in this reality. “And what about in this reality?”

“It was 209% likely that this reality’s Matt would apart of this resistance, yes.”

“And what about Pidge? Does she get her brother back?” Keith asked before hastily adding on, “In the happy ending you want for this reality.” The last thing he wanted was the statistics on whether or not Pidge was likely to find her brother in all realities. He was only interested in this one.

“It is hard to say.” Slav repeated from earlier in the conversation. As if to respond to Keith herself, the Blue Lion’s eyes glimmered before darkening in a way that caused a chill to settle in his bones.

“That doesn’t answer my question.” Keith frowned. There was this sense of something wrong that crept up upon him like a shadow. Unease prickled at the back of his neck.

It seemed Slav wasn’t going to reply. He continued to look up at the Blue Lion for a moment longer, ignoring Keith. Then, as if something in the scientist was satisfied, he nodded and turned towards the hangar doors to scamper away.

Keith was tempted to grab him as he passed, but he knew from experience that unless Slav wanted him to catch him, it was pointless.

The fact he never got his answer only served to cause his unease to grow until it was compacting heavily down on him. It felt like it would suffocate him if he let it.

He didn’t like this at all.

The Blue Lion’s eyes were dark, but he still felt like he could feel their gaze weighing heavily down upon him. The hangar usually felt like a comforting cool breeze, but it currently felt cold and empty in a way that made Keith feel distinctly unwelcome. He wasn’t wanted here.

Perhaps it was silly of him, but he backed away from the Lion. He didn’t exactly feel safe bearing his back to her as he left.
He toyed with the idea of going to the training rooms, but he knew that was likely where Myklar and Azur were, and he had little interest in seeing them. They would only want to test his control and to see if there were any new Galra changes to him.

So instead, he headed back up to the bridge to keep Coran company. Usually Keith wasn’t interested in the stories the older man had to tell but listening to them was a better waste of time than being examined by his fellow blades.

It took about an hour until they received their first check in from Hunk and the others.

The meeting with the resistance operatives in the forest had been successful save for one small factor: Matt. Apparently, he hadn’t been among their numbers as he’d taken another agent with him to rescue Sonali a few days ago.

The resistance operatives in the forest hadn’t been able to answer any of Pidge’s questions, but they assured her that there would be more information on Matt at their city.

While irritated and upset, Pidge was trying to stay optimistic. Which Keith didn’t really think sounded like Pidge, so he assumed that was Hunk just trying to be optimistic himself. Beyond that, everything sounded as fine as it could be, so Keith pushed the information to the back of his mind and settled in to listen to another one of Coran’s longwinded stories about the previous paladins.

He was starting to regret not going to the training room to be poked and prodded at, but it was too late to back out now.

Hunk’s second check in thankfully interrupted Coran in the middle of some boring space mall adventure where he’d supposedly really given the Unilu what-for. This time, however, the news he bore was considerably less pleasant.

They had reached the city and Pidge had received answers about her brother. Matt had left only a couple hours before Sonali had given her code for access and permission to land, and thus far, the resistance had been unsuccessful in contacting Matt.

It was standard protocol to try to restrict their communications as much as possible while near one of Lotor’s ships. Evidently, he had a talent for finding resistances and taking care of them. Something even the Blade of Marmora had experienced firsthand.

As such, there’d been nothing but Radio Silence from Matt. The resistance could tell he was alright thanks to the communicator that he had which would alert them if he was killed. Other than that, they had no way to call him back until he initiated contact.

Which meant that he was infiltrating Lotor’s ship to get someone who wasn’t even there anymore. He was going into danger for no reason – not that Matt knew that – and there was nothing anyone could do to stop that.

To make matters worse, the resistance had originally considered the mission a suicide mission. The risk was too great, but Matt had disagreed. He refused to leave Sonali behind, which was admirable if not stupid.

Not that Keith could talk. Like Matt, he didn’t believe in leaving anyone behind. He supposed he picked that up from his dad. He couldn’t leave anyone behind either and it’d gotten him killed.

In the meantime, the resistance was open to negotiating an alliance with the Paladins of Voltron. Although, Hunk had suggested that they should perhaps wait a day before starting those talks to see if Matt might radio in with a mission failure since Sonali had already been rescued.
It’d been a couple of days since he’d left, so, it was possible – if not a bit unlikely.

Keith privately thought this was whole thing was cruel for Pidge. Not that any of them had any choice in the matter. It was just, she finally was given hope to see her brother again, and it was being stolen away before her eyes.

It was like opening a Christmas present and finding the box empty.

Hunk said he’d next check in if something happened or in the morning, which ever came first. Keith hoped it’d be for something good happening, like Matt returning unscathed. Pidge needed good news like that.

The unease from earlier only seemed to grow like shadows at twilight as Coran ended the call from Hunk. He shivered as the cold settled into his bones and he drew his jacket tight as if it could keep out the chill.

Evening fell upon the Castle, and a spread of stars replaced the light blue sky. Keith watched the blanket of darkness as it spread across the landscape, thinking that it looked all too much like a physical representation of the unease that had been growing through out the day.

Nothing was worse than having a feeling that something was going to happen and being hapless to stop it.

Sleep, of course, alluded him just as it had the past couple of nights.

His bed felt too large and empty without Lance, his room too quiet without his humming. It unnerved him even when he wasn’t feeling like the sky was going to collapse at any moment. He laid in bed for at least an hour, staring at the ceiling and trying to pretend like the lack of warmth pressed up against him wasn’t an issue.

But it was an issue. It was an issue because it meant Lance wasn’t there. He wasn’t safe with the pride where he belonged. He was out there somewhere in the vast expanse of space, out of the pride’s reach. Potentially injured or, worse, brainwashed into a murderous ball of hatred.

Keith couldn’t take it anymore. He stole out of his room, creeping through the dimly lit hallways of the castle. If Myklar or Azur – who were patrolling the castle – noticed him, they didn’t call him out. Something Keith was appreciative of.

The last thing he wanted right now was to talk to someone.

Well, unless that someone was Lance. He would give anything to talk to Lance right now, to make sure he was safe, okay, and sane.

He ended up on one of the observation decks that could turn into an outdoor patio/balcony. He sat with his legs over hanging the banister, looking out into the dark ocean. There had to be a moon for the planet as there were waves, but Keith couldn’t see it or its light.

Still, if he watched, he thought he could see the white foaming peaks of the waves as they crested and crashed upon the shore. The cool wind howled as it cut through the balusters of the banister, carrying with it the accompanying crashing noise of the waves from down below.

It reminded Keith of what he’d seen with Lance. Not the terrifying image of his house sitting on a lake of lava and fire, but the other image with the ocean. There’d been lava there too, but it’d been… nicer. Not as hazardous.
He felt better out here. Not as oppressed and compressed. Like the wind was sharp enough to cut away the holds the unease had on him. It allowed him time to think and to wonder.

He had no concept of time, or of how long he’d been sitting out there. But when his fingers grew numb and it felt as if his blood had been replaced with ice, he figured it was time to go in.

Surprisingly, Red wasn’t complaining the chill. Which, honestly, should have tipped him off to something being wrong. Instead, it was the Blue Lion’s roar that alerted him to all not being well.

The Lions roaring wasn’t anything particularly new or odd. They tended to do it when they felt they needed to physically get their Paladin’s attention. But something about this roar set Keith’s teeth on edge.

It wasn’t like her normal roar – and at this point, he thought they’d all heard it enough times to be able to tell the difference. This time it sounded – and felt – more private and mournful. It sounded like a mother crying, grieving over her child.

The pure melancholy of it had Keith stopped in his tracks, frozen in an icy wave of sorrow. Red was with him within a second, flushing the ice with fire and flames, urging him to go. Her fire stayed with him as he raced to Blue’s hangar, rushing him and pushing to go faster, faster, faster.

He passed through the threshold of Blue’s hangar just in time for her mournful song to end, and to watch as her entire body fell dark and she fell limply to the floor. Her particle barrier flickered before coming online, sealing off any access to her.

Red’s panic surged in his mind, catching onto him like a fire caught onto tissue paper. There were empty voids that Keith couldn’t not notice. Spaces that used to be filled with Lance and now where just nothing.

Those spaces had been voids since Lance’s disappearance, but it’d been a like there was a taut rope still assuring Keith of Lance’s existence. Now that was gone, leaving a gaping maw of frigid ice and loneliness.

It felt like Lance had been the only thing keeping that cold at bay, and now there was nothing stopping it from reaching out through the paladin bonds with thin icy fingers. It felt like… Like Lance was just gone.

Which wasn’t possible. It just wasn’t.

Lance couldn’t be gone! He was a Paladin of Voltron! There was so much Keith wanted to say, that Keith needed to say. They had Bonding Moments!

To some degree, he took note of Red snapping at the cold, warding it off with her own fire. He could feel it blazing inside him, and he knew it was hot, yet all he could feel was the chill of the void on his heart.

For the first time in a long while, he felt the back of his eyes prickle. This reality didn’t seem real, and that was when it hit him. He shot up – not knowing when he’d fallen to the floor – and rushed past a startled Coran.

He searched the castle over twice, but somehow Slav managed to evade him. It was easier to think and focus on something else; on Slav and whether or not this was the ‘end’ Slav had wanted. Was this what Keith had guided the team towards? Was this the happy ending? Disappearances and death?!
The thought that he might have caused this outcome was... unbearable. That he could have caused Lance’s... Keith couldn’t even bear to think it, yet the thought kept returning like a demented boomerang out for his blood.

Keith demanded answers and the only one who could grant them refused to even show his face.

He ended up spending the night in Red. The cold chill of Lance’s disappearance couldn’t quite reach him there. It couldn’t pervade through Red’s fire and warmth and further harm him. She was a shelter, even against his own poisonous thoughts, protecting him through the night.

It was a very sleepless night, and yet Keith had the feeling it was only going to get worse.

Not that there was anything much worse than Lance’s... than Lance... than Lance’s disappearance. He could feel Red’s worry spike, and he prepared himself for the worst as he finally crawled out of her relative safety to head to the bridge.

If he was going to receive more bad news, it was likely to come from the on-planet party, and by the time he reached the bridge, he had a sinking suspicion as to what that bad news could be.

He hoped he was wrong. He prayed he was wrong.

He wasn’t wrong.

“The ship’s primary crystal shattered, and somehow fried the entire electrical system and cracked the secondary crystals. Preliminary reports are that only a portion of the crew survived, including Lotor.” Keith walked in to Hunk informing Coran.

Coran inhaled deeply and nodded. “And Matt?”

“According to the communicator? He’s...” Hunk’s holoimage faltered, and he side glanced at something outside the screen’s view. “He’s gone.”

This must have been what ki... what caused Lance’s disappearance. Only a portion of the crew survived, and of course Lotor was listed among those. Not Lance. Not Matt. Not anyone who mattered, but Lotor.

“Pidge is... Well, she’s a mess.” Hunk informed them quietly, his voice holding grief for her. “She doesn’t want to believe her brother is dead, not after all this.”

“It is unfortunate that she should go through this much pain and suffering.” Allura’s voice came from off screen, understanding yet firm. “While I mourn with her, we have at least found additional allies to help our battle against the Galra. Matt’s death will be avenged.”

“I don’t think she wants to hear that, Allura.” Hunk argued, the sad tired tone in his voice saying that this was not the first – nor would it likely be the last – time that he had told her as much. Whatever part of Keith that thought Allura would be the most understanding of Pidge’s situation withered.

After a sleepless night, Keith had no patience for the hand-holding Hunk was attempting with the princess. He cut in abruptly. “Allura, imagine you got here after hearing there were surviving Alteans and discovered that they were all dead; killed just hours after you arrived. How would you feel?”

Hunk froze, his mouth literally hanging open. His eyes darted to something off screen – presumably Allura – and then back to the holoscreen. There was silence for a good couple of
moments before he heard Allura clearing her throat.

“I see.” He was pleased to note her response seemed strangled. “Regardless, we will be returning to the castle within a couple of days. I need time to secure an alliance, and Pidge’s loss is something that will weigh heavily on the negotiations.”

Keith exchanged a look with Coran, and the adviser cleared his throat. “Sounds about right!” He cheered or tried to. Hopefully it came across more genuine in the holocall than it did in reality.

“Has anything happened at the castle?” Allura asked.

“Nope.” Coran sung out, holding out the ‘o’ in the word. “Everything’s peaches and cream!” Keith resisted the very real and very strong urge to both face palm and strangle Coran.

Hunk frowned. “Do you mean ‘Peachy Keen’?”

“Quite right, Number 2!” Coran’s grin looked painfully forced. For a royal advisor, Coran did not know how to lie, and Keith found that entire fact baffling. He had to cut in and save this mess.

“Beyond a long night, everything is fine. Focus on the negations and Pidge.” Keith commanded. Hunk nodded in agreement.

“Will do. Copy that.” His hand hovered over the holocall like he was going to end it. “Take care, alright?” He added before finally ending the call. Both Keith and Coran let out a sigh of relief.

It wasn’t that Keith wanted to lie to the others, but... they didn’t need to know about Lance quite yet. Not only because it could and would affect the negotiations, but also because Keith had no doubt Allura would take the news about the Blue Lion too far. She’d assume Lance was dead – and he wasn’t, he just... wasn’t. He couldn’t be – and push for a new Blue Paladin to be found on this planet.

Keith didn’t check her hangar before heading up to the bridge, but he doubted that particle barrier would be dropping anytime soon. Besides, it seemed cruel to force a new Paladin on Blue when Lance wasn’t dead. And if he was – he wasn’t, but if he was – then it seemed extra cruel to not allow Blue time to grieve.

Keith hated to say this, but Matt’s death worked in their favor. It distracted everyone from thinking that perhaps what had killed Matt had affected Lance as well. Or perhaps they assumed Lance to have escaped with Lotor.

Had Keith not been here to experience the Blue Lion’s reactions, he might have thought the same.

Keith sunk down into his station, dropping his head and holding it in his hands. “What a quiznaking mess.” He muttered.

Red brushed against him in a gentle caress, attempting to reassure him that he had made the right choice by holding his silence. Yet even with her warmth, the chill of Lance’s absence stayed. He feared it’d never leave.

Chapter End Notes

The End.
Joking, I promise. There's still more to come. :)
Escape pt.2

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Pidge, Hunk, and Allura met with the resistance to hopefully negotiate an alliance between them. Pidge hoped to see her brother as last Sonali knew, Matt was still with the resistance. However, upon reaching the Resistance, Pidge was informed that Matt was dead. Meanwhile, Keith realizes thanks to Blue that Lance is also dead. Upon finding out about Matt's death, he and Coran decide to keep Lance's death quiet for now.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Referenced/Mentioned Sex, Referenced/Mentioned Dubious consent, Referenced/Mentioned Alcohol, Referenced/Mentioned Drugs, Cursing, Blood, Quintessence, Lotor

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A warm hand worked its way through Lance’s hair, gently scratching at his scalp occasionally. Half asleep, he groaned, pushing his head into the hand. Someone chuckled above him, the sound warm, light, and familiar.

“See? He is fine with me.” The person who chuckled purred, and it took Lance less than a second to recognize the voice. He would recognize this person anywhere.

Lotor.

His body automatically stiffened, and there was the sound of a gun being pulled and “Enough.” Lotor’s sharp voice halted all noise. “He is waking up after a traumatic experience. Allow him a moment to realize that he is safe again.”

The hand in his hair brushed down his face and pressed against one of his scales. Automatically his body relaxed as Lotor’s emotions were filtered through. Happiness, excitement, worry, concern, possession, anger… nothing was held back, and Lance whimpered from the pure overload.

“I was so worried about you.” Lotor said, and Lance finally opened his eyes to see the prince. The hand on his scale slid down his face to the hallow of his throat, and instinctually Lance barred it for him. No, not instinctually, but habitually. It was a habit that had been ingrained into Lance through repeated offense. He was conditioned to always allow his prince access to him when it was desired.

With a clearer mind, it was sickening to see what had been done to him. What he had allowed to be
done to him. What he was going to allow again.

For a good reason, or so he told himself.

“They took off your jewelry.” Lotor tutted, gently massaging where the necklace used to sit. “We’ll have to replace it. Would you like that?”

His mind felt foggy and hazy from the emotion overload Lotor had given him only moments prior, but he still knew the ‘correct’ answer to Lotor’s question. Being back here, in this position… it was bringing back all sorts of thoughts and behaviors back to the surface. He nodded lazily, careful not to dislodge Lotor’s hand.

“I missed you.” Lance whispered, and it pained him that he couldn’t tell whether he’d spoken a lie or a truth.

In some ways, he had missed Lotor.

Lance had missed the power and attention that Lotor provided. He missed the confidence that he felt when with the prince. With Lotor, Lance could do little wrong. He was always right, the power and might of the empire’s prince at his beck and call.

But Lotor had used him. He had used and manipulated him. He had twisted him into a disgusting mess of corruption, lies, and tears.

While Voltron might not have always taught him well, at least they didn’t manipulate him like Lotor had.

Lance wasn’t given any real chance to further contemplate his own words before he was manhandled. He gasped as he was picked up and pushed into something silky and yet somehow plush. Lotor loomed above him, looking down at him with suddenly unreadable eyes.

Lance’s stomach both dropped and twisted as he looked up into them. If he knew Lotor as well as he thought he did, then his eyes wouldn’t be so unreadable.

One of Lotor’s hands held both of Lance’s wrists above his head, not too unlike how Keith had. Experimentally, he twisted and moved his hands, but Lotor’s grip only tightened. There was no escape.

Lotor’s free hand gently stroked the side of Lance’s face, his fingers dancing over one of Lance’s scales for a tick before slowly sliding down his body.

For a single tick, Lance wanted to think of Keith. He wanted to think of the warmth and heat to Keith’s gaze, of his lilac eyes, and safe smile. But it seemed like a disservice to everyone involved to do that. To super impose Keith over Lotor in his mind.

Lotor would never allow it.

Lotor’s hand stilled at the hem of his shirt; his fingertips barely grazing the thin strip of skin visible there. “You missed me?” Lotor asked, his eyes narrowed. This tone was careful, testing.

Lance swallowed thickly, his heart thudding loudly in his chest. The noise of it echoed in his ears in a never-ending song. He knew this song and dance. He’d participated in it before… had even wanted it before.

He couldn’t tell if he wanted it or not now, but he supposed he didn’t exactly have much choice in
the matter. Lotor would get his way regardless of what Lance wanted; although if Lance was willing, it’d be more pleasurable and enjoyable for him.

Not to mention the fact that if he didn’t play along, if he didn’t want it… then Lotor would know something was up. Lance’s barely thought out plan would fail.

It was to no surprise to Lance that he had no choice and it was more than a little alarming that he couldn’t say that it quite bothered him.

The itch under his skin was nonexistent. It’d disappeared at some point during his stay with the team. It no longer pushed Lance to accept Lotor’s touch, but it didn’t need to. The desire was there without the itch’s assistance, building in his lower gut, burning like hot shame.

He had missed Lotor, damn it, despite what he’d done to Lance – what he still did to him. He licked his lips, looking demure as he gazed at Lotor from under his eyelashes. “My Prince.” He purred quietly with a smile.

Some part of this was an act, but so much of it was real too. The lines between want and need blurred, as lines tended to do with Lotor.

Satisfaction flashed in Lotor’s eyes. It was only there for less than a tick, but Lance was confident in what he saw. He was on the right track; saying and doing the right things to promise Lotor’s attention and – most importantly – protection.

He just needed to keep this up. He knew the words to this song, the steps to this dance. He could sing and dance this in his sleep if needed, it was so ingrained and woven into Lance.

Lotor’s satisfaction was a good start, but it wasn’t enough. Not for what Lance needed.

“My Emperor.” Lance corrected himself, and there was another flash – this time surprise – in Lotor’s eyes before their lips were meeting. Lotor’s kisses were domineering, and this one was no different.

Lance surrendered with barely a fight, shifting his head to slot just perfectly against Lotor’s. He licked into Lance’s mouth, sucking on his tongue; his teeth grazing Lance’s lips.

Keith, Lance imagined, would not kiss like this. So harshly and violently. Keith would be, not softer, but gentler in his kisses. Still dominating, but not as unforgiving. It was wrong of him to try to imagine Keith in Lotor’s place earlier, especially when he was certain Lotor would barely hold a candle to how tender and warm Keith would probably be.

Lance squirmed as the tips of Lotor’s fingers – sharpened into claws – scraped lightly at his vulnerable stomach and waist. The hand was both a welcome addition and distraction.

It brought his thoughts away from Keith, away from Voltron. He didn’t want to associate them to what he was about to do, to how far he was about to fall. It brought him back to where he was, with his wrists in a tight grip, sharp claws at his stomach and waist, and Lotor looming over him as he killed Lance slowly with a toe-curling kiss.

Lotor pulled away, and Lance swallowed thickly, panting as he licked his lips. If Lotor had his way, those lips would be red and swollen by the time they were done.

Lotor surveyed Lance, and Lance’s heart skipped a beat.

Would he be found wanting and be tossed aside?
Part of him wished it would be so, but he needed to be at least somewhat in Lotor’s good graces if he wished to free Sonali and Pidge. All he needed was an opportunity and he could… he could…

He could what? Trick Lotor into leaving him alone? Trap him somewhere? Get him drunk off Kanki and abandon him? Lance had really not thought this plan over at all, and he regretted that he’d acted so impulsively…but his base was Blue. He was adaptable. He would change and adapt in order to endure this and succeed.

“You look at me with such fear, pet.” Lotor complained; and Lance’s heart froze, his eyes wide. “Do you fear I am angry that you left?”

Had he been found out? Had Lotor somehow figured out what Lance semi-planned? That Lance was only stringing him along for the protection and power Lotor’s position offered before abandoning him to save Pidge and Sonali?

Lance had no reply. Any and all possible answers were caught in his throat, slowly choking him. His hands were shaking in Lotor’s hold.

“I was terribly upset when you vanished, pet.” Lotor continued at the absence of a reply.

As if in warning, Lotor’s claws dug into his skin just enough to hurt, but not enough to bleed. Lance’s body jolted at the sensation. A strangled noise tore itself free from the pileup of unspoken words in Lance’s throat, spilling out of his mouth. Lotor’s smile was wicked sharp at the noise, and he leaned back down, swallowing the sound with his own mouth.

“You make such precious noises for me.” Lotor murmured into his ear when he broke off the short kiss, his teeth nipping at Lance’s earlobe. “And you came back on your own, bringing with you such a nice present for me.”

Lotor’s breath was hot against his skin, his voice like honey in Lance’s ear. His lips slowly traced Lance’s jaw, moving down to mouth at his throat. “Such good actions should be rewarded, wouldn’t you agree?”

Lance’s eyelids dropped closed, a low noise escaping out his mouth at the overstimulation of sensations assaulting him. The implications of Lotor’s words mixed with the sensual purr of his voice and the promise of a reward was too much.

It had been so long since he was last touched like this, since Lotor last rewarded him. His body ached for it, overriding his mind’s protests.

It would not be too bad for him to give into to his base desires, just until an opportunity presented itself, would it?

“Whatever my emperor wants.”

Lotor inhaled sharply and then snapped out “Axca. Leave us.”

Lance didn’t have it in him to be embarrassed that someone else had been in the room with them during this. Axca’s dismissal was promising to Lance, and he couldn’t help but to smile.

“…Sir.” There was a moment of hesitation before Lance heard the door open and close.

They were alone now.

He was alone with Lotor, and the sudden realization broke through the brief haze and sent
butterflies down to his stomach. Conflicting emotions and thoughts raced through his mind, and he hated how easily Lotor could mess him up.

He hated how easily his body responded to Lotor, like he was some sort of instrument for Lotor to play.

“Whatever I want?” Lotor mused and Lance opened his eyes to see Lotor pulling away.

Lotor’s departure was sudden, cold air filling the void where his body once was. Lance flexed his hands, now free from Lotor’s grasp. There was a smell of incense, familiar and sweet, and it made Lance’s stomach twist in a pleasant way.

He breathed in deeply and exhaled just as deeply, watching through half lidded eyes as the smoke started to swirl. He sat up as he heard the clinking of glass and Lotor pouring a drink, and his head spun, dizzy from the cloying scent filling the air.

His lungs felt tight and his mouth dry; and he blinked as Lotor appeared before him and pressed the rim of a cool glass against Lance’s lips. “Drink.” Lotor commanded, tipping the glass until the cool liquid touched Lance’s lips.

He inhaled, smelling the sweet notes of the incense and something else even more familiar. At the realization of what it was, the dryness of his mouth seemed to grow, and he automatically opened his mouth to allow the quintessence-spiked alcohol to pool in his mouth and run down his throat.

In his mind there was a nearly deafening cracking noise as the corruption broke free from the sheet of ice Blue had trapped it behind.

The itch returned in full force, running through Lance’s body, reinvigorated by the corrupted quintessence in the Kanki, and Lotor’s presence. His nerves felt like they came to life as he finished the glass.

Like a recovering alcoholic given a shot or an addict given their poison of choice, Lance fell fast and hard. He laughed, wild and free. Thoughts and emotions swirled around him in the smoke of the incense, encouraging bad ideas.

Lance listened to them, and surged forward, slotting his body against Lotor’s. He wrapped his arms around him and ran his hands through his hair, pressing a kiss against his lips.

Lotor didn’t taste like much except mouth, but Lance didn’t care. He licked and sucked until Lotor took back control, pushing Lance back while keeping their lips and bodies connected.

Lotor’s hands were on his body again, claws gently ripping through Lance’s shirt and tracing down his skin in both a promise and a threat. The kiss was broken as Lance gasped when his back hit the back of the bed, and Lotor was on him not even a tick after.

It was hard to say what woke Lance up later. It could have been the dull low ache of his body slowly healing, drawing on the quintessence balms and lubes that were used and the drinks he’d consumed. It could have been how stickly he felt, the evidence of his actions covering him.

It could have been his regret, shame, and guilt.

Lotor’s arm was wrapped possessively around him, and all Lance could do was lay there in his arms and berate himself for falling back into bed with Lotor so easily. He had been rescued from this before, what hope did he have to try to escape on his own?
But it wasn’t about him anymore. It was about Pidge and Sonali, and he just needed to keep them in mind, to keep reminding himself that this was worth it in the end.

The smoke was mostly cleared out, but the cloying scent remained, sticking to the furniture and the occupants. Lance breathed shallowly through his mouth, debating the merits of untangling himself from Lotor’s body and taking a shower.

A shower would help the stickiness, but he knew it would do nothing about the corruption inside him. He could feel it, crawling through his body, slowly sliding over him like a lover slowly caressing their partner.

It felt horrifically good, and he felt sick at the realization that he enjoyed it. Then again, it was designed that way. It was designed to make the person enjoy it, to want it more. It was how it infected, how it stayed.

As if awoken by Lance’s internal conflict, Lotor’s arm curled tighter against him and a pair of lips were pressed against his hair. “Sleep, my pet. You’re safe here with me.” His hand lazily stroked Lance’s side. “I won’t let them hurt you again.”

There was a pang of pain at Lotor’s words, in the promise in them. Unshed tears burned behind Lance’s eyes at the pure tenderness in Lotor’s promises to him. Lance fully believed that in his own way, Lotor cared for him.

Perhaps even maybe loved him.

After all, Lotor had never thrown Lance to the side like he had his other conquests. He’d never offered them such sweet promises of protection and power. Gifts were given aplenty, but never promises like what Lotor made to Lance.

And worse, Lance knew now for sure that there was still a part of him that belonged to Lotor. A part of him that relished in the attention, safety, and power that Lotor offered.

Lance may have entered this situation willingly for Pidge, but it was this part of Lance that was enjoying this. Lance took a deep breath, closing his eyes in a quiet defeat. He could allow that part of him to win for now. Just to further sell the act.

This wasn’t forever… just until he could help Sonali escape with Pidge.

He relaxed into Lotor’s grasp, snuggling against him with a quiet exhale. Sleep came surprisingly quickly and when he woke it was after another couple vargas due to Lotor’s waking. Half asleep, he started to whine as Lotor pulled away, but that quickly became a yelp once he was picked up bridal style and carried into the bathroom.

The shower was just a different type of bed, and Lance still found himself pressed up against Lotor, clinging onto him for much needed support while the prince wrung embarrassing noises and admissions from him.

“Who do you belong to?” Lotor repeatedly whispered into the shell of Lance’s ear. “Who do you serve?”

He always waited until Lance was on the precipice of pleasure, where Lance’s brain ceased to properly function to ask that question; and he would refuse to allow Lance to fall until he replied. It took time for Lance to reply, but every time he did, he could only answer “You”.

Every reply made Lance feel more and more… owned.
It seemed that Lotor’s solution to a lack of Druids available to ensure Lance’s loyalty was to pour Kanki down his throat and physically remind Lance who he belonged to… repeatedly. He was almost probably assuming that while under the influence, Lance would accidently admit if his intentions were false – which they were – but, Lance had more faith in himself that he wouldn’t let something incriminating slip.

Not with Pidge’s life and chance to find her brother on the line.

Lance lost track of space and time. Blue might have been able to help, but her presence had been diminished in his mind; her voice lost and quiet. He didn’t know if it was caused by the disappointment she felt or the corruption.

Both options worried him, but it was hard to stay worried about anything when he was high of incense, drunk off Kanki, and drowning in pleasure.

The Astral Plane wasn’t even a viable escape as Lotor kept dragging Lance to reality. He was grounded, but yet also floating, like a specter who occasionally was allowed to watch. At one point, he thought he saw Pidge, screaming with unshed tears in her eyes.

He hoped that was just a nightmare, as the last thing he wanted was for Pidge to see him such a state. She wasn’t around when he came back to himself, so he assumed that he’d been right, and she’d been just a manifestation of his guilt.

Then again, considering where he woke up, it would be weird if she was floating around.

The room he was in was a familiar one: his gilded bird cage from before. There was an ache in his body that was more deep seated than the last time he’d woken. Lotor had really put him through the works, but Lance must not have let his plans slip.

If he had, he doubted he’d be waking up in Lotor’s quarters.

“Someone looks thoroughly fucked out.” Corral’s voice sung from the couch, and Lance nearly gave himself whiplash as he looked over at her. She was smiling at him, but her eyes were dark with warning. She swirled a glass of Kanki – Lance’s mouth watered at the sight of it – and stood up. “Our prince missed you dearly.”

There was a dark tone to her voice which had Lance’s hair standing on end. He winced, hiding the reaction with a stretch.

“One hell of a welcome.” Lance replied, his limbs popping and slightly abating the ache in his bones and muscles. “But then again, our prince does nothing by half.” He sat up, his legs dangling off the bed.

There was a lingering haze in his mind from all the kanki he’d consumed and the incense he’d breathed in. Laughter bubbled up in his throat at the helplessness and stupidity of his situation. Corral pressed the rim of her glass to Lance’s lips, and he didn’t protest as he swallowed more of the poison down.

“He does not.” Corral agreed. “How was your… vacation?”

The careful phrasing, she used had Lance laughing again. “A vacation is the last word I’d call my experience.” He shook his head. “It brings me no greater joy than to be reunited with my prince… and I guess you too.”

Some of the tension melted off her stance and face. “You missed little ol’ me?” She laughed.
“I’m so flattered.”

“Of course, I did. Who else is going to help me look fabulous for Lotor, or prank him, or share the juiciest gossip with in the garden?” Not that Lance intended to stay long enough for all that. First opportunity and he was out of here, even if he had to resort to trying to knock Lotor out.

She laughed again, handing him over her glass of Kanki. “Cheers to having you back then.” She smiled as Lance downed the glass.

Lance drowned in Kanki. In perfume and incense. In pleasure. It was easier to do everything with a filter of alcohol than it was without. With the alcohol, he could pretend this was just some sort of hazy dream.

It took a week.

It took a week of pleasure and poison for Lotor to be confident that Lance was not lying when he claimed he was Lotor’s. It took a week for Lotor to believe Lance to be his. It took a week of waking to sweet nothings, of promises of safety, power, protection. A week of ‘I missed you’ and ‘I love you’ spilling from Lotor’s lips like water from a faucet.

It wasn’t hard to fool Lotor; not when Lance was more than familiar with the song and dance. Not when Lance knew all the right words to say, the buttons to push, the spots to touch… the places to kiss. It wasn’t hard, no, but it was painful.

Painful because if Lance allowed himself, he could believe this all to be true. Painful because Lance wanted this to be true. He wanted Lotor’s sweet nothings to be everything. He wanted the promise of safety, power, and protection. He wanted it all.

But there were more important things at stake, and well… fool him once, shame on Lotor, fool him twice, shame on Lance.

So, he ignored the pain. Masked it under Kanki and incense and sex.

Lotor could play Lance like a fiddle, but the same could be said in reverse. Lance could make Lotor sing for him just as easily as Lotor could make Lance. Lotor reacted like a well-used marionette under Lance’s fingers, dancing and moving to his commands.

There was power in submission, and Lance had seized it long ago when it came to Lotor.

It felt dirty to use his body like this, but… the ends justified the means, and it wasn’t like Lance didn’t particularly enjoy his time with Lotor. Given how he was planning to betray him, Lance figured he should soak up the attention and trust while he could.

Team Voltron was likely to never trust him again after this, now that he had actually betrayed them. Lotor would never trust him again either. He was really burning bridges here with this plan, but… he kept reminding himself that Pidge would finally find Matt, and that, he decided was worth all this pain.

One week, and that was all it took for Lance to convince him of his loyalty. One week, and that was all Lance needed to get an opening. That was all he needed. One opening. One opportunity.

There were plenty of times Lance thought might have been a good chance that never seemed to work out. Like when Lotor was feeling particularly soft and wanted nothing more than to keep Lance close. He’d work on something on his tablet, with Lance’s head in his lap, gently carding his free hand through Lance’s hair.
There was never anything substantially useful on the tablet during those times, but… they were nice.

“Did they hurt you?” Lotor’s voice was as soft as his gaze and touch. It was rare for Lance to see him being so soft, even before Voltron had kidnapped/rescued him.

Lance inhaled deeply, looking up at Lotor. He’d put the tablet away some time ago and had just been petting Lance’s hair for the better quarter of a varga. Lance had wondered when he would speak, but a question like that hadn’t been what Lance expected.

‘No more than you.’ was the reply sitting at the tip of Lance’s tongue, but he couldn’t say that. So instead, he offered a pained smile. “I didn’t give them much choice.”

Lotor’s lips twitched. “You shouldn’t have given them a hard time, pet.” The softness was laced with bitter amusement, and Lance smiled sweetly up at him. He sat up, twisting around to face Lotor as he did so.

“Then they shouldn’t have taken me.” Lance whispered, leaning in to Lotor to give him a kiss. Lotor’s hand automatically came up to cup Lance’s cheek, the tip of his thumb brushing against an eye scale.

Tender affection blossomed from the connection, and Lance smiled into the kiss. This was as vulnerable as Lotor would ever allow himself to be, even in Lance’s presence. All he needed was one opportunity, and Lance was pretty sure he’d finally found it.

Or maybe that was the Kanki Lance had earlier with dinner talking.

It didn’t matter. A chance was a chance, and Lance would take it. He moved onto Lotor’s lap, wrapping his arms around him and tangling his hands in his hair as he deepened the kiss. If Lotor had any complaints, he didn’t voice them.

Lance pulled back once the need for air became too great, smirking at Lotor as he ran his hands over his shoulders. “I think you need to relax more, my emperor. All the worrying you’ve done over me and the Empire must be taxing on you. Can’t you feel how… tense you are?”

“And how do you suggest I remedy that?” Lotor’s eyes dilated at the title, the hand on Lance’s face sliding down to secure him at his hips.

Lance laughed, leaning to kiss Lotor again – a shorter kiss this time – and then mouth open kisses against his jawline up to his ear. “I’ve heard baths are good.”

Lotor exhaled heavily, rising to his feet not even a tick later still holding and supporting Lance. If Lance was being honest – and he was – he’d definitely miss that once this was all done. But, being carried into the bathroom for bath sex was not on Lance’s agenda, no matter how much he’d made it seem like it was to Lotor.

Lotor’s confused pout at Lance pulling away would probably be forever ingrained into Lance’s mind. “I have a surprise for you in the bath.” Lance laughed, standing on his tip toes to kiss Lotor again. “I’ll meet you in the bathroom.”

“A surprise?” Lotor asked, an eyebrow arching up.

“Corral helped.” Lance lied. He’d been left alone in her presence just enough times that it was plausible. “I think you’ll like it.” Lance winked, turning away as if to head to the closet. “Go on now… it won’t be a surprise if you look.”
“You tease me.” Lotor’s complaint was mild, but after a lingering look, he finally headed to the bathroom alone.

Lance’s first thought was to jam the door with a scarf like how he and Corral had done when pranking Lotor before he left to see Haggar once so very long ago. But that would require time and opening the door, and a whole bunch of things that Lance didn’t have.

But that was alright. His quintessence had corruption in it again, and that was a form of quintessence he knew how to manipulate. He pulled it into his hand, and once the door had slid shut behind Lotor, slammed it into the door panel.

The door panel flashed red from the overloaded quintessence before sparking and dying. Until the door power cycled through, fixing the blown circuit, Lotor would be locked in the bathroom. If Lotor hadn’t already realized something was up, then it wouldn’t be long until he did.

Keeping that in mind, Lance threw himself over the couch, grabbing at Lotor’s tablet and quickly pulled up the information on prisoners and the ship map. His gaze was frantic as he ran down the list of the Empire’s prisoners – hesitating briefly on Samuel Holt long enough to memorize the planet he was imprisoned on – to find Pidge and Sonali.

His heart jumped when he found them, and then jumped again when he saw where they were.

Good. They were still on the ship. Sonali was in a different set of cells than Pidge, but that was fine. He could get her first, and then swing by Pidge, pick her up, and then make their way to the hangar. Provided they didn’t run into too much resistance, they should be able to make a clean break out.

And he knew just the thing to help prevent resistance: Druid Robes; and fortunately for Lance, there were still some in the closet. Lance snagged one, slipping it and an under-suit on before exiting.

He fled from the room, Lotor, and the situation.

Acxa was just outside the door, and she immediately turned as it opened. There was a brief window of time where she expected Lotor that Lance used to knock her back with a kick. Her reaction time was phenomenal, as it should be for Lotor’s top general.

She spun with the kick, pulling a knife out of somewhere and slashing upwards towards Lance. The blade caught his face, slicing cleanly through his skin.

The rush of the fight and the pain from the wound was a wonderful sobering agent, helping to clear his mind of the haze.

“Traitor.” Acxa hissed, surging forward to attack him again, but Lance didn’t allow it. He threw her back with a wave of quintessence, holding her against the wall, smothering her until her eyes closed and her body fell limp.

He was pretty sure she wasn’t dead, but he wasn’t going to check. He didn’t have the time to. People to get, places to be, ships to escape from.

He could feel the warmth of blood sliding down his cheek from where she’d nicked him with the knife, but he didn’t have the time to even worry about that. He needed to find Sonali, get Pidge, and escape.

He couldn’t even allow himself a breather or a chance to steady himself as he pulled over his hood
and started on his way.

He could feel Blue’s attention on him again for the first time in what he was pretty sure was a week. He was thankful that she didn’t follow through on her desire to pull him into the Astral Plane to talk to him, and instead watched. Trust flowed from her openly, and she purred quiet encouragements.

He could feel her apprehension about the corruption he held again, but… he hadn’t fallen back as far as she had feared he would. He was still in control for now.

He half smiled to himself and sent her back a wave of ‘I told you so’. His plan had been a mess, but it was working.

The robes worked in his favor as most of the soldiers and sentries practically leaped out of his way. None wanted to cross a Druid, and as fast as he was walking – running would be too suspicious – they didn’t want to be in his way.

The guards watching over Sonali were understandably wary as he approached. “Halt, Druid. Prince Lotor has commanded that only he and his generals be allowed access.” One of the braver ones called out.

Lance ducked his head under the robes, regretting his lack of a mask to further his ‘identity’. “The Prince has requested I bring the prisoner to him.” Lance replied.

There was little hope that they’d believe him, and when one of the guards started to reach for their weapon, Lance knew they hadn’t.

Lance’s lips thinned under his hood, and he inhaled sharply. He didn’t have the time nor the patience to be caught up here. If Lotor was discovered, then it would only be a matter of time before he was freed. Lance had no desire to take him on in a fight.

These guys, on the other hand… Lance was more than willing to take care of them. The corrupted quintessence hummed in his body, singing of battle. He could feel it pooling in his hands, waiting and wanting to be used.

He missed how responsive the corruption was to him.

It sung as he pulled on it, using it to teleport behind the soldiers. They gasped, a few of them already turning around with their weapons ready.

Too bad it was too late for them.

Lance held out his hand, manifesting a ball of quintessence before letting it drop. He slipped into the cellblock, shielding the door as he passed through it. A hand press against the door panel later and he was guaranteed at least some time before any surviving soldiers got through it.

Sonali had been stripped of most of her uniform, including her helmet. She frowned at Lance before there was a glimmer of recognition in her eyes. “Lance?”

Lance hesitated only long enough to switch to his other vision and verify that it was Sonali he was looking at before overloading the door and letting her out.

“Let’s go.”

“What are you doing here?” She demanded. “You were free!”
Lance didn’t have time for a Q&A. The corruption was restless under his skin, an electric itch he couldn’t scratch. Lotor was bound to be freed eventually, and they still needed to get Pidge, transverse the ship, and escape through the hangar on one of the fighter ships that maybe Sonali knew how to fly.

“Lotor’s still on the ship.” Lance’s response wasn’t an answer, but by the way she stiffened, she understood exactly what he was saying.

“To the Hangars then.”

“Not yet. We need to get someone else.”

“Who?” She asked, but Lance was already heading down the prison cells to the alternative entrance.

Quintessence manipulation had always been his specialty, but talent alone didn’t make up for endurance or stamina. Besides all the previously thought reasons, his slowly failing strength was another.

At least there weren’t other Druids on the ship for him to be concerned about.

They encountered some resistance on the way to Pidge’s cell, and then once more in front of it. Lance blew past the opposition with an ease that was entirely all appearance.

By the time he reached where Pidge should be, sweat soaked the back of his neck and dripped down his back. His hands trembled as he overloaded this door and stepped inside. The corruption was a low static buzz in his ears, and he couldn’t tell if the haze at the edge of his vision was from the exhaustion, corruption, or the alcohol he’d consumed.

Pidge wasn’t just in a cell like Sonali was but handcuffed as well. It was a non-existent challenge to him, even in this state, to unshackle and free her.

“Lance?” Her voice was so small and meek; so un-Pidge like that it threw him for a loop. He was about to respond when Sonali’s voice came from behind.

“Lance, we have to…” Sonali’s voice came behind him, and she cut herself off, presumably staring at Pidge. “Stars and ancients, she does look just like Matt!”

Whelp, he had been trying to think of a way to get Pidge to follow along with him and it seemed like Sonali just resolved that problem. Pidge’s eyes – already bright with questions, nearly glowing with her quintessence – brightened further. In his other vision, Lance could see her quintessence unfurling as her curiosity took hold.

“Matt?” She muttered almost to herself.

It was a sight to behold, but they lacked the time for it. Lance huffed, mentally cursing her. “Not the time, Sonali.” He pulled Pidge up and released the remaining restraints the same way he removed the handcuffs. “We’ve got to go.”

“Matt?” Pidge ignored him, looking at Sonali and repeating her brother’s name with so much hope, it nearly broke Lance’s heart.

He wished he had a moment to pull her off to the side and explain everything. To explain how Sonali was the key to her finding Matt again and that was the reason Lance had done what he did. But no matter how much he wished that, he knew it couldn’t happen.
“Not the time.” Lance repeated to Pidge. “You can talk about it more-”

“You knew my brother!?” Pidge was clearly not getting the message. He understood her desire to know, it was literally apart of her, but there was a time and place for this which wasn’t here and now.

“Quiznak,” Lance snapped at her. “This isn’t the time, Pidge.” Quintessence flared out from him unintentionally, and he covered his wince of the exhaustion of it by jerking her along. “Let’s go.”

She gasped as she stepped over the bodies of the guards, but didn’t comment or stop, which Lance was thankful for. He didn’t know what he would have done if she had.

Surprisingly, she was fairly complacent as he led her and Sonali through the ship, although he supposed that she was just biding her time to ambush him with questions later. And that was fine. He owed her answers just so long as they kept moving now.

Lance would have preferred to have sealed every door they passed, but with exhaustion already tugging at him, he limited himself to every other door. The longer it took Lotor to get to them, the better.

Sonali grew more and more unhappy every time, and after the third, she finally pulled him away. “It’s too much.” She was warning him about the quintessence manipulation, about the exhaustion he could feel pulling at him.

But he couldn’t let the exhaustion slow them down. Not if they wanted to survive. Lance’s flight or fight instincts were kicked into high gear and right now they were set on ‘flight’.

“I’m fine.” Lance replied, perhaps unkindly but they didn’t have time for questions or lectures.

“How much Kanki did you have?” She asked next and Lance grunted, unwanting and unwilling to answer that. How did she even know that he’d drank some anyways? He wasn’t completely intoxicated. “How much Kanki did you have?” She repeated. “I smell it on you.”

Ah. Well, that explained that.

“Not much.” He finally answered, and then after seeing her disbelieving look changed his answer to “Enough.”

He was frustrated at himself, at the slow pace his companions were going. Didn’t they understand the danger they were in? That they were all in? There was no time for questions and answers. There was only time to escape, and even then, their time was short.

Lotor would not let him escape easily, and if he caught up to them, well, then it’d be game over. Lance was alright with losing the game, but only if he got Pidge and Sonali out first. They were what mattered now.

And if getting them out meant mowing down the obstacles, then so be it.

As if summoned by his thoughts, he turned a corner to see soldiers heading towards them. The corruption inside him surged with excitement as he called upon it, bolstered by his frustration and anger.

He grinned to himself as he threw the corruption out, and it sung through his veins in a cacophony of joy as it spilled out of him towards the soldiers. The ones in front noticed too late what they were running into and could do nothing to slow their pending impalement on the poisonous spikes.
of corruption.

The corruption sliced through their armor and buried itself in the soft flesh of their bodies. The blood heavy gurgles of the soldiers closest to him harmonized with the rush of the corruption. Blood laced spittle flew from their mouths as they gasped out their dying breaths.

He held the corruption for a moment, allowing it to feed on the quintessence of the dying soldiers before he realized with muted horror what he’d done. He dropped the spikes, mentally wincing at the wet sticky sounds the bodies made as they fell without the spikes supporting them.

“Stars and ancients.” Sonali whispered, telling him that his companions had seen what he’d done. He swallowed down his horror and told himself there was no other choice. They would have stopped them, would have given Lotor a chance to catch up.

They needed to continue, and he needed to get Pidge away from this. She may have been fighting in a war, but that didn’t mean she needed to be exposed to the dirtier sides of it so soon. He pulled her away, continuing down the hall in a different direction that the one the guards had been in.

“You need to get back to the castle, Pidge. I didn’t mean for you to get caught up in this.” Lance informed her as she fought against him.

“You both need to go back.” Sonali said, and Lance glanced back at her with a frown.

“Of course.” He replied, although truthfully, the two who needed to get to the castle most importantly were her and Pidge. She was the key Pidge needed to reunite with her brother, for Voltron to make a new alliance. “But you’re coming too. Pidge needs you.”

“Oh.” Sonali breathed out and Lance could see her finally understand. “Oh… you returned for me.”

The lights turned red as an alarm sounded. Well, now he could definitely assume that Lotor was free and out to get him. If only there was some way Lance could slow them down more and see where Lotor was.

Blue was unhappy, but she pushed forward a memory and a thought as a suggestion, and Lance acted on it.

There was a quintessence vein nearby and he threw himself into the quintessence. The Galra ships weren’t alive like the Lions were, but they were powered by quintessence, by life and that gave them their own form of sentience. The main crystal recognized Lance, humming as they resonated.

Lance soared through the currents, redirecting flow and checking up on where everyone and everything was. He wasn’t far from the Hangars, and… and Lotor wasn’t far from him.

“Lance!” Sonali’s voice echoed in his ears as she pulled him away. He stumbled. The strain of redirecting so much quintessence taking a more physical toll on him. “Are you alright?” Dual Sonalis danced in his vision, and he shook his head, willing his vision to clear.

“I’m fine.” Lance pushed himself to ignore the physical strain and continue. Both Pidge and Sonali depended on him and they could not afford to falter. Not with Lotor close behind. “We need to keep going.”

“We can’t.” Sonali argued. “You just… This is emergency lightning.” She said as she gestured to the hallway. Lance stared at her blankly. Of course, this was emergency lighting. Lance had
redirected power away from here. “You cut off access to the main crystal.”

“I did.” Lance agreed. “But I can reroute the secondary crystals to let us through, open the hangar door, and get us out.” Hopefully.

“Did you just hack into the crystal array and imply that you can reroute it at will?” Pidge asked him.

“I didn’t imply anything.” Lance replied because he hadn’t. He’d said exactly what he was going to do, and if Pidge didn’t believe him, well, she would when he did it. Seeing was believing and she would see when it came time for it.

They had already wasted enough time and they needed to go. Every moment they wasted – even if it was just moving – was another moment for Lotor to catch up to them.

“The ship runs off quintessence.” Sonali explained quietly behind him. “And Lance is very… uh… talented at manipulating that.” He snorted to himself.

That was one way to put it, he supposed. It wasn’t like he was a prodigy, trained by one of the very best of the Druids. Man, Xana would murder him if he were still alive and present. It hurt to think of his teacher, but… Lance supposed he was happy Keith had killed him.

He could only imagine how much more difficult this escape would have been if Xana was still here.

“We don’t have time.” Lance snapped at them as he redirected power to the door panel that led to the hangar. “I’ll feel much better once we’re in a ship and away from he--”

Lance cut himself off, staring at the quintessence signature standing in the middle of the hangar. Quiznak. This was something he had not anticipated. He should have looked at where all of Lotor’s generals were.

“Ezor.” Lance called out, both to greet her and to alert Sonali of her presence. Behind him, he heard her whispering to Pidge and knew she was explaining at least some of the new situation.

“I vouched for you, and you betray us.” Ezor spoke as she stepped forward towards him. He pursed his lips, telling himself that she deserved his betrayal. He had no doubt that she knew what Lotor had been doing to him, and she did nothing.

Lance shrugged, keeping his eyes trained on her. “Seems to be a running theme with me.” There didn’t seem to be anyone else in the hangar with Ezor, and while he doubted she would answer, he wanted to make sure. “Are the others on their way?”

“Lotor isn’t too happy with you.” Ezor answered, and Lance frowned and half laughed to himself as she pulled out her fighting knives. Well, that put things in perspective for him.

He was not going to be escaping with Pidge and Sonali, that much was clear now. He’d need to stay here, to fight Ezor and ensure that they were able to escape safely. It wasn’t exactly a surprise. He’d known his chances of escape were slim, but he had still hoped….

Oh well. What mattered was Sonali and Pidge escaping. That was what mattered. Not him.

Blue disagreed but her voice was washed out and quiet in the noise surrounding him. The static waves of the corruption was nearly over powering and it had only strengthened through the escape.
He swallowed thickly. He wasn’t terrified by the fact that he would be remaining here so much as he was terrified of Lotor’s reaction. No, that wasn’t entirely accurate. He was more terrified about losing himself, and the longer he was here… the longer he was with Lotor, the more likely that horrible outcome became.

Lotor would stop at nothing to break him. To lock him back up in the gilded cage. To twist him, turn him, corrupt him. Lotor thought he was only making Lance stronger, and to some degree he had, but he was also taking everything that was Lance and destroying it.

A mindless little puppet for Lotor to love. A mindless little puppet to obey. To kill and destroy and only love Lotor.

That was what would happen to him. A heavy price to pay.

He only hoped that the Paladins would stop him… and forgive him in time. After all, by sacrificing himself like that, he was giving returning Pidge, and granting her an opportunity to reunite with her brother. Furthermore, he was giving Voltron an opportunity to an alliance with a larger resistance.

“So, you’re here as distraction, to keep us here. Too bad they’re not staying.” Lance used his druid powers to throw both Pidge and Sonali towards one of the Galra Fighter ships. “Go!” He shouted as he spun back around to attack Ezor.

She slid under the quintessence he threw at her, bouncing back up to throw some of her knifes at him. He could hear Pidge shouting, and he hoped that Sonali would take care of it. He was putting a lot of trust on the resistance spy, and he hoped that she would see Pidge safety to the Castle of Lions and reunited with Matt.

Blue roared in his mind, completing putting aside her disapproval of Lance’s actions in light of recent events. She wasn’t panicking, but damn near close to it. She had already lost one Paladin while separated from her, she didn’t want to lose another like that.

Lance didn’t think she’d have a choice in that matter.

Bolstered by Blue, he threw out his quintessence – not the corrupted quintessence – in a wave, creating a slick glass like surface of ice around him. Ezor’s eyes widened, and she screeched as her footing slipped, sending her sliding away from him.

His vision was turning black at the edges, and Lance knew he didn’t have much time left before he over extended himself. He took Ezor’s temporary inability to reach him as an opportunity and teleported to the control panel, slamming corruption-infused quintessence into it.

Ezor bounced off the ice, using the various ships in the hangar to make her way towards him. “Don’t you dare, Lance!” She screamed at him. “We’ll all be sucked out!”

Huh. Well there was an idea. He grinned over his shoulder at Ezor, a cheeky little smile that he’d seen her wear when up to mischief. In the immortal words of one Zack Fair: the price of freedom is steep. And Lance was more than willing to pay.

He dove into the quintessence, resonating with the ship as he rerouted energy to the console he was using and bypassing various safety procedures.

There was a proper procedure to opening up the hangars to prevent things – like him and Ezor – from getting sucked out, but Lance didn’t have the luxury of waiting for those processes to go through. He needed those doors open now.
He mentally applauded himself on his mental timing as the bay doors to the hangar opened, but the applause was short lived as he got unhappy flashbacks to the airlock event where Keith had saved him. Space was a vacuum, and the only things preventing most of the fighter ships from flying out was their attachment to the floor.

Ezor started to scream, but like everything else loose in the hangar, it was lost of the vacuum of space. Well, at least he didn’t have to listen to her anymore. Soon, he didn’t think he’d have to listen to anything anymore, and as an extra bonus, he’d get to die himself instead of being turning into Lotor’s puppet.

He was… oddly okay with this.

He could have tried to hold onto the console, but he didn’t. He let his body be torn away. The breath was stolen from his lungs as he was sent flying through the air, and he closed his eyes, completely ready to accept his fate.

This was a better one that what awaited him at the hands of Lotor. He’d die a hero instead of living long enough to become a villain.

Something – or more accurately, someone – grabbed his wrist. His body didn’t appreciate the sudden stop coupled with the suction, and his shoulder popped as he screamed. His body slammed against a Hangar wall. Tears streamed from his eyes, but he could still see Ezor’s quintessence, desperately holding onto him.

Their bodies waved like flags caught in the wind, and there was a heart stopping jolt when they slipped towards the exit.

Lance couldn’t tell, but he hoped that Pidge and Sonali were alright. They had to be.

The pesky safety procedures that he’d bypassed finally kicked in as the hangar door closed with an ominous boom. There was a moment of weightlessness, as his body was still experiencing the now nonexistent wind and pull towards the exit.

And then they fell. Inertia was a bitch like that.

Ezor screamed – this time with sound! – as they fell; his hand slipping from her grasp.

It all happened in less than a breath, the last thing Lance saw was the floor of the hangar coming increasingly closer and a familiar blade of a sword cutting through the door leading to the rest of the ship.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo…. we're taking a little trip back in time, I hope you guys don't mind. ;)
Dreams

Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: A time skip back in time to when Pidge and Lance were caught on Lotor's ship, except from Lance's POV. Lance seduced Lotor into thinking he was still on his side, and then trapped him before making a break for Pidge and Sonali. He successfully managed to break both of them out, but ended up staying behind to distract Ezor during their escape. During his battle with Ezor, Lance opened up the airlock, and both of them were nearly sucked out. Ezor managed to catch Lance, but was unable to help slow his fall once they fell when the airlock resealed.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Loss of Reality?, Quintessence, Lotor, Cursing

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Blue was crying, large drops of saltwater-infused quintessence dropping onto Lance’s body until he was floating in a blue ocean of them. Her fear was a bitter taste, her concern cloying. Filling his mouth and heart with conflicting flavors until his mouth was as numb as his heart and soul.

Heat blazed distantly around him, but every time Lance tried to reach for it, it slipped just out of reach.

This was not the Astral Plane, nor was it Reality, but somewhere caught between. He’d been here once, but not really. Not like this. He didn’t exist, and Blue cried, filling him with so much until he did.

He took a breath, inhaling Blue’s tears and filling his lungs with them only to cough and sputter, air replacing the tears and pain blossoming through his body. Raised voices echoed around him, but he didn’t even have the energy to open his eyes.

“I couldn’t catch him.” Repeated over and over like a mantra, swirling around him until the words took shape and coiled around him tightly like a snake constricting around its prey. Guilt was a familiar emotion, and Lance could never escape it.

“You did your best.” Whispered reassurances never helped much against the guilt. Not with it being as thick and heavy as it was.

He opened his mouth and quintessence poured into him. He was empty and void, and he welcomed the quintessence, not caring how it burned, electrifyingly painful. It clashed with Blue’s tears, setting him alight with electricity that sparked through the void of blue with purple black lightning.
It would have been gorgeous had it not burned.

He screamed. He screamed until his lungs were empty, and even then, he didn’t stop. He couldn’t stop. The pain looped itself around him, digging into him like fishhooks under his skin, tugging and pulling him into consciousness.

Lance came back into the world in pain; strung up in a cell with old chains that weren’t powered by quintessence. His body felt like a dry and hot desert, his mouth like he’d swallowed a handful of sand. He licked chapped lips and swallowed dry air.

His arm protested his position, and it took him a moment to realize that he’d been healed, dislocated arm included.

“You actually awake this time?” Zethrid’s voice was equally a welcome distraction and a painful reminder. She was a distraction from the physical pain: his pounding head, aching muscles, and this bone-deep weariness that left him lightheaded, dizzy, and tired. It hurt to even move his head, to breathe, to think. He didn’t need to think to know that seeing Zethrid meant he was still with the Galra.

Pidge and Sonali had escaped, and that was enough. It would have to be.

“Am I?” Lance croaked, and Zethrid frowned at him. Blearily, he could see her cross her arms. She wasn’t far from him, in the corner of the small cell, but it was like someone had put a blurry filter over his eyes.

“You’re in a lot of trouble.” She replied.

Lance laughed, ignoring how painful it was. Ignoring how it tore at his dry throat. His head ached, his whole body protested. Zethrid seemed, at the very least, unnerved. He could see her shift uneasily.

“Where is Lotor?” Lance asked once he’d finished coughing up the dry air from his laughing fit.

“Right here.” Lotor’s voice fell onto him like smooth cool silk. A wave of fresh cold air flooded the room from the open door Lotor entered through. It was tempting to reach out to Lotor, but he knew better than that.

His skin prickled as Lotor looked him over, goosebumps forming wherever Lotor’s gaze lingered.

“I’m very displeased with you.” His voice was quiet and soft, but that didn’t diminish how harsh it was. In the past, Lance would have cringed at those words. He would have thrown himself at Lotor and begged his forgiveness, his mercy.

Or thrown himself at Lotor and made him forget his displeasure.

Lance could do neither now, nor did he want to. He rolled his response around in his mouth, savoring the salt coating the words. “Fuck you.”

“You betrayed me.” Lotor’s voice was a low quiet promise of pain for Lance’s betrayal. And Lance was terrified at that, but he was more scared of losing himself. Of falling back into the ocean of corruption, of drowning in it until it filled his insides and wore him as a puppet for Lotor to command.

Fury filled that place now. Cold icy fury and Lance would use it while it was available. “You used me.” Lance threw back. “You made me love you, and you manipulate me, corrupted me.
My feelings were false! You made me feel that way!"

Even with blurry vision, Lance could tell that Lotor’s face remained annoyingly blank. He wanted the bastard to react, to say something, to do something. Even if it was a denial, Lance wanted a response.

“I only enhanced what was already present. You loved me of your own volition.” And the response Lotor gave was one Lance did not wish to hear.

“I guess we’ll never know now, huh?” Lance replied bitterly, dropping his head.

“We will.” Lotor strode forward, his hand grabbing Lance by his chin and lifting his head up as he squeezed. “You will love me as you once did. The Druids will see to it.”

“Because they did such a grand job last time.” Lance twisted his head, wincing as Lotor’s claws cut into his skin. “Are you going to erase my memories? Erase all that makes me and make me into your puppet. A love doll for you to fuck?”

Lotor nearly jerked back at that, his eyes widening. “Is that what you think?” He asked. His tone turned almost gentle, his grip loosening as he stoked Lance’s cheek with his thumb. It was so tender, so soft… Lance’s heart hurt. But he knew it was false.

“I would never do that.” Lotor continued when Lance didn’t answer. “But your memories would need to be altered, yes, else you wouldn’t believe my love.”

The last time Lance had seen such a tender look in Lotor’s eyes, he had used it to lock Lotor in a bathroom. Lance half laughed, dry tears coming to his eyes. “You don’t love me. You love the idea of me.”

Lotor dropped his chin and Lance’s head fell. “The Druids will fix that as well. Forgive me, my love. I was rash last time, but I will not be so now. This time they will properly condition you.”

Lance wouldn’t admit it, but Lotor’s words sent a shock of fear into his heart. He could only vaguely recall the last time he’d spent in the Druid’s ‘care’ for conditioning, but he knew it was something he never cared to experience again.

In his current state, however, there was no way for him to fight this fate. Not on his own. Still, he refused to let Lotor see how troubled he was. It would be the same as letting him win, and as far as Lance was concerned, he hadn’t.

Pidge had escaped with Sonali, and that was a win as far as Lance was concerned.

“Good luck with that.” Lance replied. “I think you’ll find that I don’t take well to conditioning.”

Lotor didn’t reply but to turn his back on Lance and walk away. Zethrid looked between them, but had nothing else to say, even after Lotor was gone. He thought of asking her about Ezor, about what happened with her. After all, the last he knew, she’d been falling with him.

He didn’t.

Instead he curled up in on himself as best he could while hanging from chains and slept, unwilling to face his horrid reality. Not that his dreams were much better.

They were hazy in the fog that was normally present, but there was this sense of surrealness that permeated through. It felt as if Lance was watching a movie rather than dreaming, and he watched
as Lotor visited him, checking in on him and healing his wounds with quintessence-infused balm.

The tender looks given spoke of betrayal and hurt, but also of hope. In his own way, the prince did truly care for Lance, and had things gone differently, then perhaps Lance might have once shared those feelings.

Now, however, he was once burned, twice shy. Regardless of Lotor’s feelings, Lance would never be able to trust his own again when it came to the prince. Bridges had been burned, and there was no going back.

He dreamed of Ezor crying in a bed, whispering words of fear and guilt into Zethrid’s arms. “I couldn’t catch him.”

“You barely saved yourself. Do not blame yourself for his choices.” Zethrid whispered in response, gently treating Ezor’s own injuries from the fall.

Acxa stood in a corner, rubbing gently at her bruises from when Lance smothered her with his quintessence against a wall. Her gaze was fixed upon Ezor and Zethrid, but it was obvious she was distant inside her own head.

More than once, his dreams featured Narti standing over him, her tail flicking while Kova stared. Nothing happened, but the image haunted him, sending chills down his spine despite his unconscious state.

Only once did Lance’s dream take him to the main crystal. There were tiny hairline fractures that escaped the notice of the sentries and guards assigned to it. Only a Druid would notice, and even then, only a Druid familiar with the crystal would notice.

Lotor had none currently onboard. Petyr and Nik were still unavailable and with Xana dead and Lance a traitor, there was no one to tend to the crystal. Lance wasn’t physically there, but he reached out anyways, gently stroking along the fractures.

The crystal pulsed warmly under his touch, accepting him despite the fact he was the one who’d accidently done such damage to it. It pulled him along, guiding him through the cracks to the core, and then through the quintessence pumped through the ship.

There was something he needed to see.

There were two intruders: a nondescript Dark Green along with a Purple that glowed so bright, it was seared into Lance’s soul. If he stared too long, he felt like he could fall inside, a galaxy of stars awaiting him there.

He didn’t stare at Purple for long, but he did follow the duo as they travelled the ship.

“Have you found anything yet?”

“No, wait… yes! It seems like Sonali escaped with another prisoner. They caught the person who helped them escape”

“We should help them. Maybe they know where your agent went.”

He tracked their progress, following along with idly curiosity born from having nothing else to do, until they came to… him.

“Lance?!”
“He must have been the one to rescue Sonali.”

“Why is he here?”

“I’ll explain later. We can’t leave him behind. Look at the shape he’s in.”

The dream fractured as Green stepped forward to touch him. Lance ‘opened’ his eyes to the haze of the dream and the face of oddly familiar helmet. He remembered it belonged to someone who wasn’t Pidge, but looked like it.

Pidge was the vivid green of plants. Ivy swirls and blossoming green flowers tattooed on her skin, so real and lifelike they moved and unfurled like plants. Pidge was a breath of the outdoors, a rainforest of curiosity and intellect. This person was too dark of a green to be Pidge. They were the shaded plants that hid from sunlight and blossomed in the darkness of night.

This Dark Green wasn’t Pidge, but it was no less curious and no less an ally.

He and Purple unshackled Lance, and he collapsed into Purple’s waiting arms.

Closer to Purple, Lance could now see how it was indeed galaxies and stars, a swirl of the night sky and never-ending cosmos. Something in him cried at the sight, finding familiarity despite never having seen this person’s quintessence signature before.

They were an imprint upon his soul, a connection he’d already made. Lance felt himself reaching out, begging for help and protection; and surprisingly, Purple responded physically, holding him tightly.

“I got you. It’s alright, Lance.”

Purple carried Lance as they made their way back through the ship, taking him to the Hangar where he knew they planned to hijack a Galra Fighter and escape. It was so similar to Lance’s own plan for Pidge and Sonali, and he had to wonder if it would have a similar outcome as well.

If it did, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to help them escape like he had Pidge and Sonali. He was so tired, it was bone deep.

Dark Green, Matt, hacked into the Galra Systems to help them escape, and it reminded Lance of the spiderwebbing cracks in the main crystal. The crystal would not last long, and as if in response to that thought, an alarm went off. A warning of the impending end of the crystal.

The crew would need to either switch to the secondary crystals or power off systems unless they wanted to crystal to overload and potentially explode. It was more likely that it’d just implode instead, but… no one usually wanted to take that risk.

If it did come to the crystal exploding, then they’d need to evacuate the ship.

Lance could feel that there wasn’t much time left. The Galra might be able to switch to secondary crystals or power down enough systems in time, but Lance wouldn’t bet GAC on that. Evacuation was indeed the best choice.

“What did you do?”

“Holy shit, I didn’t cause this. It’s real!” Matt’s voice was panicked and Lance low-key preened in that because he was the one to do that, to damage the crystal so much.
Somehow, despite the sirens, Lance felt himself slip, and then he was flying through the ship, spying on the frantic inhabitants. Lotor’s generals wanted him to evacuate just in case, but Lotor wouldn’t leave without Lance with him.

He watched as Lotor found his empty cell.

There wasn’t much time left. There never was with Lotor on the hunt.

There was no warning Lance could give to Matt and his partner, nothing that Lance could do to prevent the meeting of the two parties in the Hangar.

Lotor’s normally perfect hair was disheveled, and his whole body was taut with emotion. Furious was an understatement for how Lotor felt, his feelings so strong, Lance could feel them without him touching his scales.

Lotor screamed at them, throwing away his illusion of calm perfection. “He is mine, and you will not take him!”

Purple handed Lance over to Matt, to Dark Green. “Go.”

“Not without you!” There was a frantic tone to Matt’s voice. He was scared of losing Purple, of being alone.

Purple was strong, Lance would give him that. He was strong and familiar, and something about him, about the way he fought, tugged at Lance. But he was also losing. Even this angry, Lotor was a master tactician and fighter.

Purple would lose this fight, and as if realizing that at the same time as Lance, Purple reached out to him and asked for help. There were no words exchanged, no physical connection. Just a tug – a request, a plea – that Lance could feel in his heart.

But what help could Lance be? He was just floating in this state of both existing and not existing. He existed through quintessence now. Not enough in him still to keep him fully grounded, to keep him awake, but too much for him to disappear.

Blue had done what she could to prevent that from happening.

There was nothing he could do to help Purple, but if he did not, then they would all surely be caught and/or killed by Lotor.

He was essentially a quintessence ghost, barely hanging on, but why? There was quintessence all around him. What kind of Druid was he if he couldn’t use that? What kind of Paladin was he if he couldn’t help those who asked for it?

He wasn’t just a Druid, and he wasn’t just a Paladin. He was neither and both, and he would help.

So, Lance reached out. He reached out into the ship, into the Quintessence veins. He reached out to the main crystal, which cried tears of quintessence from the pain of existence. He took it all, forcing the quintessence to tie himself back together.

Lance dreamed of waking up, and so he did.

The world erupted around Lance, a cacophony and kaleidoscope of color and sound, yet Lance registered none of it. He didn’t have the energy to resister it. His awakening was a brief temporary thing.
He had one chance, one moment, and he could not afford to waste it.

One moment he was in a fighter ship with Matt, and the next he was standing on the ground beside the unknown masked resistance member – Purple – facing Lotor.

“Enough.” Lance’s voice was a whisper, but like a butterfly beating its wings could create a hurricane; Lance’s whisper had power.

He tied himself to the main crystal, taking not just its energy and quintessence, but also its pain. There was a buildup of energy caused by the fractures and cracks that were now rapidly forming, and Lance took that into himself.

He had once thought that it would be unlikely for the Galra personnel to stop the crystal from imploding, and now, he was guaranteeing their failure. Quintessence energy crackled around him, burning him out from the inside out, but Lance held onto it.

It built like a tidal wave inside of Lance, and then once it peaked, the crystal shattered. Ordinarily, in the rare case that a crystal shattered, it would implode, but this time the backlash flowed through the ship, frying systems. Taking control of it was like trying to control a wild horse, but he didn’t need to control it. Not exactly. He just needed to set it in the right direction and let it go.

Quintessence sparked and crackled around him, bursting forward like a bolt of lightning which sprayed wide and far, sending Lotor sailing through the air into a Galra Fighter ship. The quintessence burned, the pain electrifyingly sharp.

The ship’s alarms blared in the background of his mind, blurring in with the soundless scream of his pain as he fell – his whole body trembling – right into Purple’s arms.

“LANCE!”

“We have to go!” Matt sounded frantic. “The hangar doors won’t stay open for long!”

Lance closed his eyes, welcoming the blank void that greeted him. This time when he dreamed, it was in darkness.

Chapter End Notes

So tempted to just post the chapter and not fill in the "Previously on..." and "Trigger Warning" simply because I'm feeling lazy and I have Assassin's Creed Odyssey paused just so I could update Lilac Sweet (I'm stuck at a part until Thursday when Ghost can read it over and help me workshop a way out of a hole I accidentally wrote myself into).

Anyways, as you guys can tell, I didn't give into the temptation, but it was there.

Also, do you guys have any idea how difficult it is to type when a tiny gray fur baby insists on sleeping on the lap that your laptop is on? He is persistent. Of course, I love him anyways because he's my youngest and he's been ever so sweet ever since the surgery. It's been nice to have him be so cuddly.
Chapter Summary

Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Due to quintessence exhaustion and injuries from helping Pidge and Sonali escape, Lance witnessed reality in brief snatches of awareness. Otherwise, he was essentially a quintessence ghost, watching reality as if it were a dream. Matt and another Resistance Member rescued Lance, only to be briefly stopped by Lotor in the hangar. Lance woke up and redirected the power of the shattering main crystal powering the ship towards Lotor, throwing Lotor back and allowing Lance's group to escape.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning(s):** Quintessence

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The earliest memories Lance had with his family were often inside the tourist attraction shack and bar that his parents ran.

His siblings and friends of the family waited on people, serving his mother’s nearly famous cooking – including her garlic knots – to the tourists that his father entertained with live music. Lance’s family would dance through the crowds, singing along to their father’s songs under their breaths.

It was always so loud and lively there, even on the rare days where they were slow.

Music was special to his family. His mom sung traditional song to herself or whoever was in the kitchen, dancing as she cooked. Even his siblings were musically inclined, sometimes joining their father up on the pseudo stage if they weren’t busing tables or working a shift.

Music wasn’t just present at the shack. It was also present in their home. There was singing and dancing with the chores; his parents singing in the kitchen or garden. At night, his mother would hum to him the song that he’d always had inside his heart as she tucked him into bed. The song he now knew to be his birth mother’s lullaby.

He could clearly remember home. The way the windchimes on the porch shimmered and shined with ocean glass and shells as it swayed in the ocean breeze. The heavy taste of salt in the air, stinging his eyes as he sat on the beach and watched the stars. The laughter of his relatives as he pointed out different stars and told them all “I’m gonna go there one day”.

Lance might not have been part of the family in blood, but he was part of their family in all the ways that mattered.
Although they always laughed at his desire to see the stars, they had still supported him. Pushing and encouraging him. They thought he could do it, and he had had. But at what cost?

Pondering such questions reminded him of the days he would sneak out of the house to lay on his surfboard out at sea like a raft and think. There had always been something calming about being at the mercy of the ocean, of feeling the swelling waves beneath him and the heat of the sun against his face and chest as the cool water slipped between his fingers, and the surf and cry of the gulls in his ears.

It was so realistic that for a moment Lance forgot this was a memory, and just existed, drifting on the tide. The waves turned into this mother’s lullaby, the crying of the gulls became a soft vocalization. The language was lost to Lance, but he didn’t need to know the language to understand the words.

He inhaled deeply and lifted his hand to the sun as if he were reaching for the stars he’d longed to touch. The world obeyed him and it disintegrated around him into a bright light of what Lance knew to be pure – or at least, nearly pure – quintessence.

His mother’s lullaby shifted, warping into something that joined with the voice. The new song promised him safety, and Lance believed it. There was a crescendo that uplifted his heart, soul, and spirit; renewing him with hope.

It surged, pushing him forward, and Lance stumbled into the waking world. He was in a dark cave, but in his other vision, it was lit up with pure quintessence.

It flowed around him, carefully cradling him, keeping him safe and warm. It emitted a low hum, the voice recognizable as the one from his dream, encouraging him to recover. It bolstered his own quintessence, and he belatedly realized that he felt… lighter, stronger… healthier.

The Balmera – for what else could this be? – sung to him, the song intertwined in the quintessence around him, and Lance smiled faintly. Corruption still itched under his skin, but he pushed past that to his real quintessence and carefully pulled it out, reaching back to the Balmera.

Where he touched, the Balmera glowed white, his quintessence fading into it with his mother’s lullaby. The Balmera hummed along, seemingly overjoyed with what little Lance could offer.

The whole exchange reminded Lance of when Shay and the others would communicate with their Balmera. Almost instantly, curiosity tinged the Balmera’s song, and he realized that he was still singing back to it with vague fragments of his thoughts and quintessence.

“It is not often an outsider hears the Balmera.” An unknown voice spoke. In his vision, he noticed a barely visible outline of someone blending into the Balmera, the slightest of yellow tints giving them away. “It is even rarer that one replies.”

It was startling to find himself not alone, but he wasn’t scared. Quintessence pulsed softly and gently, comforting and easing him. He was safe here. There was nothing here to harm him.

“It sung to me.” Lance replied, unsure if he had accidently committed some taboo.

Amusement hummed through him at the idea, and he knew it was the Balmera’s. “It has been healing you since you and your companions arrived.” The Balmeran – for what else would be within a Balmera than a Balmeran – informed him. “Your quintessence was in a poor state, young alchemist.”

The title caught Lance off guard and he furrowed his eyebrows, slowly shaking his head. “I’m
“Your scales are whole and your quintessence... for the most part clear. Despite the clothes you wear, you *are* an alchemist.” The Balmeran interrupted him gently. He reached out, resting a hand against Lance’s shoulder. “It has been nearly ten thousand deca-pheobs since an alchemist visited us, but I remember my people’s songs well.”

Well, even if Lance wanted to argue, there was clearly no point. He shifted to be sitting in a criss-cross and nodded at the Balmeran.

“I’m Lance.” Lance introduced himself.

“I am Tezr.” The Balmeran touched his chest, and then touched the Balmera. “The Balmera is known as Rehdu, and you are safe here. Rehdu has not been under Galra control for many deca-pheobs.”

Lance nodded slowly. “Thanks.” He replied with a small smile. He shifted again, this time hugging his knees to his chest as he tried to process everything. The last thing he remembered was being imprisoned by Lotor, but perhaps this Balmeran knew?

The Balmera sensed his distress and began to sing to soothe it away. It reminded him a lot of Blue, and at the thought of her, the Balmera paused in surprise before swiftly resuming the calming song.

“Rehdu is fond of you.” Tezr said, taking a seat near Lance. “Normally, it prefers those with a base more similar to our own.”

Well, Lance was definitely not yellow. He’d just betrayed Voltron and Lotor in relatively quick succession. Loyalty and stability were clearly not his forte.

“I guess I’m just special.” Lance replied. He was still trying to think of what happened, but all his mind pulled up were blanks. “How did I get here?”

“I am not surprised you don’t remember.” Tezr shrugged. “I have never seen someone with such a severe case of quintessence exhaustion before, and many of us believed you to be lost. It was a blessing that you were still alive at all, let alone that you should wake.” The look Tezr gave him had some sort of underlying meaning, but Lance didn’t catch it.

He sighed, pulling his legs closer. “So I almost died.” It wasn’t a question, but Tezr answered it anyways.

“Yes, and knowing that, missing memories is a small price to pay for your life.”

“You make it sound like I gave up my memories to live.” Lance huffed, mentally running through everything that he thought he could remember. Was there anything else he’d forgotten? How would he know if he had?

Tezr laughed at him. “No, no. I am only saying it makes sense you would not remember. Had your companions not brought you here, well, I don’t believe you’d be talking to anyone right now.”

Lance was quiet again, trying to think of what companions Tezr could be talking about. Rehdu answered him vaguely, bringing him sensations of dark forests in the night, and spiraling galaxies.

They stepped into his view, and it took Lance a moment to recognize the Dark Green as Matt. He switched out of his other vision and noted that around Matt’s wrists were two bracelets that glowed
bright enough to light up the small cave. He smiled when he saw Lance, his eyes lighting up in a way that reminded Lance too much of Pidge’s.

Quiznak, Pidge! He hoped she and Sonali were safe.

Behind Matt was a taller resistance member. They still wore a helmet, although Lance recognized his quintessence as something he was oddly familiar with. Perhaps from the time Lance couldn’t remember?

“Lance! You’re awake!” Matt cheered, half running forward to him. “It’s been days, and the Balmerans just kept saying that you were exhausted anytime I asked about you.”

“He blew up a crystal.” The other resistance member spoke dryly. He leaned against the wall and crossed his arms in a way that Lance really felt was familiar. Lance creased his eyebrows as he looked at him.

“Do I know you?”

“I carried you through Lotor’s ship, and had you not stepped in when Lotor showed up, I wouldn’t be here.”

Ah. Yeah, he met him during the time he couldn’t remember. That explained the familiarity of his quintessence.

“Well, now that you’re up, we can finally get going.” Matt continued to grin. Tezr shook his head.

“I’m afraid not yet. He is still recovering. Removing him from the Balmera too soon would endanger his stability and life.” At Tezr’s words, Matt’s grin fell.

“How much longer then? We have somewhere to go.” Mr. Unknown said.

Lance blinked in confusion. Somewhere to go? Where? Lance didn’t have any place to really go to unless they were referring to heading back to the resistance. In which case, Lance didn’t really have a place with them.

“I could not say.” Tezr replied, and both resistance members groaned. Lance frowned, his thoughts buzzing. He couldn’t feel Blue to ask her opinion, the only thing he could feel was Rehdu, but… no matter how much the Balmera felt like Blue… it wasn’t.

Not that it really mattered. No matter who’s counsel he sought out, the answers were the same: he had no where to go. He couldn’t return home, he couldn’t return to Voltron, he certainly couldn’t go back to Lotor. He might as well as just stay on the Balmera.

“Go on without me.”

“Uh, no?” Matt laughed once in disbelief. “After the mess we went through? I need to know where Sonali is.”

“I sent her off with Pidge. Hopefully, she’s with Voltron by now.” Lance paused and smiled wryly as he looked up. The unknown resistance member seemed to have stiffened. “Pidge is your sister, by the way. I rescued Sonali so she could reunite you two.”

“And they just left you?” Mr. Unknown asked.

“I didn’t give them much choice. I’m not… on friendly terms with Voltron currently.” He looked
away. “It’d be best for me to just stay here.”

Rehdu agreed, surging up through Lance with a song. It spoke of his weakness and the corruption in his core. It invited him to share himself; perhaps the solution could be found between them. It was a tempting offer.

“I think it’d be best for you to get back to your team.” Mr. Unknown’s voice was distorted through his helmet, but there was a familiar edge to his tone that Lance almost recognized. “I’m sure things aren’t as bad as you think they are.”

“I tried to murder them, nearly succeeded, and then got Pidge captured by Lotor.” Lance’s tone was flat. “Trust me; they don’t want me back.”

His lack of a connection to Blue felt too much like an open wound to even think about, but… it was a sign that they’d moved on, right? Blue could get a better Paladin now, and Lance… Lance could learn to live on a Balmera.

Mr. Unknown flinched, looking at Matt before looking back at Lance. “We can discuss this later, but I don’t think either of us will be going anywhere without you.”

“Taki.” Matt’s voice was a low warning, and rested his hands on Taki’s shoulders. “Let him rest.” He told him, before looking to Lance and smiling. “If you feel you need more time, we’ll wait.”

Lance smiled, offering his appreciation through a nod before closing his eyes and allowing himself to be lost once more in Rehdu’s song.

Communication with Rehdu was a lot like communicating with Blue, but simpler. That made communication both easier and more difficult. He couldn’t open himself to Rehdu like he could with Blue, but Rehdu took no offense to that.

Instead, Rehdu asked for knowledge through songs. It was delighted by his mother’s lullaby, but it was further elated by Lance’s tale of Shay’s Balmera. Rehdu essentially lit up with glee at the realization of another free Balmera, the loneliness in its own heart fading some at the idea.

In return for this knowledge and joy, the Balmera taught Lance. He tried to argue against it at first, for surely he was just repaying it healing him, but Rehdu would hear nothing of it.

It wanted to help Lance, and the only real way it could do that was through teaching him. It sung to him songs about the Altean Alchemists of the past. Telling him stories of a mythical place called Oriande, and the Ancient sages who lived there.

It told him lore about the birth of quintessence, and celestial beings that had created the universe. It taught him about the Altean Alchemists who would visit, and the rituals they’d perform and the offerings they’d give to retrieve crystals.

Rehdu insisted that Oriande had more information, but as far as Lance was concerned, Rehdu was the Library of Alexandria of Quintessence. He was completely baffled that Rehdu would insist on sharing so much information.

“You have potential, young alchemist.” Tezr told him as he handed Lance a bowl of cavebug soup during one of the few moments Lance was awake and not with the Balmera. “Rehdu senses that, just as it senses how much you are needed.”

Lance nodded, wisely refraining from arguing with the Balmeran.
Taki was often there when Lance woke, asking him how he was feeling, but never did he pry into Lance’s past again. Although Lance often woke to Matt and Taki fighting about it. The exact words were lost on Lance in the waking moments of coming back to himself after being with the Balmera, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t tell the subject that caused it.

Rehdu taught him more than just about Altean Alchemists and lore. It also taught him about why and how Balmeras produced crystals. The crystals were nothing more than excess quintessence that was stored into the crystals in case it was needed later.

Like a camel storing water in its humps.

Alteans did not have the ability to create crystals, but they could expel their quintessence, and while it wasn’t pure like a Balmera’s, it was more powerful, in some ways, because of that.

Lance rested when he woke for anytime he was asleep, the Balmera was teaching him. Filling his head with ancient songs of wisdom and hymns of lore.

It took half a week with the Balmera before Lance could be awake for long periods of time, his quintessence slowly, but surely, restoring itself. It didn’t help that the corruption inside him festered like an infection and grew twice as quick. Rehdu was unsure of what to do about it, but as the quintants passed, it became more and more clear that it was nothing that could be ignored.

“How did you manage before?” Matt asked when Lance spoke to the group about it. Both Tezr and Taki had been silent as Lance explained his problem.

“Allura and Blue managed to weaken it, and then Blue froze it beneath the ocean of my astral plane.” Lance sighed. “I might be able to weaken it with Rehdu’s assistance, but I’m too weak to seal it away on my own.”

“All the more reason for you to return to your team.” Taki chimed in, ignoring Matt’s look that was tossed at him.

“I… I can’t.” Lance shook his head. “I can’t risk Voltron being corrupted because of me. It’s bad enough the Black Lion suffers from it from Zarkon.”

Taki’s head shot up. “What?” His question was sharp and demanding and Lance winced, kicking himself in the butt for having such a big mouth.

“The Black Lion is corrupted?” Matt asked after a few moments of silence and Lance’s refusal to answer.

“I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“That’s something that kind of needs to be known.” Matt argued. “If the Black Lion is compromised, then…”

“I… I don’t know. Blue wouldn’t tell me. She just said that if she needed help with it, then she would turn to Black, and I don’t know, I mean, Zarkon probably did stuff considering what he does to well everything.”

Taki snorted, looking away, and Lance wondered if he’d ever get to see the Resistance member without their helmet. Probably not, considered it’d been half a week and he still had yet to see him without it.

“The Balmera doesn’t have any ideas?” Matt asked, trying to break up the silence. Lance sighed.
Rehdu was stumped by the corruption. Nothing that it suggested seemed to slow down or even remove the corruption. At this point, Lance was almost resigned to acknowledge that a) he wouldn’t be getting rid of it, and b) he wouldn’t be surviving with it for much longer.

“It is a shame you are not a Balmera, and are not able to just expel the corruption through a crystal.” Tezr commented.

Lance froze, his eyes widening. That had been an idea of his before, hadn’t it? He had thought about the Balmeras and how they stored quintessence in crystals, but he’d never quite figured out the semantics of it.

But then he ran into the problem that the Balmera made their crystals. He’d have to figure out a way to store the energy into a premade crystal. Which shouldn’t be as hard as it sounded, but… he’d managed it once… hadn’t he?

He’d managed it once, all alone; so, he could only imagine what he could do with the help of a Balmera.

“Tezr, you’re a genius.”

There were a couple of problems with the plan. The first being that Balmeras didn’t generate dead crystals, and the second being figuring out how to inject the corruption into the crystal. He could spread the infection by resonating with the quintessence inside a crystal until he turned it into corruption, but maybe if he tried a different approach…

“I need to spend more time with Rehdu.” Lance announced, heading over to his sleeping area.

Matt and Taki remained silent although they shared a look that Lance ignored.

Rehdu began to focus its training on itself. It took Lance within and into itself to show him how it expelled quintessence in a deeper explanation, and in return, Lance showed it how the Druids could resonate with the energy inside a crystal to corrupt it.

Rehdu had been horrified by what the Galra had done to its crystals, but thanked him for the information by explaining what was really happening. Resonating wasn’t what Lance had been told it was at all.

When he resonated, he was actually trading some of his quintessence -- or in this case, the corruption -- with the crystal. The clean quintessence went inside the Druid, where it was infected by the corruption lingering there, while the corruption from the Druid went inside the crystal.

That was why resonating and corrupting mass amounts of quintessence was so exhausting, and why sparking quintessence into a dead crystal was so difficult.

Yet Lance couldn’t figure out how to completely dump his corruption into a crystal. He’d essentially need to do a mass transfusion, and he might as well as consider all of his quintessence as infected. He wouldn’t survive if he attempted, and even if Rehdu helped, his body would likely reject too much pure quintessence.

It’d be like giving someone too much of a blood transfusion, without swapping out the bone marrow. Like yeah, a type A blood person could accept O blood type, but could they replace all the blood in their body with it?

Lance wasn’t medically trained like that, but he could guess the answer was ‘no’.
Pure Quintessence was basically the type O of quintessence, and that was all that the Balmera could offer him. Even if he managed to filter out all the corruption and replace it with pure quintessence, it would flood his system and wreak havoc on him.

He’d need Blue if he wanted to do that, and even *she* wrecked him when she flooded his system before to block the corruption under the ice.

He needed to be able to just throw away the corruption, and *not* receive an equal amount of quintessence back. If he could throw away the corruption, keep his correct quintessence, and then supplement with the pure quintessence until he could restore his own quintessence, then he’d be fine.

Which meant… he needed a dead crystal.

Chapter End Notes

HAPPY HALLOWEEN!!! :D
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance woke up to discover that Matt and Taki -- the unknown resistance member -- had saved Lance from Lotor's ship. They escaped to a nearby Balmera, which helped to heal Lance. Lance worked with the Balmera both to recover from his time on Lotor's ship and with Lotor, and to figure out a solution for the corruption. However, in order to attempt a possible solution, Lance needed a dead crystal.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Language, Quintessence, Astral Plane, Self-Depreciation, Corruption

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

As it turned out, asking for a dead crystal was far more easily said than done. He had asked Rehdu for one before, but by its very nature, a crystal was made imbued with quintessence. Rehdu could not see how it was possible to create a crystal *without*.

Which meant Lance couldn’t have a crystal made from scratch for this.

By this point, it’d been a full movement since Lance had woken up, and both Matt and Taki were getting pretty antsy about how long they had been there. It wasn’t like Lance couldn’t understand their desire to leave, because he did.

They all had things that they needed to do. Places they needed to be. And in, especially, Matt’s case; people to meet.

Lance didn’t have anywhere to go, and he found that equally liberating and depressing. He was free. He wasn’t tied to Blue or any of the other Voltron crew. He wasn’t tied to Lotor anymore. If he wanted, he could live out the rest of his short life on Rehdu.

Rehdu was all he ever wanted in a teacher about quintessence, and frankly, who knew when he would ever get another opportunity like this again to ‘speak’ with a Balmera and gain this much knowledge?

But… just because he *could* stay on the Balmera, didn’t mean that he should.

Yes, there was so much to learn here, but… honestly, he wasn’t sure how much more of Cave-Bug strew he could take. Not to mention the fact that he would live a very short life unless he figured out how to get the corruption out.
If he didn’t get it out, it would keep spreading until it took him completely over, and then… and then at that point, he wouldn’t be Lance anymore. He would just be another Druid. He would be dead.

So. The corruption had to go, plain and simple.

Which led him to needing a dead crystal, and that, of course, led him to his current conundrum. Thankfully, he had a quasi-solution, so long as he had help.

“This is insane.” Matt muttered as Taki started up the Galra fighter ship they’d used to get to the Balmera. “Batshit, criminally insane.” He looked at Lance. “I hope you know that.”

Lance half-shrugged, half his attention on Matt and the other half on the fighter ship’s power/fuel crystal. “If he’s as good a pilot as you say he is… then there won’t be a problem.” He paused and called out the next bit to Taki. “It’s still got a decent amount in it. About how long did you fly before seeing the Balmera, again?”

“No more than two days.” Taki replied.

“Huh.” Lance pulled away from the ship. “Well, keep an eye on the power gauge and come back when it’s low. I’d say in about…” Lance quickly did the math in his head. If there was this much power left after two days, then he could estimate… “Four days or so… No wait, three days.” … until it was low enough for what Lance needed but still safe enough for Taki to land.

“Three days?” Matt questioned. He made an unhappy face, looking away from Lance to hand Taki some provisions. “I… be careful, you hear me?”

Taki nodded an affirmative, and both Lance and Matt stood back away from the ship as it started to take off.

“This is still insane.”

“Do you want to leave or not?” Lance replied, not taking his eyes off the ship.

“We could leave before you hatched this plan.” Matt argued.

“You could leave.” Lance corrected him. “I can’t leave until I have this corruption sorted out, and to do that, I need that crystal drained. And since you and Taki won’t leave without me, I guess that means you’re stuck here too. We’ve already discussed this.”

“But if you can’t figure it out, then we’re stuck here!”

“More incentive for me to figure this out.” Lance shrugged, finally turning away from the ship. “Come get me when he returns. I’m going to go mediate with Rehdu.”

Matt let out a frustrated screech he had heard Pidge utter a few times before, before stomping off, presumably to go take a walk and clear his head.

Lance could understand his frustration, really he could. This was all backwards. Lance wanted to empty the crystal of the ship, so he could try to refill it. If he failed, well, who knew how long it’d be until someone could come rescue them.

There was something to be said about this whole experiment, however: Lance’s calculations on the fuel power were pretty accurate.
“I’m still saying this is insane.” Matt grumbled with crossed arms as they watched Taki’s ship get closer and closer.

“If you want to leave that badly, then just call the resistance.” Lance returned. Ever since Taki had left, they’d been having different variations of this argument and Lance was getting sick of it. Although, this was the first time Lance had brought up the communicators.

Lance wasn’t even looking at Matt, but he just knew that the look Matt was giving him could curdle milk. “I can’t.” Matt growled. “You fried it when you Thunder Shocked L’Oréal across the room.” Lance snorted, and half shrugged as if to silently say ‘what can I say?’. “Do you have any idea how long I worked on all the systems you fried?”

“Nope.” Lance popped the ‘p’ and rolled his eyes. “I’m so sorry I broke your junk when I saved us all from Zarkon Jr.”

“Uh-huh. Sure.” Matt scoffed. “And pluh-ease. You wouldn’t have escaped without our help.”

“Mmm… sure. I’ve thanked you enough for that.”

Matt scoffed again. “Because stranding us on a Balmera is thanking us? Yeah, sure.”

Lance shrugged again. “Not my fault your stuff isn’t pikachu-proof.” He gave Matt a sly side look. “But, humor me here… so I know the stakes… let’s say I fail to become a ship fueling/charging station and we’re stuck here…”

“Tezr said it’ll be some time before this Balmera passes by the resistance. At minimum, we’d be looking at about a deca-phoeb, and frankly, I can’t do Cave-Bug soup for that long.”

“I feel you there.” Lance agreed, grimacing at just the idea of having that soup for a full year.

“’Sides, I need to get back as soon as possible, especially if Katie already made it to Voltron and the Resistance.”

Lance grimaced again, this time at the unpleasant reminder of how cosmically fucked up this all was. Fate loved its irony, and honestly, it could kiss Lance’s ass. It wasn’t like he knew Matt was going to try to save Sonali.

“She goes by Pidge now.” Lance reminded him, watching the ship as it finally landed. “I don’t think even Shiro called her by her real name.” He added as an afterthought before heading over towards the ship.

Matt replied, but Lance didn’t hear it as he focused on Taki exiting the ship and holding something that gleamed in the light: the crystal.

It was barely glowing, but still dull enough that Lance thought he might be able to work with it. To get it any lower would be to put Taki’s safety at risk. Taki tossed the crystal at him, and Lance squawked as he caught it, shooting the other resistance member a dirty look.

“If this had broken…” Lance started to scold before cutting himself off with a quick sight. “Look, I don’t know enough about Galra ships to rewire it to work with a proper crystal.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Taki turned his attention to Matt – who had jogged up behind Lance – and Lance took that as his cue to take the crystal and run, so to say. He had things to figure out, crystals to recharge,
corruption to dispel, and people to return.

Rehdu was curious about the mostly dead crystal, poking and prodding at it while using Lance as a buffer incase the balmera sparked it into coming back to life. Through this, Lance could tell there was some quintessence still in it – as expected – but he would have to make do.

This crystal was already accustomed to corruption and being recharged – and man, what Lance wouldn’t give to have taken a look at the recharge stations for the ships – and so all he needed to do was just figure out how to recharged it.

 Seriously, the Galra could figure out how to recharge the fighter planes, but not to repower a crystal? Talk about some backwards nonsense science. Lance would have paid an arm and a leg to get ahold of that information now.

Of course, figuring out how to recharge the crystal was as easier said than done as obtaining the crystal in the first place was.

It was motivating, however, that this was about more than just him. This wasn’t him trying to figure it out to figure it out, but because Taki and Matt needed him to in order to get off Rehdu. To reunite Matt with his sister.

He had not gone through this hell to get Pidge a link to the resistance for Matt to get stuck on a Balmera with no way of communication for a deca-phoeb. He just didn’t. It was insulting and rude, and honestly, fate could suck it.

Because he was going to reunite Matt and Pidge if it was the last he did. He went through too much shit for them not to be reunited.

Where there was a will, there was a way; and Lance was bound and determined to find it.

He wasn’t trying to spread the corruption. He was trying to, for all intents and purposes, imbue it. He was trying to take it from one thing (himself) and store it in another (the crystal). The crystal was just an empty vessel, something he just needed to pour the quintessence into.

A simple theory, but more difficult in practice.

Touching the crystal against other crystals sparked a reaction, but Lance couldn’t tell if it charged it or not. Maybe if he knew how quintessence traveled through a ship… he could figure out some way to create a connector… but he didn’t have the time or resources for that.

The end of the first day, Lance could already feel his hope flagging.

He may have just doomed them all to a year on the Balmera… if Lance even lasted that long before going crazy from the corruption.

By the end of the second day, he wanted to scream. Nothing he tried worked. He managed it before by… what had he done before?

He wracked his brain, trying to think of what he could have done. It had something to do with the jewelry Lotor had given him, but what? He’d electrocuted himself, by… by… he had been touching his necklace with quintessence manifested in his hand.

He had tried holding a dead crystal with manifested energy before but decided that method took too long. It was an attempt to recharge the crystal via the latent quintessence in the surroundings, similar to how it was imbued with quintessence when it was created, or naturally recharged.
What about how the Lions recharged? They could recharge from their paladins or from the Castle of Lions… but they didn’t take energy from castle. They just… resonated with the castle, amplifying quintessence so that less equaled more, and the castle’s crystal could last longer.

Like with an electronic with a battery. If it had a charge still, it was easy and quick to recharge it. If it didn’t have a charge anymore, it took time OR a bigger voltage to shock it back into starting… like what Lance had done with the quintessence and the necklace.

He had created a shock, which was enough to push a little bit of quintessence into the crystal, which he then was able to resonate and amplify.

…

So that meant Lance needed to electrocute himself?

That didn’t sound right, and that wasn’t just Lance’s lack of desire to be electrocuted talking.

No, no, no. Wait. He needed the shock IF the crystal was dead, and the crystal in his hands wasn’t dead. He wouldn’t need to jump start it, because it was already started.

Cool. Cool, cool, cool. Cool. He just figured out how to bring a crystal back to life for the second time. Now he just needed to figure out how to transfer his quintessence to the crystal, instead of resonating and amplifying it.

If he thought about quintessence as energy… well, how were rechargeable batteries charged? Similar concept, not the same, but similar enough that Lance could figure it out.

He wasn’t Pidge, but he liked to think of himself as pretty smart. Besides, he had Pidge’s brother, and that was a resource he had been sorely neglecting.

“Hey Matt~” Lance half sung Matt’s name, grinning as he sat down beside him at dinner.

Matt’s entire body stiffened, and he cut himself off mid-sentence from whatever he was talking to Taki about. “That’s never a good tone.” He muttered, half to himself and half to Taki before turning to Lance. “Yeah? What’s up?”

“How do rechargeable batteries work?”

“Uh…” Matt blinked once, twice… three times. “What?”

“How do rechargeable batteries work?” Lance repeated.

“Uhm, by reversing the electron flow. Normally batteries flow negative to positive. During the recharge, the flow is reversed… what does this have to do with anything?” Suspicious Matt was still suspicious. Never mind that he didn’t actually have any real reason to be suspicious.

“You’ll see!” Lance sprung up from where he’d been sitting.

“Don’t blow us up, please!” Matt called after him.

Lance replied with a half wave, but before he was out of earshot, he heard Taki comment, “I’m worried about him.”

“Don’t be. Alchemists are weird AF, trust me.”

Huh. Maybe Taki didn’t typically work with the alchemists at the resistance? And oooh, there
was a reason to look forward to going back. He knew the Druid’s methods to things, and he wondered how much differently the resistance alchemists worked with quintessence.

If Voltron didn’t take him back, maybe he could work with them.

Ideas to think about later for worst case scenarios. For now, he needed to focus on his current project. The key to success was going one step at a time, right? Learn to walk before running. Yada, yada, yada.

He nudged Rehdu, asking the Balmera to show him how it looked when a crystal was created and imbued with quintessence; and then compared that to what it looked like when quintessence left a crystal, what happened when crystals touched, and what happened when he touched a crystal with a hand full of quintessence.

Crystals touching didn’t make much sense in terms of a recharge. Anytime something needed to be recharged, there would need to be at least two crystals. That was just… a mess. There had to be another way.

And Lance found it by studying the reactions.

It was like Matt had said with the batteries, the flow needed to be reversed.

He fought with the corruption, trying to force it not to resonate, but to flow. Unfortunately, he quickly realized that corruption was bit like brownie batter.

It was eager to spread, but it was sticky and less eager to leave. Trying to get it to flow out of him was like trying to pour a bowl of the batter into the pan. Even with a spatula, it was still difficult to cleanly scrape all of it out.

But… once he got a flow started… it was like the crystal was siphoning off of him, helping to take and absorb the corruption.

Sweat rolled down his face, his hands shook as he channeled the quintessence through himself into the crystal. The more he poured into the crystal, the more his eye lids drooped, and his body leaned forward, until he was laying on the floor, curled up around the crystal.

He closed his eyes and instead of being welcomed by Rehdu, he was… at his Astral Plane.

He spun around, his mouth dropped open with awe at the sight around him.

The almost constant rolling dark storm clouds had cleared away to reveal a gorgeous twinkling backdrop of stars, shining like tiny ice shards glittering under a midnight sun. The horizon blended in with the ocean, seamlessly flowing into the waves that gently lapped onto the shore. The stars were reflected back on the water, undisturbed by the swell and ebb of the water.

Bioluminescent seaweed and algae washed up on the shore before being taken back out to sea, painting the rocky beach with a rainbow of color. Lava spilled from a fissure in one of the cliffs down into the ocean, the hot steam turning into a comfortable warmth as it reached Lance on a salty breeze.

Lance sighed, finding peace for the first time in forever in his Astral Plane.

Vaguely, he could feel Rehdu, floating around him and under him. It filled his Astral Plane with quiet whale song, and Lance could have cried at how perfect and clean his astral plane was again.
Blue was surprisingly not present. His tie to her was as flimsy as a single strand of spiderweb. Flimsy, barely noticeable, and all too easy to break. He felt like if he so much as breathed wrong on the connection – not that that was possible – it would break away.

They had been physically separated long distances before, but never before had he been so drained of quintessence. It wasn’t surprising that the connection had frayed this badly when he thought about it.

Still, for old time’s sake, he reached out for her along that connection anyways. His heart felt heavy with his hope that he would somehow be able to reach her.

He had just started to lose hope for reaching her when he felt her. It was like he was only able to brush the very tips of his fingers against her, and for a moment he thought he could feel the cool metal. But he felt more than just that. He felt her pure despair.

She lashed out at him with a tiny flash flood storm of the emotion, conveying perfectly how much she did not want a new Paladin so soon after losing Lance. She wasn’t interested in another Paladin, no matter what Voltron needed.

Lance and the others had been chosen because they would be a team together. They would be Voltron together, and any replacement for Lance would be cheap and false.

He felt like he was sent tumbling through the downpour of her emotions even if he didn’t actually move in the astral plane. It was touching that she felt so strongly about him. That she was so hurt by his absence.

He felt warm and fuzzy at her obvious affection for him, and yet at the same time, he felt so very guilty over making her worry so much. Over making her think that he was… gone. He needed to tell her the truth, to show her that he wasn’t gone.

He was right here.

It actually hurt to stretch himself back out, to force himself further, to touch her more than just a brush of the fingertips. But the pain was necessary. He needed to reassure Blue that he was there, that he hadn’t left her. That he wasn’t some new Paladin connecting to her. He wasn’t a replacement.

Almost immediately she snapped at him, angry that he dared to attempt to connect with her again after just being denied. And then she recognized him.

Shock, surprise, joy, it all ran through the connection, helping to strengthen it as she took some of the strain away by reaching out to him until they were meeting ‘halfway’.

Blue’s metal was a cool, familiar comfort under his hands. Without hesitating, Lance pressed his body against her head, trying – and failing – to encompass her in a hug. Tears streamed down his face, but he was laughing from the sheer joy of having Blue again.

She settled against him, perfect in every way. They were a pair, and after being separated, they were finally reunited.

“I thought I lost you.” Blue was crying again. Each of her tears was the size of Lance’s head, and it took him using both of his hands to wipe one tear away from her golden eyes.

“You didn’t.” Lance told her. “It’s you and me, right, beautiful?”
Her confirming hum echoed across the ocean, harmonizing with the whale song of Rehdu. “Where are you?” The fact she needed to ask told Lance the connection was still thin and shaky, but he’d take that over non-existent any day.

What had he been thinking, thinking that he could walk away from this? That he could walk away from Blue and Voltron? He belonged with Blue, and… if the team would have him again after all he’d done and caused… with the team as well.

“On a Balmera named Rehdu.” He answered. Reluctantly, he pulled away to gesture at the water. “Look! It’s clean! I can fix what I did to you, and with time, practice, and permission, I could try to help Black too.”

Blue’s emotions were a tidal wave that slammed into Lance so hard all he could do was laugh and cling to her. He spent an undeterminable amount of time with Blue, neither of them willing to let the other go.

He made himself comfortable in the hollow under her head, nestled against one of her paws. She lowered her head, protectively covering him but not preventing the view of the ocean. He traced designs against the cool metal, until the questions pressing at him were too much for him to hold back.

“Did… Did Pidge make it back?” Lance asked.

Blue was quiet long enough for Lance to start to worry before she finally replied with a quiet rumble. “She did. Along with the dual-based Altean.”

“Altean?” Lance repeated before the other words clicked in his head. Dual-based? Sonali had been an inverted watermelon… could that have been what Blue was referring to? “You mean… Sonali?”

“I believe that was her name, yes.”

“Huh.” Lance hadn’t expected Sonali to be an Altean, but that did explain why she had been so keen to keep her duality a secret. It was fortunate then that Lance had kept it that way. “Allura must be so pleased.”

Blue would not break her silence to reply to that. Lance sighed, resting his head against her. The questions still bubbled up inside him, but they were less pressing than the one about Pidge’s safety. Now that he knew she was safe, he could finally relax.

Well, sorta. He still needed to get Matt to her. Then he could relax.

But if Blue thought him dead… what did the others think?

Were they guilty over their treatment of Lance? Did they regret not spending more time with him? Were they thankful that he wasn’t there to burden them anymore?

No. No, he wouldn’t ask those questions, even to himself. Who cared if they were guilty or regretted their choices. Everyone was guilty of something or other.

They were probably lonely and in mourning. Hunk lost his best friend. Pidge already probably thought Matt was missing again by now, and Lance’s own ‘death’ was probably a double hit of pain for her. Keith was…

Keith was probably…
Lance blinked furiously a couple of times, like that would stop the sudden pressure from building behind his eyes.

The question was self-destructive, and he knew it but… he had to know. It pulled and nagged at him, begging to be asked. He wanted to know, for sure, with no assumptions how the others were faring.

“How are the others?” His voice cracked halfway through the question, but Blue made no acknowledgement of that.

“Red’s Paladin is…” She faltered, and Lance could feel her trying to find the words best to say, “pained. His pain burns through the entire pride, although Yellow’s Paladin tries to temper it best he can. There is only so much that can be achieved against fire without ice or water.”

Lance’s mouth stayed open as he breathed in through his mouth, stunned into silence at the extent of how much Keith missed him. He supposed they had gotten close lately, and Keith had always been… protective.

A small smile slowly started to form as Lance thought back to the warm mornings where woke in Keith’s bed, feeling relaxed, refreshed, and most importantly, safe.

The safety Keith had offered was different from Lotor’s ‘safety’. It had been genuine and sweet. Warm and comforting. He hadn’t expected anything from Lance. No kisses or touches or anything. It was honestly surprising that Keith had even allowed Lance into his bed to begin with considering their ‘history’.

“I miss him too.” He confided in Blue. Her acknowledging rumble was coated with amusement. “Hunk must have his hands full.”

“Yellow’s Paladin mourns like the others but cannot afford to do so publicly.” Lance thought to Blue’s initial reaction, and a sour taste rose to the back of his mouth.

“Everyone thinks I’m dead.” It wasn’t a question, but a fact. “I’m sorry.”

“You are here now. There is nothing to be sorry for.” Then Blue paused, and almost shyly added on, “You are coming home?”

Lance thought to the others mourning him, and to Blue’s joy of rediscovering him. He thought about his original assumption of not being wanted due to him betraying them and swallowed down his emotions. “If they’ll have me.”

“They will.” Blue’s response was immediate and absolute. There was no arguing with it, and Lance half laughed, curling into her. “I’ll prove it.”

…What did that mean? “What?” Lance asked out loud, but the response didn’t come from Blue.

“Lance?” Lance’s entire body froze at the familiar voice and then, before he could realize what he was doing, he was climbing over Blue’s paw to see that the owner of the voice was indeed…

“Keith.” Lance breathed out his name, but it was auditable enough for Keith to hear him. His gaze immediately fell on Lance. In his haste to reach him, he slipped off Blue’s paw and stumbled right into Keith’s chest.

Warm arms encircled around him, tight enough to make Lance feel wanted but lose enough that Lance could pull away and retreat if needed – he didn’t. He noted that Keith was trembling, and
his touches were gentle, like he was afraid he’d break Lance just by touching him.

“Is this… is this real?” Keith whispered, his breath hot against Lance’s ear.

Lance’s words were caught and lost somewhere in his throat. He nodded, and after a deep breath, found the words to say, “I hope so.”

“I…” Keith stumbled over his words, his grip on Lance tightening just the smallest bit. Did he think Lance would disappear again? Given his track record, Lance wouldn’t blame him if he did. “I… We thought you died.”

Lance’s entire body flinched, and he pulled away from Keith, taking one solid step back. Keith followed him with a half step, his gaze flickering as he looked Lance over. There was so much sheer hope in Keith’s gaze, and Lance couldn’t take it.

He looked away and worried his bottom lip. “Would that be so bad?” He asked quietly.

“Yes!” Keith’s shouted reply echoed in the Astral Plane, and Lance could feel Blue’s agreement with Keith. “Yes, it is that bad, Lance. Fuck, we all miss you.” He paused, exhaling softly. “I missed you.”

It was one thing to hear it from Blue, but to hear it from Keith it was… irrefutable. He swallowed thickly, gulping down the lump in his throat that he was sure was his heart, and looked back to Keith, this time really taking him in.

“You look like you need some rest.” He commented, unwilling to respond to Keith’s… whatever that was. He didn’t want to think on it, on what it meant. On how it could be taken. The feelings behind it weren’t ones that Lance felt ready to face yet.

It wasn’t a lie either. Keith’s hair was limp and dull, and heavy bags were under his eyes. There was a certain pallor to him that honestly had Lance concerned for his wellbeing. Blue had said that Hunk was helping but… Keith still looked like a wreck.

“What happened to taking care of yourself?” Lance asked.

“Of course.” Keith half laughed. “Of course, you pick on my appearance first. Typical Lance.” His lips were pulled up in a semblance of Keith’s usual smirk, but it seemed so… halfhearted. As broken as the half laugh he had just given.

“I wouldn’t pick on it if you didn’t make it so easy.” Lance bantered.

Keith let out another bark of half laughter, and Lance realized why it sounded so wrong. It was tinged with bitterness. “This better not be another dream.”

Another… dream? Keith dreamed about him? The idea made him feel so uncomfortable in so many completely different ways. What type of dreams did Keith have? Did Lance want to know?

“Technically…” Lance started but trailed off at the sharp look.

“We thought you were dead, Lance.” Keith interrupted. “We thought you were dead.” It was silently implied that some part of Keith still thought Lance was dead.

Lance took one of Keith’s hands and held it, squeezing gently like that could help reassure Keith. “Almost.” He admitted, and the sound Keith let out at that was a death rattle of a wheeze. “But I’m alive.” He stepped that half step forward and pressed his forehead against Keith’s. “I’m alive,
“You’d better not be lying to me.” Keith said. “I won’t stop looking for Shiro, and I won’t stop looking for you either. The team needs you.” He didn’t add it on, but Lance knew that there was an additional ‘I need you’ that was left unspoken.

To some degree it was… creepy to be assured that Keith would chase after him so relentlessly, but at the same time, it was comforting in the sense that Keith thought so strongly that Lance was needed. It was… reassuring.

“We have a lot to talk about.” Lance broke away from Keith and walked a couple steps away. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Keith start like he was going to follow, but he didn’t. He let Lance have his space.

“We need to work on communication.” Keith agreed.

“And trust.” Lance added.

“And trust.” Keith confirmed, nodding his head. “But this is a conversation for the whole team. Not just… us.” There was a hesitation in the way he said ‘us’, like he was expecting Lance to snap at him that there was no ‘us’ between them.

He toed the rocky beach, his gaze trained on the pebbles and sand. He couldn’t really deny that there was something between them. There was, and it both was and wasn’t like what he had with Lotor. And if he was honest, that terrified him.

But he had known from the beginning that he had a crush on Keith. He had a thing for red bases, apparently. But to have Keith just talk about it, to bring it up… especially after all that Lance had been through… And for Keith to possibly return those feelings, after all that Lance had put him through, put the team through. It was unreal, and impossible to think about.

“Us… won’t be easy.”

“When is it ever?” Keith replied. “And I don’t mean right now or even in the near future. I just don’t want to think that there’s something where there isn’t. I won’t do that to you, Lance.”

Lance didn’t really know what to say to that. It wasn’t a promise to wait. It wasn’t a promise at all. Yet it somehow still felt like one. Like Keith was promising not to push himself on Lance. He wrapped his arms around himself.

“We should probably have this conversation in person.”

“This is your Astral Plane, isn’t it? There’s not a more personal place for us to talk about this.” Keith shot back.

Lance bristled at the response, irritating flaring up. “This is my personal space!” Lance hissed, and Keith’s eyes flashed.

The Astral Plane was a projection of himself, and Keith had no right to even be here, let alone try to force a conversation Lance didn’t want to have yet. He prepared himself for a fight, but Keith looked away and stepped back. He held his hands out in a ‘placating’ manner.

“You’re right.” All the wind blew out of Lance’s sails, and he felt himself deflate at Keith’s admission. “Just one more thing for us to work on, huh?”
Lance made a non-committal sound, but he supposed Keith was right. It was one more thing for them to work on. Although, Keith was already doing pretty good with knowing when to back off. Lotor had been good at that too, but he’d always backed off in ways that made Lance feel trapped.

Keith didn’t make him feel that way.

Keith didn’t make him feel cornered or trapped, and he honestly couldn’t tell if that was a good or bad thing. Maybe not feeling cornered or trapped was just a different way of cornering and trapping him. Or maybe…

Maybe it wasn’t.

He was suddenly hit with the strange and inexplicable urge to kiss Keith. Which was stupid and weird and would send so many mixed signals to Keith. “You deserve better.”

“Not your call to make.” Keith’s voice was gentle as he replied. “And I could say the same to you. I treated you like trash before, and it took you disappearing and being hurt for me to realize that.”

It was Lance’s turn for a bitter laugh. “I’m a mess.” He didn’t know why he was trying to dissuade Keith, but the words spilled out before he could stop them.

Keith looked around at the Astral Plane before looking back at Lance. “Seems beautiful to me. At least you don’t have a burning house.”

“You haven’t fixed that yet?” Lance furrowed his eyebrows.

“No water.” Keith’s reply was so casual but the meaning behind it was anything but. “We all need each other as part of the balance.” Pointedly, he looked to the lava flow.

“You’re making it seem like you’ll die if I’m not with you, and that’s a tad creepy, Keith.”

“We all need each other.” Keith repeated. “I need you, Hunk needs you, Pidge needs you. I’m sure Shiro’s having a hard time out by himself too. We all need each other, it’s what being part of Voltron means.”

Well, Lance couldn’t argue with that. Keith was right. Being pure bases, they did need each other to help temper out the extremes.

“When you will be back?” Keith asked.

“Not sure.” Lance replied.

“Then we’ll come to you!” Keith’s voice held just the barest note of fear. Lance’s heart ached at that, but he still shook his head.

“No. I left and so I need to be the one to return.”

“Then we’ll just need to welcome you with open arms.”

Lance laughed. “Like you won’t be able to tell when I’m close.”

“You feel so distant now.” Keith moved forward slowly, watching Lance for signs to back off. Once he was close enough, he took one of Lance’s hands now. “Even though you’re right here.”

“It won’t be for much longer now.” Lance assured him. “And the sooner I leave, the sooner I can
“Don’t let me keep you then.” The Astral Plane started to fade, and Keith continued to hold Lance’s hand until he too faded away.

Lance woke to Matt’s entirely too close face and Tezr’s distant voice. His mind felt foggy from coming back from the astral plane, yet also coolly sharp. He could feel his connection with Blue fade, weakening back to the point of almost non-existence again.

He mourned the loss but knew that it was only temporary. Once he was back with her, with the team, he could work on rebuilding his connections.

“For a moment there, I thought I’d have to kiss you to wake you.” Matt commented, leaning away and giving Lance some space.

“You’re not my price charming.” Lance’s words were slightly slurred from just waking up, but he knew Matt understood him by his responding smirk and comment.

“I’m everyone’s prince charming. Just ask Taki.”

“I’d really rather not.” Lance commented as he sat up. He stretched out, and coughed as Matt thumped him solidly on the back.

“Are you okay?” Taki asked. “What happened?”

“The alchemist is fine. His experiment was a success, and he needed to reflect in his pools of his soul.”

“That’s… insightful.” Lance nodded at the Balmeran. “Thanks, Tezr.”

“I tried to tell the others, but they would not listen.” Tezr replied, side-eyeing Taki in particular.

“He wasn’t waking up and I wanted to make sure he didn’t kill himself recharging the crystal.” Matt snapped at Tezr, narrowing his eyes. “Look, I appreciate what you’ve done and what you’re still doing for us, but he’s my friend. I’m allowed to be worried.”

Well, that was interesting. Taki had been the one giving Tezr the hard time, yet Matt was the one who responded. Once he had the time and energy to care more, he’d be investigating that. Or dropping a mention to Pidge and letting her investigate. It was a little sister’s job to annoy an older brother and he wouldn’t dream of denying Pidge that opportunity. Plus, he had a feeling that he’d be a bit more preoccupied with other things.

Like Keith.

“Of course. It is natural to worry for friends.” Tezr bowed his head, and then turned around and left. Matt sighed, running a hand through his hair.

“I’m going crazy here.” He muttered before shaking his head and looking down at Lance. “You’re good, right?”

“I’m good.” Lance nodded, and then held up the now brightly glowing purple crystal. “I’m better than good, actually.”

“Fan-fucking-tastic!” Matt grinned, ignoring Taki’s chide of ‘language’. “So, we can get off this Balmera? I’m dying to see my sister.”
“Yeah. Just need to plug this back into the ship, and so long as you know the way back to the resistance… we’ll be good to go.”

Matt’s grin could have rivaled the sun.

Now that Lance had something to get back to himself, he could relate a lot more with Taki and Matt’s desire to get off the Balmera. He wanted to see Blue, to see his team… to apologize to them all for all that he’d done and explain why he’d done some of the things he’d done.

He felt ready now to talk about everything, to explain how he’d felt and what had happened. To apologize for trying to kill them, and for betraying them and getting Pidge captured.

Of course, he hoped to get some apologizes back, but… he wasn’t really expecting that. Keith’s apology in the Astral Plane had been surprising enough. He didn’t expect anything from the others.

He just wanted to go back… if they’d take him – and he was pretty sure they’d take him based off what Blue and Keith said. If they didn’t, well, at least he did his best to clear the air.

He would just have to figure something out.

Saying goodbye was tearful. Rehdu occasionally came by the resistance, so Lance knew he’d be able to see the Balmera and the Balmerans again, but it didn’t make it any less sad to leave.

He hadn’t known Rehdu or Tezr for a long time, but he felt the same as when he left his family in Cuba to join the Garrison. They had become family to him with their patience and guidance.

“How you.” He whispered to Rehdu, giving it a drop of his quintessence. Rehdu shuddered at it, pleasure and appreciation bleeding through its song of goodbye.

He hugged Tezr, and the returning hug and song reminded him strongly of Hunk. He was crying as he pulled away and he sniffled and wiped them away. There were other Balmerians on Rehdu, but Tezr had cared and tended to him the most.

They had decided to return to the resistance. If Voltron had met with them yet, then they would have a way to get in contact with Voltron. If Voltron had not yet met them, then they could wait until Voltron showed up.

Matt assured them that based on Redhu’s location, they weren’t far from the resistance. “We’re not close to the planet, but we are in the same system at least.”

“So, we could have stayed on Rehdu until the resistance picked us up?” Lance teased, recalling their previous conversation about being stuck on the Balmera for about a year.

“Fuck no.” Matt shook his head. “I’ll take a few days cramped in a Galra fighter before I stay on a Balmera for a year.”

Lance laughed, shaking his head, as Taki started the ship.
Previously on *Lilac Sweet*: Lance was finally able to obtain a dead crystal to continue his experiments with 'resurrecting' a crystal. He needed to do this to help clear himself of the corruption. He felt he wouldn't be able to return back to Voltron until that was dealt with, and there was no better time to do so than on a Balmera that wanted to help him. Lance's attempts were successful, and he - plus the two Resistance Members, Matt and Taki - started their journey to the Resistance Base, where they hoped to find a way to contact Voltron.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning(s):** Minor Allura, Minor Politics, Referenced/Mentioned Character Death, Cursing

If you feel that I need to add/remove warnings per chapter, please give me a message on Tumblr. Thank you!

Keith knew that he didn’t wear exhaustion well. If Lance were here, he had no doubt that he’d be teasing Keith over his messy hair and the bags under his eyes. But then again, if Lance were here, then Keith wouldn’t be such a mess.

Shiro had left the team to him and he had irreversibly fucked up and caused Lance to *die*. Slav said the outcome would result upon Keith’s actions, and this was the outcome. Lance was *dead*, no matter how much Keith wanted to deny it, and it was All. Keith’s. Fault.

Lance was dead. Matt was dead. Neither Blue nor Black were responsive. Allura was trying – and failing – to secure an alliance with the resistance. And due to that, Allura was pushing – now more than ever – to replace the missing Paladins. Preferably with someone from the resistance.

Keith didn’t specialize in politics or diplomacy – that was more of a Shiro, Allura, and Coran sort of thing – but he thought the idea was that they could leverage their need for Paladins to secure the alliance. Sort of like marrying off a daughter to a foreign prince.

Which was stupid. The *Lions* chose the Paladins, and if neither Black nor Blue wanted a new Paladin… then there weren’t going to be any new paladins. That was that.

End of Story.

Allura *knew* this. In the very beginning, *she* was the one to tell him and the rest of the team that.

This whole situation was part of the reason Keith hadn’t wanted to tell Allura about Lance in the first place! Coran was the one who actually broke the news to her and the others.
“Keeping secrets and lack of communication got us into this mess in the first place.” Coran reminded Keith after spilling the beans to everyone. “We’ve given them a couple days to recover from the news about Matt. It was time to break the news about Lance.”

Personally, Keith didn’t agree. He still didn’t agree. He didn’t think he’d ever agree.

They should have waited until the alliance was fully secured and the team was back at the castle. The news should have been broken to Pidge and Hunk in person. Not over some holographic call interface.

Keith was no stranger to grief. His father was dead, his mother was dead; Shiro was missing. Keith was no stranger to grief. Pidge and Hunk didn’t deserve to find out the way that they did. Coran didn’t have the right to break the news to them. Allura didn’t have the right to push so hard to replace Lance so soon.

It was just wrong.

Red agreed with him. Her own grief was thick black smoke from a smoldering fire, leaving him covered in a layer of black soot that clung to his thoughts and memories. It choked out happiness and joy, leaving him feeling melancholy and lost.

She tried not to affect him so strongly, but there was little she could do when every already restless sleep was disturbed by nightmares of dry jungles where Pidge’s screams of grief echoed into a thick canopy of leaves above, of empty dry canyons where water once coursed, of an abandoned house blazing with fire and no water to put it out. Worst still were the dreams of conversations with Lance; some real and others imaginary.

Most of his time was spent in the endlessly cold hangar for the Blue Lion, begging at her to wake up, to give him a sign that there was a mistake. A glitch in the system. Proof that Lance was alive after all. Yet she never responded.

It was irrational – especially considering how cold it had become in her hangar – but he’d taken to camping out in front of her out of fear concern that he would miss something while away.

“We’re a mess.” Keith told the inanimate form of the Blue Lion. “This is a mess. Everything’s a mess.”

He closed his eyes and dropped his head onto the tops of his knees as he heaved a heavy sigh. He was no stranger to grief, and by all accounts, he should have been handling this all a lot better than he was. He should have been.

But he wasn’t.

He mourned for Lance, for his team. He mourned for what should have been, what could have been, and what it was. He mourned that that no one would truly be able to mourn as they were in a war, and that meant they had to keep pushing on.

No matter how much it hurt.

And he hated that. He hated that almost as much as he hated Lotor and the fact he survived when Lance did not. If he ever met the Prince, he would personally ensure that Lotor would regret that.

He was almost so lost in his thoughts that he didn’t notice Red’s muted shock. She tried to cover it up, but its pure existence had been enough to catch Keith’s attention. He looked up and froze as he stared into Blue’s glowing eyes.
At first, Keith was angry. How dare Blue find a new Paladin so soon after Lance? How dare she accept someone so quickly? But he was also foolishly hopeful that maybe… just maybe… Blue wasn’t reacting to a new Paladin but to Lance.

He knew it wasn’t possible. Lance had died. Keith had felt the chill of his death through the Paladin bond.

Suspended between both anger and hope, Keith turned to the only one who would know more about the situation: Red. He closed his eyes again and took a deep breath, trying to reach out for his lion. It didn’t take long for her to respond.

She tugged at him, pulling him into her flickering warm embrace. For a moment, he saw a vision of his burning house, and then it was gone in less than a blink. Thoughts, feeling, sensations, visions, they all passed too quickly in a blur around him, and when it finally stilled, he thought he would be ill.

Even more so when he realized where he was.

He had been here before. The familiar ice cliffs in the distance, with the lava flow that he was ninety percent certain he somehow caused. However, it wasn’t exactly the same as before. The beach had become countless tiny pebbles instead of the cold slick ice shelf. The sky, once starless and dark, was a myriad of stars reminding him of the night sky at his desert home. The ocean seemed… cleaner? Like it was clearer than before, sparkling in the starlight.

It felt like his breath was caught in his chest as he looked around the Astral Plane. He didn’t know much about them, but from what he understood this was… this was Lance’s Personal Astral Plane. Which meant…

“What?” Keith’s entire body stiffened at the sound of Lance’s voice.

He looked to the Blue Lion – also new, but then again, he hadn’t spent much time here last time – and took a chance, calling out, “Lance?”

He wasn’t sure what he expected, but Lance climbing over the Blue Lion’s paw to stare at him with wide eyes wasn’t it. “Keith.” Lance said his name and then slipped off the Blue Lion’s paw right into Keith. Acting on instinct, he wrapped his arms around him to hold him steady.

Keith didn’t want to let him go. Lance was undeniably warm and real in his arms. Warm, real, and most importantly, Alive.

“Is this… is this real?” Keith had to ask if only because this all just seemed too good to be true. And in his experience, if it was too good to be true, then it usually was.

Lance’s nod was all Keith needed for relief to blaze through him, although his following words were less reassuring. “I hope so.”

“I…” Keith stumbled over his words, his grip on Lance tightening. Some part of him thought that Lance was vanish if Keith let him go, like this was just another one of his nightmares come to life. “I… We thought you died.”

Lance pulled away at that, and Keith followed, hell bent on ensuring Lance wouldn’t just slip through his fingers like smoke. The fact that Lance was here, that this was possibly most likely real was… it was unreal.

“Would that be so bad?”
Keith couldn’t believe that Lance had the audacity to ask that to his face. Then again, this was Lance, and so yeah, maybe him having the audacity to say that to Keith’s face wasn’t all that surprising. But still. How dare he?

“YES!” Keith honestly didn’t mean to shout, but it came out as one anyways. “Yes, it is that bad, Lance. Fuck, we all miss you.” Thousands of imaginary conversations raced through Keith’s mind in an instant. All the nightmares, all the dreams. Everything. He took a breath and added, “I missed you.”

“You look like you need some rest.” Keith could have screamed in frustration at Lance’s avoidance. “What happened to taking care of yourself?”

“Of course.” Just like with the audacity to ask that question to Keith’s face… of course Lance would comment on his appearance. “Of course, you pick on my appearance first. Typical Lance.”

“I wouldn’t pick on it if you didn’t make it so easy.”

Echoes from nightmares matched along with Lance’s words, and Keith let out a bitter bark of laughter. “This better not be another dream.” Because if it was, he was going to have some words with both the Blue and Red Lions.

“Technically…”

“We thought you were dead, Lance.” Keith interrupted, not wanting to hear the response for that. “We thought you were dead.”

“Almost.” Lance took one of Keith’s hands, and squeezed it. The action was more reassuring than Lance probably realized. “But I’m alive.” He pressed his forehead against Keith’s, and for a single golden moment, Keith thought Lance was going to kiss him.

This was so not the time for intrusive thoughts, yet they appeared anyways. They dared him to glance down at Lance’s lips, to just lean forward the extra little bit to brush his own against them. To prove this was real with a kiss – like that would actually prove anything.

Instead he kept his gaze firmly on Lance’s eyes. He never really noticed the orange of his pupils. Like, he’d noticed Lance’s eyes had changed, but he never really took stock of it. If that made any sense. So long as these thoughts kept him distracted from kissing Lance, he didn’t care if they made sense or not.

“I’m alive, and I’m coming back.” Lance promised.

“You better not be lying to me. I won’t stop looking for Shiro, and I won’t stop looking for you either.” Especially now that Keith was ninety percent sure that Lance was still alive. “The team needs you.”

He didn’t feel like he needed to add in the very obvious ‘I need you’. Lance was smart enough – most of the time – to hear it without Keith saying it.

“We have a lot to talk about.” Lance broke off their contact and walked away. Keith started to follow, but hesitated.

“We need to work on communication.” Keith agreed. Communication, or lack thereof, had been the cause of all of this in the first place. If they had communicated among each other… if they’d been a proper team… Well, it was too late for ‘what ifs’.
“And trust.” Lance added.

“And trust.” Keith agreed. “But this is a conversation for the whole team. Not just…” He trailed off, suddenly unsure of how Lance was going to take this next bit, “us.”

Lance was silent long enough for Keith to be pretty sure his heart was about to stop. “Us… won’t be easy.”

“When is it ever? And I don’t mean right now, or even in the near future.” Despite how much he wished he did mean that, he knew he couldn’t expect that from Lance. Not now. Not so soon after Lotor. Lance needed time to heal from that.

Time that Keith would kill to give Lance.

“I just don’t want to think that there’s something where there isn’t. I won’t do that to you, Lance.”

“We should probably have this conversation in person.” Lance suggested.

Keith frowned, looking about the Astral Plane. “This is your Astral Plane, right?” He questioned. “There’s not a more personal place for us to talk about this.”

“This is my personal space!” Lance legitimately hissed at him, and the hair on the back of Keith’s neck nearly stood straight. Lance’s eyes and scales seemed to glow, and he could almost feel the chill of the Astral Plane seem to grow and press down upon him like a heavy icy weight.

He wasn’t going to lie and say that some part of him didn’t want to fight Lance on this. Because he did. He wanted nothing more than to continue to press, but he knew better than to do that. If he did, it would make him no better than the other people who had pushed and pressed Lance into misery.

He needed to take a step back.

“You’re right.” He agreed. “Just one more thing for us to work on, huh?”

“You deserve better.” Keith blinked at the reply and just barely bit back his immediate denial.

“Not your call to make, and I could say the same to you.” Keith tried to keep his voice gentle, his movements non-threatening. He didn’t want to make Lance scared of him or remind him of that horrible moment in Blue’s hangar after their first visit to the Astral Plane together. “I treated you like trash before, and it took your disappearing and being hurt for me to realize that.”

“I’m a mess.”

Keith scoffed and looked around the Astral Plane again. “Seems beautiful to me.” He replied. “At least you don’t have a burning house.”

A burning house that Lance had told Keith to fix. Except he wasn’t exactly sure how to do that.

“You haven’t fixed that yet?” Lance asked, and Keith felt himself start to go defensive.

“No water.” It wasn’t until he’d said it that he realized what he’d implied. “We all need each other as part of the balance.” He quickly added on, pointedly looking to the lava flow.

Lance snorted. “You’re making it seem like you’ll die if I’m not with you, and that’s a tad creepy, Keith.”
…. Well, he messed up there.

“We all need each other.” Keith repeated. “I need you, hunk needs you, Pidge needs you. I’m sure Shiro’s having a hard time out by himself too.” One more reason to work on finding him once Keith got the team all back together and sane. “We all need each other, it’s what being part of Voltron means.”

Some part of that seemed to resonate with Lance. Keith could just feel it in the atmosphere of the Astral Plane. It really started to feel like he and Lance were connecting again. Now, to get physically get Lance back.

“When will you be back?” Keith asked.

“Not sure.”

“Then we’ll come to you!”

Lance shook his head. “No. I left, and so I need to be the one to return.”

Keith wanted to argue, but Lance had a point. A very valid point. So, there was only one more thing to say on that. “Then we’ll just need to welcome you with open arms.”

He knew that the Paladins wouldn’t have any problem with that, but Allura would probably take some convincing. Not that she really had a choice in the matter. Lance was part of the team. He was a Paladin of Voltron, the same as Keith and Pidge and Hunk.

Allura wasn’t. She didn’t understand the Paladin bonds as well as she thought she did. She couldn’t.

Lance’s laughter was a balm to Keith’s heart after going so long without hearing it properly. “Like you won’t be able to tell when I’m close.”

Speaking of that… he could feel Lance again. But it was so… “You feel so distant now.” He approached Lance slowly, watching for any signs to back off again. “Even through you’re right here.” He took one of Lance’s hands into his own.

“It won’t be for much longer now.” Lance assured him. “And the sooner I leave, the sooner I can return.”

Keith knew a goodbye when he heard and saw one. Lance was telling the truth, that much he was certain. The sooner he let Lance go, the sooner Lance could finish whatever he was doing and come back. He licked his lips, not wanting to let the moment go.

“Don’t let me keep you then.”

He woke up on the floor, staring at the Blue Lion as her eyes slowly started fade. It was still almost unbearably chilly in the hangar, but it was somehow less heavy now. Like a great weight had been lifted.

His communicator beeped, informing him of an incoming message or call. He furrowed his eyebrows as he sat up, wondering who was calling him this late at night. Unless he’d been passed out and in the Astral Plane for longer than he thought.

It hadn’t seemed like that long, but maybe time moved differently there?
He pulled out the communicator and felt his heart falter at seeing it was a call from Hunk. Had something happened? Were he and Pidge okay? Was everything okay with the alliance negotiations? Had Allura found ‘someone’ to take to the Blue Lion to see if they were ‘acceptable’? They wouldn’t be since Lance was alive still, but it was still a valid concern.

“Hunk, is everything alright?” He answered.

“I was going to ask you.” Hunk’s voice sounded shaky. “I just woke up with this weird urge to call and check up on you…” He trailed off.

Keith felt a spike of sympathy for him. None of them knew how to properly navigate the Paladin bonds between them, and of the team, Keith supposed he and Lance were the ‘experts’. Which sucked because he didn’t really have any answers – he couldn’t speak for Lance.

At some point since Keith’s return from his… interesting… training with the Blade of Marmora, Hunk seemed to have unlocked some sort of awareness of the Paladin bonds. One more thing to add to the growing list of things to talk about, Keith supposed. He should probably start writing some of this stuff down so they could have an actual list to follow.


“So, something did happen?” Pidge’s voice was hoarser than Keith could ever recall hearing it and just a tad sleep slurred.

“You’re supposed to be sleeping.” Keith could hear Hunk attempt to muffle the communicator against his chest as he chided Pidge.


Keith didn’t bother to fight the smile slowly growing on his face. They were all becoming more aware of the Paladin bond. Pidge, Hunk, Keith, and Lance. All they needed was Shiro, and they’d be complete. Once he was back, they could stop running around like a headless chicken.

Not that headless chickens ran around, but Lance had once assured him that was a phrase that people said. Then again, Lance had also said that chickens did run around headless, so maybe what did he know?

“Lance is alive.” Keith announced.

Both Pidge and Hunk were quiet, both of them processing Keith’s seemingly random and impossible statement.

“Keith,” Hunk started to speak first, “It was probably just a dre-”

“How do you know?” Pidge interrupted him. “Are you sure?”

“I’m ninety percent positive Lance is alive. Blue reacted, and I… it’s complicated, but he’s alive.” Keith explained. “He’s coming back to us. We just… we need to wait for him.” As much as it killed Keith that they would have to wait, there was no getting around it. “And welcome him when he comes.” He added on, recalling what he’d told Lance while in the Astral Plane.

“How?” Pidge asked.

“Pidge.” There was an almost warning tone in Hunk’s voice.
“I don’t know.” Keith admitted. That was probably something he *should* have asked.

“If Lance survived… then maybe…”

Keith felt his stomach drop at what Pidge was implying. Never mind ‘how’, Matt should have been what Keith asked about. He hadn’t even thought to ask about Matt, to see if he’d survived along with Lance.

“Pidge.” Hunk interrupted. “Pidge, Keith probably just had a dream. Let’s not get our hopes up.”

“It wasn’t a dream, Hunk.” Keith argued. “Can’t you feel that I’m right? That Lance is still alive? It’s what woke you up, isn’t it?”

“I… I’m not sure what I felt.”

“I felt something.” Pidge said. “If Keith is telling me that what I felt was Lance, then I believe him.” Warmth flooded Keith at Pidge’s belief in him. He could feel Red’s pride in him and his team flickering warmly against him.

“It’s the paladin bond.” Keith said after a moment. “And it’s something we can discuss further once we have Lance back.”

“More magic.” Hunk sighed. “Ya know, I don’t mind magic in stuff like video games and DnD, but not in real life.”

“It’s just one more thing for us to work on.” Pidge said, and Keith could imagine her shrugging. “The important things to focus on right now are 1) when is Lance coming back and 2) who is going to tell Allura?”

“Fuck Allura.”

“KEITH!” Hunk sounded so scandalized. “You can’t… I know you don’t really get along lately, but you can’t just… say that.”

“Let her continue her bullshit about needing a new Blue Paladin. She’ll see she was wrong when Lance returns.” Keith continued like Hunk hadn’t just scolded him.

“Sorry to say, but I’m with Hunk on this, Keith.” Pidge added before further explaining. “We should tell her. We can just ignore her when she doesn’t listen to us after we’ve told her. She’s not my princess, but she’s is sorta in charge of us. I mean, Voltron was created by her father and we do live in her castle.”

“Technically, she could be considered Lance’s princess.”

“I don’t think Lance is any more fond of her currently than we are, Hunk.” Pidge argued. “And he’s a… Druid? Or an Alchemist with the Resistance. And given how our negotiations are going… I don’t think the Altean resistance thinks of her as their princess either.”

“… I think he’s more a third party.”

“He’s part of Voltron.” Keith interjected. “He’s a Paladin of Voltron, and one of us.”

“Hear, hear.” Pidge agreed.

“In any case, we need to let Allura know.” Hunk said.
Keith hated that Hunk was right. Hunk and Pidge both. Allura did need to know. He sighed, then pursed his lips.

“Fine.” He growled out. “Then tell her that through the Paladin bond, you know Lance is still alive; and so long as that stays true, the Blue Lion won’t accept another as her pilot.” He wondered if she would try to refute their claims if they said their knowledge came through the mystical Paladin Bond. He hoped she wouldn't, just like he hoped Lance would return soon.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! Ghost let a little doodle on the bottom of the word document for this fic. I asked her permission to post it, and she said 'sure.' So... I posted it on my tumblr HERE!
The ride to the resistance planet was spent in relative silence.

Taki operated as the pilot of the ship – something that Lance was only just now realizing meant that he was probably part Galra. That was probably why he never removed his helmet, although… he was a bit small for a Galra. Perhaps he was only half?

Matt operated as the navigator/communicator. He seemed familiar in the system they were in and only spoke to point out alien constellations and near by planets. Lance wasn’t sure if he was talking to anyone specifically or if he was just pointing these things out to anyone who felt like listening.

With Taki as the pilot and Matt as the navigator/communicator, that left Lance as the engineer as he was the only one who could really interact with the quintessence – not that he wanted to.

Honestly, their current set up reminded him a lot of his Galaxy Garrison days, except back then, he would have never been an engineer.

If only Iverson could see him now.

He’d probably shit bricks because Lance was an alien. And because Keith was an alien.

…On second thought, perhaps it was best for everyone’s health and sanity that he and Keith never go back to Earth and that Earth never found out about them. He could only imagine all the end-of-the-world-esque scanning that everyone would have to endure to see if there were any more aliens hiding among the people.

Matt’s occasional information about the constellations was at least helpful for keeping Lance awake. The ship hummed with quintessence, the corruption running quite happily through it.

After spending so much time with Rehdu, it was hard for Lance to not imagine the quintessence singing.

The hum of the static white noise of the corrupted quintessence was actually kind of soothing. It
was hard to keep from drifting into semi-consciousness. He hadn’t actually managed to get that much rest while on Rehdu, and it wasn’t like there was much to do in the tiny little space craft.

These things weren’t meant for long journeys. They were meant to be launched, fight a couple minute – couple hours at worst – long battle and then return to the cruiser. There wasn’t even a bathroom on board, which made things… interesting.

Lance knew when they were close to the Resistance’s planet before Matt could even say something. Through the journey, Lance had felt his connection to Blue slowly strengthen until it just snapped back into existence as it should have been.

Well, not exactly. It was still weak, but it existed again.

And with that snap came a flood of other weak connections. The strongest of which was tied to a heat burning so strongly he knew it to be Keith. The other connections, however, were a surprise to Lance. Neither of them actually felt like something as easily described as heat like Keith.

But he knew the feeling of grass under his hands, and the sensation of dancing sunlight on his skin due to tree leaves to be Pidge. The gritty ground, stable and strong under his feet was Hunk.

He hadn’t thought it would take them long to become aware of the Paladin bond, but they were further along that Lance had theorized.

Obviously Blue was the easiest to connect with, but after her was Keith. His connection to the Red Paladin was strong, and despite knowing Keith would have felt him rejoin the bond, he tugged at him lightly.

Keith’s returning tugs were a bit more insistent and hurried. It seemed to Lance like he was saying ‘Hurry up, or I will come get you. I know where you are now.’

Knowing Keith, that was probably exactly what he was saying.

“I feel like I should be concerned that you’re smiling.” Matt side eyed Lance.

“Voltron’s with the resistance.” Lance replied.

“How do you know?” Taki asked. “We’re still a couple hours from Pollux.”

“I can feel them.” Lance replied. “I think… if we don’t hurry… Keith will come out here and pick us up himself.”

“Sounds like him.” Taki’s response had Lance furrowing his eyebrows. He hadn’t really spoken much about his teammates to Taki, so it was a bit surprising that Taki thought that sounded like Keith.

“So... We’re almost to Pollux!” Matt cheered. “Let me just go a head and transmit my id code, and get clearance to approach and land. Man, I can’t wait for some showers. What about you, Lance?”

“Uh... Showers would be nice, yeah. Say, Taki, how did-”

“Are you going to shower before or after meeting your team?” Matt interrupted. “I’m totally showering before. Like, I love my sis and all, but I am not up for a however long reunion smelling like this. I want a hug from her, not a scrunched-up nose.”
Lance sighed as Matt continued to ramble on, not giving Lance time to answer his question or to even ask a few himself. He crossed his arms and slumped back against the wall of the ship.

If he wanted to be petty, he’d mess with the quintessence, but… that wasn’t a good idea and would only delay them. He had no doubt that if that were to happen, Keith would make good on his promise/threat and come get them.

Red was quick and Keith had no patience.

At least, he didn’t before all this started. It seemed he somehow learned while Lance was away. Or perhaps, he learned because Lance was away. Or maybe… he learned to make Lance stay.

Or maybe Keith had just gotten better at ignoring his impatience. The closer they got to Pollux, the more and more Keith’s impatience bled from the connection. Lance had taken to bouncing his knee just to work off the urge to run or to ask Taki to be ‘faster’.

Like they all didn’t want to return to Pollux for their own reasons.

Lance wanted to return because of Blue and Keith and Pidge and Hunk. Matt wanted to return because of Pidge. And while Lance didn’t know Taki’s motivation for returning, he imagined it was as equally urgent – to him at least – as Matt and Lance’s reasons.

They entered the atmosphere, and he could practically feel Keith’s excitement and anxiety and impatience buzzing under his skin. Blue was basically all around him, surrounding him in herself, calling out for him to return to her so they could properly sync again, and be together.

She missed him, and was proud that he’d worked so hard to reunite Pidge and Matt… She was proud that he was returning. Still disapproving of the plan that he’d come up with in the first place, but no less proud of him.

The white Castle of Lions looked beautiful set up on a beach near a seemingly endless forest. If Lance hadn’t known any better, he’d almost say that they were back on Earth with how similar it all looked. Or in a fairytale.

A snow-white castle sitting on the beach between the land and the sea – the forest and the ocean. A cloudy blue sky above that blurred into the horizon and joined the glistening sea. Fuck. He couldn’t wait to go swimming in it.

Matt had stopped chattering to them to talk to someone through the communication lines. “They don’t want us to head to base.” He informed Taki and side-eyeing Lance. “Suspicious little bastards. We’re to land at one of the forest outposts, where we’re to refresh and collect ourselves before our debriefing with the resistance and joining alliance negotiations.”

“Negotiations?” Lance repeated.

“That’s what they said.” Matt shrugged. “We’ll find out more…” He paused and amended “I’ll find out more once we land.”

Huh. Looked like Matt was higher up the chain of command than Taki.

It would have been amusing that they weren’t stopping at either the castle or the main base if it wasn’t for Keith’s sudden and seemingly endless frustration. That, Lance decided was far more amusing than wondering about Matt’s rank.

To be honest, the landing and everything afterwards was a bit of a blur in Lance’s mind. He didn’t
actually find a moment of peace until he was in a ‘guest room’ and securely hidden inside the bathroom.

Why was it that Lance always seemed to find himself staring into a mirror looking at some sort of change? In this case, it was the scar on his cheek under his scale where Axca’s knife had nicked him. He had hoped that it wouldn’t scar but… it seemed like it would just become more physical evidence of his time with Lotor.

Well, more accurately, of his second time with Lotor.

On the bright side, the resistance seemed to understand his thing for loose fitting clothes and hoods. He’d expected to be given clothes like what Matt or Taki wore, but instead he was given an under suit more similar to Allura’s space/battle suit and a long flowing pastel colored hooded robe.

Fashion wise, Lance would take the Druid Robes or his hooded jacket any day. As a matter of fact, he would have killed to get his hands on his hooded jacket. But he supposed beggars couldn’t be choosers, even if he wasn’t begging for anything. He could just appreciate that he had clean clothes and there was a hood.

There was a knock at the door and Lance jumped.

“Lance?” Matt’s voice floated through the door. “Once you’ll ready, we’ll head over to the Castle of Lions. Princess Allura, formerly of Altea, has graciously offered to host negotiations there, and I’ve heard that the Paladins of Voltron are… anxious to reunite with you.”

Lance opened the door and Matt appropriately moved out of his way. “Alchemist robes don’t look half bad on you. Though, you should have a Master’s set after what you did to the ship’s crystal.”

“I’m not a Master.” Lance scrunched up his nose. “And please, I’m already going to have to explain what happened to the others once, I’d rather not have to relive the memories more than needed.”

Matt sighed and sat down on the comfortable-looking guest bed that Lance now figured he’d never get to use. “I understand. I can’t imagine what you’d been through with…” He trailed off.

Lance mentally shuddered but physically drew his robes closer around him. “I saved lives.”

“That you did!” Matt cheered. “Serious, the help you gave the resistance… fuck, I’d be surprised if they didn’t honor you in some way.”

“I’m not a hero.” Lance snapped.

Because he wasn’t. He wasn’t a hero. He was just some poor unfortunate soul who ended up in all the wrong/right places at all the wrong/right times. He was just some poor sap who fell for Lotor’s lies, who allowed himself to be manipulated, controlled, and corrupted for the sake of the ‘greater good’.

Lance now knew that the road to hell was paved with good intentions, and he wished he still had the blissful ignorance to not know that lesson.

He could tell by the look on Matt’s face that he disagreed, but thankfully, he kept his silence on the matter. “In any case, you’re probably going to be turned into some fun political bargaining chip due to that and your connection to Voltron.” Matt made a face.

“They’d keep me from my team?” Lance snapped, narrowing his eyes. Matt’s eyes flickered
down to Lance’s hands and then back up to his face. His face was carefully blank as he considered his next words.

“I never said that.” Matt chewed over more words, but Lance was at least reassured by the four words Matt already said. “I’ll probably be a bargaining chip myself for similar reasons.” He added after a moment. “You’ll be given right back to Voltron as a symbol of good faith and because, let’s face it, everyone’s terrified that your team will rip the Resistance apart to get to us.”

He scrunched up his nose. “That’s why we can’t even get a single night’s rest before heading over to the castle.” He paused and then with an almost sly look added, “Someone’s impatient over there.”

Mentally checking the connections, Lance concluded that there were actually several someones who were impatient.

“Pidge has been looking for you for over a year.” Lance shrugged. “After all she’s been through, I’m sure she wants to see you… actually, that reminds me!” Lance snapped his fingers. “The planet your father is on! It’s Kypedon.”

“What.” Matt’s entire body tensed.

“Kypedon.” Lance repeated. “If I recall correctly, it’s one of Lotor’s prison planets. He uses it for scientists to make them work for the Empire.”

“How long have you known where my father was?” Matt stood up, his eyes narrowing. Lance didn’t have to be a mind reader to know what was going through his mind.

He crossed his arms. “I found out just before I broke Pidge and Sonali out. With any luck, he’ll still be there. And if he’s not… well, it’s at least a lead.”

“You’re right.” Matt nodded his head. “Once we get this thing with Voltron settled, I’ll check it out. I’m sure I don’t have to ask to know Voltron will back me?”

Lance laughed. “Are you kidding? You might as well as be an honorary member. Maybe we can even keep you on the castle as a resistance liaison.”

“Doubtful.” Matt frowned. “The Resistance will want to keep me. I’m a valuable link to Voltron.” Which was basically code for ‘I’m going to be a barging chip against Voltron until I die because they know Voltron will do anything to keep me alive and healthy.’ “Sonali will probably become your liaison since her cover with the Empire was so epically blown.”

“So sorry.” Lance rolled his eyes. “I didn’t mean to so epically ruin everything.”

“You should be.” Matt stuck out his tongue. “You’re the absolute worst.”

“I know.” Lance sighed dramatically.

Matt laughed and nodded his head towards the door. “You ready to go?”

“I’m actually kind of nervous about meeting up with my team.” Lance admitted. “The last time I came back from Lotor… I tried to kill them, and then I ended up betraying them and getting Pidge captured and…” He trailed off.

“It’ll be fine.” Matt clasped his shoulder and smiled. “Come on and you’ll see.”
Lance nodded his head. “You’re right.” He knew he was being irrational. Keith said that they would welcome him with open arms, so he didn’t know why he was suddenly so… nervous about meeting up with them. “Let’s get this over with.”

Matt nodded his head and followed Lance out of the room. Taki bounced off of the wall he had been leaning against. “Ready to go?” He asked.

“Yeah.” Lance furrowed his eyebrows. “I didn’t know you were coming with.”

“There’s some things I need to talk about with the Paladins.” Taki shrugged. “We’ve been allowed downtime before the negotiations. I figure it’ll be easier to speak with everyone then.”

… Okay then. That wasn’t ominous at all.

Lance drew his robes around him again but didn’t say anything else as they headed over to the castle with a small entourage of Resistance Politicians. More than a few of the politicians eyed Lance, but none of them said anything to him – a fact that Lance was grateful for. Especially since they apparently thought of Lance as a hero.

Ugh. Shiro could have all the hero worship. Being a hero wasn’t what it was cracked up to be, and Lance had no interest in ever being one if this was what it took to become one.

Within no time at all the gleaming white castle was before them. The entire time since landing, Lance had felt Keith tugging at him almost insistently. As he approached the castle, it only seemed to get worse and worse, like Keith knew he was closer.

Given the nature of their bond, he probably did. He knew the exact moment Keith saw him because the heat of Keith’s gaze washed over him, and the tugging came to a dead stop.

There was a small welcoming party of Allura, Coran, and Keith. He was standing to Allura’s right, his dark gaze trained solely on Lance. He saw him take a half step forward, as if to approach or maybe grab Lance, but hesitated and looked to Allura.

She ignored him and stepped forward, her arms outstretched in a greeting that Lance knew wasn’t for him but for the politicians. “Regent Hira.” She greeted. One of the Altean politicians who had been eyeing Lance earlier stepped forward and gave a half bow.

“Princess Allura.” Her tone was cool as she returned the greeting. Lance studied her, noting her green scales probably meaning that she was more analytical than emotional. He couldn’t see her or Allura getting on well together, especially since Allura tended to let her emotions rule her judgement.

They started to speak between them, but Lance tuned it out, bouncing up on his toes in an effort to prevent himself from just darting forward and hugging Keith. He was watching Lance, no doubt as anxious and eager as he was to be reunited.

Coran would look over at him every so often as well, his mustache twitching every time he did so.

“Enough of such talks for now.” Hira’s words caught Lance’s attention. “Reunions are in order, I believe. We can continue our negotiation tomorrow.”

“Of course.” Allura’s smile was thin as she nodded at Hira. “Coran will show you to your guest rooms.”
“Ah yes, quite. Right this way, if you would.” He nodded at the direction he was going to head in before actually heading away. Before he turned away, he winked at Lance; which Lance supposed was his way of saying ‘welcome back’.

Keith scarcely waited for the last of the group before he was moving forward and suddenly Lance was encased in the warmth of a hug. “Hunk’s keeping Pidge preoccupied.” Keith informed him as he pulled away, his hands resting still on Lance’s shoulders. “I can’t believe you’re alive.”

“And how is that? I hardly believed it when I was informed of such, but the evidence provided could hardly be easily refuted.” The look Allura was giving him was as chilly as her tone, and would have fit perfectly into his icy Astral Plane.

“Careful, ‘lura, or one might get the idea that you aren’t happy I survived.”

Allura pursed her lips at Lance’s reply but before anything else could be said, Taki stepped forward – he had stayed with Matt and Lance instead of following the group – and nodded towards the castle. “Perhaps we should take this conversation inside with the others?”

“Yes, I’m sure they all want to know how we escaped and besides, I want to see my sister.” Matt added.

“Oh, of course.” Funny how her smile turned much warmer when she turned to Matt. Keith let out a low growl that probably wasn’t meant to be heard. “If you will follow us?”

“I’d follow a woman as beautiful as you any day.” Matt waggled his eyebrows and shot Taki, Lance, and Keith a wink to show he was hopefully joking.

Not that Allura wasn’t pretty – because she was – but somehow, Lance just didn’t see her being Matt’s type. Her smile slightly thinned in response, and Lance slightly regretted not warning Matt that she didn’t appreciate being flirted with.

“Right.” She coughed awkwardly before heading inside. Matt sighed before following after her with Taki in tow. Keith watched after them before looking back at Lance. He reached up and Lance saw him hesitate before brushing his fingers against the scar on his face.

“Did Lotor do this?” Lance flinched, both at Lotor’s name and the pure anger in Keith’s tone. Keith quickly dropped his hand and took a step back. “Sorry.”

“No, no... it’s fine. Acxa – Lotor’s general – gave it to me during the escape.” Lance explained. “I’ll explain with the others.”

“Wouldn’t want to miss Pidge’s reunion.” Keith pulled away and gestured for Lance to go on ahead of him.

Lance let out a single bitter laugh. “After all the work I did to make sure it happened?” He rhetorically asked. “Like hell I’d miss it.”

“…And Lance found a lead on dad.” Lance walked into the ‘common room’ to hearing Matt explain to Pidge. Lance was a bit sour at missing the initial reunion, but seeing Pidge smiling with tears of joy in her eyes as she sat next to her brother on the couch.

Hunk was sitting on the other side of Matt, watching the siblings with a fond smile; while Allura stood towards the ‘front’, also watching. Taki leaned against the wall near the door, like he was waiting for Lance and Keith to arrive.
Hunk looked up as they entered, and his small fond smile broke into a giant grin. “Lance!” He cheered, standing and approaching with wide spread arms. Lance didn’t have a chance before he was swept up in a back-crushing hug. “We thought you were gone! I didn’t believe Keith at first when he said you were alive.”

“I did.” Pidge wiped away some of her tears and beamed up at Lance. “and I can’t believe you saved Matt too.”

“Saved?” Matt laughed. “He’s the one who blew up the crystal in the first place. And then stranded us on a Balmera!”

“Let’s not get too ahead of ourselves.” Taki said, bouncing off the wall to walk up behind them. “We should probably start from the beginning…” Lance saw Allura narrow her eyes and open her mouth, no doubt to demand to know who he was. But Taki reached up and removed his helmet.

“Starting with what happened after our last battle with Zarkon.” Shiro’s disapproving gaze swept over each and every one of them – lingering over Keith and Lance – as he dropped his helmet and crossed his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Holidays!

It's hard to believe that Voltron will be airing it's final season in less than a month from now. I'm actually kind of sad to see it go. While the waits between the seasons was... taxing, I feel like the show was over with too quickly. 8 seasons shouldn't had passed in under 3 years like it did. :(

It still feels like only yesterday when I was just finishing Season 2 and concocting my plotline for this fic. My how the times change.

In other news... to everyone who called Taki being Shiro: You were Right! Taki was Shiro! For those confused that 'Taki didn't recognize Lance', he was pretending not to. He had an opportunity to observe without interference from his presence, and took it. Shiro seems like the type of person to wait and watch before finally getting involved in a situation (as we've seen with the gladiator and even some arguments).
“Shiro?” Allura seemed to regain enough composure to be able to speak first, echoing the thought Lance was sure was running through everyone’s mind. “How is this possible?”

Lance was questioning that too, running over all his interactions with Taki – Shiro – in his mind with hyper focus. How had he missed this? How did something so simple and – in hindsight – obvious slip his notice?

The only one in the room who didn’t seemed stunned by this turn of events was Shiro – of course – and Matt, who was grinning like a loon. Clearly the resistance hadn’t filled the team in on Taki being Shiro.

Shiro didn’t so much as look at Allura or even acknowledge her question. Instead he kept his disappointment-heavy gaze on Lance. He shifted, uncomfortable under the weight of that gaze, and almost automatically Keith half stepped to cover Lance.

“Shiro.” Lance could hear the tremor in Keith’s voice as he called out Shiro’s name.

Now Shiro’s gaze flickered to Keith, and Lance could see the confusion clearly in the dark swirls of Shiro’s quintessence galaxies and eyes. The confusion was as clear as the heat that burned through the Paladin connection, fiery fierce and protective – of not just Lance, but all of them.

Not that there was anything to particularly protect the team – or Lance – from. It was just Shiro.

Then again, it being just Shiro wasn’t all that reassuring when one considered that at one point it was just Lance, and he nearly tore the entire team to shreds.

But still… this was Shiro, the Black Paladin. Lance’s former hero, and the team leader and Keith’s… whatever they were. Shiro was the Black Paladin, the leader.

Except…

Except Lance couldn’t feel him through the paladin bonds. Shiro was standing there in front of
them all, and yet his connections through the paladin bonds were all but nonexistent. For all intents and purposes, Shiro wasn’t there.

Granted, everyone felt more distant than they actually were. Blue’s call to him was the loudest and most pressing. Her song filled his heart and soul, tugging at him, begging for him to come to her so that they could reconnect and sync properly. He just knew that if he did so, the connections between him and the other Paladins – minus maybe Shiro – would spring back into life, blossoming into the full connection they should have been.

It was probably the same for Shiro. Once he reconnected with his lion, everything should be fine. They would all be a team again, the pride would be reconnected, and Voltron would live.

But for now…

For now, Shiro might as well as been a stranger wearing a familiar face. He wasn’t part of the team or the pride. He vanished and left them; his connection to the team faded and gone.

With that in mind, it was no wonder Keith was so protective. In Shiro’s absence, he was the team leader, and as far as the paladin bonds were concerned, Shiro was still gone. Keith was still in charge, and as to be expected, he didn’t appreciate any perceived threats to the team.

“Oh, woah, woah, woah. Wait a moment.” Hunk stepped up beside Keith, also crossing his arms. “You don’t get to just reappear like magic – we’ve had enough of that, thank you very much – and just demand answers. You’re the one who disappeared.”

Ah yes, Red and Yellow could be rather… protective.

Shiro didn’t flinch at the not-so-subtle accusation in Hunk’s tone and words, but his mouth did twitch and twist into a frown. “I didn’t plan on that. I don’t know what exactly happened.”

Well, that was… reassuring.

“The Black Lion was empty and you were gone.” Pidge was still sitting next to her brother – who was no longer grinning – watching Shiro with a gaze as sharp as one of Keith’s swords. “We looked everywhere for you.” That sharp gaze switched to Lance. “Did you know?”

“Matt? Yeah. Shiro? Not a clue.” Lance replied. “I didn’t meet him until the rescue, and… I should have noticed. His quintessence seemed --”

“My quintessence?” Shiro interrupted.

Keith didn’t growl, but it was a near thing. His entire body tensed. Likewise, Hunk also tensed. “It’s a thing, but you’d know that if you had been here.” Hunk said, and Lance could practically taste the bitterness and salt in his words.

Allura cleared her throat. “I think, Shiro, that we deserve our answers before we answer any of yours.”

Well, wasn’t that something? Allura taking the side of the Paladins and demanding answers before judging. Lance was impressed.

“That’s fair.” Shiro nodded.

Allura returned the nod and smiled thinly. “What happened to you? As Pidge said, after the battle the Black Lion was empty and deactivated in the hangar.”
“I don’t know.” Shiro said. “I woke up in a cryopod with Matt looming over me, just as surprised to see me as I was of him. He promised to help me get back to Voltron once I healed. By the time I was finally cleared by a doctor, Matt was planning on rescuing Sonali. I volunteered to go with him.”

“Except instead of Sonali, we found Lance.” Matt added on. “According to the files I pulled up, he was going to be transferred to the personal care and attention of the High Priestess of the Druids, and well… we couldn’t just leave him to that. Especially not the state he was in. I don’t think he was even awake for any of the escape until the end.”

“He was.” Shiro corrected Matt. “At the very least, he was aware. If he hadn’t been, then he wouldn’t have known when to wake up to-”

“Thunder Shock Lotor across the hangar with all the power of a shattering crystal core of a ship?” Matt interrupted to suggest. “That was fucking terrifying and impressive, and if all Druids can do that, then that’s a Problem with a capital ‘P’.”

“What did he do exactly?” Allura’s eyebrows furrowed as he asked her question. Lance imagined that she was tripping up over the Pokémon reference Matt kept making in regard to the event. Pidge and Hunk didn’t have that knowledge barrier, however.

Nearly a second after Allura started her question, both Pidge and Hunk exclaimed, “You did what?!” in near synchrony. Pidge’s question held more excitement than Hunk’s, who was primarily worried. “I hope it fucking hurt the creep!” Pidge continued to say.

Well… that was cause for concern. What had happened between Lotor and Pidge? What had she seen and experienced?

“It was already cracking, I just sped up the process and redirected the flow of the impact. Shiro wouldn’t have won that fight and it was the only thing I could think to do.” Not that he had known that it was Shiro at the time. He just thought that Taki was familiar, and well, now he knew why.

“Redirected…” Allura repeated and trailed off for a moment before focusing her gaze on Lance. “Lance, that would kill most. You should have died.” She seemed mystified, awestruck, and angry all at once. “The amount of quintessence in Battleship-Class Balmera is nothing to scoff at.”

“Well, that settles the Problem with a capital ‘P’ and explains why Druids don’t do that often.” Matt muttered before clearing his throat and raising his voice. “He nearly did. Die that is.”

“What happened?” Keith asked.

Matt shrugged. “We landed on a Balmera, and let me tell you, the Balmerans were hella interested in Lance. He recovered, did some stuff with the crystal of the ship we were using, and then nearly stranded us on the Balmera.”

“We weren’t stranded.” Lance scoffed. “And even if we had been, if your equipment was better designed-”

“Better designed?!” Matt repeated and immediately stood in outrage. “How was I supposed to know to design my stuff to survive a Thunder Shock, Pikachu?!”

This time Keith did growl, lowering his chin to hide his neck as he glared down Matt. The room erupted into chaos as Pidge chided Keith, and Hunk tried to placate everyone and…
“Enough!” The entire room fell silent as everyone looked to Shiro. “I hoped I wouldn’t have to hear that argument anymore after leaving the Balmera.” Shiro sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “In any case, what happened with me is explained, now, does anyone want to fill me in with what happened here and why Lance is Altean?”

“You could have asked while we were on the Balmera together.” Lance said. “Instead of hiding behind your helmet.”

“You were busy,” Shiro started to explain. Quietly Matt muttered something under his breath that sounded an awful lot like a mocking ‘busy’ as he sat back down. Shiro side-eyed him before continuing. “You needed to focus on the task at hand, and I didn’t want to distract you. Besides, I wanted the full story.”

“The full story,” Keith spat out, “depends on who’s telling it.” He jerked his head over at Allura, who had been mostly quiet through all of this. “If you ask Allura, Lance is a traitor and should be forgotten and replaced.”

“Do not tell lies and slander me.” Allura snapped at Keith. “The only reason I advocated for a new Blue Paladin to be found was because the universe needs Voltron. Without a Blue Paladin, Voltron is impossible. This is the same argument I used for a new Black Paladin as well.”

Shiro’s mouth dropped open a little while Allura spoke, but at that last part, he completely flinched.

“Oh please, you never wanted to find Lance after you basically chased him off the castle ship.” Pidge frowned and crossed her arms. “You were always supportive of a replacement, but never relocating the existing.”

“He kept secrets from the team that endangered us all! Furthermore, as I recall from the recordings, I was not the only one who caused him to leave the castle and give Lotor a crack to dig into.” Somehow, Lance didn’t think that the ice running down his back was from Allura’s tone, despite how chillingly cold it was.

“Recordings?” Lance repeated. He didn’t raise his voice like Shiro had, yet the entire room fell completely quiet and still. Keith and Hunk were still in front of Lance so he couldn’t see their faces, but Pidge had stiffened and was looking anywhere but at Lance. “What recordings?”

“We agreed not to ever bring those up.”

Lance’s gaze snapped to Keith as he spoke. “Bring what up?” Lance asked. “What. Recordings?”

“Your conversations with Lotor.” Pidge’s answer was slow and almost hesitant. “I managed to get some off the destroyed communication device.”

“And you listened to them!? That was private!” Lance hissed. “What the fuck gave you that idea?” He took a couple steps back away from everyone, suddenly not feeling safe around any of them.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Shiro sidestep to stand next to Matt, both of them just quietly watching the argument with mixed expressions on their faces.

How dare they? After everything that happened, and they still thought it was acceptable to just go through Lance’s private conversations and listen to them? Was he just destined to be violated no matter where he went?
With Lotor it was… a mess; and with Voltron, it was his privacy.

“We had to see if you were really a traitor!” Pidge tried to explain. “Allura wanted to listen to it to try to help you.”

“No, she wanted to try to incriminate Lance.” Keith interrupted.

“I did not!” Allura snapped at him. “I quickly tire of your false accusations, Keith.”

“I knew this was gonna happen.” Hunk whined to himself, basically confirming to Lance that everyone had listened to the conversation, and more than that, they had decided to keep that from Lance. Like what made them think that was a good idea?!

When did they do this? Before they captured Lance, after he ‘betrayed’ them to reunite Pidge and Matt? When?

“You promised me I could keep my secrets.” Lance accused Keith, and finally, Keith spun partially around to face Lance.

“Lanc-” He tried, but Lance cut him off.

“How much did you listen to? When did you listen to them? Was it before or after making that promise? How long did you know?” Lance demanded to know. “You promised me!!”

“I didn’t think we should listen!” Keith shouted. “I stopped it after the first conversation!”

“You should have stopped it sooner!” Lance hissed, shaking his head. “I honestly thought we were going to do better. That the team was going to do better.”

“I told you all this was going to blow up in our faces.” Hunk said.

“Not helping, Hunk.” Pidge snapped. “And it was before the market trip.” She answered Lance. “We just wanted to try to fix what was wrong, and it wasn’t like you were going to tell us without ripping our heads off or tearing our throats out. Keith and Hunk were against listening to it further than the first conversation.”

“This just in,” Mat stage whispered to Shiro, “Team Voltron is a dumpster fire.” Shiro elbowed him in the ribs but didn’t verbally respond. If anything, his lips thinned as he pursed them to prevent himself from saying something.

“Because that makes it better?” Lance snapped at the team. “I tried to destroy that thing for a reason.”

“Destroying it made you suspicious.” Allura said. “We needed to see what information you were giving away.”

“I thought you wanted to listen to ‘fix’ Lance?” Keith cut in sharply.

“I didn’t need fixing!” Lance growled. “And I wouldn’t have destroyed it if I had thought you’d respect my privacy!”

“Didn’t need fixing? You threatened to kill me!” Pidge shouted. “After trying and nearly succeeding in killing Hunk!”

“He wasn’t himself!” Keith defended him, which would have been sweet if it wasn’t for the fact that he was a promise breaker who listened to private conversations and betrayed trust. “I thought
we were over all this. Yes, it happened, but it’s in the past and we’re going to do better moving forward.”

“I’ve heard that promise before.” Lance crossed his arms. “Did you listen to the recording before or after it?”

“Does it matter?” Pidge asked. “He wasn’t given much of a choice. He listened to the first conversation and then put an end to it. You can’t be mad at us over this. It happened ages ago.”

“Before.” Keith said. “At least, I think it was before. I’m almost certain it was after Blue drowned you.”

“What?” Shiro finally spoke up. “Seriously, could someone tell me what happened while I was away?”

“You know what, I need some time to cool off. Someone else can explain to Shiro.” Lance spun around and exited.

“You’re already feeling pretty chilly.” He heard Pidge mutter, but he didn’t bother dignifying that with a response.

He felt Keith start to follow him before he called out, “Lance, wait!” but Hunk stopped him before he could reach Lance.

“Give him time.”

The door slid shut behind Lance, and he leaned against it and let out a heavy sigh. Couldn’t he just have anything? Why did everything have to be such a mess, always? He sighed again, shorter this time, and bounced off the door.

Well, if he needed to be cool and calm down, there was only one place he could think to go to. He had put off his reunion with Blue long enough and if he stayed in the room, he was almost certain he was going to see if he could recreate the spikes of corruption with icicles instead.

Blue’s hangar was thankfully empty – with the exception of his beautiful girl – and quiet, giving Lance the perfect place to calm down.

There was always something awe-inspiring about seeing the Lions of Voltron. Maybe it was their sheer size, or perhaps, it was just the presence they carried. For Lance, however, right now, it was just the feeling of finally being where he belonged.

He scarcely touched her, just the tips of his fingers brushing against her metal before he felt the sharp snap of the paladin bond falling back into place. It didn’t hurt, but the sensation started him enough that he fell forward onto Blue, his head briefly spinning.

The flame that he knew to be Keith roared to life, almost too hot for Lance to stand at first until the chill of Blue chased it back. Hunk and Pidge weren’t as present or persistent as his connection to them wasn’t as strong as it was to Keith.

The empty place where Shiro should be was a glaring hole that Lance felt he should have noticed well before now. He supposed it just hadn’t been that obvious when Hunk and Pidge had been missing, but now that it was only Shiro gone…

Well, that would hopefully be resolved soon.
And what of Lance? He could feel Blue’s curiosity swirling around him, wondering what he would do now. Would he continue to stay with Voltron, with Blue, as he had said he would? Would he abandon the team and pride to go off on his own now that he thought them to have betrayed him again?

“I could never leave you.” He whispered to Blue, running his hand over her cool metal like she was a small cat to be pet. “Not again.”

She vibrated as the low steady rumble of her purr indicated her satisfaction with that answer. Lance laughed quietly to himself before climbing up her paw to sit against her. The chill of her cold metal permeated through his clothes, but he didn’t really find that he minded.

The cold was part of her and a part of him. He liked to think that it helped him think, which was what he needed to do. He just needed some time to think things through.

He knew he was being irrational and illogical about the whole thing with his teammates. It made perfect sense for them to listen to the recordings to make sure that he wasn’t betraying the team – he wasn’t, well, not purposefully at that point anyway – and to find out what exactly had happened. If the situation was reversed, Lance couldn’t say that he wouldn’t have done the same.

Heck, he had invaded Lotor’s privacy thousands of times anytime he read something off Lotor’s tablet to pass along to Sonali, Matt, and the resistance.

At least the team – or most of it anyways – had stopped listening after one conversation. Lance couldn’t even remember what that first conversation was. So, really, it couldn’t have been important if he couldn’t remember.

So really, he didn’t need to get so worked up and upset about this.

But it was the principal of the matter. It was the fact that they’d gone through his stuff again, digging around for his secrets. He destroyed that device so the conversations couldn’t be heard, but they were, because of course they were.

It was just… frustrating.

Blue wasn’t proud of how he handled the situation with his teammates, but she understood why he was upset. However, she also understood why the team had done what they had. She poked at Lance until he admitted, at least to himself and Blue, that Pidge had been right about the unlikelihood of him talking to them without an attempted murder or three during that time.

He pulled his legs up to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. “It just… it’s irritating.” He admitted quietly. “I don’t know if I’m more upset that they did it or that they planned to hide it from me.”

His mind lingered on Keith’s part of the argument. He was the one who had let it slip that they weren’t supposed to bring up the recordings. Had he been the one to suggest hiding it from Lance? How was the team supposed to get better at communication if they were hiding things from each other like this?

How could Keith preach about wanting to do better when he was hiding stuff like this?

The one bright silver lining in all this was that Keith listened to the conversation before his promise to Lance. So, he wasn’t a promise breaker like Lance had originally assumed.
That didn’t make things instantly alright, but it certainly made it better. Along with the fact that Keith had stopped listening to the recordings after the first one.

He sighed and rested his chin on his knees.

The door to the hangar beeped to alert it was about to be opened, and Lance’s gaze immediately snapped to it, a sharp retort waiting on the tip of his tongue to lash out at whichever team member was disturbing him. Except, according to the Paladin bond, all of his team members should have been still in the common area – no doubt filling Shiro in.

It wasn’t a team member but Slav who passed through the doors once they slid open. He paused once he noticed Lance sitting on top of Blue’s paw and blinked curiously up at him. Lance stared at Slav, and Slav stared right back at him.

Neither of them moved or did anything until Slav tilted his head to the side and said, “You know, they were just trying to help.”

“They could have done it without invading my privacy.” Lance retorted, narrowing his eyes at the scientist. Honestly, he had sorta kinda forgotten that he was here. Especially since he didn’t think he had seen him during his last stay.

Slav hummed, and tilted his head the other way, his gaze still firmly on Lance. Lance’s skin prickled under his gaze. “I expected more of a reaction to the news of your teammates betrayal. This response is good.”

“Excuse me?” Lance snapped.

“It is good that you’re doing so well with all of this.” Slav continued like he hadn’t even heard Lance.

“With all of this?” Lance asked, raising an eyebrow. “What? Finding out my team listened to my private recordings and that I was traveling with Shiro and he didn’t tell me? Oh yeah, I’m doing just great.” He smiled and nodded his head sarcastically before rolling his eyes.

Blue hummed through the connection, attempting to soothe him like one would a disgruntled cat. For a moment he was tempted to snap at her for that but… she was an innocent here. She didn’t deserve him to take anything out on her.

“I meant in general.” Slav shrugged. He paused, and his studying gaze turned speculative and sly. “There were worst outcomes, you know?”

On a typical day Lance felt like his blood had been replaced with ice water, but at Slav’s words, he really felt like his blood turned to ice. A shiver went down his back that he knew had little to do with the chill of the room, or his or Blue’s quintessence.

“Excuse me?” He repeated, slowly enunciating his words so maybe this time Slav would sense his seriousness and give him a relevant reply.

“There are worst outcomes.” Slav repeated. “Realities where you weren’t rescued, where you go on to become the High Priest of the Druidic Order, the right hand and Emperor Consort of Emperor Lotor.”

Some part of Lance wanted to scream ‘what the fuck’, to slide down off Blue’s paw and shake Slav and ask what was wrong with him. But he couldn’t. He was just frozen on Blue’s paw, staring at the scientist with a dropped jaw in shock.
“You would have been great. Terrible, but great.” Slav continued heedless of Lance’s reaction.

“I… I couldn’t. I wouldn’t!” Lance’s stuttering protests fell upon deaf ears.

“He loved you.” Slav tossed at Lance, his tone as sharp as the mental knives his words were stabbing into Lance. Like Lotor’s love excused the horrible things that happened. Like it explained anything. “He would have given you the universe had you only asked. Of course, by that point, the universe would have been safer in his hands.”

“Stop. I don’t want… I don’t need to hear this.”

“Alternatively, there was an equally good chance that you wouldn’t survive the backlash from the crystal or the conversion and corruption. The Blue Lion would not accept a new Blue Paladin until it was nearly too late. Countless lives lost.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Lance demanded. “I don’t want to know! I didn’t ask for this!”

Finally, Slav seemed to register Lance’s responses as his entire body flinched away. Lance wasn’t sure if it was from his tone, volume, or his distress, or perhaps a combination. The sudden fear in Slav’s gaze made guilt bubble in the pit of Lance’s stomach, especially when coupled with the knowledge of what he could have become had he stayed with Lotor.

“Things may seem horrible to you, but things can always be worse.” Slav explained. “You should forgive your friends. They were only trying to help.”

“You told me those horrible things to make me forgive them!?” Lance’s tone couldn’t fully hold the incredibility he was feeling. “Are you for real right now? None of that stuff happened, and it won’t.”

“Won’t it?”

Lance resisted the very real urge to scream and pull at his hair. He suddenly understood with crystal clear clarity why Shiro hated Slav. “Are you suggesting that I’ll go back to Lotor?” Lance couldn’t believe Slav right now.

Why would he go back to Lotor, especially now that he knew his fate if he did? If Lotor would even accept him after what happened in the hangar. Furthermore, what made Slav think that Lance would go back in the first place?

The only reason he went back was to get Sonali to reunite Matt and Pidge. That was it. There was absolutely no further need for him to have any other contact with Lotor outside of battle.

“There are a lot of realities with a lot of different outcomes.”

Well, wasn’t Slav’s response cryptic as shit. It wasn’t like Lance wanted an actual answer to his question at all, oh no.

“Is this where you tell me to forgive my teammates again?” Lance asked drily, already assuming that Slav wouldn’t really answer him if he pressed more on the other topics.

“I suppose.” Slav shrugged. “I was going to say to forgive your friends, but teammates works as well.”

Lance snorted. “I’ll think about it.”
Slav blinked up at him. “I believe that is the best I will get from you in this reality.” He glanced at the door behind him. “There’s a 62.97% chance that the Yellow Paladin will check in on you after I leave. There’s a 270.86% chance it will be the Red Paladin.”

Lance groaned and sighed, rolling his eyes. “I don’t want to talk to either of them.” He checked on the Paladins bonds and was pleasantly reassured to find that Hunk, Keith, and Pidge were all still in the same place.

Good. He wasn’t ready to talk or see them yet.

Well... maybe Keith because he wasn’t a promise breaker. He invaded Lance’s privacy before the promise, which didn’t really make things better. But it certainly didn’t make things worse.

Heat washed over him from the connection as Keith apparently noticed Lance. He flushed from embarrassment of being caught and crossed his arms. “It’ll be Keith. I just got his attention.”

“When didn’t you have it?” Slav asked slyly before he exited the Hangar.

“When didn’t you have it?” Lance mocked at the closing door. He was so extremely tempted to spit in Slav’s former direction but didn’t if only because it was Blue’s Hangar and he would be the one to have to clean it up.

The conversation with Slav left Lance frustrated and annoyed, even more so at Slav than at his teammates for their ‘betrayal’. Desperate to find some sort of release for that, he mediated on Blue’s paw, allowing her to help guide him as he centered himself and tried to internally work through his feelings.

Some part of him wondered what exactly Slav intended with his conversation. Did he mean to frustrate and irritate Lance? If so, was it to take some of Lance’s irritating away from the Paladins? Or was he attempting to scare Lance into staying – which was pointless and dumb, because Lance was staying anyways.

He promised Blue he wouldn’t leave her again, and he didn’t intend to break that promise.

Which meant that he would need to make up with his teammates.

He sighed, coming back to himself and dropping his chin to his chest.

“You know you can’t keep running away anytime you get upset.”

Lance jumped, so startled by Keith’s voice he nearly fell off Blue’s paw. He could feel the vibrations of her amused rumbles as he steadied himself and turned to look at Keith with wide eyes.

Well, Slav had warned him Keith would be showing up, and Lance had gotten his attention.

“How long have you been here, and how’s Shiro?” Lance asked, pleasantly ignoring Keith’s opening comment. Keith sighed and bounced off the wall he had been leaning against.

“Not long.” He answered. His narrowed eyes told Lance that he was letting the matter rest for now, but he would be returning to it. Probably later during this conversation. “He’s talking with Pidge and Matt now. I volunteered to go check on you. He wants to talk to you too.”

Lance crossed his arms and frowned. He checked on the Paladin bond, verifying that Keith was telling the truth about the others, and also noting that Shiro had yet to reconnect with the Black
Lion. Was there a reason he was waiting?

“He had his chance on the Balmera.” Lance shrugged dismissively. “Shoulda talked to me then.”

“Lance.” Keith sighed. “Communication is-

“And when were you going to communicate to me about listening to my private conversations?” Lance interrupted.

“Fine.” Keith huffed. “I should have told you, but how could I when you would rip out my throat if given the chance?”

“If given the chance?” Lance laughed disbelievingly as he repeated Keith’s words. “You slept with me completely unguarded and undefended. Not much better of a chance than that!”

“You were getting better! I thought saying something would be taking a step back in the wrong direction.”

“So, you thought just hiding it and not telling was better? Miscommunication got us in the mess in the first place, and you said we as a team would do better!”

“We are, and the only way to continue is to move forward.”


“Oh, we’re talking apologies now?” Keith growled, crossing his arms. His eyes flashed in the light of the hangar. “When do you plan to apologize for leaving the team? You should have told someone what you were planning. Pidge could have died. You could have died. You almost did. You were reckless!”

“That’s rich coming from you.”

“Why are you doing this?” This time when Keith growled, it was considerably more animalistic. “Pidge got a hold of the recordings, Allura wanted to listen to all of them, Hunk and I stopped it, and that was the end of it. I should have told you, but I didn’t, and I’m Sorry.”

Well, that apology was probably the lease genuine apology that Lance had ever heard. But it was an apology, and upon hearing it, it was like a weight was lifted off Lance’s shoulders. “That’s what I wanted. An apology. Not excuses or explanations. Just an apology.”

“Then I think you owe the rest of the team that too.”

Probably.

No. Not probably, Lance did owe the rest of the team an apology. His heart was in the right place with wanting to reunite Matt and Pidge, but he went about it all the wrong way. Keith was right, he should have told someone. He should have planned it better.

Lance should have done better.

But this wasn’t about that. This was about Keith and the others invading Lance’s privacy again. But then again, this was before the promise. “How do I know you won’t do this again?” Lance demanded to know.

“Are you serious!?” Keith shouted as heat flared along the connection fully conveying his irritation. “I already promised you could keep your secrets. What do you want from me?”
What did Lance want from him? He already got an apology. A piss poor one, but still an apology. He hadn’t even realized that was what he had wanted until he got it, so what more did he want? Keith was right, he had promised Lance that he could keep his secrets. He had even proved it to him.

“I just… I don’t want things that affect me to be hidden like that again.” Lance sighed, lowering his gaze and looking away. “The last thing I expected when I returned was to find out that not only had you guys listened to the recordings, but also decided to hide that from me…. Even if it was for my ‘own good’.”

“I can’t promise that, but I’ll try.” Keith responded after a moment.

“I guess that’s the best I’ll get out of you, isn’t it?”

“Guess so.” Keith shrugged. “You wanna talk about you running away now?”

“Not really.” But Lance could just feel that it wasn’t an acceptable answer.

“Being part of a team is give-and-take, Lance. You can’t just run away anytime you run into a problem.” Wow, that statement didn’t just make Lance feel fifty shades of guilty. He squirmed where he was sitting, mentally preparing an argument, but Blue stepped in quashing that.

She brought up all the times Lance had run away from the team instead of confronting or talking to them. Now that it was brought to his attention… it was actually a problem of his, wasn’t it?

“I didn’t want to stay, and I needed to reconnect to Blue anyways.”

“Lance.” Keith sighed.

“Fine!” Lance snapped. “I won’t run away again. I’ll talk to someone, I promise.”

“One of the team.” Keith corrected him. “Not just ‘someone’. One of the team, Lance. If you do better to come to us, we’ll do better to listen.”

He supposed Keith had a point – and wow, since when had Keith become so much better at being a leader? – and nodded. Lance had talked to someone before and had caused so many issues. What he needed to do was talk to someone on the team. They were only able to start fixing things once they knew Lance’s complaints.

Granted, they found out those complaints through invading his privacy, but at this point, he supposed he was just beating a dead horse. What was done was done, and all that was left was to forgive them and hope they learned their lesson. Lance should have gone to them in the first place. Then again, they wouldn’t have learned that they needed to listen unless this all happened; soooo…..

“I guess this whole thing will be a learning experience for us all.” Lance sighed. “Fine. I’ll talk to one of the team, I promise.”

“Good.” Keith approached the Blue lion’s paw, carefully keeping an eye on both Blue and Lance. “You gonna come back?” He stopped in front of Lance, and looked up at him, his gaze and expression soft and open. “There’s apologies owed all around, and Shiro still needs to hear your side of the story.”

Lance nodded, and when Keith offered his hand, he accepted it to slide down the paw back onto the floor. Surprisingly, Keith didn’t drop Lance’s hand. Instead he laced their fingers and
squeezed lightly and briefly. He nodded his head in the direction of the hangar door. “Let’s go.”

Lance could have pulled his hand away at any time. He could have pulled ahead or lagged behind. There was absolutely nothing making him continue to hold Keith’s hand, but the warmth between their joined hands was oddly comforting. As was the fact that Lance could break off at any time.

Keith wasn’t forcing him into anything that Lance didn’t want. He wasn’t pressing himself past Lance’s boundaries. He was just there, and it was nice.

The walk back to the common area was quiet and was only broken when Lance paused outside of the room. Keith half turned to look back at him, quirking up an eyebrow as if to say ‘what?’.

“Is Allura still there?” Lance asked, glancing between the doors and Keith.

“She was when I left.” Keith replied with a short sigh. “You can’t avoid her forever, Lance; and she can’t ignore that you’re a Paladin. You’re one of us. Let us handle it if she can’t accept that. That’s what teams do.”

Lance nodded and took a deep breath before entering.

Sometime between him exiting and entering, a table had popped up from the floor in the middle of the sunken couches. Food that had to have come from Hunk littered said table, as evidenced by the tray Hunk was holding as he stood by. Allura stood off to the side, her arms crossed as she watched Matt, Pidge, and Shiro at the table.

Everyone looked as Keith and Lance stepped into the room, although Hunk brightened the most. He grinned almost cautiously at Lance. “Hey buddy!” He greeted. “You were able to convince him to come back, that’s awesome, Keith.”

“It wasn’t hard.” Keith replied softly. “All he wanted was an apology.” The corners of his lips twitched as he side glanced at Lance like what he said was some sort of inside joke.

“She wanted an apology?” Allura repeated, arching an eyebrow.

“Yeah. For invading his privacy. We shouldn’t have done it. Or kept it from him.” Keith explained.

“I hardly think-”

“I’m sorry, Lance.” Both Hunk and Pidge started at the same time, interrupting Allura. Pidge whipped her head around to glare at Hunk. “Shush, I hacked the device, I get dibs on second apology.”

“Fine, fine.” Hunk replied. Lance got the distinct impression that if it wasn’t for the fact Hunk’s hands were full, he would be making the ‘calm down’ hands gesture.

“I’m sorry I hacked the device.” Pidge continued, looking at Lance. “And thanks for getting me my brother back.”

“And I’m sorry for not stopping the recording earlier.” Hunk said.

“I’m sorry too.” Lance let go of Keith’s hand to step forward toward his teammates, and Keith let him. “I should have told someone what I was doing and warned Pidge before I got her captured. I shouldn’t have run away either.”
“Looks like the team’s really come together.” Shiro pipped up only to wince as both Pidge and Matt – who he was sandwiched between – elbowed him in the ribs. “Ow!”

“You weren’t even here, so shut it.” Pidge scolded.

“I said I was sorry.” Lance didn’t take Shiro to be the type to whine, but that was a whine if Lance ever heard one. He smiled at Lance almost sheepishly. “And I suppose I owe you an apology too. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you who I was on the Balmera.” He gestured to an empty spot at the table. “Do you want to share your side of the story now?” He asked.

Lance looked back at Keith, who nodded shallowly. Mentally, he could feel Blue pushing at him gently, nudging him forward. He glanced at Allura and then at Hunk and Pidge and Matt and Shiro before finally looking back at Keith. Keith smiled softly and stepped forward to gently touch Lance’s shoulder.

“When you’re ready, we’ll listen.” Keith assured him quietly before taking a seat beside Matt. Lance nodded and with a deep breath, took the offered seat next to Pidge and across from Keith. When he stretched out his legs under the table, they brushed against Keith’s.

Keith’s cheeks flushed just the slightest bit pink, and Lance smiled cheekily at him before turning his attention to Shiro. “So, it all started when you decided to take a vacation…”

Chapter End Notes

Wow. Let's keep this goodbye short, simple, and sweet. This is it: The End.

It's been fun writing this fic and sharing it with you guys! I really hoped that you enjoyed the journey with me. :D

There will be an epilogue at some undisclosed point in the future. In which, I will hopefully answer some questions that any of you may have or show you things that you would like to see. Just let me know in the comments, and I'll add it to list, :D.

End Notes

Thank you all for your support! I appreciate each and every reader!

If you guys ever want to talk, I promise I don't bite! You can reach me at my Tumblr!

Art: Chapter 1, Part 1; Shiro Card (Chapter 13); Druid!Lance (Chapters 16+); Keith Says "I missed you" (Chapter 91/92) by GhostRemnant

Altean!Lance (Chapters 16+) by Yuzurudropa

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